Politics of Integration and Marginalization in a Federation:

The South-South Question in Nigerian Politics

Segun Oshewolo
(M A. Political Science, University of Ilorin, Nigeria)

Abstract

The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings cohere on the central issues. These are linked to national unity, local autonomy and self-determination, equitable distribution of revenue, rewards, opportunities and power. They also include the observation and implementation of fundamental human rights, among which are the rights of franchise and empowerment, and socio-economic rights to basic needs' satisfaction, sustainable environment and lif*e* (Anifowose and Seteolu, 2004:45)

Key words: Federalism, Integration, Marginalization, South-South**,** and Nigerian politics

Introduction

From the quotation above, the Nigerian federal principle has been struggling against the forces of social cohesion. The exponential growth of this phenomenon is not only common in Africa where Nigeria is geo-politically located but also in the new federations of Asia and the Caribbean Islands (Ray, 2006:171). The cardinal goal of federalism is the promotion of unity in diversity. Therefore, federalism as a system is not only about uniformities, but also the recognition of diversities. In a young federation like Nigeria, with diverse ethnic nationalities, there are social and economic factors which contribute to integration and also impede integration in a variety of situations. Scholars have noted that the dynamics of federalism requires the identification of these forces. Perhaps, this will give impetus to national cohesion and put divisive tendencies at bay. The assumption is that, given the plural and polyglot nature of the Nigerian society, the marginalization of some sections, especially the minority groups, becomes a likelihood. There will definitely be claims and counter

claims. It is this development that makes integration a difficult task. However, it should be noted that there are usually basis for these claims as amplified by the South-South (see Ifeka, 2001:100).

The intriguing force behind the South-South episode is evidently the 'politics of oil' (Omoruyi, 2001). Since the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in 1956, life has been a long stretch of struggles for survival for the people of the region. This is because oil has been and still remains the object of claims between the federal government and the Niger Delta with the relationship degenerating into large-scale conflict. Obviously, the South-South question in the light of the foregoing relates to resource control and revenue sharing. Ifeka (2001:99) however notes that the basis for the struggle is the enormous deprivation been experienced by the host communities. Moreover, the inequalities in the distribution of power, wealth and status, and domination and oppression by bigger groups and their collaborators within the smaller groups have frustrated the minority people of the South-South (Angaye, 2003). Their doggedness to resolve this anomaly has set the country on a keg of gunpowder.

Could the emergence of the South-South struggle be a reflection of the mismanagement of the Nigerian federal experiment by successive political leaders? What impact does the South-South question have on the Nigerian polity? And what are the wider prospects of federalism in addressing the conflict situation in the region beyond the federal government's amnesty programme? These are germane issues to this discussion. The background information and the thought-provoking questions raised above therefore set the framework for this paper.

Federalism

There is neither an accepted theory of federalism, nor any agreement as to its real nature (Ray, 2006:150). This implies that the term is still shrouded in controversy largely because of contrasting conceptualization. However, commendable attempts have been made by different scholars to demystify the concept. Wheare (cited in Ray, 2006:151) distinguishes between a federal principle, a federal constitution and a federal government. By the federal principle, he means 'the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each within a sphere,

coordinate and independent.' A federal constitution is one in which the federal principle is predominant. A federal government is that which embodies predominantly a division of powers between general and regional authorities each of which, in its own sphere, is coordinate with others and independent of them. The explanation given to the federal recipe above gives a clear picture of what a federation looks like.

From an operational perspective, Ojo (2002:10) points out that federalism is reputed to be an effective political-cum-constitutional design for managing complex governmental problems usually associated with ethnic and cultural diversity. In his own submission, Mazrui (1971:300) claims that federalism is an institutionalization of compromise relationship. It is not only democratic, complete with the institutionalization of most essential ingredients; it is also creative and flexible enough to incorporate several accommodation formulas.

Despite the optimism regarding the ability of federalism to resolve problems of diversity and disparity in the interests of harmony and unity, Jinadu (1979) opines that there is the problem of how to design the federation in such a way as to prevent an ethnic group or a combination of ethnic groups, or one state or a combination of states, from perpetually dominating and imposing their will on other ethnic groups. From the above premise, Agbu (2004:3) notes that one cannot discuss federalism in Nigeria outside its implication for the country's ethnic diversity.

From a socio-economic perspective, Agbu (2004:3) believes that the contestation over federalism in Nigeria has manifested itself not only in the quest for access and control over political but also as access to federally generated revenue. This assertion best describes the situation in the South-South where the people are clamouring for a considerable upward review in the current 13 per cent derivation.

