

THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND NIGERIA'S INTEGRATION AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, 1970-1975

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ABSTRACT

National integration has become a major issue in post-civil war Nigeria. Nigeria could not afford to return back to the pre-war conditions of regional, ethnic, and party conflicts and rivalry which led to the collapse of the First Republic (1960-1966) through military intervention and the civil war (1967-1970). These issues have summarily been termed the "National Question". In the immediate post-war years (1970-1975), the military regime considered (re)integration its responsibility and set about devising variety of ways to integrate Nigeria into a more cohesive entity. This paper therefore examined the role and place of the military in the drive for national integration in post-civil war Nigeria. Focusing specifically on the period between 1970 and 1975, this paper suggests that the process of national integration in Nigeria has been largely effected and facilitated by the military in Nigeria's politics.

INTRODUCTION

The issues of national integration have been a subject that has dominated discussions and debates in Nigeria since its inception as a sovereign and independent nation. This is more so as the colonial legacy which transformed hitherto autonomous entities into component parts of the new whole became a reality in the nascent nation. The amalgamation of 1914 which brought together people who lived under various political systems of varying degrees of sophistication in terms of organisation and management of their affairs was as a result of British diplomacy of imperialism rather than as a matter of choice for any of the people that were enclosed in this grid. Authoritarian as this may be, this frame-work provided the initial structure for the modern state of Nigeria (Eleazu, 1988:9).

This merger for Nigerians at that time, particularly the educated elites in the Southern Protectorate, was an opportunity for

nation-building, albeit, within the context of participation in colonial administration and ultimately for self-government. However the British colonial administration did not share this vision and were indeed hostile and opposed to the nationalists' idea of self-government in terms of a single and unified nation. The administration's determination to oppose the development of a "United Nigeria" was practically expressed in way the regions were administered (Osadolor, 2001: 32-33). Both the Northern and the Southern Province were administered separately without a common law-making body. It was not until the constitutional arrangement of 1946 (NAI, CSO5/5/43, Order-in-Council, 1946) which came into effect in 1947 that a framework for greater interaction of the Nigerian peoples was sought. However, by the time the North and the South became integrated politically, the struggle to gain political and other advantages within the colonial state made

ethnic identification explicit. This therefore, came to shape all aspects of politics in Nigeria.

This unification, however it has been described or viewed (some call it the “mistake of 1914”) (Momoh, 2002: 17), and the way in which the British colonialist ruled Nigeria, birthed the conditions that gave rise to the National Question. The unresolved national question was one of the foremost issues that led to the thirty months civil war (May 30th, 1967 - January 12th, 1970) that almost disintegrated the nascent nation within seven years of its existence (Ikime, 1986).

Against this backdrop, the discussion of the Military and Post-Civil War national integration in Nigeria, 1970-1975, will begin with an analysis of the national question in Nigeria, and how it degenerated into the civil war. This will be followed by an examination of the role of the military regimes in facilitating national integration in Nigeria. Finally, the discussion will conclude with an appraisal of the extent to which military regimes have achieved national integration in Post-Civil war Nigeria.

The National Question and the Nigerian Civil War: A Historical Analysis

The point has been made in the preceding section that the root of the national question in Nigeria lies in the incalculable unification of the area that came to be known as Nigeria by the British. It is imperative at this juncture therefore, to attempt a clarification of the meaning and essence of the National Question in Nigeria. Different scholars have espoused varied perspectives in their explanation of the National Question as it relates to the world in general and Nigeria in particular.

The “national question” has always been central to the political discourse in virtually every polity where the building of a coherent and sustainable nation-state has become a problematic struggle. In the former Soviet Union, it was called the ‘Nationality Question’

where ethnic nationalism by a conglomeration of non- Russian groups that were fractionally brought under the Russian hegemony since the days of Peter the Great were increasingly challenging their subjugation to the Soviet state (Naanen, 2001: 216). In Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was conceived by some people as a solution to what they must have perceived as a fundamental problem of existence (Labinjor, 2001:53). In the tradition of the French Revolution, the national question is the question of whether relations among peoples conscious of their separate identities shall be based on liberty, equality and fraternity (Toyo, 1993: 4).

