

The National Integration Discourse in Nigeria: Whither the Muslim Ummah?

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Abstract

This study examined the position of the Nigerian Muslim Ummah in the ongoing national debate on restructuring within the context of the National Integration Discourse. The study identified ethno-cultural and religious diversities as the bane of national unity and development as a result of which Nigeria has experienced constitutional transmission from true federalism of the first republic to the unitary system of the military dispensation and the present skewed federalism, which is the source of current agitation. The study posited that the solution to this problem has till date eluded the Nigerian successive governments whether military or civilian. The study therefore examined the relevance of restructuring to national integration and queried the motif of its protagonists. The Nigerian Muslim Ummah, as an entity, committed to national unity as argued by this paper could only identify with restructuring concept that is compatible with national integration. This study concluded with recommendations to strengthen the position canvassed.

Introduction

At independence, the Nigerian nationalists opted for a federal system of government with three autonomous regions in recognition of the country's ethno-cultural and religious diversities. In less than a decade, the democratic process was subverted with the military take-over. General Aguiyi Ironsi who took over as Head of State returned the country to the unitary system which he believed would promote national integration better than the federal system. The counter coup within six months that brought General Yakubu Gowon to power led to the 1967 Nigerian civil war which lasted for three years. At the initial stage of Gowon's regime, while the civil war was raging, he promulgated decrees reintroducing federal system, created 12 States and later introduced the National Youth Service Scheme, all in an attempt to foster national integration. It becomes clear, with this scenario, that Nigeria has been experiencing constitutional transmission from true federalism to unitary system and presently to skewed federalism which is the source of the current agitations for the restructuring of governance. The question therefore arises: what is the way forward for Nigeria? In treating this subject, the

following issues are key to the discussion viz: the conceptual framework of the study; the politicization of ethnicity and religion and the implication for national integration; the military strategy of promoting national integration; the relevance of restructuring to national integration and the dilemma of the Muslim *Ummah* in the call for restructuring.

Conceptual Framework

A discourse of this nature must necessarily begin with an examination of relevant concepts especially pertaining to national integration. Integration, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, has variety of meanings including:

- i) Making up or composition of a whole by adding together or combining separate parts;
- ii) The harmonious combination of the different elements in a personality and
- iii) The process of bringing out or achieving equal membership of a population or social group, removal or absence of discrimination against group or people on racial or cultural grounds.

This last definition is germane to the subject of this lecture. The work of Akin Alao's (1986) on the Military and National integration in Nigeria also becomes relevant here. He has cited different scholars that have dealt with meanings of national integration including Odetola (1978) and Binder (1964). The former defines national integration as meaning the establishment of a close interdependence among the various component units of a state and the creation of higher loyalties to the nation that will supersede parochial loyalties to sub-national communities, ethnic groups or regions while the later explains national integration to involve the creation of "a cultural—ideological consensus of a very high degree of comprehensiveness".

He also cited John Paden and Edward Soja (1971) who explain national integration as the aggregation of erstwhile autonomous, independent and primordial groups into a larger, more diffuse units whose implicit frame of reference is not the ethnic scene, but the nation state. According to Alao, If applied to the political process of a plural society, national integration could mean the process through which existing small units are amalgamated into a larger unit and common central institutions are established, to which the component units transfer their loyalty. It should however be noted that in practical terms, the preservation of some degree of loyalty to one's ethnic group is not necessarily at variance with national integration. Ethnic

loyalty and integration do not represent two parallel lines. In fact, the historical experiences of such nations as the United States of America, Switzerland and the Soviet Union demonstrate that the maintenance and retention of residual cultural values, attitudes and commitments do not preclude the emergence of a strongly held national identity. National integration merely requires that identification with the nation should, in certain situations, supersede limited ethnic loyalties (ibid).

In the same vein Myron Weiner (1967) gives the dimensions of national integration to include: (a) the process of bringing culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial nationality which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties; (b) the construction of governmental systems that will satisfy the desire of the state's component ethnic groups to have some control over their own destinies and wellbeing and at the same time meet the state's need for order and unity; and (c) the problem of linking government with the governed meaningfully and effectively.