Integration

Federalism and integration are two concepts that are intertwined. This is because federalism, which is adjudged to be an integrative mechanism, seeks to promote unity and harmony among diverse ethnic groups in a plural polity. It therefore implies that the existence of ethnic diversities and cleavages engenders the need for integrative efforts. Notably, a major problem facing new states, particularly developing new ones, with numerous cultural, linguistic and social diversities, is that of national integration (Ojukwu, 2005:130).

Duverger (cited in Ojo, 2002:6) defines integration as "the process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious." From the above presupposition, the success of integration depends on the perception by the federating units of how equitably cordial the binding order is, at least, in terms of harmonious federal-state relations and inter-ethnic relations.

Natufe (2001) proposes that the inability of a federal government to equitably relate to the interests of the federating units gives rise to centrifugal forces that could destabilize the federal polity. When this happens, the levels of citizenship - state and federal - become entangled in perpetual conflicts as the federal government and the federating units fail to agree on vital issues of interest to the latter. He further notes that under this scenario, citizen's loyalty gravitates towards their respective states and the legitimacy of the federal government becomes questionable.

The programme of national integration is to be coordinated by the government at the center but with the cooperation of the federating units. When this support is lacking, especially when the components units perceive the activities of the central government to be at variance with their interests, the goal of national integration becomes a mirage.

Tijani (2005) in his own contribution states that unity connotes a social and political process while integration is organic. Integration is deeper, and can be the basis of unity. Akinbade (2004:89) views integration as the process of maintaining the territorial integrity of a state. What this means is that, in a deeply divided society with 'babel' of voices like Nigeria, integration becomes a necessary task that must be implemented for the purpose of securing stability and adaptability within the state. Alapiki (2005:49) contends that the prospects of national integration and local autonomy depend on the emergence of a purposeful national leadership and proper political restructuring of the federation designed to generate a national image that has more appeal than the regional ones.

Marginalization

Just like other concepts in social sciences, marginalization has been variously defined by several scholars. There is often a proliferation in the semantisation of the concept in a deeply divided society like Nigeria where virtually every geo-political zone complains of one form of deprivation or the other. Ojukwu (2005:141) views

marginalization as a state of relative deprivation, a deliberate disempowerment of a people by a group or groups that, during a relevant time frame, wields political power and control the allocation of material and other resources at the center.

In a similar vein, Obianyo (2003:6) submits that marginalization depicts neglect, non-involvement or inequality in the distribution of the socio-economic and political resources of the state or indices of development. Taking a cue from the above, Akinbade (2004:109) explains marginalization as a denial of access to political power or social amenities to a group or region while dispensing favour to the advantage of others. He further explains that this is particularly the case in Nigeria where every group complains of marginalization. This ultimately reveals that state resources are not evenly distributed. It should be noted that the phenomenal concept of marginalization gives rise to other terms such as oppression, domination, accusations and allegations of neglect, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, nepotism, and bigotry among others.

In his expository analysis on ethnic politics in Nigeria, Agbu (2004:31) states that ethnic minority politics has basically relegated the minorities to dominated or subordinated groups who often times take solace in engaging in 'spoiler politics'. Little wonder, many of these groups are in the forefront of the calls for a restructuring of the Nigerian federation.

The revelation given above explains the role played by ethnicity or ethnic politics in encouraging marginalization in Nigeria. The position maintained by Angaye (2003) is that conflict occurs when deprived groups or individuals attempt to increase their share of power and wealth or to modify the dominant values, norms, beliefs or ideology. Emphatically, when a group begins to nurse the feelings of strangulation, emasculation and discrimination, conflict may ensue.

The Instrumentality of Politics and Theoretical Issues

From the view of Akindele, Obiyan and Owoeye (1998:1), politics can be understood as an act or practice that involves the skills, insights and astuteness of a leader or other officials involved in politics. The concept of politics is ubiquitous in nature because it is of variant practices. Hence, we can talk of 'politics of integration', 'ethnic politics', 'politics of oil' among numerous others.

Another conception of politics is that which views it as the struggle for power. A radical variant of this is offered by Marxists as derived from the work of Karl Marx

(see Murkherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:348-387). This view holds that politics is conflict between antagonistic classes in the society. In essence, politics connotes class struggle and the state is an oppressive instrument in the hand of the ruling class. Natufe (2001) points out that 'politics is about power and influence. It is a struggle of contending ideological viewpoints on the allocation and distribution of resources. It determines who gets what, when and why.'

