

## Intergroup Relations, National Integration and Nation-Building: A Comparative Study of Military Regimes and Civilian Administrations in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The research paper aims to investigate the impact of inter-group relation in post-independence Nigeria, focusing on the comparison between military and civilian administrations in their efforts towards nation-building. Inter-group relations in Nigeria since independence have been marked by suspicion and conflict, which has hindered national integration and development. This research utilized use of secondary sources of information to analyze different approaches taken by military and civilian administrations in managing inter-group relations and their impact on nation-building. Additionally, the study evaluates the effectiveness of these approaches in promoting national integration and unity. Therefore, the study provides insights into the effectiveness of military and civilian administrations in managing inter-group relations and their impact on nation-building in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Inter-group Relations, Nation-Building, National Integration, Military and Civilian Administration in Nigeria

### Introduction

Intergroup relations refer to the behavioral and psychological interactions between two or more groups. These interactions are influenced by how individuals relate to one another and how they categorize others, which can include social categorization, stereotypes, intergroup biases, prejudices, and the functional process within groups. Intergroup relations are social phenomena that arise from contact between people and can manifest in various forms, such as inter-ethnic, inter-religious, inter-national, inter-gender conflicts. These interactions are characterized by human actions that are inevitable in human interactions.

It is important to note that intergroup relations differ from inter-ethnic relations primarily due to the presence of 'ingroup-outgroup' dynamics and the interactions between these groups. These dynamics can be influenced by wars, politics, economic factors, social factors, and cultural factors. For Example, trade is a significant economic mechanism for intergroup relations and plays a crucial role in shaping the interactions between different groups.

It is not a historical jargon according to Obafemi Awolowo in 1947 who expressed that Nigeria is not a nation, it is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English' or 'Welsh' or 'French' the word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. In the same 1947, Tafawa Balewa remarked also that since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorate in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper... It is still far from being united. Nigeria unity is only a British intention for the country.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, Nigeria has had in leadership conscienceless people who are in power and powerless people are the ones with conscience, which is the Nigerian dilemma.

In post independence era, intergroup relations facilitated misperception and appreciation especially after the civil war. Since independence, inter-group relations have remained within the matrix of suspicions and hostility. National instincts do not exist, only ethnic instincts. This is why Ikime avers that Nigeria remains without Nigerians and the search for Nigerians continues<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, what constitutes inter-group relations in contemporary Nigeria is not so much skewed in cultural differences as governance issues. The cultural diversity of the country itself is not an aberration in ethnic relations<sup>3</sup>. Notions of belonging, inclusion and exclusion are shaped by access to power, party politics, and land issue, politicization of religion, political corruption and perception of marginalization. Tamuno as well noted that a common national identity in Nigeria was a plant of slow growth. It was much possible to establish the Nigerian state than to nourish the Nigerian nation<sup>4</sup>. Anthony Nwbughuogu in his view also noted that the problem militating against nation building in the country is the absence of nationalism before independence and the failure to develop it during colonial rule and after independence<sup>5</sup>. However, added to this also is various ethno-religious conflicts, secessionist agitations, fraudulent elections and rising wave of crime made Nigeria to be predicted as failed which may collapse someday in the future. The increasing pervasiveness of ethnic nationalism and solidarity movements underscores the futility of nation-building process in plural society like Nigeria.

### National Integration in Nigeria

National integration in its general terms remains bringing together of different group of people into a whole. In this context, national integration in Nigeria would refer to the processes of bringing the various Nigerian ethnic groups to cohere, on a continuing basis<sup>6</sup>. This means or involves the development of cherished norms and values respected by all the cohering groups, in order to enable all component parts in the integration process to continue to have a sense of belonging and development. It is therefore, discernible at this point that national integration as a process, involves

continuous adjustments of elements that would lead to a more or less coherent pattern of social interaction. It also means that the people should be seen as the means of deriving both economic and political advantages. Thus, every group should be ready to give and take. This is no doubt a process of intergroup relations.