In the light of the foregoing, Alao opines that national integration signifies the conscious and progressive process of bringing various ethnic groups of a country together and the simultaneous establishment of mechanisms for mediating and resolving inter—group conflicts. Thus, integration entails some degree of homogeneity, and also accommodation of group differences which will ensure the viability of the political system. This becomes necessary because it is only within the context of peace and concord that national cohesion can be enhanced and national integration achieved (ibid). The realization of this condition is however very problematic especially in a plural and post—colonial country like Nigeria.

It takes a patriot to believe in national integration. Patriotism, by popular dictionary meaning, is the love that people feel for their country. It is the love or devotion to one's country. According to Layiwola (2017) patriotism and Nationalism are two phenomena, meaning one and the same thing, arguing that both the patriots and the nationalists are devoted to their fatherland and serve her with exemplary passion. This is more so that nationalism is advocacy for the unity or independence of one's country.

Looking at the concept from the Islamic perspective, patriotism in Arabic is *wataniyyah* While nationalism is *qawmiyyah*. They are concepts which devout Muslims must imbibe, in

accordance with the Prophet's hadith which sees patriotism as an index of faith (*Iman*). From the view point of Islamic political thought, it is expected of a Muslim to obey Allah, his Prophet and the constituted authority, which in this context means having faith in the country's constitutional provisions. As for the concept, nation, Merriam Webster's dictionary defines it as "a large area of land that is controlled by its government or the people who live in a nation. Another definition given by the dictionary is in reference to the nation of America i.e. a tribe of native Americans or a group of native American tribes that share the same history, tradition or language. This latter definition serves our purpose significantly because it recognizes heterogeneity or diversity of culture that characterizes some nations. This concept is recognized in the Islamic tradition in view of *Surah* 49:13 which reads: "Oh mankind, we have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another..." The purpose for the diversity is clearly stated in the passage, in the context of nations that are federal like Nigeria. We will interpret the purpose as enabling one to know each other's comparative advantages that can be harnessed to forge unity and national integration. It can also be interpreted as encouraging tolerance and peaceful co-existence regardless of cultural diversity, after all. Quran 11 v. 118 says: "If it had been Allah's wish, he would have made you a single nation, but he willed it otherwise meaning that diversities and divergences are inevitable and should not be grounds for disunity.

Politicization of Ethnicity and Religion as an Impediment to National Integration

The duo of ethnicity and religion are key elements impeding unity and national integration in Nigeria, whereas if properly constituted and rightly deployed both could promote national citizenship (Olupona 2017). Politicisation of ethnicity and religion can be traced to the period of colonial administration. During the struggle for independence, the nationalists were disunited on many issues of national interests on the basis of religion and ethnicity. This came to the climax when the first three major political parties were formed before independence. The National Congress of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) founded by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe in 1948, which appeared a national political organization in outlook, was strictly a party that drew its major supporters from the Eastern Region; the Action Group formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1951 was based in the Western Region while the Northern People's Congress founded also in 1951 did not hide its Northern Region identity. While the Action Group had its roots in the *egbe omo oduduwa* founded in 1949, the Northern People's

Congress originated from the cultural organization known as *jam'iyarmuteni arewa* founded also in 1949.

The outcome of the 1959 pre independence federal election clearly reflected ethno religious voting pattern as each political party won within its regional base. As rightly observed by Oyeweso (2017), the contest can be interpreted as a struggle among various ethnic groups for the control of power in the post -colonial era. Since none of the three parties had the required number of votes to justify forming government at the center, NPC and NCNC had to form alliance in forming government at independence while AG remained in the opposition. Ethnic and religious rivalry that characterized politics of the first republic not only led to the crack in their alliance, but also contributed to the collapse of the first republic.

Similarly in the 1979 presidential election that ushered in the second republic, the voting behavior was hardly different as National Party of Nigeria, Unity Party of Nigeria and Nigeria People's Party which were the three major parties won in the north, west and east respectively. The election was almost stalemated but for the twelve two-third formula invoked by the erudite lawyer of the first republic, Chief Richard Akindele that came to the rescue.

