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CONTENTS

Fifty Years of Nigerian Independence: Governance in a Multi-Ethnic Nation-State

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Abstract

Nigeria is among the many African countries marking fifty years of independence from colonial rule in 2010. As the country celebrates this milestone of its history, there is also need for sober reflection on the state of affairs in relation to democratic structures and governance. This article aims to analyse certain issues that are paramount for effective anchoring of governance in the polity such as decentralisation of political power, structuring of visionary leadership, the sovereign national conference, and strategies toward nation building. The article argues that the pre-independent nationalists never laid a solid foundation for the governance of a multi-ethnic state of Nigeria. They (nationalists) needed to have considered more seriously the heterogeneous composition of the country for effective structure of governance. Therefore, fifty years on, the country has need for some structural re-organisation that will harmonise and stabilise the diverse people of the country. Having identified those issues that will buttress governance, the article concludes that the Nigerian project needs to be recreated and Nigerians must endeavour to begin to think collectively, see collectively, make collective decisions and act collectively, for Nigeria and Nigerians. This is the way forward for a dynamic Nigeria project.

Introduction

Nigeria is in 2010 marking fifty years of the disengagement from colonial Britain in her internal affairs. Fifty years is a milestone in a country's life and usually it calls for a good celebration. But the point is can Nigeria truly celebrate? The country rather than be in the state of elation is actually gloomy in the sight of the world. The gloom seems to cast a dark cloud over the country so that sometimes it appears it is going to fail outright. The state of Nigeria has deteriorated in recent times to an almost irredeemable catastrophe. It was for this same deplorable situation that Hillary Clinton the US Secretary of State in her 2009 visit to Nigeria described it as a failed state.[1] This article will proceed to analyse the fact

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[1] This statement is situated within the context of what Hillary Clinton said at her 'Town Hall' meeting with people when she visited Nigeria in August 2009. According to her, "the most immediate source of disconnect between Nigeria's wealth

that Nigeria has found itself in this predicament because there has not been a solid foundation for the structure that is today highlighted as Nigeria.[2] Understandably, a common history can hold and sustain a nation, but that of Nigeria is a different story. One can then understand what Obafemi Awolowo one of the foremost nationalists of Nigeria meant when he said that Nigeria is a "mere geographical expression."[3] Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation-state with a diversity of people.[4] My contention is that if the nationalists in the pre-independent period of Nigeria had weighed properly the entity Nigeria, they would have first and foremost considered the heterogeneous composition of the country. This perhaps would have compelled them to fashion out a system of government (democracy) that would be most suitable to the various peoples of Nigeria.[5] The degree of nationalism in a country is often

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and its poverty is failure of governance at the federal, state and local government levels." See *Tell Magazine*, Number 34 (24 August 2009).

[2] For instance the controversies surrounding the health of President Yar'Adua before his death would not have happened if the basis of Nigeria's unity had been resolved. The developments regarding the health of the president of Nigeria and the political logjam it created did not give Nigerian politics a good image. Since 23 November 2009 when President Yar'Adua was flown out of the country to Saudi Arabia and his eventual return to Nigeria and death, he was not seen in the public. There was uncertainty about his health condition and that created political instability. See the newspaper caption "Yar'Adua: 'Blame Nigeria's Faulty foundation'" *This Day*, Tuesday, 2 March, 2010.

[3] Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd. 1947): 47. Also to be noted is the recurrent Jos crises due to ethnic and religious clashes which have claimed many lives. When there is instability in leadership of any country, there is bound to be conflict in the polity. For sometimes now there have been sporadic conflicts in different parts of the country. Most of them have been religious and others have been as a result of ethnic agitation and communal clashes. It is to be understood that conflicts in contemporary Nigeria are occasioned by the fact that people are no longer just contented with unsubstantiated explanations for their poor state in life. Since independence, Nigeria has experienced a lot of tension and struggles by groups as a means to improve their social conditions.

[4] A. A. Nwankwo and S. U. Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation: Biafra* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1969): 9; Anthony A. Akinola, *Rotational Presidency* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1996): 22; See also Rotimi T. Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 19-26; and Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980): 107-139.

[5] Nigerian nationalists did not act positively to promote national consciousness. Except when it suited their personal interests and ambitions, they did not have any commitment to genuine national unity, and they lacked the patience and capacity to wield the Nigerian society together. See Toyin Falola, Abdullahi Mahadi, Martin Uhomoibhi and Ukachukwu Anyanwu, *History of Nigeria 3: Nigeria in the Twentieth Century* (Lagos: Longman Nigeria Plc 1991): 119.

determined by the nature and effect of the political action of the nationalists in that country. The political actions by the pre and post-independence Nigerians reveal the misdirection of their nationalists' energies in that the end product of those actions taken tended to destabilise the political system by firmly entrenching disunity in the consciousness of the Nigerian people.[6] It is in this light that a consideration of such questions as what is a nation, when is a nation, how is ethnicity related to the structure of a nation, become pertinent in this article. It is through these issues that we try to understand what appears to be a gradual decline of the Nigerian nation. The national question is bothering the Nigerian entity presently and there is great effort to understand the complexity of the country by trying to analyse the question 'what is Nigeria?'[7] The national question, as Suberu puts it, involves the challenges and dilemmas associated with accommodating multiple identity communities within the framework of a single, integrated, national political system.[8] I shall proceed to show how Nigeria got locked into this heterogeneous composition through a historical analysis and suggest that Nigeria even after fifty years of independence should go back to the drawing board of re-aligning the Nigerian project through a constitutional conference that will bring the multiple stakeholders together and putting tangible measures together for effective Nigerian polity.

Nigeria before Colonialism
The year 1914 marked a turning point in the history of the peoples now known as Nigeria, for they were brought together under the umbrella of one country by the British. Prior to this date, autonomous ethnic groups were in existence. As it is rightly captured, "One hundred years ago, Nigeria did not yet exist as a state. Even then the land was already settled by various [groups] with [their] own distinctive culture in addition to

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[6] Balarade A.T. Balewa, *Governing Nigeria: History, Problems and Prospects* (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press Ltd., 1994): 115-116.

[7] Basil A. Ekot, "Conflict, Religion and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Nigeria" *The Australasian Review of African Studies* 30:2 (December 2009): 48. See also Berch Berberoglu, *The National Question: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Self Determination in the 20th Century*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995): vii. Nigeria today can be classified as one country that still have unfinished programme regarding the national question.

