

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE: LESSONS, HOPE, AND REALITIES, 1960-2020.

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving political structure of Nigeria since the country achieved independence in 1960. This analysis focuses on the lessons and realities of Nigeria's journey since independence, and the future hope for the nation. By discussing significant events in Nigerian politics, including military coups, government corruption, and regional tensions, the paper provides an overview of the major events that have shaped the nation's political landscape. It argues that Nigeria's political history is one of both challenges and opportunities and that in recent years, the nation has seen increasing levels of stability and accountability in its political system. This paper begins by examining Nigeria's initial structure and stability at the time of independence. It then goes on to discuss the effects of the various military coups that have occurred in the nation's history, including their impact on the nation's central government and its political parties and regional tensions. It then turns to the social and economic realities of the Nigerian polity, articulating the challenges the nation has faced since independence, and how these challenges have been addressed by successive governments. The paper then examines the current state of Nigerian politics, focusing on the nation's progress in terms of institutional stability, political accountability, and economic progress. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the history and evolution of Nigeria's political system since



independence. By examining the nation's progress in terms of stability, social and economic development, and the resultant effects on governance, the paper highlights both the challenges associated with Nigerian politics and the measure of hope for the nation in its future. It argues that, while Nigeria has faced and continues to face many difficulties, there is reason to be optimistic about the prospects of the nation's political future.

Key words: Federalism, Agitation, Colonialism, Political System, and Restructuring

Introduction

Nigeria is sixty-two years as a Nation and fifty-nine years as a Republic. It is then imperative to know that the Nation called Nigeria is no longer an infant, but has attained adulthood. The essence of this paper is to look at Nigeria's political structure before the colonial period, during the colonial period, and post-independence. The focus will be on how local governance could be stimulated to bring governance closer to the people, and also to see how the middlemen (the states) could be eliminated due to their avarice and the high negligence of the local government in the political structure. The underlying cause of all the problems that Nigeria experienced in the 1960s. The geographical area now known as Nigeria was created by the British colonial administration in 1914, not by indigenous peoples themselves. Thereafter, the people within the borders of Nigeria were known to the world as "Nigerians," but in reality, this designation meant little to most people, whose lives continued to be primarily centered on local communities that had existed for hundreds and thousands of years. The regional and federal emphases of the constitutions of the 1950s further undermined the development of a unified national consciousness by determining that access to power at the national level was to be derived from holding power at the regional level.



Pre-Colonial Political Structure

Before the advent of the colonialists, the various Nigerian areas that came to be amalgamated on 1st January 1914 by Lord Fredrick Lugard had a unique political structure that they used in administering their people. It will be mere fool handy to assume that the Nigerian people did not have any form of governance before they came into contact with the Europeans. Local governance was seriously in place as we shall x-ray briefly. The traditional political structure before the coming of the Europeans had wide variations from one region to the other.

In the Western region, their political structure was one based on a high level of checks and counter-checks. That revolved around four cardinal figures- the Alaafin who was the supreme head of the empire as well as the supreme commander of the empire's armed forces. Secondly was the council that administered the empire with the Alaafin, which included the "Ona-Efa" the Chief Justice, and the "Otun-Efa" who was the administrative head and doubled as the deity of Sango. There was the "Osi-Efa" who was in charge of the empire's treasury. There was also the "Ilari" who acted as the Alaafin's representative in any of their conquered village or town. Thirdly was the Oyo-Mesi which stood as the highest ruling council in the empire, headed by the Bashorun, and had the singular power to select a new king or dethrone the incumbent when performance is becoming inimical to the development of the empire. Fourthly, was the army force headed by the "Are-Ona-Kakanfo" who has the mandate to win all battles and in the place of defeat not return to the kingdom alive¹

This political structure of the Western region was what James S. Coleman referred to as a "constitutional monarchy."² Ajayi asserts that "The Yorubas developed an urban type of society and a monarchical form of government...with several kingdoms."³