However, the national question has had changing definitions and shifting meanings over time for different scholars and people. Presumably, the national question means some questions about the nation, but what exactly is the question? Aptly defined, the national question relates to the rights to self-determination of nations (Connor, 1973:3). For Ikime (1986), it is the colonial legacy that created the geo-political entity known as Nigeria and encompassed within it diverse peoples, whose interactions and relations with each other constitute the National Question. In other words, the ethnic problem in Nigeria is indeed the National Question! Ikime is not alone in attributing the cause of the national Question in Nigeria¹ to the artificiality of the

¹ For examples of argument relating the national question to British colonial legacy see, Bode Onimode, “The Economic Basis of The National Question”, in Eghosa E.Osaghae and Ebere Onwudiwe (eds), *The Management of The National Question in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: The Lord’s Creations, 2001), pp.62, 63.; Uyilawa Usualele, “The Edo Nationality and the National Question: A Historical Perspective”, Eghosa E.Osaghae and Ebere Onwudiwe (eds), *The Management of The National Question in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: The Lord’s Creations, 2001), p.198.; Isaac O. Albert, “The Yoruba and The National Question”, in Eghosa E.Osaghae and Ebere Onwudiwe (eds), *The Management of The National Question in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: The Lord’s Creations, 2001), p.272.

colonial creation, Adebani (2001) writes that,

The National Question is intrinsic to the very idea, formation and existence of Nigeria. Many of the varied, contentious issues which today constitute the fabric of the National dilemma (National Question) emerged simultaneously with the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates to form a single country in 1914 (Adebani, 2001: 150)

One of the dangers of accepting wholly this ethnic dimension of the national question in Nigeria is the underlying assumption that the national question is a static phenomenon. The national question is a sponge expression that soaks up and covers but not limited to a range of related issues which includes empowering and emancipatory group rights, right to separate existence, or in the absence of this, free and voluntary choice of which state to belong to in the local political autonomy within a larger political territory; to language, culture, religion and other elements of group identity essential to the preservation of the group and held dearly by its member; to power and resource sharing in the state to which the group belongs; finally to equity and justice in relations with other groups and with the state (Osaghae, 2001: 220; Osadolor, 2004: 5).

In Nigeria, the national question has transcended the inability of the post-colonial Nigerian state to redress the structural inequalities inherited from the colonial regime. The national question in Nigeria includes but it is not limited to the following: First, the continuous struggle among the three dominant ethnic nationalities for the control of the centre, and between the major ethnic nationalities on one hand, and between smaller minority nationalities on the other.

Second, the bitter rivalry among the ever increasing states in the federation especially over an acceptable revenue allocation formula. Third, the inter-ethnic rivalry within states, inter-clan rivalries within particular states in the federation such as Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. Fourth, religious rivalries and conflicts between Christians and Muslims especially over Sharia and the secularity of the Nigerian state as well as the intensification of regionalism along the North-South divide following the annulment of the 1993, June 12th Presidential election (Abubakar, 2001: 233). Fifth, added to these is the Niger Delta Question which refers to the serious grievances of the communities in Niger Delta as regards the issues of exclusion, social injustice, deprivations and despoliation, to the fundamental problem of human rights violation, oppression, intimidation and domination (Osadolor, 2004: 5).

The preceding discussion and analysis indicates that the National Question in Nigeria transcends ethnicity; it is basically a problem of the realisation of the human ideal. It goes beyond ethnicity, for there is no such thing as the ethnic ideal. All the concerns of oppression, domination and marginalisation boil down to issues of alienation, inequality and inequity in society (Momoh, 2002:1). Ethnic explanation cannot capture the totality or ramification of such claims. The National Question pertains to issues and debates on how best to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings, so that they may have the same rights and privileges, access to power and an equitable share of national resources (Ajayi, 1992: 14).