[8] Rotimi T. Suberu, "The National Question, State Creation and the Reform of Nigerian Federalism" in Eghosa E. Osaghae and Ebere Onwudiwe (eds.) *The Manage*: 121.

values and socio political institutions shared with their neighbours."[9] In many parts of the country the existence of many polities which were independent of European contacts could be identified. We shall limit ourselves to some of the polities of the pre-European Nigeria for there were about 2780 of such polities among the Igbos east of the Niger, a hundred in Akoko and the north-east Yoruba borderland, 140 among Edo speakers and 90 among Idoma and other related peoples.[10]

The various peoples of Nigeria were scattered all over the north, west and east of the country. In the north were the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Tiv and Nupe. This area was differentiated politically into three main groups; in the north-east were the Kanuri people of Bornu and Lake Chad areas who were the subjects of the Shehu of Bornu. In the north-west were the Fulani and Hausa people organised into a large number of semi-independent emirates governed by a Fulani aristocracy under the religious leadership of the Sultan of Sokoto. In the north-central region were the Tiv, Birom, Gwari and well over 200 other small linguistic groups. "Within these broad groupings, the peoples were at various stages of political development ranging from unconsolidated village groups to the centralized sultanates of Sokoto and Bornu."[11] Islamic jihad played a significant role in the political administration of the north. The long-established trans-Saharan trade and migrations which linked the Hausa people, Kanem Bornu and the Fulanis to the Mediterranean and the Arab world through North Africa, facilitated the entrance of the Muslims.[12] These and other many numerous groups of people could be found in what is today known as northern Nigeria. They had distinctive features of political organisations particularly the centralised monarchical system of government enshrined in the Sokoto Caliphate.[13]

The Yoruba peoples were the occupants of what is today the south-west of Nigeria. They are the largest cultural aggregation in West Africa with a history of political unity and a common historical tradition. The most

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[9] Kola Omojola, *At the Crossroads: Challenges and Options for Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Pulsemedia, 1992): 3. It will therefore be an error to assume that the peoples of Nigeria had little history before the final boundaries were negotiated by Britain, France and Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. See also Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962): 19.

[10] Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, (London: Longman, 1983): 29.

[11] James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958): 19.

[12] Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1998): 2.

[13] See Sir Rex Niven, *Nigeria*, (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1967): 61.

notable of the Yoruba peoples were Oyo and Benin. At the height of their respective glories, these two empires between them controlled almost the entire regional formation.[14] They traced their origin to the legendary Oduduwa with Ife as the cultural as well as the political source of the empire. "All the various tribes of Yoruba nation trace their origin from Oduduwa and the city of Ile Ife. In fact Ile Ife is fabled as the spot where God created man, white and black, and from whence they dispersed all over the earth."[15] The Yorubas were a uniquely integrative group of people despite political and regional dialectical differences that existed between them.

The Benins are the centre of the Edo-speaking people whose origins have sometimes been linked to the Yorubas. When the Portuguese visited Benin City at the end of the fifteenth century, they found a powerful kingdom. "At that time, the Kingdom of Benin was the most centralized state on the Guinea Coast."[16] The area of influence of this Kingdom was enormous and included some areas of the present day Delta state. The traditional system of government was similar to that of Oyo, with the Oba at the head assisted by a council of elders.

The group of people making up present day 'eastern Nigeria' are better identified as Igbo, Ibibio, Efik (Old Calabar), Ijaw (Niger Delta), and a host of other segmented peoples. These societies were made up of very numerous ethnic groups who were divided into a large number of small village democracies.[17] These societies were on the whole united by trade linkages, markets and other cultural and social activities which cut across the area. According to Carlston, the structure of government in non-centralised societies prior to the advent of Europeans was well exemplified in the societies of eastern Nigeria. "The largest social and political unit was the tribe or village group, consisting of a number of villages in a single territory whose members identified themselves as having descended from a common ancestor."[18] However, it has to be stressed that these societies had peculiar mechanisms for maintaining law

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[14] James S. Coleman, 25.; Egbosa Osaghae, 1998, 3.

[15] Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1921): 15.

[16] James S. Coleman, 27.

[17] Monday Effiong Noah, "Political History of the City States of Old Calabar, 1820-60," in Boniface I Obichere, ed., Studies in Southern Nigerian History, (London: Frank Cass, 1982): 42-3.

[18] Kenneth S. Carlston, *Social Theory and African Traditional Organization* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1968): 197.

and order.[19] Therefore, for the people of eastern Nigeria, authority was dispersed among groups rather than an individual or a body. Traditional mechanisms were evolved for effective administration. By and large, government was the business of the entire community. This underpins the argument that the system of government in eastern Nigeria was in consonance with contemporary structure of democracy.

The Nationalist Approach to Power
The nationalists should have taken the advice of Smith into consideration in their effort to wrestle power from the departing colonialists. Smith in his analysis of territorial nationalisms stated that:

> The nationalist movement which arises among heterogeneous populations is based upon the territorial unit in which they are forcibly united and administered, usually by a colonial power. The boundaries of the territory, and the administration of the colony, form therefore the chief referents and focuses of identification of the nation to be. On taking over the colonial territory, the nationalists' main attention is devoted to integrating a culturally heterogeneous or 'indistinct' population, a coalition of tribes or mixture of races, who possess neither myth of common origins nor shared history, except for the latest, often relatively brief period of colonial subjection.[20]

But the nationalists did not give serious thought to the fact that the package Nigeria was like a portmanteau into which all kinds of people were thrown inside. Nigerian nationalism in this period was mainly putting up a challenge to the colonial conquest and establishment in Nigeria. Walter Schwarz's words best describe the sentiment of the people; "Resistance there was: it began on the day the British arrived and continued to the day they left."[21] Thus, there emerged in the Nigerian society a group of people who became more outspokenly nationalistic, anti-colonial, and fearful of economic exploitation by the Western world. The Nigerian students in London with all amount of pride were able to identify themselves with Nigeria, and began to think of themselves as Nigerians rather than Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. The identity was now with the new political entity Nigeria rather than with old tribal allegiances.[22]

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[19] Daniel A. Offiong, *An Introduction to the Ibibio of Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Apex Books Ltd., 2008): 122.
[20] Anthony D. Smith, ed., *Nationalist Movements* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1976): 5.
[21] Walter Schwarz, *Nigeria*, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968): 83.
[22] Michael Crowder, 225.