The June 1993 presidential election contested and won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola was completely a departure from the previous pattern of voting. It was an election which was devoid of ethno religious sentiments, but unfortunately, it was annulled by the Badamosi Babangida military administration. I make bold to say that what did the magic was the two-party system that was introduced at the time. It was a contest between Social Democratic Party and National Republican Convention. None had any ethnic or religious coloration, and to me, it portends the best system for the country so far.

There is no gainsaying that politicization of ethnicity and religion has often impacted negatively on the nation's intercommunal relations, resulting in incessant conflicts that have continued to threaten the basis of our peaceful and harmonious co-existence. The list of such conflicts include, as enumerated in a related study by Opeloye (2012):

- i. The 1980 Maitatsine insurgency in Kano
- ii. The 1982 Maitatsine crises in Bulunkutu Kano and Kaduna
- iii. The 1986 Palm Sunday riot in Ilorin
- iv. The 1987 Kafanchan revolt

- v. The 1991 Tafawa Balewa riot in Bauchi State
- vi. The 1992 Zango Kataf crises
- vii. The 1995 crises
- viii. The 2000 kaduna riot
- ix. The 2008-2011 Jos crises
- x. The 2008-2008 MEND insurgency
- xi. The 2011 Boko Haram revolt

Opeloye (1998) has had cause to engage in another study focusing on this problem titled “The Socio- Political factor in the Christian-Muslim Conflict in Nigeria.” The study identifies ethno-political factor as the primary contribution to the Christian-Muslim conflict in Nigeria, while indicating the secondary role of socio-economic considerations and religious fundamentalism, as exemplified in the Zango Kataf riot of 1992 and the Tafawa Balewa and Bauchi disturbances of 1991 and 1995 respectively. The study reveals that the tension that erupted from these episodes merely ignited the bomb of ethno-political rivalry between the minority and majority ethnic groups. He posited that the eruption of violence on each occasion was a manifestation of the collective anger of minorities that had been incubating over a long period against the domination of Hausa/Fulani hegemony. Religious and socio-economic considerations were only incidental factors. It is stressed that even though the disturbances started as ethnic conflicts, they spread rapidly to other towns in the wake of rumors of their religious connotations.

It should be noted that of all the communal crises, the Tafawa Balewa episode deserves special focus because of the threat it continues to pose to national integration till date. The situation in Tafawa Balewa as reported to the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs at its EGPC meeting of October 2017 is alarming and it shows cause for serious concern. The town has been experiencing intermittent ethno-religious disturbances since 1991. Since the last conflict that occurred on 27th January 2011, Muslims have been displaced from the town, while their properties have been destroyed. Several appeals to the state and Federal Government have fallen on deaf ears. According to report, since the year 2011, there has been no call to prayer in the town that is predominantly Muslim. The Muslims in the town have reached a point of despair, mystery and despondency because they have consistently been experiencing this agony. They have not only been impoverished by incessant aggressions and

displacements, they have also been terrified and numerically weakened by intermittent genocide.

The problem in Tafawa Balewa is deep-rooted. The problem can be traced to the pre-independence period when the Christian Sayawa tribe, the southern neighbours had been waging war against the people under the pretext of fighting for self-determination from Bauch Emirate, their claim being that they own the land being the original settlers. This claim is spurious and it can be easily faulted by the people who are familiar with the history and the socio-cultural setting of the settlement. The seeming government incapacitation despite creating Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area and Sayawa Chiefdom appears to us hypocritical. What is more amazing is the fact that this is happening at a time a Muslim is the Nigerian President. The situation in Tafawa Balewa is not peculiar to the North. Similar problems do occasionally erupt in other parts of the federation including Ife-Modakeke crisis in the West and Umuleri-Aguleri in the East. The more governments allow these to persist the more danger it poses for national integration.