Additionally, national integration and nation building in Nigeria would be more meaningful if the historical and political sociology of Nigeria is nourished with patriotism and nationalism before the formal commencement of other processes are outlined. This would elucidate high degree of integration that will be attained. It will also enhance social justice for social order which is founded on freedom, equality, rights, obligations and opportunities for every citizen before the law<sup>7</sup>. Social justice deals with consciousness of the worth of human life, the fact that life is a trust and that those in authority shall protect and nurture it.

It would be recalled that before and after independence, one of the foremost institutions established for maintaining law, social order, protection of life and territorial integrity in the country is the Nigerian army. However, recruitment into the army since its establishment had been shared in the ratio of 50:25:25 for the North, East and the West respectively<sup>8</sup>. This ratio perhaps exists till this day. This explicates the preponderance of northerners in command positions in the Nigerian military. Again, the obnoxious resource control issue has made the south-south region the most underdeveloped region in the country, yet the producer of the nation's wealth. This irony of a region constitutes a challenge to national integration and nation building in Nigeria.

### **Nigerian Political Journey Between the Civilian and Military Era**

The political history of Nigeria indicates the fact between the civil democratic government and the military. The political journey since independence in 1960 has been marked by a series of transitions between civilian administrations and military regimes. Each period of rule had its own strengths and weaknesses. From 1960 up to 1998, Nigeria experienced a series military regime that significantly impacted the political landscape of the country. The first civil democratic government took over governance from the colonial masters and forged national integration through the formation of the Government of Alliance for National Unity, between the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian citizens (NCNC). These led to a marginal sense of belonging among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The period between 1960 up to 1966 before the coup recorded major historical maladministration from the men at the helm of affairs. It was on record that political leaders were running Nigeria aground with their corrupt ways. Ministers under them were living flamboyant lifestyles and looting public funds at the expense of ordinary citizens.<sup>9</sup> It can rightly be asserted that the first civilian administrators sharpened lines of cleavages which made the process of building strong institutions and nation building to suffer a setback as a result.

In 1966, there was a political and institutional change in Nigeria following the military coup. The coup led to the dissolution of regional legislative and executive powers, which had previously wielded significant influence due to the allocation formula in the constitution. The military government took over control, aiming to establish a centralized authority and maintain peace and order across the country. This period marked the beginning of state-building in Nigeria, a process where the central or federal government seeks to exert its influence and control over sub-national entities. The goal was to create a cohesive and unified nation-state, despite the diverse ethnic and regional identities within Nigeria. The military government's assumption of power and the dissolution of regional authorities were significant steps towards centralization and the establishment of a strong federal presence. This move aimed to ensure stability and effective governance across the country, although it also led to debates about the balance of power between the center and the regions.

The eastern region of Nigeria was never homogenous as the minority ethnic groups expressed fear of domination by the majority ethnic group. In fact the 1958 Willink commission ordered by her majesty's government had confirmed this fear in its 1959 report. The fears of the minority groups were assuaged in May 27, 1967, when Gowon declared a state of emergency, assumed all powers and created twelve states out of four regions. The creation of states according to Gowon was to correct the imbalance in the structure of the country and to minimize future political friction and ensure a stable federation<sup>10</sup>. This made the centre stronger while immobilizing the regions and states from threatening the centre any longer. A degree of integration was attained.

It is pertinent to state that the various military moves as outlined, have not only transformed Nigeria from a mere geographical expression, but has turned it into an organic and integrated state. Intergovernmental relations also defined by the military regimes as federalism was instituted as a form of interaction for all tiers of government.

At the dawn of 1977 and 78, the ban on political activities was lifted. Principal among the conditions for registration of any organized group of citizens who hold similar political opinion and who work to get control of government so that the policies they are interested to pursue be recognized as a political party, it must have effective presence in at least 2/3 of the states in the federation. This was indeed another step intended to integrate the various people in Nigeria. These structures of state and nation-building by the military were able to bring Nigerians together under a central government authority.<sup>11</sup>

Nigerian's quest for national integration was given the impetus it needed by the military elite corps. This is partly because the military has dominated governance for many years. The basic structural reorganization needed to foster

national integration was instituted by the military. This also includes steps taken to assuage the fears of the minorities enclosed within the hitherto three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The institutionalization of such standard should transcend to the federal, state, local governments and the ward levels. This is the only way towards the birth of an organic Nigerian state.