The colonialists in an effort to rebuff the nationalist movement came out with what could have been the significant point for the nationalists in anticipation of independence. The words of Sir Hugh Clifford attacked most significantly the idea of a Nigerian nation. He made it emphatically clear that the idea of a Nigerian nation was both inconceivable and dangerous:

> Assuming . . . that the impossible were feasible - that this collection of self-contained and mutually independent Native States, separated from one another, as many of them are, by great distances, by differences of history and traditions, and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers, were indeed capable of being welded into a single homogeneous nation - a deadly blow would be struck at the very root of national self-government in Nigeria, which secures to each separate people the right to maintain its identity, its individuality, its own chosen form of government, and the political and social institutions which have been evolved for it by the wisdom and the accumulated experience of generations of its forebears.[23]

In a way this form of attack on Nigerian nationalism was a foresight of what would be haunting the entity called Nigeria in the post - colonial era. If only the nationalists at this stage had been sensitive to this fact, the present Nigeria would be a different story. The issue of heterogeneity is a disturbing one. The nationalists were primarily concerned with a common enemy, the British. Thus, in the course of the nationalist movements, ethnic issues were beclouded.[24] A stimulant organisation to the nationalist's movement was the formation of the Nigerian Youth movement (NYM) in 1934. The NYM set forth the objectives of unification of the tribes of Nigeria through the encouragement of better understanding and cooperation for common purpose. It raised the standard of political education through public opinion to a higher moral, intellectual level, creating a national consciousness through the movement of official organ. The NYM and their supporters pressurised the colonial administration to have a better educational plan for the Nigerian youths. But significantly their efforts towards positive action were short lived because of some ethnic wrangling. Dissension had developed between Ernest Ikoli (Ijaw), a founder and active leader of the

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[23] Michael Crowder, 228.
[24] Basil A. Ekot, "A Failing Nigeria: The Political Transformation of Ethnicity in a West African State," *An Unpublished Ph.D Thesis* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2002): 92.

group with Nnamdi Azikiwe (Igbo), and Dr. K. A. Abayomi (Yoruba). It is argued that there was press rivalry between Ernest Ikoli who edited the Daily Service and Azikiwe who owned the West African Pilot. The dissension is said to have arisen partially from the character of Azikiwe himself who was not prepared to play second fiddle in a political organisation when Ikoli was put forward for the leadership of the party. He therefore counter-proposed Akinsanya, a Yoruba; as leader. Consequently, the Igbos led by Azikiwe, withdrew from the group in 1941. This crisis was the first major manifestation of ethnic tension that affected all subsequent efforts to achieve unity in Nigeria. With this trend, the future of Nigerian nationalism degenerated into ethnic sentiments, and the foundation was laid for the protracted tension between Igbo and Yoruba in Nigerian politics. This could be seen in the large scale ethnic tension and distrust in 1951 during the regional premiership elections, when Awolowo played the ethnic card in attempt to out-stage Azikiwe in his bid for the Premiership of the Western Region.[25]

Constitutional Anomalies
Colonial constitutional evolution especially the Authur Richard's constitution of 1951 buttressed the nationalist's imbecility by granting excessive powers to the three regions of Nigeria. Underlying these developments was the 'minorities' issue. The question of whether or not there should be more regions and the issue of minority rights was considered by the 1957 Conference. The minorities had followed most of the constitutional changes since 1951, and started taking stock in relation to their future in the country. The regionalised structure was beneficial to the major ethnic groups:

> Consequently some members of the minority ethnic groups began to entertain considerable fears for their future safety. Their fears in the future of Nigeria knew no bounds. Their faith in Nigeria as a country in which democracy would be expected to reign supreme was badly shaken. From the events which they had observed, it was doubtful whether justice could ever flourish in Nigeria. This was because in each of the three regions there was deeply entrenched a predominant ethnic group, which as a matter of practice took special delight in ignoring the existence of minority ethnic groups therein.[26]

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[25] Iniobong Udoidem, "The Dialectics of Betrayal and Revenge in Nigeria's Political History: 1951 to Present Day," *Koinonia: Studies in African Issues* 1 (June 2000): 25.
[26] Sir Udoma U. Udoma, *History and the Law of the Constitution of Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press, 1994), 158.

On 1 October 1960 Nigerians became the official rulers of the gigantic entity called Nigeria put together by the British with heaps of unresolved problems. The heavyweights in the run-up to independence assumed office; Tafewa Balewa became the Prime Minister, Nnamdi Azikiwe became Governor-General and Obafemi Awolowo was the ebullient opposition leader. It is of interest that prior to independence, during which the leaders needed to prove that they could work together as members of one country, the regional parties put aside their differences to form a government of national unity which comprised ministers from all the main regional parties. But this unity hardly survived the formal declaration of independence. Nigeria plunged almost immediately into various crises which have continued until today.

Post - Independence Scenario

When Nigeria gained independence from Britain, it was hoped that the bitter divisions of the preceding decades would be submerged in the glow of nationalist pride. It was hoped that the enthusiasm with which the country was launched into nationhood would sustain the Nigerian Federation and help her people to develop a sense of common destiny and common nationality. But it was soon to be realised that Nigeria's most vexing, most basic problems were those of [ethnicity], sectionalism – or subnationalism, and of leadership.[27] And as Larry Diamond observed:

> If the British and most Nigerians chose to believe that the bitterness and rancour of the past had been overcome with the achievement of nationhood, and if foreign observers knew too little of Nigeria to appreciate the depth of these divisions, there are a few who saw real dangers . . . the structure of social cleavages, the traditional and emergent structure of class domination, the contradictions of colonial rule, and the evolving pattern and character of political conflict did not augur well for the future of liberal democracy.[28]

At independence, Nigeria became a federation and was divided into three large regions (Eastern, Western, and Northern) and, in July 1963, a fourth region, the Midwest was carved out of Western Nigeria. Each region had an ethnic group that dominated. The east had the Igbos, the west had the Yorubas, the north had the Hausa-Fulani and the Edos dominated the Midwest. As power passed from British to Nigerian hands, and the dominant position of the Ibo, the Yoruba, and the Fulani and Hausa

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[27] A. A. Nwankwo and S. U. Ifejika, 34-35.

[28] Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1988): 65.

within the three original regions became clear, "separatist movements sprang up among many of the minority groups. Often the ethnic minority of one region allied itself with the ethnic majority of another, and thus regional politics have had the same ethnic cast as national politics."[29]

As we saw above the pre - independence era of Nigeria was characterised by lack of a common front in leadership matters and a clear ideology which could have brought harmony and integration to the multi-regions of the country. As a consequence, such widely felt needs as stability, security, and welfare were not met. "In this environment, the conflicts which could have been resolved by able statesmanship and timely concessions assumed such proportions as to threaten Nigeria's integrity continuously between 1960 and early 1970. The resultant divisive trends aroused more fears, if not open threats, of secession."[30] Since there were no positive solutions to the diverse ailments of Nigeria, between 1962 and 1966 the country was plunged into a series of stormy crises which brought it to the brink of disintegration. The result was to usher in a persistent period of coups and military intervention in Nigerian political affairs.