Role of the Military in National Integration

The Military rule in Nigeria was in two phases. The first phase was between 1966 and 1979; when Aguiyi Ironsi, Yakubu Gowon, Muritala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo were Heads of State, while the second phase was between 1984 and 1999 when Muhammad Buhari, Badamosi Babangida, Sanni Abacha and Abubakar Abdussalaami administered the country. The task of national integration fell squarely on the Military government of the first dispensation, being the period the nation experienced disintegration occasioned by secession of part of the eastern region, leading to the civil war of 1967. Ironsi's six months rule diagnosed Nigeria's problem to be ethnic rivalry and he tried to bring about rectification by promoting integration through centralization. Believing that regionalism was the bane of the first republic, and a factor that led to its fall, Ironsi promoted the Unification Decree as a result of which Nigeria ceased to be a Federation. He not only abolished regional constitution, he unified regional public services into a single national public service (Alao 1986).

Ironsi's rule did not last because of the blunders he committed including his nepotistic ways. After his ousting and Yakubu Gowon's takeover. He immediately took steps to rectify Ironsi's misdeeds, he considered Unitary system of government as being unsuitable for the

heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society and therefore set up machinery in motion for a return to federalism. He put up constitutional conference committee to deliberate on a system that would ensure the survival of the country as a nation and promote national integration. Delegates from different regions of the country had diverse opinions that made consensus on the form of government to adopt difficult. The withdrawal of the eastern delegates though stalled the committee's proceedings, did not prevent Gowon from carrying out his plan to create the twelve states federal structure. He believed in a form of federation in which no one region or tribal group would be in a position to dominate others; and no region would be large and viable enough to threaten secession or hold the rest of the country to ransom in time of national crises. Gowon acted pro-actively by announcing creation of the twelve states federal structure at the eve of the planned secession in order to frustrate the plan. The twelve states structure that was introduced was not only meant to promote national integration, it secured support of the minority groups for the federal government. The new structure was unique in a sense as it balanced the number of states in the north and the south. Creation of the twelve states did not stop Ojukwu from carrying out his secession plan, believing that his people's interests could not be served if he continued to be part of the Nigerian Federation. The war that ensued is now history. Suffice it to say that the general amnesty granted to the easterners and the policies of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation embarked upon by the Federal government were in the interest of national integration. One bold step taken by Gowon's administration towards national integration after the civil war was the introduction of National Youth Service Corps. The scheme when launched in 1973, was meant to mitigate the impact of ethnicity. It was introduced with a view to promoting common ties among the Nigerian youths and encouraging national unity. (Oyeweso 2017). It was not long after the three years' civil war that Gowon's regime started experiencing dissatisfaction on account of maladministration, official corruption and contract inflation arising from the economic boom. His administration was seen to be anti-Arabism and pro Zionism. (Alao, 1986). Worse still, he reneged on his promise to hand over power in 1976. These were some of the factors that led to his overthrow and takeover of Muritala Muhammed in July 1975. The new administration believed that bringing government closer to the people would make people feel the impact of government better and he consequently created seven additional states to make 19. His belief was that by bringing government closer to the people, they would have better sense of belonging to the nation and therefore enhance national stability. The 19 states structure

brought about subdivision of the large ethnic groups such that ethnicity could not be seen as a relevant factor in political scheming and in building an integrated nation. What is more, the states were no longer identifiable by their geographical locations, rather, they were given new names to obliterate memories of the past territorial affiliations (ibid). One would have thought that with the 19 states Federal structure, an end should have been put to state creation, but this was never the case.

Ibrahim Babangida embarked on further state creation during his regime twice. In 1987, he created two states while in 1991, he created additional seven. The last state creation exercise took place in 1996 during Sanni Abacha's regime when six additional states were created, bringing the total number of states to thirty-six. It should become clear by now that the proliferation of states in the country is becoming counterproductive. First, it leaves many states unviable, second, it weakens the highly cherished federal system of Government. It is unimaginable that some people would still clamour for creation of additional states all for their selfish interests.

The Relevance of Restructuring to National Integration

Almost two decades since Nigeria returned to democratic governance, the country continues to drift, not being in a hurry to catch up with the level of development attained by her sister states that got independence about the same time. The seventeen years of democratic rule has been bedeviled not only by the endemic corruption, but also by factors inimical to national integration: The boko- haram insurgency in the north east, secessionist agitators in the east, the resource control agitators for emancipation of Niger Delta, the menace of the Fulani herdsmen in the north central, all these are manifestations of and reactions to bad governance of the successive democratic governments. General frustrations of the citizenry and loss of confidence in the government have led to the vociferous agitations for restructuring of governance.

