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Abstract

Nigeria federalism was adopted in response to the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria in 1954. Since its adoption, the nation has had to contend with the structural and operational defects in our federal system. These defects have largely been responsible for the restructuring of the federation from regionalism to states creation, which began in 1967 by the Gowon's Administration. However, the recent debate in Nigeria's federal system is the issue of power shift, which forms the subject of our study. To this end, the study has shown that the resolution of this agitation would be a large extent shape the future of our federation. It is important to note that, the agitation for power shift is predicated on the marginalization of the South by the North in the political process of the nation and the centrality of the state power in the political economy of the nation thereby making competition for political power very serious.

Introduction

One of the contentious issue in Nigeria politics in recent times has been the power shift controversy. This power struggle emanates from the nature and character of the federalism that was imposed on the Nigerian state. However, out of naivety, mischief or both, people are reducing the pertinent issue of building a true federalism in Nigeria to a mere geographical change of power from the rule by the northerners to southerners. This arrangement may in the short run assuage the political desires of the southern elite to be incorporated in to the Nigerian power structure.

The root of federalism in Nigeria must be sought partly in the process by which the country came into existence, through the administrative structure of colonialism that was created and partly in the varying responses of Nigerians to both the process structure of colonialism. Federalism emerged instead of political unification typical unitary system which was unacceptable due to social and political diversities of the pre-colonial societies.

Power in politics implies control or dominance of the political and social-economic activities of a people in a country by a person or an entirety. Where power in a state is concentrated in one body politic, the government is said to be unitary system as in Britain. Where power is shared between the center and the component is generally referred to as a federal system, as in United States of America. Therefore, this study focuses on the impacts of power shift on the future of Nigerian federalism.

The Problem

Nigerian federalism has sought to achieve unity in diversity, which provides for relative compromise among competing ethnic group claims the balance between national and sub-national. The challenge facing the nation is how to build a much stronger and much more just political community in which national interests begin to displace primordial ones. Federalism is supposed to be a vehicle for achieving it as it seeks to provide a unique way for organizing political

power of various levels so that all the participants could be involve is decision making process however, the crisis of Nigerian federalism is about social injustice that characterizes power relationship, a phenomenon that precipitates the demand for power shift in the country. In view of this, the advocates of power shift argue that the future of Nigerian federalism depends on the concept and practice of power shift. Thus, what would be the effect of power shift on the future of Nigerian federalism, and how the structure and operation of Nigeria federalism influenced the struggle for power shift in the country.

Objectives of the Paper

This research work focuses on the Nigerian federation and the issue of power shift. The aims and objectives are as under:

- i. To examine the defective nature of Nigerian federalism in order to know how it prompts the demand for powers shift,
- ii. To know the extent at which power shift can address the problem of social injustice in Nigerian federalism
- iii. To evaluate the minority problems and contests in the operational structure of Nigerian federalism.

The Debate on Power Shift

The general argument in Nigerians power politics has been the wide complain against the domination of the Nigeria politics by a section of the Northern region. (Diamond 1988: 37), argued that indeed, much of the turbulence of post-independence politics resolved around the effort of the aristocracy to realize its ambition of national politics. Thus, the on-North has produced national leadership for 38 years of the almost scars of independence and now continue its stay in power. The annulment of the acclaimed freest and fairest presidential election of June 11993 heightened the Southern fears that power politics in Nigeria is planned to be monopolized by the Northern forever. This provoked a lot political crisis out of which emerged the demand for power-

shift whose philosophical underpinning to provide sense of belonging to the southern of Nigeria(Oni 2000:102).