In the Eastern region, the political structure was not centralized. It was dispersed among groups rather than centralized in any one



individual or body.⁴ There was a lot of interplay between traditional societies and age-grade institutions in the Eastern political structure. Anene opines that,⁵ The Ibo never came under a single pyramidal system. They lived in small communities often described as village 'democracies.' The political unit was the village group consisting of lineage segments bound together by the belief in the common descent of all the segments from one ancestor. These localized lineage groups were structurally equal units. The study of political authority among the Igbo is not concerned with formal institutions. The groups were concerned primarily with their corporate existence and therefore also with the formulation of rules and standards of social behavior.⁶

So in Igboland, the political structure was more or less localized to the villages and the people were the voice of the community. What one can hold on to as a visible organ of government was the "Council of Elders"⁷ who were also the fathers of the component family segment?⁸ They were the representatives and mouthpieces of the community's ancestors, but not the legislative arm of the government in the real sense of it. The judicial structure was also informal, but the age groups played major roles in enforcing laws even though not a formal executive organ of the government. In a nutshell, Igboland was democratic in the sense that governance was the concern of all.⁹

As the Eastern region developed politically places like Nri, Onitsha, Oguta, Osomari, Aro, Aboh, and Benin came to have kingship political structures. The kings became the heads of the government and ruled with the cabinet chiefs (Ndi-Ichies).¹⁰ These chiefs acted as checks on the use of power by the king. While in some parts of Igboland succession was hereditary, in others it was rotational.¹¹

Alagoa wrote, "The political culture of the Igbo has been labeled variously as acephalous, stateless, and republican.¹² But to label, the Igbo political structure as such would amount to a blanket



characterization of its political structure. In the words of Prof. Nzimiro, "Kings and titled chiefs might rule in one area (as in Aba, Onitsha, Osamari, and Oguta), while in others such as Asaba and Aguleri, titled personnel and age grades combine... in Western Ibo areas, we find kingdoms which differ from these Niger areas in detail of the structural organization. In some other Ibo areas, such as Nri, Ndi Nze (title associations) and heads of lineages (elders) combine in the rulership."¹³

In the Northern region, Mahdi Adamu¹⁴ stated that due to the reoccurring wars among the various Hausa states; Hausaland had never had one government until the 19th century when the Sokoto caliphate was created. Before the advent of the caliphate, Hausaland ran a multi-central political structure in contrast to Borno which ran a uni-cameral structure.¹⁵ Before the Fulani jihad of 1804, the Hausaland had developed an efficient system of government. Under this system, each state was governed by a Sarki (king) who had a council of ministers from the hereditary aristocracy. The Sarki had limited powers as he would not act without the approval of his council of ministers. The Galadima was the highest official of the royal council who looks after the state or town when the Sarki and other chiefs went to war. The Madawaki was the commander-in-chief of the army and also acted as an adviser to the Sarki on matters of appointments and dismissal of title holders; he also summons meetings and facilitates the choice of a Sarki when the office is vacant, other officials included the Waziri (chief minister), the Magaji (Chief of the treasury), the Yari (head Gaoler), the Sarkin Dogarai (head of the King's bodyguard; the Sarkin Yan Doka (in charge of the police). The states were divided into villages and districts for the local government each having a head that reports to the Sarki. By 1804 the Northern states were to witness a major political change as most of the Hausa states were overrun by the forces of the Sokoto jihadists led by the Fulani people.¹⁶ It was this jihad that for the first time brought Hausaland under one political rule with the centre at Sokoto.



By the time the jihad ended in 1809, the Fulani had succeeded to establish the caliphate political structure with its centres at Sokoto and Gwandu (dual capital). To widen the caliphate fighting continued till the first half of the 19th century.¹⁷ Most important was the fact that the entire Northern region did not come under the central government established by the Fulani jihadist.¹⁸ Places like Borno, Gumel, Ningi, Igalaland, Idomaland among others were not conquered.¹⁹ The Sokoto caliphate did not operate a unitary system but had autonomous emirates each with its Emirs and government.²⁰ The caliph who resided in Sokoto did not have overwhelming control over the emirates. But much respect was accorded to the headquarters when it comes to the selection of who would become the Emir of any emirate.²¹ It was observed that the Hausaland practiced a highly centralized system of government that was fused with religion. According to Kayari Tijani, " In Islam, society, religion, and state fuse so deeply into one another that the Islamic State has been described as a divine Monocracy a theocracy, modified only by the fact that the regulation of state is 'not directly by God,' but by the law."²²