In view of the post-independent political situation, it is clear that ethnic nationalism has intensified in contemporary Nigeria. As Peter Ekeh has argued, the issue of ethnicity in Nigeria developed within the context of Nigerian politics, and as a matter of fact flowed from the ideologies and myths invented by the new leaders to consolidate their parcels of influence in the new Nigeria. "No ethnic group existed before Nigeria as a corporate entity with the boundaries now claimed for them and the loyalties now directed at them. What existed before Nigeria were amorphous polities."[31]

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[29] F. A. O. Schwarz Jr. *Nigeria, The Tribes, the Nation, or the Race – The politics of Independence* (London: M.I.T Press, 1965): 2. It is good to highlight the fact that the first years of Nigeria independence were characterised by severe conflicts within and between regions. The three major parties, National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) of Azikiwe, Nigerian Peoples' Congress (NPC) of Balewa, and Action Group (AG) of Awolowo, were ethnically structured and regionally based. Their main focus was the interests and concerns of the major ethnic groups and how they could control the federal government after independence.

[30] Tekena N. Tamuno, "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria since 1914," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 8:4 (1970): 572-73.

[31] Peter P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 17:1 (1975): 105.

The ethnic nationalisms created by the political elites have spread like a virus and have become very problematic for the Nigerian nation-state. The ethnic virus as Onigu Otite describes it, has been one of the most important causes of social crises and political instability in Nigeria. Ethnicity has been perceived in general as a major obstacle to the overall politico-economic development of the country.[32] In the 1950s, minority politics in Nigeria became very articulate. The ethnic infection that caught the pre-independent nationalists has assumed a larger proportion today. It is no longer merely the power play of the three dominant ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa), but the minority groups such as the Ibibios, Ijaws, Middle Belt, Edo, etc., are also demanding recognition. The major problem for the rulers of Nigeria is how to harness the demands of the different ethnic groups.[33]

The major development in Nigerian politics today is the formation of new alliances for the promotion of minority ethnic groups' interests. The bottom line is, as we have already noted; that the diverse people of Nigeria, collected together by British colonialism to form a nation, attained independence with just a few years of contact and co-existence. These diverse people forced to form a single state, have refused to accept one another as equal members of a corporate union. The present trend of nationalism in Nigeria is well articulated by Ray Ekpu: "We have retreated into ethnic bunkers, complete with ethnic armies and champions. The national pendulum is swinging dangerously from its position of centripetalism to one of centrifugalism even though we may rhetoricise about the goodness of bigness and the strength of diversity."[34]

The seeds of disunity are growing every day. The signs are ominous. Emphasis is now on micro-loyalties rather than macro-loyalties.[35] Thus, we have seen above the present day entity called Nigeria was as a result of the lumping together of peoples who previously had existed independently of one another. The motive of the British colonialists for this amalgamation was largely economic. But to ensure that their economic policies were enforced, effective colonial administration was entrenched. The nationalists who later took over the leadership of the

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[32] Onigu Otite, *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria*, (Ibadan, Nigeria: Shaneson Ltd., 1990): 145.

[33] With the upswing in ethnic based agitations, the quest for National integration is daily, proving to be elusive. See Special Report, "The Minorities' Revolt," *Vanguard* (Lagos) Saturday, 9 September, 2000.

[34] Ray Ekpu, "A Broken Beacon," *Newswatch* (Lagos), 10 October, 2000.

[35] "The Minorities' Revolt," *Vanguard* (Lagos) Saturday, 9 September, 2000.

Nigeria were so power conscious that they failed to recognise the complexity of the country handed over to them. The first attempt at governing Nigeria by Nigerian citizens became catastrophic due to the ethnic ailments that had started haunting them in the pre-independence period.[36] Perhaps there would have been a chance of remedying the precarious state of Nigeria if the leaders were allowed to learn from their mistakes. But the unnecessary intervention of the military in politics was a road-block to this process.[37]

The Contemporary Scene
That the Nigerian nation-state's very existence is now imperilled by the rise of a mass of ethnic nationalisms is of course very well known and referred to continually by the Nigerian press and media. What seems to be much less appreciated however, is that there is nothing 'natural' about this process. That is to say Nigeria's numerous ethnic groups (both majority and minority) are not simply giving expression to differences and hostilities which have somehow 'always' existed, or which somehow 'automatically' from differences in language, or culture or even religion. (Although, as we will see, it is significant that more and more Nigerians show the ever - growing frailty of Nigeria and their own growing ethnic nationalist identity by talking and writing as if this were the case). Rather,

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[36] Post independent Nigeria saw the emergence of leaders who based their focus along patrimonial lines. As Bradshaw puts it, "The logic of nationalism secured the departure of the colonial powers and the achievement of formal statehood, but no sense of nation, or citizenship, ever developed, social identity never encompassed the sense of political obligation to fellows that nationality and citizenship entail. Political loyalty instead became channeled along personal and patrimonial lines, on the 'big man' model". To buttress the argument, Chabal-Daloz adds that "given the importance of infra-national identities, of the ways in which political leaders seek to advance the interests of their community or fractions and the manner in which clients associate with their patrons' *desiderata*, there is virtually no scope for horizontal representation. Politics link leaders and followers within a well-understood relation of unequal reciprocity that is rooted in patrimonialism." See Cherry Bradshaw, *Bloody Nations: Moral Dilemmas for Nations, States and International Relations* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008), 110; Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Culture Troubles: Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning*, (London: C. Hurst & Co. 2006), 288.

[37] Out of the fifty years of Nigeria's independence, the military ruled for twenty-eight years. During these years the experience has been one of dictatorship and of the predatory and self-interested character of military rule, culminating in acute political and economic crises. This resulted in intensified social discord and internal military disaffection. See Peter M. Lewis, "Endgame in Nigeria? The Politics of a Failed Democratic Transition," *African Affairs,* 93 (1994): 323.

it is the very functioning - or rather mal-functioning - of the Nigerian nation-state which has produced, and is still producing this ever-rising consciousness of ethnic difference amongst Nigerians.

The point is, Hausa people do not have to hate Yoruba people merely because they are Hausa, any more than Yoruba people have to hate Igbo people merely because they are Igbo. Rather it is when people of different ethnic origins become incorporated in a single state which is massively unequal in all kinds of ways and also disastrously led and managed, that such hatreds arise. However, the very fact that so many Nigerians now do think of such hatreds, suspicions and animosities as somehow 'natural' or as arising from 'primordial' historical or cultural origins shows just how far the process of transforming ethnicity into ethnic nationalism has gone in Nigeria.