From the above explanation of the national question, one would be able to observe in the successive brief recount of the precipitants of the civil war (for detailed discussions on the civil war see, Forsyth, 1969; Kirk-Greene, 1970; Uwechue, 1971;

Mohammed, 1988), issues one can refer to as unresolved national question. The passionate and ruthless race to secure and consolidate personal, party, ethnic, economic and political opportunities and advantages climaxed in the census controversy of 1962-1964. This conflict which was characterised by inflation of figures, that eventually gave the North 54 per cent of the total population of the country at that time dashed the hopes of the South to wrestle political dominance from the north constitutionally (Mohammed, 1988:75). The election rigging, massive corruption, violence and anarchy which characterised the elections of 1964-1965 provided the immediate justification for the military intervention of January 15, 1966.

It is imperative at this juncture to note that coup and subsequent military take-over of government was at first welcomed all over the country. There had been calls for the military to intervene at the height of the crisis of 1964-5. However, this welcome was momentary and was quickly replaced by apprehension, resentment and hostility in the Northern Region, where the leaders began to read anti-Northern motives and attempts at Igbo domination in the take-over (Osaghae, 1998: 58). This ethnic interpretation was reinforced by several factors. First, the orchestrators of the coup were predominantly Igbo, and the casualties of the coup were mostly senior army officers from the North and the West. The second factor was the tactless and provocative attitude of the Igbos living in the North; posters appeared in Kaduna showing Nzeogwu standing over a fallen Ahmadu Bello. Third was the ethnic interpretation of the military take-over through the network of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), whose Hausa service enjoyed wide patronage in Northern Nigeria. The fourth had to do with the Ironsi regime itself, which seemed to confirm the suspicion of an Eastern-Igbo agenda to

dominate the country (Osaghae, 1998: 58-59; Elaigwu, 1986: 53-57).

These ethnic undertone caused a deep division within the army coupled with General Ironsi's Decree 34 of 24th May, 1966 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1966: A153), which abrogated the Federal structure for a Unitary one and abolished regional public services. For the Northerners, the Unification of the Civil service was the most annoying aspect of the decree. It confirmed their suspicions of Ironsi's regime. Both the Northern and Western Regions were unenthusiastic about the decree for it threatened their securities. Those who opposed these new measures, particularly in the north, thought that this was a dangerous experiment which had to be protested most strongly. These unacceptable measures and the humiliation which northerners suffered as a result of the military coup and the euphoric conduct of the Ibo everywhere led to riots in several parts of the north (Gboyega, 1979: 239). On May 27, 1966, violent demonstrations broke out in the North, spearheaded by public servants, Northern Students and academics in Ahmadu Bello University as a reaction to the promulgation of the decree in the North. For two months the riots continued involving the massacre of Igbos in the North and the destruction of their properties (Osaghae, 1998: 60; Elaigwu, 1986: 53). While General Ironsi was at Ibadan to open a conference of traditional rulers, a group of Northern soldiers abducted and killed both him and his host the military governor of the West, Col. Faluyi Adegunle (Osaghae, 1998: 60; Elaigwu, 1986: 64-65).

The July 29 coup has been rightly termed a vengeful coup aimed at avenging the deaths of the Northern officers killed in January and removing Ironsi and his supporters. This aim was achieved as only one of the ten officers that were killed was a non-Easterner. Other than the revenge killing, there was no clear cut plan to take over power as majority of those

who executed the coup favoured secession of the Northern region and had embarked on the repatriation of their families from South to the North. Discipline was difficult to enforce as was manifest in the inability of Brigadier Ogundipe, the most senior ranking officer to assume control. It took the British high commissioner, Francis Cumming Bruce, as well as the US ambassador, Elbert Matthews to convince the Northern secessionist officers to drop their plan. For three critical days while these were going on, the country drifted along without a head of state, the situation was temporarily brought under control by the assumption of Lt Col. Yakubu Gowon (Osaghae, 1998: 60-61; Elaigwu, 1986: 65)