From the ongoing before the European invasion, Nigerians had ruled themselves via their unique political structure. Mostly there was the use of a direct form of government that made governance come very close to the people. The leaders from the central had direct contact with the people they led. For the Igbo, it was more democratic because the people were the voice that determined what would happen in their locality. Even though one could argue that the political structure set up in Hausaland before the jihad in the 19th century in Northern Nigeria was akin to the federal structure we have in our present-day Nigeria, it could quickly be debunked in that at the state or emirate level the Emirs were directly in contact with their people at the grass root, unlike what we have now whereby the Governor is situated at the state level and need a local government Chairman to liaise with before getting down to the grassroots. The bureaucracy in governance today was strongly absent then.



It was these political structures that welcomed the colonialists when they came into Nigeria, it was this that also to a large extent determined the methodology they adopted in their colonial governance. As later shown in the paper was a lot of thwarting and destruction of these political structures by the colonialists. We will also discover that it was the coming of the Europeans that brought the advent of states and less emphasis on local governance. From our traditional system of government, governance had been directly linked to the people; nobody acted as a go-between. Policies and decisions were handed over to the people directly through their various leaders.

Colonial Political Structure

Even though the consent of Nigerians was not sought, the colonialists on 1st January 1914 succeeded in forcefully amalgamating the Northern and Southern protectorates with a common head.²³ The principal actor in the 1914 Amalgamation Sir Fredrick Lugard favored and canvassed for an indirect political administrative structure. So no uniform style of governance developed in either group of provinces.

The British did not restructure the countries they administered.²⁴ Administration at the local level was left in the hands of the indigenous chiefs,²⁵ especially as it regards the tasks like public works and administration. In the words of Crowder, "In more highly organized states, the chiefs though deprived of their armies, maintained their police force, so that even the task of keeping of the peace devolved on native authorities."²⁶ It was through native administration that the majority of Africans felt the political impact of colonial rule, which also fueled Nationalists movements.²⁷ The adoption of the Indirect rule system was borne as a result of the paucity of manpower, lean financial resources, health hazards being faced by the colonialists, and their realization that the traditional rulers were already experienced in the art of governance, were familiar with



their people and could help simplify the work of administration.²⁸

Thus the earliest local government system adopted by the British came into existence in 1891.²⁹ This attempt was made in the territory known as the Niger Coast Protectorate between 1893 and 1899 and as the Southern Nigeria Protectorate between 1900 and 1905.³⁰ This local government administration in 1899 had its local treasury funded by court fees and fines collected from defaulters which were channeled into paying local government staff and execution of local projects. Unfortunately, this administrative structure was largely artificial in the sense that it did not represent the interest and minds of the people. Most were British stooges and were not chosen by the people themselves. So we could equally deduce that it was undemocratic. Yet it was still a sign of good governance that lacked the substance to give it credence. According to Afigbo,

*"The pre-conquest states and kingdoms of West Africa had their ideals of government which were inspired primarily by local religion as well as by sheer tradition. These were necessarily different from those that evolved in the industrialized and mechanized societies of the colonial powers. One of the most widely advertised aims of the colonial powers was the introduction into Africa of 'civilized,' that is, European ideas of good government. Inevitably this meant supplanting traditional ideas and ideals. The traditionalist of the indigenous system of government derived not only from their structural arrangement but also, even more fundamentally, from the philosophy of government and society that animated them. When the idea of government is lost, the system ceases in a very real sense to be traditional even if it does not suffer structural disfiguration."*³¹



He further argues that it was the British that up to 1886 first showed the tendency to federate their holdings in West Africa.³² An attempt was therefore made to federate Lagos and the Gold Coast colony of which the elite of the former vehemently resented,³³ but this concept of the federation was to rear its head later in various territories in the area called Nigeria. So the amalgamation of 1914 was a further step taken as a solution to the administrative problem in Nigeria.³⁴ By the time the amalgamation was finalized, Nigeria came for the first time to be seen and known as one administrative federation despite the difficulties it posed. Afigbo³⁵ deduced that the British did not export to their crown colonies the English system of local government, instead instituted a legislative council made up of official and unofficial members to advise the governor on the administration of the colony. This political concession took place in Lagos in 1862.