The oppression of the disadvantaged groups and the desire to consolidate power will give birth to the twin concepts of 'resistance politics' and 'resistance to change' (Natufe, 2001). The oppressed and marginalized elements argue for systemic changes that will eliminate the causes of their oppression. They demand for equity and fairness. This condition is termed 'resistance politics'. On the other hand, 'resistance to change' is championed by the elements of the ruling class, which include representatives of the military and civilians in politics (see Natufe, 2001). Resistance to change, in the view of the scholar, is a major obstacle to social progress.

The above juxtaposition captures the relationships between the South-South and the federal government of Nigeria. The South-South is notorious for resistance politics while the federal government is rigidly resistant to change. Ideologically, Marxists argue that the ruling class determines the form and content of the means of production as well as the distribution and consumption of national wealth. The ruling class controls state power. This ideological leaning has led to the centralization of the fiscal system in Nigeria by the illegitimate military governments and the maintenance of the status quo by succeeding civilian governments.

Prior to military intervention in 1966, the principle of derivation retained 50 per cent royalties and mineral resources to the regions of origin, 30 per cent to the distributive pool and 20 per cent to the federal government. Under the guise of protecting minorities and raising resources to fight the civil war, the military transferred resources previously vested in the regions to the central government. The 50 per cent derivation to the regions of origin was subsequently reduced to 10 per cent, giving rise to a new revenue formula, which was generously in favour of the federal government. The period coincided with the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, which made Nigeria one of the leading producers of oil in the world. But for this change in revenue formula, 50 per cent of oil revenue would have been divested to the Niger Delta areas (see Adeola, 2008:6-7). Consequently, the demand for resource

control by states of the South-South and the unwillingness of the federal government to address it has precipitated violence and wanton destruction in the region.

The institutionalization of large-scale corruption has become identified with the Nigerian politics. The federal government became an over-bloated bureaucratic system due to the concentration of too much resources to the center (Adeola, 2008:8). Aristotle, the great philosopher and intellectual colossus, consequently points out that the source of revolutions and sedition is usually the image of the government, and that care would have to be taken to prevent offices from being used for personal gain (see Murkherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:131). This development also gives room to what Richard Joseph (1991) describes as 'prebendal politics'. This means using public positions for primitive accumulation of wealth and personal aggrandizement. Under various regimes, there was profligate spending of national resources. This has in reality, been the cause of the struggle in the South-South.

The South-South Struggle: Some Inescapable Facts

The South-South struggle is premised on historical dialectics, which implies that the struggle actually predates the political independence of Nigeria (see Aghalino, 2006:301). As noted by Lea and Young (cited in Jike, 2005:153), the struggle stems from widespread social deprivations, development disjointedness and inequities including the allocation of government revenue, ancillary infrastructure or appointment to choice public positions. With this situation, the people began to perceive a profound sense of marginalization and alienation from the realties of a prosperous nation whose wealth is derived from the bowel of the Niger Delta. Akpan (2005:35) gives an economic dimension to the political question of marginalization by associating with the economic relations that have evolved from the current resource ownership and control regime. The factors underlying the struggle are presented below.

A major underlying factor is the displacement of the traditional occupations of the people in the region. As observed by Akpan (2005:36), the dispossession of their land and waters by oil companies has created inherently endemic unemployment among the members of those communities previously engaged in traditional occupations. This has entrenched poverty and dualized the economic classes in oil producing areas along the lines of a high-income economy with good economic infrastructures and social amenities and a contrasting subsistent income traditional

sector with a high level of unemployment and a deteriorating environment. Fiakpa (2003:7) laments that the wealth from its bowels has made the nation's skyscrapers, expressways and housing estates possible, but the only tale from the South-South is that of neglect. With this state of affairs, lack of jobs, non-siting of industries and a near lack of infrastructure, the region has become synonymous with squalor and poverty.

Another inescapable fact is environmental degradation. Because of the links created by water channels, heavy rains and occasional natural floods, oil spills and gas flaring have effects that are easily spread throughout the entire region through the relief and climatic factors as conveyance vehicles (see Akpan, 2005:36). In his essay, Naess (1997:43-45) identifies the anthropocentric and biocentric approaches to the sustainable development of the environment. The anthropocentric approach to human condition within the natural world is based on materialism and the pursuit of wealth to the neglect of the environment. The emergence of multi-national corporations in the South-South and the vested interest of government describes this picture. The biocentric approach on the other hand is eco-friendly. In any case, just compensation and resource efficiency are far from been realized. Thus, environmental degradation persists despite decades of protests and reform attempts.