Furthermore, the problem of Nigeria has lingered because national integration in Nigeria has not been a voluntary process. More so, given absence of purposeful leadership and a just administration, national integration would have produced an organic Nigerian state. However, it should be acknowledged that the journey towards that destination is still on that part of cross road, but the act of political willingness from the side of the leaders, would make national integration attainable.

### **Nation Building as a Solution for Nationhood and National Integration in Nigeria**

Anthony Nwabughuogu in his well-articulated study asserts that,

Nation building is a search for nationhood. It is a process of developing national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for a given nation and to accept their commitment to a nation-state. It also involves the creation of a favourable environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individuals and groups for the nation-state. Thus, nation-building would normally involve the creation of impressive elements of organization (political, social and economic) that characterize a modern state: good roads, water supply, facilities for education and health, efficient communication, opportunities for employment and so on that would make the citizens develop love for their country<sup>12</sup>.

To foster sense of love and loyalty among citizens towards their country, it is essential to provide facilities and opportunities that enhance the well-being and development of individuals. By improving these aspects of life, citizens are more likely to feel connected to and invested in their country.

Nation-building also involves promoting a sense of national identity and unity. This can be achieved by highlighting shared values, symbols, and institutions that bring diverse groups together. Celebrating national holidays, promoting a national language, and fostering a sense of pride in the country's history and culture can all contribute to a stronger sense of national identity.

Nigeria since independence has made some efforts targeted at nation building. Some of these efforts came after the civil war which understandably engineered nation building that enhanced proper integration of the warring elements. Among the efforts are: the institution of the policy of No Victor, No vanquished with its attendant 3Rs mechanism, the establishment of the national youth service corps (NYSC) scheme, the convocation of political reform conferences including the upcoming ones, among others.

The No Victor, No vanquished policy which gave rise to the 3Rs of reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation was initiated to demobilize the Biafrans and reintegrate them into the national life. While the objective of the policy was laudable, actual implementation was deceitful. However, the policy remained a nation building effort in Nigeria whether or not it yield meaningful results.

Similar effort was made through the establishment of the NYSC scheme. The national youth service corps scheme was created by decree No. 4 by 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1973 in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild Nigeria after the civil war. The core objective among the youth of Nigeria was the promotion of national unity. This scheme involves posting of young graduates of thirty years and beyond to different parts of the country distinct from their states of origin and probably regions. This was to enable them lean and appreciate the cultures of the people in their places of primary assignments. Whilst this scheme has recorded a lot of achievement, recent developments in the policy where corps members become easy preys in times of crisis and where the well-connected graduates are posted to their choice and juicy places irrespective of their geographical contiguities are some the challenges confronting the scheme and undermining the national integration efforts.

More importantly, the convocation of national political reform conferences over the years in Nigeria has remained an attempt at nation-building. These conferences were often a mandate to draw the way forward for Nigeria but each time, failures have continued to be recorded either as a result of the character of the delegate or the convocation and selection process of members. And where the delegates succeeded at reaching a genuine and feasible conclusion, their recommendations are often not binding and are therefore confined to the dustbin of history. This is why people are increasingly becoming jittery with political reform conferences in Nigeria especially as they have turned into avenues for political settlements.

Unfortunately, the only huge success of nation building recorded in Nigeria is adorning our public institutions with the national symbols like flag, coat of arm and pictures of Nigeria presidents, governors within their respective states as well as the recitation of the Nigerian anthem in official gatherings which in effect does not guarantee ones but at least it is a sign of togetherness. However, while this effort is not bad because it reminds us of our national identity, it is not sufficient to guarantee nation building with issues from personal conviction and patriotic standpoint.