There is now virtually nothing that happens politically in Nigeria that is not interpreted and explained - at least by Nigerians - through ethnic nationalist categories. And that fact is in itself part of what is meant, in this article, by Nigeria not having a focus and appears to be 'failing'. That is, Nigeria is failing not just because its history has been plagued by corruption or military coups or disputes over the use of federal power. It is failing because of the motives and intentions which generate corruption or coups, or abuse of federal or local power, and because of the way Nigerians understand the motives and intentions of other Nigerians who are not of 'their' ethnic nation. Nigeria is failing, in short, because in all kinds of ways Nigerian people (both the powerful and the powerless) refuse to treat many other Nigerians as 'fellow citizens' to whom they owe any duty of care or concern or fairness.

This process, as I hope to have shown in this article, began with the actual 'Nigerian' nationalist struggle against the British. For from the very beginning Nigerian political leaders were as much concerned with ensuring the dominance (or at least the non-subordination) of their ethnic grouping within the new Nigeria as they were with getting rid of the British colonialists or creating a united Nigerian state. And even more importantly, the ways and means such leaders employed - the language and rhetoric they used - to create a mass following for nationalism in Nigeria, did as much to create separate ethnic nationalist awareness as it did to create a single Nigerian nationalism. And after formal independence, as we have already hinted their actions have tended to actually accentuate ethnic nationalist awareness among the bulk of the population at the expense of any Nigerian nationalist feeling.

The Way Forward

At this stage, it becomes imperative to consider certain factors that can ameliorate the fragile condition in which Nigeria has found itself, due to incessant conflicts since independence. So far in this article, we have identified various issues that have precipitated conflicts within the Nigerian polity and have seen how these issues revolve around one central problem, ethnicity and a pattern of leadership tending always to strengthen ethnic nationalism at the expense of Nigerian nationalism. Thinking about political re-arrangement in Nigeria presupposes a focus on national political leadership. The fundamental question is, what are the measures that leadership of the country should consider so as to enhance effective consolidation and integration of the peoples?[38]

On the whole there have been the collective demands for political, economic and social equity in the polity. The way these issues are addressed becomes critical to the well being and even the survival of the political system.[39] It must be noted from the outset that in an attempt to address this question, we must recognise the fact that the Nigerian predicament so far seems to defy all remedial solutions. But we have also to recognise the fact that sometimes solutions are proffered without adequate diagnoses. As we mentioned earlier, at the foundation of the Nigerian problem is the forceful heterogeneous 'wedlock' of the diverse ethnic groups. While this has given the country a gigantic image in the eyes of the world, for the people of the country itself, it has become problematic and has consequently created an enfeebled reality of Nigeria that is far from its image.

It is therefore important to highlight some of those areas that should be addressed in the overall interest of the country and for the sake of peace and stability. The dynamics of conflict management are also to be understood from this perspective. Nigeria had the opportunity of enthroning democracy again in May 1999, and it is expected that some of the ingredients for effective democratic governance would be in place.

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[38] Most of the time because government is distant, it works at cross-purposes with the people. The government should be close to the people to enable them to participate. There is the need for decentralisation of power to enable the lower levels of government to be involved in the basic grassroots programmes that need to be done. At all levels, there should be that shrinking of the overbearing influence of the state in Nigerian civil life.

[39] Donald Rothchild, "Collective Demands for Improved Distributions," in Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola, eds., *State Versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983): 172.

There is great expectation that a political culture based on justice, equity, sense of belonging participation and involvement, tolerance, transparency and accountability in the conduct of affairs of the country, will prevail.

Leadership Devoid of Monopoly

What Nigeria needs today is "an appropriate, dynamic, visionary leadership that can accept the challenges of institutionalising the practice of democracy, turn the economy around . . . tackle poverty and rural transformation and cement the unity of the country."[40] In other words, Nigeria needs a leader with foresight and one who can address the fundamental structural and institutional problems of the country even at the expense of his short-term political interest. The re-positioning of power can be effected through what a number of analysts call "rotational presidency". As political leadership in Nigeria was dominated by one regional grouping, so the concept of rotational presidency, which is popularly known in Nigeria as 'Zoning', "seeks to formalise a pattern whereby the geo-ethnic origin of the national leader alternates from one election to the other."[41]

It was in recognition of the ethnic diversity of the country that made the defunct National Party of Nigeria (NPN) come out with the model of 'zoning' that alternates the geo-ethnic origin of the party's presidential, vice presidential and chairmanship candidates from one election to the other. This was an attempt to integrate the ethnic groups with equal opportunity for leadership. To a certain extent it became useful for the party in the 1979 election for even though the party grew out of the NPC of the north, it attracted membership from the southern elites.[42] But it was still an arrangement that favoured the major ethnic groups and left the minorities at the periphery.[43] As Anam-Ndu argues, this structure is essentially "a coalition of major ethnic groups seeking to establish hegemony over other groups in the country mainly for the purpose of capturing and perpetuating itself in power to the exclusion of other group members except in so far as such members qualify as agents."[44]

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[40] Edet James Amana, *We Can Take Our People up There: An Examination of Leadership and Democracy in Nigeria*, (Lagos, Nigeria: Union Communications & Publications Ltd., 1997), 60-61.

[41] Akinola, 1.

[42] Akinola, 12-13.

[43] The NPN zoned the key offices to the three major ethnic groups: Shehu Shagari (Hausa/Fulani) became the presidential candidate, Alex Ekwueme (Igbo), the vice-president, and Adisa Akinloye (Yoruba) was the party chairman.

[44] Ekeng A. Anam-Ndu, "Renewing the Federal Paradigm in Nigeria: Contending Issues and Perspectives," *A Paper Presented at the International Conference on New*

The NPN experiment, all the same, did not survive as subsequent military intervention disrupted the arrangement. However, following the constitutional conference under Sani Abacha in 1995, and after many debates about the issue at the constitutional assembly, it was suggested that the presidency of Nigeria be rotated between North and South:

> The "tensions, emotions, conflicts, stresses and strains" which the election of the Chief Executive has always generated in Nigeria since independence flows from the fact that the Presidency is the highest, most glamorous and the most prestigious office in the land with responsibility for making appointments, allocating resources, locating projects and disbursing funds and other perquisites. The Presidency is the fountain from which all blessings flow . . . it is the President who decides who gets what, when and how.[45]

In this case, the issue still remains a problem as the north and the majority groups will still dominate. In other words, the various minority elements within the north and south enclaves may never have an opportunity to reach a position of leadership at the apex level in Nigeria.[46] Democracy should be fashioned in such a way that sectionalism is done away with, and everyone is carried along irrespective of ethnic groups. Every tribe deserves a chance to govern this country. Leadership role should be distributive and not monopolised.[47]

However, if the issue of rotation of the presidency is to have credibility in the polity, it has to be considered from the perspective of the six geo-political zones of the country. The six geo-political zones currently operating in Nigeria will give a pragmatic applicability of the idea of zoning. The rotation of the presidency within the zonal structure will give the diverse ethnic groups an opportunity of leadership and avoid what has

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Directions in Federalism in Africa. Organised by African Centre for Democratic Governance (AFRIGOV), Abuja, 14-18 March, (2000): 15.