Against the foregoing background, towards the last week of ember 1994, after the national constitutional conference committee on lower sharing and constitutional structure of the federation submitted its sports, the issue of rotational presidency was widely canvassed by some conference delegates from the South from which sprang the clamor for power-shift to the South. In the forefront of the champions for rotational presidency was ex-vice president committee on power sharing and constitutional structure of government. Even before he was elected a delegate to the constitutional conference, Dr. Ekweme had on four different occasions in the past propagated the idea of power shift (Tell Magazine), Subsequently, Ekweme's postulation was widely accepted by most[delegates from the south. Reason advanced for power shift has been to rescue Nigeria from disintegration. It is also seen as a veritable instrument for promoting national integration in a multi-ethnic plural country like Nigeria. Stressing further, Ekweme argued that the ratification on power-shift was the pillar that held the 634 which metamorphosed in to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the popular party in the continent of Africa and eventual shift of power to South West in 1999(Thisday, 1999:7) the view of the above, can power shift address the problem of injustice in Nigeria federal system?

In Nigeria, the state is the major indicator of economic, social and cultural activities. This is largely due to its colonial origin among Nigeria's large number of ethnic groups, inadequacies, among size, sources endowment, education and access to state power and resources.

Minority Issues and Power-Shift

This has become one of the most emotional issues in Nigeria federalism, especially in the context of the politics of hegemonic control and identity. At the forefront of the debate for power rotation, lies the minority dilemma, particularly in the Middle Belt Region and in the Niger Delta. Two

expressions of minority fear lies on ethnic and political Domination Egwu, (2002:64).

These fears were expressed in the terminal phase of colonial rule. The departing colonial authorities then respond by setting up the Willink Commission to look in to the fearers of minorities and suggest ways of allaying them. Rather than concede to the creation of new states as demanded by ethnic minorities in various regions, the commission recommended the establishment of development areas and the entrenchment of fundamental human rights. The construction of the Nigerian state to reflect the hegemonic interests of the ethnic majorities in the post independence period is the basis of the current agitation of ethnic minorities. Afigbo said that:

The other minority ethnic nationalities might as well not exist. As far as the British were concerned, it was largely the interrelationships to these three major ethnic nationalities that constituted Nigeria politics. The whole elaborate facade of constitution making from 1944 to 1958 was an attempt to work out a stable federal balance between the three regions or to put it more starkly between the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo.(1989:11 12).

A remarkable feature of post-colonial politics in Nigeria is the constitution of the political position of ethnic majorities. Consequently, the contradictions based on ethnic majority-minority dichotomy have become a core element in the political power relationship in the country.

Majority fears dominate the discourse of the North central Zone who perceives them as being an "Internal Colony" in relation to the core -North. The ethnic minorities in the region support a united Nigeria, but insists on a power rotation in order to renegotiate the "Federal Pact" and end the political hegemony of the majority ethnic groups particularly the monopolization of the Presidency by the North. (Alhassan 2004:49). Similarly, the Niger- Delta people have fiercely expressed this position. Here, the patterns of political domination and exclusion in the post independence era, the abolition of

the derivation principle and the expression of the agitation of the people oil producing communities, have all contributed to this power-shift controversy. This misfortune is explained in terms of the conspiracy of the majority ethnic groups who have prospered significantly by controlling state power and the oil wealth having alienated them from the power process Azeloma and Akpotor, (2003:51). It is significant to note here that the demand by the Niger-Delta nic organizations like the Chorkoko movement and the union of Niger-Delta for the insertion of the issue of power rotation/shift in the situation as seen in just aborted constitution review debate is a pointer the enormity of their bitterness. Therefore, the agitation for power-shift or rotation in the Nigerian federal system is in line with the modernists conception of federalism as a power arrangement that responds to the aspiration of the people. Thus, the analysis above has shown the imperativeness of social justice as a necessary requirement for the existence of true federalism.

Federalism and National Question In Nigeria

The year 1954 remains a watershed in Nigeria's evolution in to statehood. For whichever way the current crisis of legitimacy of the Nigerian state is resolved, reference cannot but be made to the year when abolition the colonial state functionaries and the "Nationalists" reached a consensus that federalism was the best form of power sharing for the nation-in the making.