Nigeria between 1914 and 1939 resembled a federation of two groups of provinces opined Tamuno.³⁶ Sir Bernard Bourdillon on 1st April 1939 split Nigeria into three regions this tripartite division of Nigeria into Western, Eastern, and Northern regions was a mistaken sacrosanctity.³⁷ It further laid the foundation for the ethnocultural division of Nigeria till 1963.³⁸ Unfortunately, this tripartite political structure was not altered before the independence, but rather the inheritors (Nigerians) accepted and consolidated the foundations laid by generations of British officials.³⁹ In the words of Tamuno, "Nigeria's systems of local government after independence had abiding roots in her colonial administrative experience,"⁴⁰ and that from the 1980s local government councils became more and more democratic in form.

It was established that even during the colonial era there was no state government. The colonialists either used the Native Authority system or the indirect rule system to govern the people. It was from the central government down to the local government.



Ambrose Imoode⁴¹ had done quite some work on the evolution of Local government in Nigeria. According to him, the local government started before the advent of the colonialists, when the people governed themselves with no higher authority to account to if not the traditional heads and chiefs. The government was direct and people-oriented. During the colonial era, the colonialists introduced a local government system via indirect rule used especially in the North and to some extent in the West but a complete failure in the East. The Native Authority system of 1933⁴² was introduced later by the colonialists but by the 1950s a lot of changes were to take place.

In the South-East by 1950 the Native Authority Ordinance was replaced by the Eastern Region local government ordinance of 1950; In the South West by the Western region local government law of 1952; and in the North by the Northern region native Authority law of 1954.⁴³ During the era of the Native Authority system, the functions of the authorities were the maintenance of law and order, regulation of the manufacture and distribution of liquor, provision of prison services, schools, and police, maintenance of local roads, native courts, and health facilities, ironically these functions were not stated in the ordinance.⁴⁴ The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in her charter of 1938 declared,

*"We are opposed to the term 'indirect rule' literally as well as in principles. Honest trusteeship implies direct British Rule with the vision of ultimate self-government. We shall therefore strive for the complete abolition of the indirect rule system. Native Authority should be a form of local government, and it is for that reason that we will encourage and support it."*⁴⁵

Obafemi Awolowo was of the strong opinion that if the Native Authority system was to be practiced correctly, will provide a good training ground for the eventual democratic self-government, so he suggested that the territory under the Native



Authority Administration should be split up so that there would be central, district and ward councils which should be encouraged to hold regular meetings.⁴⁶

In the same vein, George Oka Orewa stated that local Government is a product of decentralized administration.⁴⁷ In such a manner that the Local Government was given reasonable scope to raise funds and to use its resources to provide a range of socio-economic services and establish programs to enhance the welfare of those residents in its area of authority.⁴⁸ The Local government political structure comprises the executive, legislative, and judiciary, which is also replicated in the state and the federal.

Post-Independence Political Structure

From 1960 to 1963 Nigeria was still taking directives from Great Britain. The review conference for a full Republican Constitution in Lagos in 1963 was to bring an end to this and usher Nigeria into her first Republic.⁴⁹ At that conference, a unanimous agreement was reached by the delegates to expunge all traces of colonialism in the Constitution.

This first republic headed by Alhaji Tafawa Balewa as the Prime Minister and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as the President was abruptly hijacked by power-thirsty military men. The intrusion into governance by military dictators set the nation backward for decades as long as they were in power. Even though there were giant strides that could not but be credited to the military era, suffice it to say that you can't use wrong to correct wrong. It was the intrusion of the military that finally led to the bloody civil war that engulfed the Nigerian people and nearly disintegrated the nation from 1967 to 1970.