Corruption is another underlying factor. The high level of corruption among government officials in Nigeria can also be linked to high prevalence of agency activities that are associated with the large proportion of the resources controlled by the government (Akpan, 2005:41). According to Adeola (2008:8), corruption has not only become institutionalized but also glamourized in Nigeria as a result of overconcentration of resources to the centre. Jike (2005:153) notes that the characteristic profligacy of the typical Nigerian politician who squanders 'petro-naira' at the slightest opportunity is another cause for worry.

To address the problems identified above, different cultural and militia groups have been formed at different points in time. These include the Egbesu Boys, Ijaw Militia, Itsekiri Militia, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, Niger Delta Vigilante Services and Niger Delta Patriotic Force among numerous others. These groups cut across all the ethnic affiliations of the Niger Delta. The goals of these groups include among others an upward review in derivation and resource control. These goals were essentially

derived from the legacies of Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Government Interventionist Policies

The peculiarity of the South-South as a region that deserves attention for development has for long been recognized but not actualized. It should be stated that efforts at ameliorating the plight of the region started in the pre-independence Nigeria. The then colonial administration set up the Henry Willinks Commission in 1958 to recommend the path of development that should be followed for the region. This led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board, NDDB, in 1961. In 1976, the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority, NDBRDA, came on board (see Tell Magazine, April 7, 2007).

In 1981, there was the Presidential Task Force, which allocated 1.5 per cent of the federation account for the development of the region. In 1992, the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission, OMPADEC, was inaugurated in place of the Presidential Task Force. And with the death of the military dictatorship and the birth of democracy in 1999, the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, came on stream. On December 21, 2001, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated the board of the NDDC to redress the injustices of the years of neglect of the region. The Commission was charged with the mission of facilitating the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful (see Suberu, 1996; Odukoya, 2005; Tell Magazine, April 7, 2007). The above mission appears laudable but the persistent deprivation of the people of the region put the performance of the NDDC in the realm of prospective analysis.

Late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua created the Niger Delta Ministry in 2008. This effort represents one of the attempts made by successive governments in Nigeria to address the complaint of emasculation by the people of the region. The major breakthrough of the administration perhaps came with the unconditional pardon granted the militants through the Amnesty Programme introduced in 2009. The militants in the region surrendered their arms but kidnapping for ransom now represents the new face of the crisis, which is fast spreading across the entire country.

The policies identified above consist of the interventionist programmes of government in the region. However, the extent to which these policies have allayed the dilemma of the South-South remains a topical issue. The success of any policy is

measured by the direct impact it has on the lives of the affected people. In the case of the South-South, the daily increase in the complaints of exploitation and strangulation raise doubts about the effectiveness of these programmes. The present Amnesty Programme, although it is still early to assess the success or otherwise of the programme, appears to hold the key to peace in the region.

The South-South Episode and Implication for Nigeria

The long episode of the South-South struggle no doubt has far reaching implications for the Nigerian federal polity. With guns all over, prior to the introduction of the Amnesty Programme, the zone was a theatre of war. All kinds of sophisticated weapons were freely deployed by youths in various communities resulting in huge destruction of lives and property. With the growth in unemployment, environmental degradation and high development demands in the region, there has been an increase in social tension. The tension has been a cause of worry to the political class in Nigeria and has given birth to the grave issue of insecurity in the South-South.

Furthermore, the struggle over resource control and revenue sharing has been a major cause of disaffection among the diverse people of Nigeria. It has threatened the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria and encouraged separatist tendencies. As a matter of fact, this social misnomer will frustrate the project of an integrated polity.

More so, development cannot take place where the people find it difficult to peacefully co-exist. Equally, social crises such as the vandalization of pipelines and strategic installations will definitely retard economic growth and development.

Another implication is the battered image of Nigeria in the international environment. The abduction of expatriate and indigenous workers for ransom is capable of straining Nigeria's relationship with other countries. Obviously, this can be described as the criminalization of the struggle. This dimension of the struggle can negatively impact on the level of direct foreign investment into the country.

Nigeria and the Federal Option

Nigeria is the most populous black nation on earth and undoubtedly a deeply divided society. Federalism is seen as a political arrangement with the prospects of solving the problems of nation building. Although in theory, societies with divisive tendencies are said to need federal solutions, but in practice, no two federal constructions are the same. Each is conditioned by the character of the federation. The

Nigerian case is a unique one due to colonial experience, military incursion into politics and the complex nature of the federal polity engendered by ethnic diversity. These ethnic groups are biologically, culturally and linguistically distinct from each other, and often view their relations in actual or potentially antagonistic terms (Odukoya, 2005; Adeola, 2008). The Nigerian federalism may not conform with the practice elsewhere, what is responsible for this is the character of the national question. However, federalism remains the panacea for the divisiveness in the Nigerian federal composition. It should be stated without mincing words that political leadership in Nigeria will have to intensify effort on massive restructuring of the federal system.