Nwabughuogu, moves further to reiterate that nation building would not normally be a problem if the people of the

world live in nations in the original sense of the word, that is, a body of people having the same language, culture, common historical experience and popular will and at the same time inhabiting a geographically contiguous territory. The need for nation building arises for two main reasons. First possession of important determinant factors of nationhood such as common language, territorial boundaries, common history, geographical contiguity etc. since these enumerable factors are lacking in the Nigerian nation, there is the need to create national consciousness into these people and groups in the nation state they have found themselves in.<sup>13</sup>

The second idea is the continuous drive to modernity that is the desire to create a better life through the development of technology, which can only be gotten through a comprehensive division of labour, science and industry among many nation-states. This may be difficult for small nations despite the commoners or language, territory, history and popular will. In Africa, nation building is much a more herculean task. The countries that emerged at independence were not nations as conventionally defined, for instance, people having the same language, culture, common historical experience and popular will. They were rather nation-states brought together by accident and history of colonialism. They not only lack all the determinants of a nation as defined above but also they were not in a position to create the good life for their citizens at independence because they were brutalized and exploited for a long period of colonial rule.<sup>14</sup>

So, the task of nation building in Nigeria involves the transformation of many separate nations into a single nation and the stimulation of love for that new entity. Thus, the spirit of traditional communities must be made to give way to the modern form of organizing human life. Unfortunately, for Nigeria more than six decades after the attainment of independence, nation building is still at its rudimentary stage. The attempt to forge nations out of the entities created by colonial rule has been a chimera. Regimes after regimes try and fail and this has great negative effect on the development of Nigeria.

Put differently, to build is a very critical and time consuming project because measurement is involved, but to destroy is very easy because no establishment pattern is required. This is also applicable in nation building. Building a nation requires that the actors otherwise the builders must perfectly have an idea of the type of a nation they desire and therefore worked towards having it actualized. Just like the services of many actors are involved in building a house, the architect to draw the plan, the surveyor to take measurement, the brick layers to lay the blocks, the carpenters to fix the wooden works and do the roofing, and the host of others, so also it is in nation-building. Cartographers are required to draw the map and define the boundaries of the nation, lawyers are required to define the sovereignty of the nation, and political scientist are needed to offer leadership that can lead to proper execution of the project of nation building. This leadership role of the political scientist is one of the most critical aspects of human management that gives credence to nation-building and development. The reason being that it defines both the structure and architectural designs of the type of nation to be built. This by implication is a master role that harnesses all other roles required in having a just society. For this reasons therefore, political science becomes a master science discipline, where political scientist are trained as master scientist that champions the structural design for statehood. This means that they are required to possess master knowledge of human problems both those relating to pure science and humanities as well as social nationalism, and therefore use their administrative ingenuities to reconcile the contradictions arising from the antagonisms inherent there from. They are bequeathed with the role of leadership that gives credence to building strong democratic institutions that would subsume individual egotisms. This was what Obama meant in Ghana when he said that the problem with Africa is the existence of weak political institutions and strong individuals. However, the critical task remains how can the political scientist achieve it task, given the type of Nigeria society where crude stereotypic mentality has been built around them as braggarts that are not worthy of administrative mandate? This is a task that must be achieved if leadership problem were to be solvent in Nigeria. Lastly, economy lays foundation for successful nation-building. This is another crucial area where the political leadership plays significant role. The political elite group that controls the machineries of the state must be able to launch a self-sustaining economic development process that de-emphasizes greater reliance on external help for economic recovery. It is only when the political leadership in a country has evolved a self-sustaining economic development strategies that foreign aid would make meaning. While we agree that there is no uniform pattern of nation building, what remains incontestable to us is the conviction that if these factors are properly harnessed in Nigeria, nation-building can be made possible.