The first military coup of 15th January 1966 championed by Major Emeka Nzeogwu brought in Major General Aguiyi Ironsi as the first military Head of state. In mid-1966 a counter-coup was



already in the pipeline which was a purely Northern extraction that came to reality to unseat Major General Aguiyi Ironsi on July 29th, 1966. The military having tasted power became drunk in it and were not in a hurry any longer to leave the scene. Lt. Col Odumegwu Ojukwu's inability to pay allegiance to the new government and the massacre of the Eastern people plunged Nigeria into its first civil war from 1967 to 1970. After the civil war and towards the end of General Yakubu Gowon's regime another bloodless military coup took place. According to the coup plotters, the government officials were ridden with a high level of corruption even though it was a military government. The same charge the previous coup plotters used to unseat the civilian government.

So on 29th July 1975, Brigadier Murtala Mohammed came on board as the third military head of state. He had barely settled down to begin his reign when another bloody abortive coup struck on 13th February 1976 by Colonel Dimka which led to the assassination of Brigadier Murtala and the taking over by his second in command General Olusegun Obasanjo as the fourth military Head of state. It was during this regime that Nigeria was brought back to civilian rule to experience its Second Republic.

On 1st October 1979 power was successfully handed over to Alhaji Shehu Shagari as Nigeria's first executive President and Dr. Alex Ekwueme as the Vice President. The government was accused of violations of its constitutional limits, continuous record of irregularities, and abuse of power.⁵⁰ The administration's weak points especially in debt accumulation, looting of the National treasury, party bias, ethnicity, and incompleteness of over-flooded contracts began to pave the way for another military intervention.⁵¹ By 31st December 1983, President Shehu Shagari was arrested and overthrown in another military coup that witnessed Major General Muhammadu Buhari becoming the fifth military Head of state. The rigidity of the Buhari-led government was one of the reasons deduced for the regime to be



ousted on 27th August 1985 by another team of military men led by Major General Ibrahim Babangida. After a reign of going to a decade and due to pressure from within and outside the country especially with the annulment of the 12th June 1993 election adjointed to be the freest and fairest in the history of Nigeria by Nigerians on 26th August 1993 General Babangida handed over power to an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan.

The Interim National Government (ING) lasted for barely three months and was ousted by another military power-drunk dictator Gen. Sani Abacha on 17th November 1993. His regime was a reign of terror, dictatorship, and autocracy. On 8th June 1998, Gen. Sani Abacha died in his sleep and the mantle of leadership now fell on the chief of Defense staff, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar as the new Head of state on 9th June 1998. The coming to power of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar brought some relief as he championed the actualization of restoring democracy to the people. On 29th May 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in as the second Executive President to usher in the fourth Republic and became the first past military man to rule the nation as a military and as a civilian.

Jemibewon captures it as “It is a sad commentary that on our national history that 29 years after independence, the largest concentration of blacks in the world is yet to create for its citizens and the black race an enviable, worthy, stable and enduring political system.”⁵²

What General Jemibewon did not state was the fact that Nigeria has been largely controlled by military men like him which is undemocratic. After the independence, the military altered the democratic process in Nigeria greatly. Today Nigeria is roughly sixty-three years of which the military had stayed in power for twenty-nine years. It, therefore, goes to show that over 50% of the nations independence has been controlled by the military.



The military had destroyed democratic ideals, ideas, principles, gains, and development that should have been consolidated.

Justice Chukwudi Oputa said, "The worst civilian democratic dispensation is better than the best military administration. This view enjoys universal acceptance. What is actually in dispute was not mere infrastructural facilities, but freedom. The first and greatest dividend of democracy is freedom. If the democratic rule is freedom, dictatorship is slavery."⁵³

This disruption has gone to a large extent to prevent Nigeria from nursing her nascent democracy handed over to us by the British. No democratic institution can develop properly under intervening military coups, talk more when such coups had taken a chunk of the meat. During all the military regimes none have been brought before a panel to face corruption charges, and none prosecuted or executed. Every time the military men seize power Nigeria was thrown into a world of uncertainty, and every democratic process will cease to function until power is restored to a democratic government.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh Republics did not continue with the Federal structure handed over by the British. Macpherson's constitution which was introduced in 1954 was a catalyst in converting the country into a federal system.⁵⁴ Also, the new constitution bequeathed to the Shagari-led administration was modeled from the American Presidential system with a three-tier model of government- local, state, and federal.⁵⁵ At the time of enacting the 1979 constitution, Nigeria had 19 states and this constitution did not make autonomy of Local government, instead, it was made to be subject to the state government.⁵⁶ Iyoha quoting Fabian's ideas opined that local authorities must have power over policy formulation and implementation guaranteed by a viable source of revenue.⁵⁷