Gowon assumed office at the climax of deep national crisis. In addition to the unsettled terrain in Lagos, and the continuing upheaval over the abrogation of the federal system, the counter-coup resonated in the northern region in form of renewed genocidal killings of the Igbo and Easterners. The Northern leaders were harbouring plans of secession, the military governor of the Eastern region, Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu refused to accept Lt Col. Gowon's accession to power. The genocidal killings of the Igbo in the North which had gone on since the unitary decree was promulgated in May, and the revenge killings of the Eastern officers, including the head of state, in the July counter-coup, provided grounds for Col. Ojukwu to devise secessionist schemes (Osaghae, 1998: 63; Elaigwu, 1986: 53).

By the end of September, Col. Ojukwu concluded that the safety of Easterners living outside the East can no longer be guaranteed, and asked them to return home. He also asked non-Easterners to leave the region. This order combined with the revenge massacre of Northerners in Port Harcourt, Enugu and other Eastern cities, led to a counter-exodus of non-Easterners from the region. Secessionist sentiments grew among the Igbo elites, and

pressure mounted on Col. Ojukwu to act. From October 1966, relations between Eastern government and the Federal government/Northern region deteriorated rapidly, and all attempts to find a solution failed as Col. Ojukwu insisted that neither he nor any other representative of the Eastern region felt safe attending meetings outside the Eastern region. This was the background to the 'peace summit' held at Aburi in Ghana. The disagreements over the interpretation of the agreements reached at Aburi by the Federal government on the one hand and the Eastern regional government on the other further weakened relations between them.

In March Col. Ojukwu announced the take-over, from April 1 of all federal departments and parastatals in the Eastern region by the regional government and withholding all federal taxes and revenue in the region. The federal government responded by declaring the act unconstitutional and later placed economic sanctions on the region. All attempts by Gowon to reconcile the differences between the Eastern region and the Federal government failed. Ojukwu declared the East a Sovereign State of Biafra with its flag and National Anthem on 30th May, 1967. The Federal Government declared Ojukwu's move an act of rebellion while maintaining that the Federal territorial integrity must remain intact. Fighting broke out between the Federal and Biafra forces on 6 July, 1967, the Federal government then declared "police action" that later developed into a full-fledged war which lasted for thirty months (Elaigwu, 1986: 76; Osaghae, 1998:65; Ikime, 2002: 60-64).

What is discernible from the above recount is that the issues relating to the National Question such as tribal politics, ethnic mistrust, and mutual fear of domination, corruption and nepotism coupled with the inability of political leaders to resolve these issues ignited the constitutional crisis

that paved way for the January 1966 coup and the subsequent civil war.

The outbreak of the war was interpreted by analysts that there was probably no workable basis for the concept of one Nigeria. The war was interpreted to mean that the state has failed to evolve an indispensable mechanism to mediate and integrate the series of conflicts and contradictions arising from the country's constellation of class, ethnic, economic and social forces. On the other hand, the end of the war in January 1970 aroused new curiosity about the possibility and practicability of Nigeria as a national entity. A dominant issue in the interpretations of the war has been the National Question in Nigeria political debates. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, efforts at national integration were not quite successful in transforming the constituent units of Nigeria into national societies with national values and national character. This was due to the low degree of institutionalisation of socio-political structures in relation to the national centre. The problem of what to do with the country and how the constituent units sought better understanding became known as the National Question (Osadolor, 2002: 74).

Gowon's Effort at National (Re) Integration

The civil war ended with the public declaration of the surrender of Biafra by Lt. Col. Effiong whom Col. Ojukwu handed over a virtually "vanquished Republic" when he fled to Ivory Coast the previous day (Osaghae, 1998: 69). The devastation of the war was enormous, the number of deaths, mostly of Easterners was estimated at between one and three million, while another three million became displaced persons and refugees. The Eastern economy was in ruins, with infrastructure and utilities destroyed, and severe shortage of shelter, food, clothing and medicine (Ibid.).