We should first define what restructuring is. Merriam Webster defines it as changing the basic organization or structure of something or changing the makeup and organization or pattern of a thing. However, in the context of the national restructuring debate, the concept portends different interpretations to different people. For some, it means going confederal, for others, it means going back to true regionalism others, the desirable restructuring is that which

takes stock of our arrangement to ensure that no state takes a disproportionate amount of resources or most of the available space in the education or job sector or subjugate the other culture or religion or lords it over the other so that the number of the poor and uneducated whose future is circumscribed by their circumstance is shared proportionately. In other words, restructuring should ensure equity, fair play and welfarism.

In the context of this address, only confederation is not in the interest of national integration and it is therefore not worthy of our consideration. Going back to true federalism is the view generally supported by the southern leaders the purpose for which they have been meeting. The north on the other hand is not necessarily opposed to true federalism as evident in the views expressed by Ango Abdullah, Secretary of the Northern Elders Forum, as well as Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal, the Sokoto State Governor and chairman Northern Governors' Forum on restructuring (Nigerian Tribune, 2nd October, 2017). As opined by Ango Abdullah, the north is never afraid of restructuring, saying that the region is ready to go back to the pre 1914 arrangement, or at worst, go back to the 1960 system. But more importantly, he argues that the problem is not about the structure but about the managers of the structure.

Considering the prominence given to true regionalism in the restructuring debate, it would be worthwhile to examine the major issues involved, especially in the light of the position taken at the Yoruba summit held in Ibadan on the 7th of September, 2017. Below is the 15 –point communique as endorsed by the summit for our examination.

1. That Nigeria must return to a proper federation as obtained in the 1960 and 1963 constitutions, this being the position since 1950 Ibadan conference and developments in Nigeria over the last fifty years reinforce this conviction.
2. That Yoruba are clear that restructuring does not mean different things to different people other than that a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria can only know real peace and development, if it is run ONLY along federal lines.
3. That the greatest imperatives of restructuring Nigeria is to move from a “rent-seeking” and “money sharing” anti-development economy to productivity by ensuring that the federating units are free to own and develop their resources. They should pay agreed sums to the federation purse to implement central services.

4. That the federating units- whether states, zones or regions must themselves be governed by written constitution to curb impunity at all levels.
5. Nigeria shall be a federation comprised of six regions and the federal capital Territory, Abuja.
6. The Federal Government shall make laws and only have powers in relation to items specified on the legislative list contained in the constitution of the Federation.
7. The Regions shall in turn be composed of states.
8. Each Region shall have its own constitution containing enumerated exclusive and concurrent legislative lists regarding matters upon which the regions and the states may act or legislate.
9. Contiguous territories, ethnic nationalities or settlement shall be at liberty through a plebiscite, to elect to be part of any contiguous region other than the region in which the current geo-political zone or state boundaries places them.
10. States as presently comprised in the geo-political zones into which they fall, which shall become regions, shall continue to exercise the executive, legislative and judicial functions currently exercised at that level of government.
11. The States within a region shall determine the items on the legislative lists in the Regional constitution for the purpose of good government and the administration and provision of common inter-state social, economic and infrastructural requirements. Residual powers shall be vested in the states
12. The power to create states shall be within the exclusive powers of the region which shall be obliged to create a state provided a plebiscite is conducted, following a request by an agreed percentage of the residents of the ethnic nationality within a state. The procedure for conducting a plebiscite and the percentage of any ethnic nationality shall be out in the regional constitution.
13. The power to create local governments and assign functions to them shall be vested in the states.
14. States shall be entitled to manage all resources found within their boundaries and the revenue accruing therefrom. The issue of the entitlement of littoral states to offshore resources and the extension of such rights from the continental shelf and rights accruing to the federal government shall be determined by the national assembly.