The evolution of states in Nigeria's political structure started in 1967 when General Yakubu Gowon destabilized Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu's secessionist tendencies and quickly replaced the regions with the creation of twelve states via his military decree.⁵⁸ Another military Head of state continued the partition by creating an additional seven states to make the states nineteen in 1976. In 1987 a military head of state General Ibrahim Babangida created two new states. The creation of additional nine states with the Federal Capital Territory in 1991 was also the handiwork of the military (General Ibrahim Babangida). In 1996 General Sani Abacha followed the footsteps of his predecessor and created additional six states bringing the number to thirty-six states and Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory.

From the foregoing the creation of states was the brainchild of the military, the civilian did not create any state. The colonialists also maintained the order of a central and local government, there was no state government.

Why then did the military become a specialist in state creation? The pioneer of this trend Gen. Yakubu Gowon did it out of sheer political reasons to practically make it impossible for Col. Ojukwu to form a formidable force against the nation; unfortunately, the state creation did not prevent the civil war but rather increased the tempo. This "divide and rule" syndrome was also inherited by the colonialists and furthered by indigenous rulers.

The running of a three-tier government structure is seriously draining the economy of this country. There is a lot of duplication of offices from the federal to the local government level. Most of these offices are a clog in the wheel of progress and development. Many do not seem relevant in affecting the lives of the people. The Federal allocation to the states could go a long way in putting a lot of facilities and infrastructure for the people. When this Federal allocation to states is calculated over the years one would



imagine how much Nigeria has expended in taking care of the state at the detriment of the Local Government. Every art of governance is first and foremost people-oriented, without the people, there will be no governance. Whatever step needs to be taken to make the people have a strong feeling of the presence of good governance should not be discarded, it is in this vein that this paper advocates for the scrapping of the state government and letting the central government deal directly with the local government.

In Economics, talk about the elimination of the middlemen gained a lot of prominence among the manufacturers, as they sought to have direct access to the final consumers because of the bottleneck and bureaucratic process the middlemen employ in the distribution of their product. In the political circle, the state government is like a political middleman. Their interest is just in how to satisfy themselves, make more gains, and rip the citizens off. Their elimination will help the central government to have a direct link with the people they are governing, the grass root who is even the essence of governance, thereby making the dividends of democracy be enjoyed by the people promptly.

Presently the Local government is not enjoying absolute autonomy as they still take directives from the state government. Moreover, the federal allocation due to them does not get into their coffers directly but rather passes through the state coffers. Who knows what transpires before the local government finally gets its allocation? A look at the functions of the state will reveal that it falls under the concurrent and residual list. While they share with the Federal Government the concurrent list, they share with the Local Government the residual list. By this, there is no specific list attached to the state *per se*. the state, therefore, is hanging between the Federal and the Local government, why continue to deal with the state when direct access could be gotten to the Local Government? One would tend to ask who the state represents in the geography of events in the country. They are not



representing the people nor are they representing the country, just hanging and milking the nation dry.

A cursory look at the three-tier system will reveal that there exists two tiers which are the Federal and the state, not a three-tier state, where the Local government will be included. As is currently being witnessed whereby many states have succeeded in drowning the Local Governments in their states in a bid to also keep a hold on the Local Government allocation. There are so many states where presently there is no substantive Local Government chairman with his cabinet, rather an interim Chairman that had stayed there for God knows how long.

The erroneous mistake in the 1979 constitution was to make the Local Government to be a state creation and to take directives from the state. It denied the Local Government autonomy and made it a slave to the state, without which it can't function maximally.

The monthly emolument for thirty-six state Governors which is not less than N1.5m presently, his personnel aids, the state house of assembly, their personnel aids, the commissioners, their personnel aides etc is mere waste of taxpayers' money. While these people live in opulence the people who they govern live in abject poverty.