[45] Okon Eminue, "The Presidency: Zoning, Rotation and Multiple Vice-Presidency," in O. E Uya & V. C. Uchendu, (eds.), *Issues in the 1995 Nigerian Draft Constitution*, (Calabar, Nigeria: CATS Publishers, 1999): 79-80.

[46] What is playing out today in Nigeria is a clear testimony to this fact. When Yar'Adua the president of Nigeria and a core northerner became sick and incapacitated to continue in office, some people did not feel that Goodluck Jonathan should take over the affairs of the country simply because he was not from the north as the presidency was zoned to the north by PDP. So Goodluck was merely accepted as Acting President until the death of Yar'Adua when he was constitutionally sworn in as the substantive President of Nigeria.

[47] John A. Udoh, Interview by author, 13 January, 2001, oral recording, Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit, Nigeria.

become characteristic of Nigerian politics, that is, ethnic monopolies of leadership. As Akinola argues, Nigeria since independence has directly or indirectly been limited by the choice of leadership, and has almost excluded the minority areas. The question as Akinola asks is, "Must we wait until they [minority areas] gang together to fight a way of "Membership without Equality" before we recognise their legitimate aspirations."[48] The present zonal alignment of political activities in the country will be a workable structure for the peace and stability of the country.

The idea of zoning for political offices is not new to Nigerian culture. The idea as already noted, is not to discard the principle of modern democracy but to situate the modern democratic principles in the context of the peculiarities of Nigeria. In effect, the zonal arrangement will enable political parties to come out of the ethnic enclaves to have a national outlook. "Political aspirants would be made to dedicate themselves to advancing the national cause, and being the opinion moulders of their people, the latter would consequently become socialised into seeing themselves as Nigerians. With patience, this could be the process towards nationhood."[49]

The needs and challenges of national cohesion which we have examined in the article call for this type of structural arrangement. There is need for a democratic accommodation of the diverse peoples of Nigeria. This arrangement will make provision for a simultaneous participation of representatives from all geo-political areas identified "without in any way weakening, but has the capacity of strengthening and recreating democratic values congruent with the imperatives of our national political life."[50] Through this process, a useful arrangement of leadership, collegial leadership will emerge in the country. Collegial leadership is "the operation of a set of continuing political leadership structures and practices through which significant decisions are taken in common by a small, face-to-face body with no single member dominating their initiation or determination."[51] This collegial leadership will have continuity, and a political class will emerge giving rise to a lasting political culture.

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[48] Akinola, 20.
[49] Akinola, 20-21.
[50] Ekeng Anam-Ndu, 107.
[51] Thomas A. Baylis, *Governing by Committee* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989): 7.

Federalism and Decentralisation of Political Power

Decentralisation as a concept is understood as a process or situation in which powers and responsibilities are transferred from a central unit to other, usually more local, organs. It is a term that can be employed in relation to the political decision-making process, to the distribution of powers between elected authorities and to the organisation of the bureaucracy.[52] The argument proffered in Nigeria today is that at least at the state level, there should be some autonomy. Each state should be allowed to operate its own constitution so as to enable them to identify areas of interest within the one Nigeria. Ayoade stresses the point that a certain level of autonomy to the states will remove the continual focus on the centre for assistance:

> As long as I have to look forward to a centre to be able to provide breakfast for my people, then the struggle will be higher to get to that centre. I think that is how we orchestrated and fashioned these conflicts for ourselves. To reduce the conflicts, let us reduce the centre and once the centre is reduced, everybody goes home in freedom and participates at the local level. At the local level there is a better understanding through the same language, the same needs and commonalties with the same goals and aspirations [53]

The development of Nigerian federation since independence in 1960 has shown that there have not only been structural and administrative changes in the polity, but also, more importantly, a steady erosion of the autonomy of state governments by the various Federal Governments. It is this type of set up that has encouraged the prevailing attitude of ethnic nationalism, and it is gradually undermining Nigerian nationalism. The concentration of power and resources at the centre has been identified as one of the major structural defects of the Nigerian federal system. This concentration has rendered the federating states impotent and powerless, relating to the Federal Government in a dependent manner. In a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria such development breeds a sectional monopoly of power and, therefore, lends itself to easy marginalisation of others. It further results in suspicion, lack of trust and tension in the body politic.[54]

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[52] See David Robertson, *Dictionary of Politics*, (London: Penguin Books, 1993): 125.

[53] John Ayoade, Interview by author, 24 January, 2001, Ibadan, tape recording, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

[54] T. Uzodinma Nwala, *Nigeria: Path to Unity & Stability*, (Nsukka, Nigeria: Niger Books & Publishing Co., 1997): 129.

In other words, federalism is a major concern in Nigeria; a contentious issue in contemporary Nigerian politics and central to the national question in the country. The dominating argument today is that Nigerian federalism should reflect what is regarded as true federalism.[55] Thus, the struggle for true federalism remains one of the sore points at the centre of the Nigerian question.   To be noted also is the issue of corruption in the system. Corruption is one disease Nigeria needs to fight to avoid sudden death. This fight is a key area of national reconstruction. Larry Diamond has very articulately presented this fact: "Corruption is poison to Nigerian democracy not only because it ravages the economy and shreds the moral fabric of society, but because it distorts the character of political competition. State power has become the main vehicle for personal enrichment and upward class mobility in Nigeria."[56] Nigeria needs at this crucial time of her political history to demonstrate that she can have humane and honest governance that can reach every citizen. The present democratic dispensation needs to be sustained and corruption will not facilitate it. The point is that, if those charged with the responsibility for the common good overcome self-interest, they will be in a position to pursue justice, equality and fair play.   As a step towards curbing corruption in Nigeria, the government should diversify its economic focus. Today the main source of revenue is oil and since it yields so much income to the Federal Government, the interest of politicians is how to share the oil dividends. The bottom line is that the tussle for the control of political power, particularly at the highest level, is underlined by the desire to control oil money, because the perception in Nigeria is that oil

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[55] The concept of federalism invariably involves a set pattern of relationships between the centre and the states. It is in this light that Lucio Levi defines a federal government as a form of government by which several small republics agree to become members of a larger one capable of providing for the security of the union. But the relationship of the small states and the larger one is regulated by constitutional procedures to forestall any attempt at domination. That is, the federal system of government contains the formula for the application of the principle of self-government to concurrent governments operating within a comprehensive constitutional framework. What this implies, in effect, is that the concept of federalism takes into consideration the institution of the government of the federation and a set of governments of the member units, in which both kinds of governments rule over the same territory and people and each kind has the authority to make some decisions independently of the other. See Lucio Levi, "The Federalist Papers and the Choices before the American People," in Andrea Bosco (ed.) *The Federal Idea: The History of Federalism from Enlightenment to 1945,* Volume 1 (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1991): 32; William H. Riker, *Federalism: Origin Operation Significance*, (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1964): 5.