15. The sharing ratio of all revenues raised by means of taxation shall be 50% to the states, 35% to the regional government and 15% to the government of the federation.
16. For a period of 10 years from the commencement of the operation of the new constitution (or such other agreed period to be enshrined in the federal constitution) there shall be a special fund for the development of all minerals in the country. The Government of the federation shall raise this sum by way of additional taxation on resources at a rate to be agreed by the National Assembly. The National Assembly shall set up a body to manage the funds with equal representation of nominees from each of the Regional governments and shall also set out and specify the guidelines for the administration of the funds exclusively for this purpose. The president of the Federation shall appoint a chairperson for the entity so formed.

Any right thinking Nigerian will see justification for restructuring our present system as it poses a lot of challenges. A situation where virtually all the states of the federation have to depend on the government at the central to survive is a misnomer. A situation being as bad as not being able to pay workers' salary. This questions the viability of most of our states. Similarly, the arrangement is not ideal, which vests in the Federal Government, jurisdictions, control and oversight on close to seventy items, leaving thirty items on the concurrent legislative list, which the Federal Government again shares with the constituent states (Part 1, 2nd Schedule, 1999 constitution). Section 4 of the same constitution provides that in the event of conflict between the legislative Act, at the central and an enactment by a state, the Federal prevails. These provisions have granted too much power to the central at the expense of the state, which is not in tandem with the principles of true federalism.

Be that as it may, some of the views canvassed for restructuring are full of absurdities. For instance, the structure now being propagated is a four level governmental structure. In our view, we see the politicians canvassing these as wanting to eat their cake and have it. To us, it not only makes governance more expensive, but also more complex. We rather will push for two-level structure as obtains in Britain or retain the three- level and decide whether to annul governance at the state or local level in preference for regional/zonal government. That to us shows more seriousness, after all, our local governments as at today are no longer effective. The legislative arm of the government can also be restructured to make membership part time.

Ours has been rated as the most expensive to run in the world. The restructuring considered most desirable in our present circumstance is that which cuts down on cost.

The Muslim Ummah and Restructuring

The muslim *ummah* in Nigeria is a community of Muslims living under the suzerainty of the Sultan of Sokoto and the President, Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. The current symbol of leadership of the *ummah*, like any other stakeholder in the Nigerian nation building process, is committed to national integration as evident in the stance of the supreme council on issues of national importance. The *ummah* will equally be committed to restructuring as a means of strengthening national integration as long as justice, equity and fair play are not misplaced. However, the Muslim *ummah* will have cause to be skeptical of restructuring that portends infringement on their rights and freedom, and that which despises their religious culture and tradition. Unfortunately, this is the impression demonstrated in development agenda for western Nigeria (DAWN) as endorsed by government of the south west. The eight clauses underlining the development agenda are as follows:

1. Evolve a compelling case for regional development autonomy by circumventing the constraints fostered on the region by the skewed Nigerian Federation
2. Build organized and focused efforts towards achieving high global competitiveness
3. Rekindle a strong regional solidarity and pull of resources for rapid development
4. Unleash the collective capacity and enterprise of the people for development
5. Reinforce the dominant world view of social welfarism and progressive development ideology
6. Rebuild our dilapidated social orientation
7. Reclaim our cultural affinities
8. Develop our region and transform our society.

As can be clearly observed from item 7 of the agenda, importance is attached to revivalism and rejuvenation of indigenous cultural heritage in total disregard of the Islamic cultural identity of the teeming Muslim population of the south west. This is the sore point in the approach to calling for restructuring, an approach which subjugates the others' culture and religion or lords it over the others. It is an approach which calls for return to idolatry practices. This is unacceptable to the Muslims