Nigeria has also made political offices so attractive that people are willing to kill to make sure they get there. The attractive nature of political offices should drastically be reduced, letting political officeholders see themselves as public servants and be remunerated the same. As long as the office remains attractive the people that dream to be there will do anything to get there and remain there. All over the world, Nigeria is one of the few countries where political officeholders acquire wealth as soon as they get into power.



It was a situation like what we have now, where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer that led to the first coup that took place in Nigeria, especially when the government became distanced from the people, that was what informed the statement made by Emmanuel Ifeajuna,

*"One real problem was that those who ruled us, grew larger and became more distant from the people. They could not genuinely feel the pulse of the people they only believed in what they wished to believe... they sought to absorb you into the ruling group failing which they would seek to destroy you. What interested the old pack of politicians in power was not what was good for the people or the nation. What interested them was what was good for themselves personally and their regime. So if in any new solution, they stood to lose, even if it meant that the nation would gain, they opposed it firmly ..."*⁵⁹

Nigeria must take a strong decision to come out of the clutches of these local imperialists and fast too.

One can't afford to continue to dance to the same music that had not done the majority of Nigerians any good. The music must change, and the dance steps must also change, and that is how the country can advance rapidly like other nations. One must redefine this concept of Federalism to suit national context. Since the colonial and pre-colonial eras, the colonialists implored every known means to make governance people-oriented, likewise, the traditional leaders had direct access to the people. The splitting of Nigeria into multiple states as earlier stated was the idea of the military and had further split Nigeria rather than unified the country.

Concluding Remarks

One cannot over-emphasise the importance of a new beginning for Nigeria which must be based, *inter alia*, on the revisiting of



the political history of Nigeria which should therefore be the first item on the agenda for Nigeria at sixty-two. Given its historical development as a federal state, there is an additional condition that must be satisfied if mutual trust and understanding are to be established and a sense of unity and oneness fostered, for one to be convinced that the cause of Nigeria's federalism will be well and truly advanced.

In the light of the foregoing criteria, this paper suggests propose the restructuring of Nigeria's federalism. Therefore, in restructuring the Nigerian polity one must abolish the state structure (residual powers) hence operate a centre, and local government and the state should not exist. Based on this arrangement Nigeria will only have two tiers of government in the new federal structure. States are parasitic in the federal system. Nigeria must put in place a structure and a system where all players have the opportunity to gain, indeed, a political arrangement that provides equality of opportunity for all citizens at grassroots and national development. The restructuring process must also include the restitution of genuine federalism.

There is, of course, no harm in trying a new experiment, if the result of the previous one proves to be unsatisfactory, inefficacious, and untenable. An ideal local government will deliver basic services to citizens at the grassroots level and this has largely been lacking in the Nigeria case. Here, this paper has no space and time to discuss the role of the centre and the local government in the experiment of federalism. In light of this, Ogban captures these;

“We must add a generally well-known truth, at least to those familiar with these matters, that the existence of Nigeria's polity will always manifest the balance of powers among the classes, groups, and forces within it and their allies outside Nigeria. If this is so then we have to realize that the current balance of power is in favour



*of the forces, groups, and classes who thrive on and or are capable of sustaining anything but greed incompetence, inept leadership, injustices, and inequality whether or not the Nigeria polity is a federal or unitary system."*⁶⁰

The national question must embody a reformulation of Nigerian federalism. Federalism was never a luxury in Nigeria. It was a necessity. Military rule has dangerously turned federalism into a disposable luxury. In doing so, it has attacked the very premises on which the survival of Nigeria rests. It has also changed fundamentally the theories of government that animated political discourse in the 1950s. In these ways, the legacies of military rule threaten the very survival of Nigeria. Reviving the integrity of Nigeria requires a return to maximum federalism, retaining the current states as its constituent units. Maximum federalism includes the authority of the states to have their Constitutions, police formations, and choices of their capital headquarters. It also includes redistributing national economic resources in ways that will enable states to develop their natural and human resources. The notion that development can only be achieved and directed from a central point in Abuja is unwise. It is a bad legacy of military rule that reverses the wisdom of the Founding Fathers of the Nigerian Federation.



Endnotes

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