

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIONS AND THE ROLE OF MILITARY IN NIGERIAN FEDERALISM

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Abstract

The history of Nigeria cannot be complete without reference to colonial and military administrations. Consequently, most of the institutions, agencies, boards, policies and soon of the government of Nigeria are traceable to either colonial or military administration. This paper aims at examining the historical facts that led to the establishment of 'Nigerian federalism'. The paper argues that one of the legacies of military rule in Nigeria is the Nigerian brand of federalism. The objective of this paper will be achieved through interviews and consulting related literature. The findings reveal that Nigerian federalism is unique as other federal states do not practice Nigeria type of federalism. This paper concludes that the hierarchical nature of the military coupled with military fiat made it comparatively easier for the military to entrench their legacies, including quasi-federal system in the country.

Key words: Colonial administration, unitary system, federalism, military, legacy

Introduction

In Nigeria's contemporary political history, colonialism and military rule plays dominant role in the emergence of Nigerian federalism. Apparently, the history of Nigeria as a modern state could not be discussed without reference to colonial administration. On the other hand, the history of post-independent Nigeria would be incomplete without an examination of military rule and their legacies. These two administrations, established much of political and economic institutions in the country. However, for the colonial administrations, there are indications that rather than foster unity in the country. It intensified the divide in the country and therefore deepened ethnic conflicts (Madiabo, 1980).

Contrary to this was the administrative system of the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian military interfered in politics on January, 15, 1966, following regional politics, political alliances, party intricacies, ethnic politics, corruption, lawlessness, and so on (James Ojiako, 1979, Oyeleye, 1980). The administrative style of the military is largely unitary- This paper examines the current unitary-federalism as part of the Nigerian military legacy. There were other legacies that would be mentioned briefly. The center aim of the paper is to examine how colonial administration encourages divisive tendencies in Nigeria and how in turn the military tended to encourage a centripetal tendencies by creating a strong central government, without taking into consideration, the federal structure of the country. Hence, the logical historical sequence of the argument of the paper is that the colonial administrators created divide and rule tendencies in

the country. Hence, the logical historical sequence of the argument of the paper is that the colonial administrators created divide and rule tendencies in the country, the military in turn created a strong center, which weakened the federal state structure. The paper addresses some salient and pertinent questions; was federalism imposed on Nigeria? What were the circumstances that led to unitary government in Nigeria? What went wrong with Nigeria federalism? In what ways did military administration style affect Nigeria federalism? Put succinctly, why did Ironsi regime introduce Unitary Government? As an academic exercise, the paper relied on secondary sources. Relevant literatures were consulted. The primary sources are interview and observations. The paper concludes that though Nigerians were not consulted in 1884/1885 Berlin Conference, they were also not consulted in the 1914 amalgamation, they were however involved from 1950 – 1954 on the making of Lyttleton Constitution that brought in the principles of federalism in Nigeria. The paper also concludes that the space of conflicts, terrorism, military, political upheavals etc are concomitant or derivatives of quasi federalism in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

There are some basic concepts used this paper that requires explanation. For the purposes of clarity these concepts shall be operationalize in line with how they are used within the content.

Protectorate: A country that is controlled and protected by a moneful country (Wodi, 2008: 287). Wodi further defines it as a territory whose traditional rulers had by treaty surrendered some of their rights of government the British, while still retaining their unceded rights and membership of the land.

Indirect Rule: For James Coleman indirect rule as a system of local administration which the essential features were the preservation of the British administration to the requirement of modern units of local government. It was an administrative practice that made it difficult to achieve national unity because it divided people into groups. It was as a system of administration under which traditional rulers were allowed to rule their people under the supervision of British officials. This inadvertently, reinforced ethnic divisions and contributed to postcolonial problems.

Federalism: The concept of federalism has many definitions and perspectives. Wheare (1963:10) conceptualize federalism as the method of dividing powers so that general and regional government is each within a sphere coordinate and independent. Tekena Tamuno (1978) argues that federation is a form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and functions in a cooperative manner though the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity among others tend to pull their people apart.