### **Civilian and Military administration in Nigeria: A Critical Comparative Study of a Federal State.**

A comparative study of military regimes and civilian administration in Nigeria can be chronologically asserted using Nigeria federation under civilian and military regimes as a focus point. Federalism is generally defined as the principle and method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each within a sphere, coordinate and independent<sup>15</sup>. This means that since Federal government involves a division of functions and also the states forming the federation are anxious that they should not surrender more powers than they know. It is essential for a federal government to provide a written constitution embodying the division of powers, and binding all governmental authorities throughout the federation. From it, all state and federal authorities device their powers and any actions they perform contrary to it are invalid.

Nigeria experience with military and civilian rule suggest that military rule is not entirely incompatible with federalism. This is because, the heterogeneous and centrifugal forces that operate in a multinational polity like Nigeria will make use of federal principles of reasonable option for military rulers. To some extent, federal principles have become entrenched in Nigeria. Too great a violation of those principles by a military regime can spark communal conflict and destabilize the regime. The major difference in the operation of civilian and military federalism is to be found in the style of structures of administration.

In the wave and eve of decolonization, many Nigerians clamored for declaration and finally opted for federalism in the terminal colonial period. It was in this context that the late Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Belewa, told the House of Representative in 1957, "I am pleased to see that we are all agreed that the federal system is, under the present conditions, the only sure basis on which Nigeria remain united."<sup>16</sup> However, the political crisis upheaval of 1966 in the Nigeria particularly the South and corruption and deviant behavior by the political elite gave rise to the military incursion/coup and counter coup that destroyed the federal system of the first Republic. In 1970 after the civil war, Gowon declared no Victor, no vanquished. According to him, it was with the spirit of keeping Nigeria as an indivisible or indissoluble country that "Federalism is essentially a compromise solution in a multinational state between two types of self-determination (1) the self-determination afforded by a national government that guarantees security for all in a nation-state and (2) the self-determination of component groups to retain their individual identities"<sup>17</sup>. Thus, federalism as it were, is an attempt to reflect diverse political, social, cultural and economic interests within a frame of unity. It therefore satisfies the need for cooperation in some things coupled with a right to separate actions on others. Only federalism fulfills the desire for unity where it co-exists with a determination not to smother local identify and local power.

Federalism emphasizes non-centralized powers. Each component unit of a federal system has its powers and functions delineated and guaranteed in a constitutional document. Federalism is the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, coordinating and independently viable. This has promoted intergroup relations because it reflects the acceptability of inherent diversities in the Nigeria society. It also become a system, that is fashioned to hold different groups or nations together in a state, while it still allows each of them a degree of autonomy in certain areas. It gives room for unity in diversity. Comparatively, are the army better nation builders than the civilian government they overthrow? Many scholars in the 1960s up to 1990s believed that the army is the most reliable agency for modernization and nation building. This belief stemmed from the many capabilities the army possesses. The armies possess discipline, which makes them distinct from such other elite groups as technocrats, academics and students. They therefore possess a centralized structure with a chain of command. By their training they are nationalistic in outlook than other groups because from their beginning they are trained to serve a given nation as one group.

### **Socio-Political and Administrative Problems**

The post independence era of Nigeria was face with various political and administrative challenges including demands for equal representation between the Northern and Southern regions, threats of secession, and a decline in the social unity. The country also experienced limited social developments in the area of infrastructure such as roads and water supply being inadequate, and education being underdeveloped. The political landscape was further complicated by corruption, rigged elections, and the dominance of foreign control over the economy.