[56] Larry Diamond, "Nigeria's Search for a New Political Order," *Journal of Democracy*, 2:2 (1991): 66.

money belongs to the government, so anybody can help himself or herself to it. The agricultural sector has been more or less neglected. As Jibrin Ibrahim has pointed out, "the transformation of Nigeria's economic base from agriculture to petroleum, a process which led to the centralisation of the country's financial resources, was an important factor in the exacerbation of all forms of struggle for political power and consequently for economic resources."[57]

Strategies for Nation Building

Nigeria, according to Omojola remains an enigma, an explosive question, and a controversial issue that has not surrendered itself to a detailed analysis and dispassionate scrutiny. Yet without such an analysis, it is impossible to chart a progressive course for the nation.[58] In other words, it is long overdue for Nigeria to begin to consider tangible issues for nation building. The enormity of the structural complications created for the country at independence has over the years been compounded with a complex socio-political problem. But there are ways this endemic problem can be handled. We have to stress that the success of any effort toward nation building will depend to a large extent on the attitude of the Nigerian leaders. As Kukah has argued, the real need of Nigeria is to have leaders who have sufficient imagination and selflessness to help the nation find a rallying point where differences can be harmonised to achieve national greatness.[59] One way of going about having effective leaders is through the grooming of people for leadership. One amusing thing about Nigerian politics is that anybody can wake up in the morning and stand to be an elected leader. And in a situation where credentials are secondary to money in politics, the person always gets his or her way. So, education for leadership becomes essential:

> The way out of the leadership problem is education. Education is the core of every system. The school system has to be overhauled with inculcation of those old values. If those values are respected, leadership will emerge. Governance should be an art of apprenticeship from local government to state and so on. Leadership should be based on maturity and experience.[60]

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[57] Jibrin Ibrahim, "Religion and Political Turbulence in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29:1(1991): 127.

[58] Kola Omojola, 124.

[59] Matthew H. Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1999), 28.

[60] Mbuk B. Ebong, Interview by author, 7 January, 2001, Port Harcourt, oral recording, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

In other words, to have a well-articulated civil society, the exercise of enlightenment is imperative for Nigeria both for the aspirants to leadership and followers. As Ukoyen has mentioned, to solve the problem of leadership, there has to be change of mental focus throughout the length and breadth of the country, that is, there has to be a change of orientation.[61] The followers especially the illiterate ones need to know what their rights are because all along they have been subjects of manipulation by the politicians.

The idea of building a supportive political culture according to Bratton et al is a society-wide, multigenerational project. But the fear is that the elites, particularly in Nigeria, are unlikely to pursue this agenda at their own initiative, "finding it easier to govern when subjects remain unacquainted with universal liberties."[62] The fact remains that the poor, illiterate masses do not have a clear understanding of modern day politics and so become very vulnerable. These are the ones, who, because of their precarious situations, are easily bought over or bribed by the politicians to vote for the wrong person. It is a fact that an enlightened community gets enlightened leadership. The franchise available to the people is that they understand the situation and act in accordance with the understanding they have. By and large, there is need for a deliberate policy of educating people to have an appreciation of the demands of and a sense of duty to the country and not the self. This is an area where the impact of the educational institutions should be felt. Starting from the primary school up to the research level, the value of service should be taught and researched. There is need to subject Nigeria to intensive study. Good leaders will emerge from a corruption-free environment and various institutions need to be strengthened.

What this implies is that there has to be a general political re-orientation of both leaders and followers. Nigeria has for many years experienced a breakdown and inefficiency of the system which has become a huge problem. Leadership does not have to be imposed on the country. A properly structured civil society will evolve some basic rules that are accepted by those in leadership positions about certain things they cannot do and for which they would be held responsible. In other words, a culture of discipline has to develop, with the civil society exercising greater vigilance and control over what government does, and to hold and

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[61] Joseph P. Ukoyen, Interview by author, 26 January, 2001, Ibadan, tape recording, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
[62] Michael A. P. Bratton, G. Browser and J. Temba, "The Effects of Civic Education on Political Culture: Evidence from Zambia," *World Development*, 27:5 (1999): 807.

demand that the government be accountable and responsible.[63] Having come to this awareness, there is need, to go back on the path of rectitude to effectively enhance progress. Above all, there is a need to create the political will to change the past into the future that will be appropriate for development.[64] It is this process of creating the political will that requires some form of political education and guidance of the people. There is every hope that the people will become sensitised and be more scrupulous so that a workable system can be instituted.

A National Constitutional Conference
The continuous existence of Nigeria as one country has become a major source of concern in recent times because of the incessant conflicts stemming from ethnicity.[65] The question being contemplated today is can the Nigerian nation survive? Chief Anthony Enahoro, a veteran politician is one of those who asked this important question: "Can Nigeria survive as one country? Should it survive as one country? If it does so survive, will federalism survive? Can the component groups of Nigeria secure for themselves an honourable and equitable share of power and of the nations' resources?"[66] And it is a sensible thing for the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, to come together and decide the terms of their association. It is a step that is imperative for Nigeria as Emeka Anyaoku the former Commonwealth Secretary-General observes:

> Informed by the experience of other successful pluralistic states, I believe that the best way of settling these debates and controversies is through a national dialogue, that is a national conference at which the representatives chosen by the main ethnic and creditable groups of this country can discuss and arrive at consensual positions on these fundamental issues of our constitution.[67]

Anyaoku adds that stability will elude the nation unless the national summit is convened, to thrash out the various vexing national issues.[68] I have argued from the outset that Nigeria has been an association that did not arise from the volition of the peoples, and there has been a constant plague of conflict as a result of the low level of compatibility.

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[63]Steven Nkom, Interview by the author, 29 January, 2001, Zaria, tape recording, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria.
[64] John Ayoade, Interview, 2001.
[65] The continuous crises in Jos where there has been killings of hundreds of people speaks volumes of the rising tide of ethnicity in the country.
[66] Cited in Rotimi Suberu, 2001, 203.
[67] See *Guardian* (Lagos), 30 May, 2001.
[68] *Guardian* (Lagos), 30 May, 2001.