Going back on the memory lane, that has been the pattern, where it all started in the old Western Region. Chief Obafemi Awolowo could be said to be fairly sensitive and responsive to the Muslim's plight. He introduced the first Muslims Welfare Pilgrims Board in the country. Realizing the need to have teachers to teach Islam in the primary schools, he introduced Arabic teacher's test for the '*mallams*' to facilitate recruitment of special teachers for the subject. The subsequent leaders in the region were not as sensitive. Muslims never had their rights on the platter of gold. They always had to fight for them. Chief Bola Ige's era and the encounter with the National Council for Muslim Youth Organisations (NACOMYO) is still fresh in memory. In our contemporary time, when Muslims are clamouring for their rights, it is often interpreted as islamization agenda, without considering various ways by which Nigeria has been Christianized. It all started with Sharia dispensation of justice. During the colonial era, the colonialists applied their usual policy of divide and rule, allowing *shariah* courts to operate in the north but prevented same in the south. After independence, despite our constitution's recognition of shariah legal system, the current south west governors, even as Muslims don't consider it expedient to make any move to initiate legislative process for the introduction of *shariah*. They have even failed to take advantage of the existing independent *shariah* panels operating in Lagos Oyo and Osun States to kick-start the process for fear of being accused of Islamizing their states. This will be an unjustifiable fear when we take into account many non Muslim countries of the world operating plural legal system, including *shariah* (Halkano 2014).

The issue of *hijab* presents a consistent case of the ruling class exhibiting extreme intolerance. It took the court's intervention before Muslims were allowed to exercise this basic Islamic right. We have seen right thinking Christian leaders querying the rationale behind aversion to the Muslim's right to wear *hijab*. Roberto Maroni, the interior Minister of Italian republic from 1994-1995 and 2008-2011, in reacting to the bill banning *hijab* said: "If virgin Mary wears veil all her life, why do you expect me to sign the bill banning *hijab* in the public" ([www.google .com](http://www.google.com))

At the time Islamic interest free banking system was gaining recognition worldwide; it was interpreted in Nigeria as a move to Islamize the nation. The latest in the islamophobic tendencies is the issue of *shukuuk* bond. It has been alleged that its issuance was another

attempt to Islamize the nation. The Deputy Secretary General of the NSCIA in a recent Nigerian Tribune publication(23rd September, 2017) offered explanation for the purpose of the one hundred billion naira worth of *shukuuk* on the local market to fund loan projects. He called attention to the world bank involvement in the issuance of *shukuuk* bond, as well as the involvement of many non -Muslim countries in Africa, Europe and Israel. What accounts of peculiarity of the Nigerian experience is yet to be understood.

We have gone into all these to drive the point home that if the agitation for restructuring the country is a result of the alleged marginalization of the south by the government at the central, then the ruling class in the south are guilty of the same misdeed against fellow Muslim citizens of the same region. This kind of mentality does not portray us as people who are ripe for the type of restructuring being propagated. In our view, if restructuring will not guarantee justice, equity and fair play for all, if it will not prevent subjugation of one's religion or culture for the other, and if it will not prevent domination of one group by the other, then, it will call for caution.

The plight of the Muslim *ummah* in Nigeria calls for self- liberation, using appropriate platforms, the apex of which is the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. Any other platform is subordinate to the council. Under it operates the *Jama'at Nasirul-Islam* and Muslim *ummah* of south west. These organs need to be united to be able to liberate the *ummah*. The desired unity of the *ummah* is predicated on the clarion call in *Qur'an* 3 v. 103 which enjoins the Muslims to hold fast to the cord of Allah and should not be divided. Similarly, in *Qur'an* 5 v. 2, Muslims are admonished to enjoin one another unto righteousness and pious duty, but not unto sin and transgression. In the light of these, the *ummah* should not be dissuaded by the obnoxious views of the likes of Tola Adeniyi as expressed in his article titled "Islam and Religious Imperialism" published in Nigerian Tribune on 17th October, 2017. In the said article, he remarked as follows:

1. That Muslims in Yoruba land and indeed in Bornu region of Nigeria do not and should not owe allegiance to any self-styled Islamic authority outside their domain.
2. That the Chief Imam of every town should be the leading authority on Islam.

3. That the so-called Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, to all intents and purposes is a purely political outfit, the leadership of which is never contested and the office holders hold office in perpetuity.
4. That if the Yorubas wish to combine their Islam with monarchy, they should make the Awujale, Alaafin or the Soun the supreme head of their religion in the respective regions.
5. That it is the internal imperialism of Islam in political and circular matters that always imposed the position of number one monarch to the sultan at the meeting of the National Council of Traditional Rulers.
6. That Islam should not be used to subjugate the Kafanchan or Sango Kataf people who are dominantly Christians, and that the non-Muslims who are currently put under the control and rulership of the heavy turbaned Emirs shall eventually be free to live in accordance with their cherished culture and traditions.