According to Appadorai, (2003:495):

A federal state is one in which there is a central authority that represents the whole, and acts on behalf of the whole in external affairs and in such interest and in which there are also provincial or state authorities with powers of legislation and administration within the sphere allotted to them by the constitution.

Appadora's definition appears apt and appropriate within the context of federalism as exemplified by most federal states like USA, Canada, Australia and Switzerland.

Unitary State: This may be defined as one organized under a single government; and Unitarianism as the habitual exercise of supreme legislative authority by one Central power as exemplified by Britain, France and Italy. The concern of this paper is on colonial administration and the legacy of the Nigerian military. The pertinent question is, what is the relationship between the state/region and the centre during the colonial and military administration? The essence of this question is couched on the fact that the distinguishing factor between a federal state structure and unitary government is the nature of the relationship of the central to the local/state or regional bodies/authorities.

Background to Colonial Administration in Nigeria

Historically, the emergency of colonial administration in Nigeria must be traced to events in Europe and Africa (Effiong, Mboho and Wordu, 2018). In Europe, the concern of their regimes, traders, sailors, administration, soldiers, was on how to acquire territories in Africa. In Africa, there were virgin opportunities for Europeans companies to exploit. To minimize conflicts among European nations in the struggle for territories in Africa. In Africa, there were virgin opportunities for Europeans companies to exploit. To minimize conflicts among European nations in the struggle for territories in Africa, the Berlin conference 1884 - 1885 was organized by German leader Otto-Von Bismack.

Asante Kete (2007:228) describes the Berlin Conference as "one of the most arrogant acts in modern political history". Europe and its America and Turkish compatriots decided the fate of Africa without regard to Africa political, social and legal rights. Indeed, African people had no rights that white nations believed they needed to heed.

Out of the Berlin Conference emerged three declines; the doctrine of spheres of influence; the doctrine of effective occupation and the doctrine of European missionaries, explorers, and scientists who exploited the African people's resources. The conference mandated European nations to take effective occupation of the areas of influence. Already, by 1849, Britain had taken the first step towards power in the area known as Nigeria when she appointed John Beecroft as Consul for the Bight of Benin and Biafra with headquarters at Calabar (Bassa, 2004:48).

Again, by 1861 Lagos has been declared a crown colony. By virtue of this declaration, Lagos came under the direct administration of United Kingdom in Buckingham palace Citizens in colonies were treated or regarded as British citizens. These are the basic differences between crown colony and protectorate. By the doctrine of effective occupation the Berlin conference accepted British claims of the areas now described as Nigeria. To entrench British influence in

these areas, the National African Company (ANC) limited, which later replaced the United Africa Company (UAC) signed more than 70 treaties with local rulers on both banks of the Niger upto Lokoja. By 1886, the company has metamorphosed to the Royal Niger Company and was granted a royal charter to among other things, "exercise all purposes of government and preservation of public order", especially in northern Nigeria (Bassey 2000; Inegbe, 2024).

However, it was only the appointment of Sir Claude Macdonald as Consul General in 1891, that a regional administration was established in South/Eastern Nigeria. The Royal Nigeria Company Charter was revoked on December, 31, 1899 (Onwubiko, 1986). With this revocation, colonial rule in Nigeria dates from January, 1, 1900. In ha year, the British Government took over the administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate and merged it with the area south of the Royal Niger Company. The entity was proclaimed the protectorate of southern Nigeria. The other areas controlled by the RNC, North of Idah were proclaimed the protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Lord Lugard was later appointed the High Commissioner for this Protectorate. The territories or protectorate within Nigeria then were not merged together immediately, rather, though the process of gradual amalgamation as recommended by Sir Selborne Commission was adopted. Thus, by 1906, the colony and protectorate of Lagos was amalgamated with the Southern Nigeria to form the colony and the protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Tamuno (1980) pointed out that the primary aim of the government in the 1906 minor amalgamation was economic. It sought to use the better financial position of the protectorate of southern Nigeria to cover the cost of administration of and development in the financially weak colony of protectorate of Lagos. More so, as the rail times were under construction for maximal utilization of resources in southern Nigeria.