The military government was able to manage the situation and proved wrong all the

predictions of the Western press that the end of the war would be marked by genocide and mass trials of war criminals, by saying that there was no 'victor' or 'vanquished' in the war of brothers. General Gowon's desire to enforce reintegration is expressed in his guarantees to erstwhile secessionists that:

... We must commence at once in greater earnest the task of healing the nation's wounds. We have at various times repeated our desire for reconciliation in full equality once the secessionist regime abandoned secession. I solemnly repeat our guarantees of general amnesty for those misled into rebellion. We guarantee the personal safety of everyone who submits to federal authority. We guarantee the security of life and property of citizens in every part of Nigeria, and equality in political rights. We also guarantee the rights of every Nigerian to reside and work wherever he chooses in the Federation as equal citizens in one united country. It is only right that we should henceforth respect each other. We should all exercise civic restraint and use our freedom taking into full account the legitimate rights and needs of the other man. There is no question of second class citizenship in Nigeria (Elaigwu, 1986: 136-137).

It should be noted that General Gowon's contribution to the process of national integration in Nigeria started even before the outbreak of the civil war. To preserve the country as one political and economic entity, General Gowon, in a broadcast at 9am on 27 May, 1967, announced a decree dividing the country into twelve states in a bid to remove the psychological threat of regional secession and the fear of domination by minorities in regions (Ojiako, n.d. : 219).

While the war was going on, the federal military government, anticipating the enormity of the rehabilitation work,

established the National Rehabilitation Commission by Decree No. 41, and charged it with the responsibility of collection and distribution of drugs and other humanitarian gifts from foreign governments and from international and non-governmental organisations. This committee was very central to the achievement of rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes in Eastern States. Its work assumed tremendous proportions after the war (Elaigwu, 1986: 140-141).

The federal government embarked on a vigorous policy of reintegration and rehabilitation built around the 'three Rs'- Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. Mr Ukpabi Asika an Igbo lecturer at Ibadan was appointed to coordinate relief matters and see to refugee problem of the East. General Gowon also authorised the establishment of Abandoned Properties in all States to administer and collect rents on all properties belonging to Igbos who had abandoned such properties during the 1966-1970 civil war. Many Igbos returned, after the war to huge sums of money which helped to resettle them, although in some cases there were problems of restoration of properties. Most of the properties left behind by the Igbos were reclaimed by their owners, in addition to rents paid on houses during the war. The Igbos soon came back into the economic stream with greater vigour and determination than seen before the war (Ibid.; Balogun, 1973: 113-114).

Through the National Rehabilitation Commission and the Red Cross Society, the immediate task of organising emergency relief supplies to the ordinary man emerging from the war, was accomplished admirably well. In his broadcast at the end of the war, General Gowon called for volunteers; doctors and nurses, engineers, technicians, builders, plumbers, mechanics, administrators and

skilled hands. In a short time fifteen doctors and fifty nurses were rushed to Igbo heartland to embark on mercy operations alongside nine hundred Nigerian Red Cross officials and one hundred and fourteen foreign Red Cross officials. In addition, the federal government made available two million naira (i.e. one million Nigerian pounds then) for relief activities. The warm reception accorded the secessionists back into the Nigerian fold was amply demonstrated by the magnitude of donations made to war relief activities (Ibid).

In a major act of reconciliation, the federal government announced details of reunion. For public servants, there were a number of categories.

- a) All those secessionists who were members of the Eastern Nigerian Public Service should return to their respective state governments for re-absorption.
- b) Federal Civil Servants transferred to the former Eastern Nigerian Public Service, should report in the first instance to their respective state government for re-absorption; they were eligible for absorption into in the Federal Civil Service if they so desired and applied through their State Public Service Commission for transfer to federal service.
- c) Federal officers on posting to federal offices in the former Eastern Nigeria should report at Benin, Calabar, Enugu and Port Harcourt, to respective state governments as agents of the Federal Government; state governments would then advice appropriate Federal ministries and departments which would then issue instructions to officers concerned.
- d) Those public servants who left posts without formal transfer, and who had

therefore been dismissed or had their appointments terminated, were to register with respective state government and apply through these for reinstatement in Federal Public Service if they so desired.