These are inflammatory remarks and such can only be made by people who do not believe in the corporate existence of Nigeria as a nation. The statements are not only a ploy to turn Nigerian Muslims against themselves, but also to further incite the Muslims and non-Muslims of the north against each other. The collapse of caliphate in 1924 under the Ottoman Turks (Boswarth 2008) was the handwork of the imperialists, and that does not mean Muslims should forget their historical past and traditions in getting themselves organized. More importantly, Islam preaches universal brotherhood, and the unity of Islam transcends territorial boundaries, which is what is taught in the verses cited above.

Conclusion

After 57 years of independence, Nigeria is still in search of what system or structure of governance to take her to the 'Promised Land'. During the first republic, the system was federal parliamentary with 3 regional structure. The first restructuring took place within 3 years of independence with the creation of the mid-western region from the west. With the military take-over, unitary system of government was introduced, though short-lived, before return to federalism. With military fiat, Nigeria intermittently went through restructuring process culminating in the creation of the present day 36 states structure. The 2nd and 4th republics discontinued with the British parliamentary system and introduced the American presidential system with the restructuring of the country into six zones. Now there is new agitation for return to the British parliamentary system. The current clamor for restructuring to

us is a gratuitous expression of dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs. If Nigeria's experience of the British Parliamentary and American Presidential systems are failed experiments, then the problem is not in the systems but in the operators of the systems. In effect, no amount of restructuring will take Nigeria to the 'Promised Land' if the psyche of the average Nigerian is not reoriented. A significant factor in the re-orientation process should be fear of Allah (*taqwa*), without which restructuring cannot bring about the much desired national integration. Putting the foregoing into Islamic perspective, I put forward the following recommendations:

1. Nigeria is erroneously referred to by the constitution as a secular nation. Since secularism connotes indifference to religion and rejection of religious considerations, the term cannot appropriately describe the country's status in view of its involvements in matters of religions. This being the case, the constitution should reflect the multi-religious status of Nigeria.
2. Nigerian political parties have a tradition of sponsoring joint Muslim-Christian tickets for the presidential and gubernatorial elections. In recognition of the multi-religious configuration of the Nigerian society, the practice should be formalized by entrenching it in the constitution as it is the tradition in Lebanon.
3. Any system of government no matter how perfect and good, if run by people lacking in the fear of Allah, will impact negatively on the governed. The ruling class under whatever system of government should therefore be guided by the principles of justice, equity and fair play. It is under such a system that all Nigerians irrespective of faith adherence or ethnic affiliation will feel secured.
4. Despite the constitutional provisions, some state governments especially in the south-west continue to deny application of Shariah adjudication system in their states. In the spirit of the call for restructuring this trend should be reversed in order to satisfy the yearnings of the teeming Muslim population in the zone. This should not be a problem because of the existence of the Independent Shariah panels in three of the six states in the zone.
5. It is a misnomer under a true federal system for the constituent states to be going cap in hand to the centre to collect their share of the national revenue. Therefore, each state of

the federation should have control over its resources. The agreed percentages should then be remitted to the government at the central.

6. In consequence of number 5 above, there should be devolution of power from the central to the states. The jurisdiction of the central government will then be restricted to functions that should necessarily be performed on behalf of the states like the defense, foreign affairs and central bank.
7. The politicians wanting to eat their cake and have it are advocating reintroduction of regional (zonal) government while still retaining governance at the state level. This will lead the country to having 4 tiers of government which will make governance not only expensive but also complex. If the country cannot be restructured into having 2 tiers of government as it obtains in Britain, the status quo should remain.
8. The muslim ummah, whether from the north or south must in response to the clarion call in surah 3: 103 remain united as a means of securing their rights, more often than not trampled upon, and should as patriots collaborate with fellow Nigerians in advancing the course of national integration.

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