Finally, the historical land were of the existence of Nigeria was made on January 1, 1914, when the colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria was amalgamated with the protectorate of Northern Nigeria from the colony and protectorate of Nigeria with Lord Lugard as Governor General. As with the Berlin Conference of 1884 - 85, Nigerians were not consulted whether they would all prefer to be under one geopolitical entity as one country. Having amalgamated these protectorates and colony into one geopolitical entity, what administration system did the British adopt and why?

Colonial Administration in Nigeria

The British system of colonial administration in Nigeria through which the British officials administered territories through the local chiefs, Emirs etc it was tasted in India and East Africa. Bassey (2007), argues that Luguard and his colonial officials faced some administration and financial difficulties which made the introduction of indirect rule system imperatives. Generally, they were confronted with issues of language barrier, (Nigeria has minimum of 250 ethnicgroups), shortage of personnel, finance, transportation, communication, electricity, road, culture, customer, etc. all of these made the introduction of indirect rule system inevitable. Wodi (2008), itemize some of the merits and demerits of indirect rule system, some of which include; it preserves, protects and granted self-autonomy to the pre-colonial political institution; it gave the paramount rulers the opportunity to continue governing the local people; more specifically, it was less expensive; it also protected the British administrators from native revolts. The later

assertion should not be taken in absolute terms, as there were case when they interfered in the local affairs of the people to the extent of appointing warrant chiefs or deposing traditional rules.

On the other hand, its demerits are as follows; the educated elites were neglected and alienated from the political system me specifically, and in view of the subject matter of this paper, the colonial indirect rule system, encouraged different administrative systems in Nigeria. There were minimal interference in the cultural and religious activities in Northern Nigeria (Bassey, 2004). Again, the North and the South were administered separately for decades (Tamuno, 1980). The consequence of these differences in administration pattern was that it widened the political and cultural differences between the North and South. These divisive tendencies were reinforced during the period of regionalism. Oyeleye (1979) therefore argues that, regionalism brought in fragmentation in the country. In the views of Olusanya, (1980), the seeds of the crises that led to the Nigerian civil war were sown by the 1945 Richard's Constitution, which created three region. The three regions were such that it did not fulfill one of the criteria of a federal state. In the opinion of most federal scholars, no region or state should be more powerful than the other regions put together. The North as it were constituted a powerful bloc within the period of regionalism. The regions were autonomous with rift competition. Thus the centre was weak, while the regions were powerful (Otoghagua, 2007).

Furthermore, Bassey (2007:55) argues that the failure to establish a legislative council to cover and integrate properly the North and South as early as 1914 and 1922 should be seen as one of the root causes of dignity in Nigeria. One other feature of colonial administration in Nigeria is the constitutional development. A number of constitutional reforms were carried out in colonial Nigeria from 1914 - 1960. In this paper, what is significant to the topic is the federal system of government. It addressed some of the salient issue raised in this paper; was federalism imposed from above on Nigeria just as amalgamation was imposed? Or was it a general opinion of Nigerians to adopt the federal system of government. This, according to Effiong, Ekanem, and Ottong, (2023), puts the issue of political inclusivity of ethnic groups in the country in a larger political spectrum for further examination.

Federalism as a form of government was not imposed on Nigeria by the British colonial administrations. Though there were some British officials like Richmond Palmer and Lethen, G. J. who feel that the solution to conflicts or the problem of integration could be solved through the introduction of federalism (Olusanya, 1980). The genesis of the introduction of federalism in Nigeria dates to the constitutional reforms of 1946 – 1950. Because there were inherent shortcomings of the previous constitution (Sir Arthur Richards constitution of 1946), Sir John McPherson Commissioned select committee of the legislative council in 1949. The purpose of this was to examine the problems of introducing a new constitution, following the agitation generated by Richard's constitution. The committee recommended a wide measure of consultations which was to start from village level to a general conference to ascertain the views of the people, two, important questions were asked;

- (a) Do we wish to see a full centralized system with all the legislative and executive powers concentrated at the centre, or down with to develop a federal system under which each region of the county would exercise a measure of internal autonomy?