On the part of the British, it was the formula that assures their lends the northern oligarchy of progress at their own place. On the issue of the other anti-colonial agitators from the south, it facilitated the (assumption of a dream -the termination of British rule and consequent realization of sovereign statehood. In Euphoria of the moment, little attention was paid to the dynamic of inter-ethnic competition for scarce state resources that was soon to be unleashed to undermine the process of national integration as the new republic crawled off. Of course, a full appreciation of 1954 must begin with 1914, the year Lord Lugard, the Governor-General, in a lightening move decided to unite the administrations of the

two hitherto superlatively administered protectorate. But the picture of the process of Nigeria March into the "Federalist Revolution" (Elazar, 1979:2) will not be complete without reference to another imperial act of administrative expediency.

In 1939, the Southern protectorate was split into East and West, impleting the process of constructing the tripod federal formula structure that was consummated in the 1954 constitution. The central contention of this is that on reflection, the Nigerian "nationalists" who delivered Nigeria from British colonial rule were less concerned with forging a Nigerian identity than with carving out a geographical base for their personal material advancement. That legacy continues to Haunt Nigerians as a people till date (2012). The current political and constitutional stale-mate is the clearest testimony of this debate, (Eleazu, 1979:9) Wondered:

The "founding fathers" of Nigeria adopted federalism as a pragmatic instrument for holding together the entity called Nigeria. They thought that through federalism they will maintain unity in diversity; that within the federal structure the diverse ethnic groups can be welded in to a modern nation. They were full of hope for this country and I am inclined to believe that they all menu I well. But by 1966, the hope was blighted by the very same leaders who espoused it we can then address ourselves is how can a repeat of 1967-70 be avoided? At the risk of being considered a prophet of doom rather than a social scientist there is sufficient evidence that all the trapping of 1967 have been unfolding since 1993 and may soon assume a logic of their own (if they have not already) from which we may never recovered a corporate entity.

Power Sharing and Federalism in Nigeria

The Nigerian state incorporates about 374 ethnic groups and has a 1 post colonial history of factional political conflicts due to the inherent weakness in Nigeria's Federal arrangement to respond adequately to agitation for equity in power sharing in the country. To this end, while there is a federal system in the nation because the federating

units agree to I establish such a government to provide sense of belonging to all peoples that make up the country. The issue of monopolization of political power by the North has tended to have heightened the debate for power shift in the country (Daily Champion, Sept. 6, 2001).From the military era to the present moment Nigeria has had to introduce frame moment like federal character to address the problem of political marginalization in the country (Ajakaiye, 2000:4), Professor Daniel Okpako in an article " Nigeria's nations and the challenge of federalism", (2006:46), argues that the introduction of federal character in Nigeria and its subsequent insertion in the constitution was the need to avoid the domination of one ethnic group by the other considering the levels of mutual ethnic distract in the nation.

It is important to note that despite the practice of federal character principle, there is still the complaint of exclusion in the political bargaining •process by the south-south region of the country as the North dominates the political scene of the country. Thus, according to Adigun (1998:8), the first step towards codifying the ideology of power sharing was taken by the national constitutional conference inaugurated by Late General Sani Abacha on 27th August, 1994 with the Mandate to deliberate upon the structure of the Nigerian nation- state and work of Modalities for ensuring good governance, guaranteeing equal opportunity, to aspire to any public office irrespective of state of origin, ethnicity or religious background and le engender a sense of belonging in all our citizens.

After a serious debate at the power sharing committee many commendations were made including those calling for rotation of the presidency, rotation of executive heads of government at the state and local levels, zoning of other public posts, proportional representation at all level of government establishment of a federal character commission.

This issue of rotational presidency received more attention which is widely opposed by the North and welcomed by the South representatives. The committee finally

concluded that the election of the nation's member one citizen has been a major source of our political crises and upheaval, determined to fashion out a constitution that will be acceptable to the majority of Nigerians and mindful of the need to avoid concentration of power in the hands of a few, or sectional groups, and the need to allay the fears in certain quarters that the position of the number one should rotate among the six (6) geo-political zones of the country, table below shows the breakdown of the nation's past rulers and how the opportunity to taste that position of the presidency since the history of the Nation.