- e) Officials of statutory corporation were to be covered by the above categories (*Morning Post*, January 27, 1970: 1).

The federal government pointed out that re-absorption into federal and state public service would not 'prejudice the career prospect of those who remained in their post throughout the crisis to serve their country' (Ibid).

As for the military, the case of the Biafran soldiers was to be reviewed by a Board of Officers, whose duty was to probe the activities and roles of officers on the secessionist side. At the end of the exercise, a number of officers were re-absorbed; some were dismissed from the Nigerian military service, while those Nigerian officers who had participated in the January 1966 coup and those who helped the secessionist forces to invade the former Midwest state were detained for a further period. Otherwise there were no summary trials or execution (Balogun, 1973: 113-114).

One of the major steps General Gowon took in reintegrating Nigeria is embodied in the first independence national broadcast after the civil war. General Gowon enjoined Nigerians to rededicate themselves to the service of the nation and to bring the same energy, devotion and loyalty which they displayed in the struggle to preserve the sovereignty and integrity of their country to bear on the great task of reconstruction and development that lies ahead. The federal government in consultation with state governments launched a four-year National Development Plan. The purpose of the consultation was to 'ensure as much as

possible the even development of the country; correct the imbalance of the past and avoid conflicting plans between the states and federal government (Osaghae, 1998: 72; Ojiako, n.d. : 71). The main preoccupation of the plan was to rehabilitate, reconstruct the wreckages of the civil war and reconcile the entire people of Nigeria into an entity free of rancour and disunity. Significant aspect of the plan concerned national security, agriculture, education, social welfare, transport and communication.

The immediate post-war years necessitated various policies that enhanced the national unity of Nigeria. In particular, the federal government took a number of measures which fostered the reintegration of the country. The first was the reconstruction projects that built the Niger Bridge which was destroyed during the civil war. One of the highlights of the reintegration efforts was the establishment of more 'Unity' Schools (federal government colleges), with students from all states of the federation admitted on a quota basis (Ojiako, n.d. : 224; Osaghae, 1998: 72). Another step that was taken towards fostering national integration was the establishment in 1973 of the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), under which graduates of universities and polytechnics did a compulsory one year national service outside their state of origin. The scheme, which is still operative, was meant to transcend political, social, state and ethnic loyalties. It seeks to inculcate among Nigerian youths the virtues of useful service to the nation, a disciplined outlook, a spirit of self-reliance, a sense of common belonging, and a basis of fostering loyalty to the nation (Adekanye, 1989: 189; Osaghae, 1998: 72). The national sports festival was also introduced in 1973 to compliment the national festival of arts and culture in promoting greater understanding among the

various groups in the country (Osaghae, 1998: 72).

These endeavours were indeed successful as it bred tolerance for difference and fostered unity in the sense that Nigerians were forced to interact with one another first at a developing age in the unity schools and later as proud youths of Nigeria under the NYSC scheme and the National Sports festival.

Military Rule and National Integration: An Appraisal

These efforts notwithstanding, the military political management of the situation has come under serious criticism. As politically masterful as the state creation strategy of General Gowon was, rather than foster national integration, has had several negative consequences on politics in Nigeria. In the first place, the rather arbitrary manner with which states were created has made the demand for the creation of more states a major source of tension arising from protracted agitations. Part of the incessant demand for more states can be traced to the absence of a national consensus on the proper criteria that should be applied to the process of creating new states. In the absence of a national consensus, selective and arbitrary criteria have been used as the basis for creating states. In addition, the lack of country-wide consensus has created opportunities for political leaders to use state creation exercise as a cynical manipulative ploy for selfish and nefarious objectives. In turn, the realisation by many Nigerians that indefensible and arbitrary criteria are used to create new states stimulates intense demands for more states (Agbese, 2002:132).