Although most Nigerians are sceptical of the convening of the conference, overall well-meaning people, individuals and agencies both within and outside the country have debated the issue of ethnicity and the survival of the Nigerian Federation. There is no doubt that the two regimes of Babangida with the abortive transition programme, and the setting up of a Constitution Conference Commission by Abacha in 1994 heightened the concerns of Nigerians. And these concerns have led to the questioning of the desirability or otherwise of the continued existence of Nigeria as one united country. Thus, the Sovereign National Conference (SNC) is a question that is born out of the frustrations that have attended a long drawn struggle for democracy in the country. So that at every turn the struggle had been evident, but had always been blocked in one-way or the other. The only way this federal dispensation can respond to the demands and agitations that are prevailing is to have a federal bargain where elected people will sit down and work out the terms. We certainly need a forum where Nigerians will negotiate and 'bargain' about power distribution. In the words of Zartman, the time is ripe[69] to have this negotiation in the overall interest of the nation as we look forward to more years of Nigeria as an independent country. It is then that there can be a reconstitution of the federal constitution to respond to these agitations. The fear is that if these agitations are allowed to build up, it might reach a point where they will become unmanageable. The debate has not ceased since the commencement of the Fourth Republic in 1999. If anything, it has intensified. The point is Nigeria cannot continue to operate in this seeming laissez faire atmosphere where the constitution is only manufactured for the people. The available option for Nigeria is a SNC, which will have the purpose of addressing and agreeing to the basis of Nigeria's survival as a country under a constitution designed by the representatives of all Nigerian peoples. A broad section of Nigerians are

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[69] For Zartman, The concept of a ripe moment centers on the parties' perception of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) -- a situation in which neither side can win, yet continuing the conflict will be very harmful to each (although not necessarily in equal degree nor for the same reasons). Also contributing to 'ripeness' is an impending, past, or recently avoided catastrophe. This further encourages the parties to seek an alternative policy or 'way out,' since, the catastrophe provides a deadline or a lesson indicating that pain might be sharply increased if something is not done about it soon. See William Zartman, "Ripeness," in Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, eds., *Beyond Intractability,* Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. August 2003 http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/ripeness/ (accessed 27 August 2010).

in favour of this conference because it is seen as the only channel through which Nigeria can achieve peace and stability.[70]

The SNC advocated is a forum where such issues could be tabled and agreement arrived at. A crucial issue, however, concerns how the conference is to be composed. And it is certainly my fear that if the previous precedents - of composing the conference in proportions determined by the demographic size of Nigeria's differing ethnic groups - is followed, this will be disastrous. For it will only reproduce the 'majority'/'minority' obsessions which have plague Nigerian political life since independence, and almost certainly lead to a situation in which, whatever constitution is created, will be seen by some large number of Nigerians as having been imposed by an ethnic majority or majority coalition.   I therefore believe it imperative then in the composition of the conference all ethnic groupings in Nigeria should have an equal number of representatives, irrespective of their demographic size. This at least will ensure that majority decisions, when made, are not ethnic majority decisions, but reflect a genuine majority view among representatives. Composing the Constitutional Conference by what I will call the 'ethnic equality' principle (a principle which I believe should also be built into the election system for a Federal Upper House) would also have the advantage of enshrining the idea of corporate (rather than individual) representation.   If peace and stability is to be sustained in the polity the government has to take the opportunity and convene a conference in the overall interest of the Nigerian peoples. The demand for justice and equity on the part of the powerless and poverty-stricken peoples of Nigeria will continue until the issue of resource control is resolved. The Federal Government of the present democratic dispensation has ample opportunity albeit a challenging task, to right the wrongs of the past fifty years that have been visited on the Nigerian polity.

Nigeria could be compared to a designed material which in the course of time needs re-designing. Nigeria is long overdue for re-designing from the 1914 design. Fifty years is the age of mature adulthood, when personal stocktaking is imperative. If today at fifty, Nigeria cannot take steps towards redesigning itself, then there is cause to worry. However, the remedial process is not completely elusive if the union members will come to agreement on such fundamental issues as political power structures, resource control and equitable distribution of wealth. Nothing

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[70] See Oma Djebah, "National Conference: Why Leaders are Insistent," *Guardian* (Lagos), 11 June, 2001.

stops Nigeria from learning from other federal models but this should be done in cognisance of our immediate environment and cultural peculiarities.

Conclusion

It is not an overstatement to conclude that underlying Nigeria's fragile democratic institution is the country's flawed constitution-making procedure. The different constitutions of the country have always been handed down by the military and imposed on the people. The active participation of the citizenry is always lacking. So the SNC is imperative for Nigeria as we hope that in this twenty first century, the country will develop a well articulated structure of leadership and governance. In addition such a forum would afford Nigerians to rise above ethnic nationalism to ensure the survival of the nation as a corporate entity. Nigerians must endeavour to begin to think collectively, see collectively, make collective decisions and act collectively, for Nigeria and Nigerians. This is the way to go if Nigeria, the sleeping giant, is to wake up and provide the necessary leadership required of her in the African continent in the present century. It is not too late for Nigeria to undertake these measures to re-create the Nigerian Project.

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Human Rights Activism and the Silencing of Women[1]

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Abstract

This article explores and examines the competing interests of several international and national stakeholders concerning a development program offered to marginalised women reported to be exploited by a cultural practice in the Volta Region of Ghana; the discourses around the cultural practice and the way in which Ghana's rural women are represented in international, national and local discourses; and the stakeholder interest in representing the women, against the backdrop of Africa's imperialist history and the continents current fight against neo-colonialism. It is argued that the case study of the *Trokosi Woman* provides an important and relevant example of how women's empowerment cannot take place when white race privilege and class structures within Ghana remain un-interrogated.

The Case Study of *The Trokosi Woman*

This article uses the case study of *'the Trokosi woman'* to explore the ways in which women's bodies are imagined within communities, within national struggles and through international development arrangements; and the ways in which poor rural women in post colonial settings are silenced by local and national urban males and international white men and women. The article argues that human rights discourse is mobilised by powerful groups in order to maintain their positions of power, while the *empowerment* of poor women within post colonial states, continues to be a sacrifice to the greater good.[2] It is my argument that the Trokosi women are positioned as individuals whose marginality provides a *'distinctive angle of vision,'*[3] able to provide reasons for the women's oppression that are different to those of their oppressors. This case study highlights how poor women are not permitted to participate in discussions concerning their own futures; rather, these discussions take place between the nation's elite, who tend to be urban residing African males. Whilst national indicators point out that the life chances of women are improving

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[2] Shirin Rai, *'The Gender Politics of Development'* (Zed Books, London, 2008) 21.

[3] Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (Routledge: New York and London, 2000) 12.