Shift and Injustice in Nigeria Federalism

The agitation for power shift in Nigeria is a product of marginalization either real or perceived. The agitation for power shift confirms the notion that unless and until one's kinsmen and women helms of affairs especially of the presidency one's interest cannot be protected (Nuhu, 2003:6).

While looking at the prospect of power shift in addressing the problem of marginalization in Nigeria federation, Okwori (2002:2) argued that it is crystal clear that marginalization is caused and sustained by unpatriotic Nigerians who are found from all the regions in Nigeria from all the tribes and religions. In other words, the exploiting group constitute a clique whose members have common interests which is inimical to the survival of the mass majority. One of the fundamental difficulties of power-shift in the Nigerian federal system is the fact that a minority tribe may be complaining bitterly of marginalization from the major ethnic group, whereas at the same time from within the minority tribe you find some people complaining of being marginalized by some elements of their tribes (Nuhu, 2003: 41).

With the ascendancy of Obasanjo in to power in May, 1999, the Northwest began to complain of marginalization in the political power process at federal level. The outcry is in two-fold: The first was the immediate Purging of Military officers of North-Western

origin by the government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in the wake of this assumption of office. Second, the attempt by Obasanjo at placing Yoruba people in very sensitive position in his cabinet.

However, federalism is a political arrangement designed to respond to the yearnings and aspirations of all the people in the country. Thus, the controversial debate of power shift which result from domination of a particular region of the country due to the North/South divide cannot address the problem of marginalization in the country, it is clear that politics, and power relation in Nigeria are always determined by few individuals amongst the Nigeria elites who belong to various regions, ethnic enclaves and sections. And that politics and power relation always directed towards overshadowing of the masses from the political economy of the nation. Thus, if there would be genuine power shift should be to producing credible leadership who can satisfy the public who have always been at the receiving end of bad governance in Nigeria as poverty does not respect ethno-regional. Background, where one section (North) has subordinated the other sections in the political power process in the country. And, all efforts hitherto made to address this problem have achieved little or no demand for democratization in the country is predicated on the need to enthrone democratic arrangement that believes in the values of justices, equity is fairness where every group and section of the country will have a dense belonging.

Unfortunately, however, since the colonial days to contemporary time Nigeria political power has not been by the pc seekers regardless of their ethnic and regional background and instrument of service to the larger members of the society. These see stems from the nature of class formation and the nature of the Nigeria state, which is rooted in our colonial origin.

Conclusion

The research for a true federal state in Nigeria should limited to attempt to resolve the elite

quest for power, but be resolved in isolation of the larger question of the rich and powerful individuals who "emerged from the state" through primitive accumulation of state's resources and live in affluence in the midst of mass poverty. Every ethnic group or region in Nigeria is class oriented and thus class oppression takes place in all of them.

It follows, therefore, that at this critical moment of Nigeria's history when the goal is democratic consolidation, the country cannot be toiling with mechanical shifting of power from one zone to another if our effort. Inwards nation building is really an agenda. If only, there is going to be shift of power, then, it should be to the people and not the elite class that runs through all the ethnic groups in the country and have participated at one point or the other in the plundering of the country's resources and consequently casing the country her development vision.

Recommendations

In spite of the problems inherent in Nigerian federalism, it remains essentially the most viable framework for effective administration for Nigeria, as the benefit of complementarities of resources cannot be overemphasized.

The agitation for mechanical shift of power along the ethnic and regional lines does not in the long term constitute effective solution to the perceived or real domination of the minority in the country. What the country needs to address this problem of injustice in the Nigerian federal stem is the principle of good governance as no reform can be successful without a leader that would bring equity, justice and fairness to bear on governance. The idea of zoning the presidency at the federal level and governorship at the state level may not solve this problem at it is only an impression of our inability to rise above ethnic and sectional consideration, in the majority democracy rooted in a free and fair election should side our electoral process at all levels, as poverty is no respecter of ethnic and sectional background. To this end, what the country

needs now is a leader that can facilitate mass empowerment.

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