One resultant effect of the failure to establish concrete criteria for state creation is a vicious circle. Every community or group feels it has as much right as any other group for a state of its own. All it has to do to get its own state is to assert its claim to a state on

similar amorphous criteria that has been used in the past to create other states. Each group uses protests, petitions, political pressures and memoranda to press its case for a state of its own. Political leaders respond to the incessant and enormous pressure for more states by increasingly using nebulous and arbitrary criteria. In turn, a lack of clear cut criteria for creating states provides a powerful impetus for groups whose demand for new states are not met to insist that their demands must be met in the next round of state creation (Agbese, 2002:134).

Secondly, the proliferation of states has been a serious drain on the national resources of the country, as this has resulted in the emergence of relatively weak composite unit vis-à-vis the Federal centre. The subsequent adoption of most of the items of the Dina Commission Report that was rejected in 1968 resulted in the federal government absorption of certain constitutional functions of the states, thus, growing steadily in its constitutional and administrative powers at the expense of the states (Elaigwu, 1986: 161).

Nigeria's federalism became a unitary form of federalism in which subsequently more states were created in the post-civil war era, even when these states lacked fiscal autonomy and depended on allocations to them from the federal government to survive. This development reinforced the struggle for power at the federal level, for he who captures the centre, captures the purse of the nation. Furthermore, state creation has heightened conflicts among even previously 'homogenous' ethnic groups. The facts that there are still ceaseless cries of ethnic marginalisation which currently dominate political agitation provide evidence that the fears of ethnic domination were not exorcised by the creation of states (Agbese, 2002: 134; Adejumobi and Aderemi, 2002: 202).

Despite Gowon's proclamation that the war produced no victor and vanquished, it was obvious that winners and losers did emerge for the war. Obvious winners included the military institution and military officers, contractors who supplied guns and materials to the fighters and civilian politicians such as Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro, Mallam Aminu Kano, Wenike Briggs and Joseph Tarka who were appointed commissioners and members of the federal cabinet. They were appointed into the cabinet on the eve of the war as a strategy of shoring-up support for the federal government. Their appointment was significant for other reasons. Many of them were in opposition political parties before the civilian government was overthrown in January 1966. In fact, Chief Awolowo was brought out of jail where he was serving a sentence on his conviction for treasonable felony. With their appointment, these politicians were brought into the political mainstream as major players (Agbese, 2002: 134).

Gowon's inability to manage the enormous wealth brought by the 'oil boom' of the early 1970's and the unproductive investment in stupendous salary increases for public servants (the famous Udoji awards) and the profligate spending on prestige projects like the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), as well as his lack of political will to discipline and control his corrupt and powerful governors, commissioners and super bureaucrats has caused the regime to come under serious criticism (Osaghae, 1998: 78).

Osaghae states that perhaps the only issue of reconciliation and reintegration of the Easterners which Gowon was not forthcoming

was that of the so-called abandoned 'properties', that is properties left behind by displaced Easterners, many of which was taken over by wartime owners. The issue was finally dealt with although in an unsatisfactory manner to the Easterners, by the Mohammed regime which in February 1976 announced a 14 million Naira grant to state governments to pay five years' arrears of rent to certified owners. The federal and states government required some for their use and the remaining ones were sold to indigenes of states where they were located (Ibid).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the Gowon era in Nigeria is variegated and could be described as both a blessing and a curse in many respects. It nevertheless achieved a broad spectrum of integration through wide range of policies which were not properly implemented. The civil war which would have led to the total disintegration of Nigeria as a political entity was managed in such a manner that social and economic reconstructions were less difficult and painful than they would have been otherwise. In the light of these and other considerations, the management of the civil war and the post-war reforms and policies pursued by the government of General Gowon was consequential in the integration of a post-war Nigeria and fostered National unity. This regime, albeit the criticism it has attracted, succeeded in creating a stronger state with instruments of effective administration at the centre and a unifying federal government upon which successive regimes built upon.

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