- (b) If we favour a federal system should we return to the existing regions with some modifications of the existing regional boundaries, or should we form regions on some new basis such as the many linguistic groups in Nigeria?

Consequently, the regional conferences held in Ibadan, Enugu and Kaduna agreed on a federal system of government though, there were slight modifications for instance, the Western conference recommended a federal government made up of states formed on ethnic and linguistic basis. They however, maintained that for the time being, the three regions should continue with the regions exercising powers that would be assigned to them by the centre. As a follow up, an all Nigeria Conference was held in Ibadan in 1950 under the chairmanship of the Attorney General, Sir Gerald Howe. The conference finally recommended a federal system of government with the existing three regions. The resultant constitution (1951) was equally criticized and in its place the 1954, constitution. It was this constitution, otherwise known as Lyttelton's Constitution that actually established a federal constitution in Nigeria. On the whole, it could be argued that federalism in Nigeria was not expressly imposed on Nigerian from the "outside" but was a collective will of her citizens. Though, it is also plausible to argue that the British favoured a federal constitution when it became obvious to them that the unitary system of government in Nigeria was no longer tenable, due to its heterogeneity nature. Akinyemi, et al (1979:102) summed it up that '... Nigerians accepted the imperfection of their federal constitution the result of which has been very tragic.

The Emergence of Military Rule in Nigeria

The tragic result of Nigerian federalism began to manifest in the late 1950s, following ethnic and regional politics. Thus to appraise military intervention in Nigeria it is often best to begin the analysis from this era through the critical era was from 1962 - 1966. According to Inegbe, (2024), the intricacies in Nigeria political system involving, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) later National Council for Nigeria citizens (NCNC), the National Democratic Party, the Action Group (west) all contributed in one way or the other to intensify the divide in the country. (Okute, January 18, 2016).

What heightened the tension, the more was the alliance system that emerged in the cause of struggle for power at the regional and federal levels. Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) was formed by NPC and ND? - National Democratic Party while AG and NCNC formed United Progressive Grand Alliance. NNA victory in the election of 1964 was questionable, UPGA candidates and voters boycotted the election with this situation in NNA and UPGA, the country was divided into two main political alliance (Ojiako, 1980).

The division created by the alliance system made it extremely different for campaigns across the country, this leading to riots, violence, upheavals and alienation. In a nutshell, it was the activities of politicians, particularly in western Nigeria, that attracted the attention of the military. Thus on 5 January 1966 by 11:50pm the military (Nigerians five major) led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu struck and easily swept politicians out of the office. On 16th January, 1966 the Acting Senate President, Dr Nwafor Orizu was invited and handed over to the

Commander of the Nigerian Army, Major General Thomas Johnson, Omunakwe Aguyi Ironsi (Ojiako, 1980).

Incidentally, Ironsi was Igbo, therefore worsening the misinterpretation of the coup as Igbo dominated intended purely to entrench Igbo hegemony in the country. The composition of the coup plotters though more of Igbo extractions also had other ethnic group. Apart from this, the broadcast by Nzeogwu which later became the pattern of subsequent coup broadcast in Nigeria made it explicit. In his broadcast, he made it explicitly clear that the major reason was to kick the politicians out of office who the coup plotters described (Okute, January, 28, 2016).

Needless to say, the coup was received by all Nigeria, (including the North) as a timely intervention. However. the partial success of the coup in Lagos, Ibadan and Enugu (which gave room for various interpretations) made it difficult for Nzeogwu to achieve his ambition and also thwarted the strategies which the coup plotters had in mind, one of which was to release Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was in detention in Calabar (Okute, January 28, 2016). This political dimension of the coup confirms the famous political thesis as the most fundamental reasons for military intervention in politics. According to Oyeleye (1979) that there are two schools of thoughts with regard to military coup. The first, being the military explanation and the second political. The political school of thought regards the military explanation as fallacious, that the most important causes of military intervention are not military but political.