This situation was altered by the military whereby introducing the possibility of both political and economic restructuring and set Nigeria on the path to socio-economic and political progress. Even one of the greatest critics of the military regimes in Nigeria Billy Pudley admitted that, the real achievement of the military administration lies in its attempts to create new institutions. Actions taken in this respect were (1) the creating of new states (2) the introduction of new system of local government and (3) the drawing up of a new constitution.<sup>18</sup> This was also the belief that in fragmented societies which characterized Nigeria state, the military is the only group that could serve as a new form of solidarity and even as an embodiment of a respected and sacred symbol, making them irreplaceable nation builders. Even, where the military lack respect, scholars still believe that they have the advantage of being the most highly organized and efficient group in the society. One of the most vocal exponents of this school about African armies tends to be detribalized, westernized, integrated and cohesive institutions in their respective states<sup>19</sup>. The army often enjoys a greater sense of national identity than other institutions. In technical skills, including the capacity to coerce and communicate, the army is the most modern agency in the country. A more vivid symbol of sovereignty than the flag, the constitution or parliament, the army often evolves more popular sentiments than a political leader. It is this belief that made the army welcome by scholars in Africa. With the anxiety to transform the continent politically, socially and economically and give the Africans a sense of belonging, a good or developed economy and a good life, most scholars were therefore prepared to support the army believed to be the most potent agency to achieve these objectives. But this belief did not translate into reality. It soon became clear that the army did not translate the advantages it had over the elite group in the society into an instrument for a rapid socio-economic development of their countries. Many countries became worse under military regimes than they were under civilian government. There were many reasons for this. Soon after taken over of power, the military were easily corrupted by their civilian

brothers and sisters who quickly reminded the military leaders that they belong to their ethnic groups and that it was incumbent on them to assist their people get a bigger chunk of the national cake. Besides, Nigerian armies are not angels from heaven but Nigerians in military dresses. They are therefore exposed to the same weaknesses of the Nigerian civilians. They quickly saw political power as a means of grabbing enough resources to solve the financial problems of themselves and their families. Military overthrows of military regimes became a constant feature of the period and therefore military discipline disappeared. The command structure was polluted and this made the army a weak organization during the period.

During this period in Nigeria history, it was under the military regimes that the greatest looting of the treasury took place depriving the nation of much need funds to build necessary infrastructure that could have made the citizens enjoy better life and become committed citizens and lovers of their nation. Much of the debts owed to the international monetary fund (IMF), the Paris club and the London club were incurred under the military.

It is on record that a commission of inquiry appointed by Murtala Mohammed in 1975 found ten of the then twelve military governors guilty of corruption involving diverting their state funds, amounting to over 211 million dollars into their own use. The Abacha regime also misappropriated a whopping sum of over 40 billion dollars. Nigeria's image reached rock-bottom level because of the narcotic trade and the activities of the advance fee fraudsters which blossomed during the period of military rule. It was also the military that started heavy borrowing on the Eurodollar market at exorbitant rates of interest that has today made Nigeria one of the major debtor countries in Africa<sup>20</sup>.

On the basis of these facts, therefore, it would be strange to regard the army in Nigeria as better nation builders than the civilians' government they overthrow. For at the end of military rule, the basic foundation of nation building in Nigeria had not been laid.

### Summary and Conclusion

Inter-group relations in Nigeria before and after independence Nigeria have been bedeviled with plethora of troubles that disrupted the economic growth. The enthusiasm with independence profound economic development goals that would be realized was marred. Economic policies of the military and the civilian politicians though laudable, but implementation was often the challenge. As such, series of developmental plans were mapped out at different stages of policy making, but the snag has always been poor execution. Both the military and civilians are culpable. Staggered and result deficient in different projects which were embarked upon without completion in most cases. The impact of all these is poor human development index assessment occasioned by unemployment, poor infrastructure, antagonism, downward economic projection and general poverty up to 2022.

However, people believe that military intervention in Nigeria was caused by tensions and the fragility of the states in the country. The poor economic situations in the country alienated the ruled from the rulers and made the citizens passive to what happened to their leaders. Thus, it was easy for the military to attack and capture the leaders knowing that once you arrest the president, you arrest the state. The military themselves claim that they overthrow government because of corruption and nepotism practiced by the civilian leaders. In short, the army feels that the politicians are usually incapable of developing the country and that, because of their practice of nepotism; they are unable to weld the numerous ethnic groups together. Whatever the reasons, however, the fact is that the army tend to come to power when, at a certain point the life of a nation, there appear a sense of disillusionment with the existing order and no visible means of change so the claim to have come to right the wrong of society, to put the country on the right track of modernization and development. In short, they believe the idea is to accelerate the process of nation building.

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