In response to the problem of diversity described above, federalism became operationalized in Nigeria in 1954. Since then there has been militating factors against the practice. One of these is the struggle for resource control. The predisposing factor, however, is the variation in the possession of economic opportunities and potentials. This situation has made the naturally endowed areas to be reluctant in sharing their wealth with other regions that are less endowed. The federal provision has been the evolution of a system of revenue allocation encapsulated by the derivation principle, a system that has historically become controversial in Nigeria. This system allows money to be returned appropriately to the states of origin of natural resources (see Oladeji, 2006).

Regions that are rich in a federation like the South-South, whose bowels oil is produced, will prefer fiscal autonomy and the control of their resources while the poor ones will favour and demand for a system in which resources are evenly distributed among states. The response of governments in the past has been to establish different commissions to deal with the problem. Such commissions have been set up at one time or the other to resolve the problem of revenue allocation. These commissions include: the Sydney Phillipson Commission of 1946; Hicks/Phillipson Commission of 1951; Louis Chicks Commission of 1954; Raisman Commission of 1958; Binns Commission of 1964; Dina Committee of 1968; Aboyade Technical Committee of 1977; Okigbo Presidential Commission on Revenue allocation of 1979; and Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission of 1998 (see Odukoya, 2005:117).

The regime of fiscal regionalism of the 50s significantly favoured the regions because of the application of the derivation principle, but the fiscal centralism of the

post independence period has led to a consistent reduction in the state's allocations. From 50 per cent between 1960 and 1967; to 45 per cent (minus off shore proceeds) between 1971 and 1975; to 20 per cent (minus off shore proceeds) between 1975 and 1979; to 1.5 per cent from 1982 to 1992; and back to 3 per cent between 1992 and 1999; and to 13 per cent from 1999 (see Oladeji, 2006:289). The delegates that represented the South-South region in the National Political Reform Conference organized by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2005 demanded for 25 per cent derivation, which must be increased to 50 per cent in the next five years (see Saliu and Omotola, 2008:182). This demand was a demonstration of their displeasure with the current 13 per cent derivation.

Arguably, the military played a prominent role in promoting fiscal centralism in Nigeria. Successive military governments have arrogated too much power and resources to the centre. This was reflected in the continuous reduction in the allocation to the states. Today, the cause of the volatility of the South-South is the adoption of fiscal centralism as against fiscal federalism. This is a legacy of the military (see Agbu, 2004; Adeola, 2008). Due to prolonged military rule and its resultant operational defects, it is widely claimed that Nigeria's federalism has failed. The obvious reason for this perceived failure has been the *centralist* nature of the military, which the succeeding civilian governments find more appealing than fiscal regionalism. As a result, the nation's resources have been concentrated in the centre with the central government being the biggest beneficiary at the expense of the producing states. Therefore, with the present democratic experimentation, the mobilizational orientation of the Nigerian federalist ideology should be *decentralist*.

There may be imperfections with the Nigerian federal arrangement as revealed by the compendia above, but the federal therapy still remains a viable option for Nigeria. Odukoya (2005:125) argues that federalism is a perfect recipe for the management of Nigeria's diversity. The system will not only protect the interests of the minorities, but will also fast track the process of nation building. The federal ideology accommodates different mechanisms for addressing Nigeria's ethnic and cultural diversity in addition to issues relating to resource control and management.

Concluding Remarks

Nigeria has been a major testing ground for federalism in Africa (Adeola, 2008:4). As the largest federal polity in Africa, a number of factors exist to frustrate

the Nigerian federal experiment. These are socio-economic, political and even geographical factors. Studies have however shown that these challenges are expected because of the uniqueness of Nigeria's federalism and the character of the national question. The minority question, agitation for resource control, vociferous complaints over marginalization and alienation, and blazing row over disproportionate political representation, which have become the songs of lamentation of the South-South constitute major challenges. It should be unequivocally stated that these challenges notwithstanding, federalism remains the best option for Nigeria because the principle accommodates the interests of culturally diverse people.

However, the Nigerian federation requires massive restructuring and the entrenchment of sustainable democratic machinery will be a necessary step in this direction. The principles of fairness and equity in the distribution of resources as well as proportionality in political appointments are necessary ingredients for the stability of the system. More importantly, the task of confidence building should be taken seriously as this will promote mutuality of feeling among the diverse cultural groups in Nigeria and eliminate the political allegory of alienation, suspicion and mistrust characterizing the ambience of the South-South.

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