Ironsi Government and Military Legacies

Be that as it may, Major General Ironsi assumed office. He was perhaps not too sensitive to the political situation of the time. To Ironsi the unitary government was his panacea to themyriad of problems confronting Nigeria then (Matlu, 2007). The popular slogan in the North was "Federalism is good for Nigeria, unitary system not for us". Ironsi, having considered several factors, including the manner in which regionalism torn the county apart decided to enact Unitary decree otherwise known as the unification decree, which intended to unify the county and its civil services (Otogbagua, 2007). It was this decree and the need to topple the "Igbo dominated coup" that led to the July 28, 1966 counter coup, which ushered in the Gowon Administration.

The major issue which this paper seeks to clarify is that despite the fact that Gowon abrogated Decree 34, and reintroduced federalism, and later made Nigeria a federation of 12 State structure, his regime and subsequent military regimes in the country, never deviated from the Ironsi. Unitary Government or sometimes described as unitary federalism. The classical difference between a federation and the unitary government is based on the nature of relationship between the states/province and the centre or inclusive government. The relationship within these military regimes and even the civilian administrations indicate clearly that what is in practice is unitary government and not federalism. For instance Ironsi had the plan of rotating the Governors, an idea which other heads of state copied.

The second concern of the paper, is to illustrate that fifty years after the first military coup - January 15, 1966 - 2016, one of the outstanding contributions of the Nigerian military, is unitary federalism. Ever since independence, the Nigerian military increasingly became an important factor in the political, economic and social development of the country. And as a

result has bequeathed some legacies to the country, examples are the creation of states; Accelerated Food Production Programme (AFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), War Against Indiscipline, National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), Nationalization and Indigenization policies, local government reform 1976, the principles of federal character and the 1979 constitution establishment of universities. National Orientation Agency, etc, just mention few. These are indeed indelible legacies. Ukpabi, 1986:118, emphasized that “the coup (1966) left a permanent mark on the political history of Nigeria”.

Summary and Conclusions

The central theme of this paper is on the legacies of colonial and military administrations in Nigeria. The logical sequence of the argument is premised on the imperatives of colonial administration which led to the introduction of indirect rule system. The extent to which it succeeds varied from the three regions. However, it recorded huge success in the northern less in the west in the East it recommended minimal success. The creation of regions in Nigerian and the different administration pattern adopted by the British Colonial officials further widened the gap between the north and south. This method is divisive in practice and partly responsible for man conflicts and ever the Nigeria Civil War. As it were, most Nigerians do not consider people outside their regions as people of the same country that adequate any form of respect.

The paper addressed the issue of federalism in Nigeria and it concludes that while Nigeria were not involved in the Berlin Conference and the process of amalgamation they were however involved in the process that led to the establishment of federalism in Nigeria. The failure of the system therefore, was traced to the activities of politicians at the regional and federal level& It was this political federal levels. It was this political struggle that created crises in the country from 1962 – 1966, which necessitated military coup. The coup was received as a prompt response to the political crises. The sequence of events from 1962 to 1966 was such that it was subject to different political and ethnic interpretations. It was these interpretations that culminated to the July 28 1966 counter coup, and eventual the civil war.

The position of this paper is that among other legacies bequeathed by the military to Nigerian the most fundamental is the unitary federalism. Though Aguyi Ironsi was killed in the coup, but his unitary solution was adopted by subsequent military administrations. As a follow up to the above, the paper concludes that the failure to practice fiscal federalism is partly responsible to series of conflicts in the country. It is also responsible for militancy, terrorism, religious intolerance, ethnic politics and even the call for sovereign constitutional conference.

Finally, the paper concludes that what is suitable for any heterogeneous or multi-ethnic nation-like is fiscal federalism as it ensuring unity in diversity. It seeks to protect the respective federating unit while prescribing their identity.

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