



## **Mister - The Missing Republic and National Integration in Nigeria**

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Submitted:	1. September 2018
Published:	6. September 2018
Volume:	5
Issue:	7
Affiliation:	Kings University, Odeomu, Nigeria
Languages:	English
Keywords:	Republic, Democracy, Elite, Constitution, Election
DOI:	10.17160/josha.5.7.461
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# The Missing Republic and National Integration in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The paper identifies the relevance of party system in the third republic to national integration in a multi-ethnic Nigerian state and also, it identifies the implications of the transition (annulment) on the fourth republic. The study made use of secondary source of data in achieving its objectives. The study reveals that in a multi-ethnic state, like Nigeria, where ethnic group maintained geographical location and a distinct culture, language and quest for power (cultural, political, economic, etc.), political parties should be left to operate on democratic principle. The study further revealed that the annulment of the transition election and the consequent crises reveals the significance of ethnic identities to the issues of national integration in Nigeria. The paper concludes that democracy can be used to quench the fire of ethnic sentiment in Nigeria if the rules are obeyed and kept.

Keywords: Republic      Democracy      Elite      Constitution      Election

## Introduction

The third republic in Nigeria coming after the first republic and second republic featured another milestone both in the development of political activities in the third republic and future (fourth) republic in Nigeria. The era, unlike the second republic, witnessed the formation of political parties and funding of political activities by the Federal Military Government (FMG), and also the annulment of elections supposed for the complete transition to democracy. Therefore, since 1992, the Yoruba have threatened to secede (Falola & Heaton, 2012) and this implies the ethno-political importance of the transition to sustainable integration in Nigeria.

In the second republic, the existence of political parties has been in line with the requirements of the constitution. The 1979 constitution had outlined in section 202 the requirement to be fulfilled by a political association before becoming a political party. The Third Republican constitution likewise stated the requirement a political association must fulfil before becoming a political party but the constitution did declare the number of political parties allowed to operate as two.

President Babangida created two political parties, namely Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) and financed them (Dzurgba, 2008). Therefore, two political parties established through an Electoral Commission (that is National Electoral Commission) became the political parties' options available to the diverse ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic Nigeria.

In the spirit of transition to the third republic, elections were held in 1993 (from April to June). The elections to local government councils, state houses of assembly, House of Representatives and Senate had been completed. The members of the four bodies had been sworn-in and had been working at the various levels. The office of the president was still occupied by the military president, namely President Ibrahim Babangida the third republic partially took off in Nigeria

(Dzurgba, 2008). The presidential election was then conducted in 1993 (on 12 June). The contest was between Alhaji Bashiru Tofa (of the NRC and a northerner) and Bashorun Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola (of the SDP and a southerner). As the result of the presidential elections were been announced, the FMG suspended the transition and hence the republic that was the hope of Nigerians, in the settlement of ethnic sentiment, establishment of democracy, solve the problem of elite, etc. was declared missing.

In 1997, Babatope in a study stated that, ‘the greatest political problem Nigeria has battled since independence is the ordering of the federal nature of the country’s existence. This problem has always ignited bitter and bloody controversies over the issues of power equality and distribution in Nigeria. In the civil war era, it was the unfortunate and tragic Biafra war. Since third republic, it has been the June 12 crisis’; there was a republic in the making which was cancelled and the question of cancellation continues till this day. The Republic would not have been declared missing if the judiciary had been allowed to try cases of election through tribunal after the election.

While the problem of the third republic transition continues till this day in Nigeria, perhaps, because of the transfer of power between the locations (from North to South) or from military to civilian government, there have been various efforts to fill the effects of the ‘missing’ republic in Nigeria’s democratic history. General Ibrahim Babangida (then military head of state) handed over to an Interim government under a Yoruba from Ogun state (a person of Ernest Shonekan) instead of the acclaimed winner of the election, Chief MKO Abiola. The illegitimacy of Shonekan lead to his resignation and the invitation of another military to the power platform in Nigeria. Then, General Sani Abacha became Nigeria head of state.

General Sani Abacha attempted to transit Nigeria back to democracy in his own democratic think of succeeding himself in office (an average African leader definition of democracy and mentality to power). In the observation of Ojo, 2009, ‘the parties that were registered during the transition programme were not different from government parastatals’. Bola Ige (cited in Ojo, 2009 p. 101), described the five political parties as ‘five finger of a leprous hand’. The death of Abacha made it possible for General Abdulsalami Abubakar to ascend to position of power on the military order or style of assuming power.

The transitional government of Abubakar opened the doors to the registration of political parties shortly after it took power. Twenty-six political associations applied for registration as a political party with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), but after many of them had combined with each other (in alliances) in order to satify the requirement of the constitution of 1999 as stated in section 222, three major political associations were registered as political parties (Falola & Heaton, 2012). There were elections in 1999 which ushered in the fourth republic with the swearing-in of a Yoruba man from the West (President Olusegun Obasanjo).

Nigeria Federal Republican Constitution came into effect in 1999 (on May 29) in line with Section 320 of the constitution. There was hand over to a man from Yoruba ethnic group has president, there was the observation of the federal character principle (in constitution of executive members) and also, the date of transition became Nigeria democracy day. Contrary to the day of transition choosing as democracy day at the inception of the fourth republic, there has been clamour for the recognition of 1993 (June 12), as democracy day following the believe that

the 1993 (June 12), election remained credible and sacrosanct for democratic practice in Nigeria. The study of the third republic became significant and hence, this study.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were defined in the paper. The essence of conceptualization is to understand the perspective from which the researcher views what is discussed:

**Republic:** A republic is a country that is governed by elected representatives and by an elected leader (such as president) rather than by a king or queen. The word has used in this work is in line with the definition given by the named dictionary.

**Democracy:** Going by the Greek words from which democracy was coined, Demo and Kratia, Demo means People while Kratia means Government. Democracy can be simply defined as Peoples Government. In this study, the definition of democracy is taking to mean a system in which government is constituted by the people. There is periodic election, party system, supremacy of the constitution etc.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts elite theory. In every human community, there exist two categories of individual; the ruler and the ruled. The truth of the Nigerian situation since the country's independence has remained the lack of unity within the political class in Nigeria. It has been the major problem that has made the cementation of democracy an illusion for the country (Babatope, 1997).

Elites derive from a fundamental and universal fact of social life, namely, the absence in any large collectivity of a robust common interest (Higley, 2008). Elites may be defined as persons who, by virtue of their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, are able to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially (*ibid*). Put differently, elites are persons with the organized capacity to make real political trouble without being promptly repressed.

In his work ‘politics: who gets what, when and how’, Harold Lasswell views man in society as belonging to either the elite or the mass. The elite are the influential who gets the most of what there is to get; the rest are the mass (cited in Adeforiti, 2016). More so, C. Wright Mills defines the power elite as those who are able to realize their will even if others resist it. In practical terms the power elite for Mills consists of the political, economic and military circle which share, through overlapping cliques, control over decisions having at least national consequences (Cited in Adeforiti, 2016). They consist not only of prestigious and “established” leaders – top politicians, important businessmen, high-level civil servants, senior military officers – but also, in varying degrees in different societies, relatively transitory and less individually known leaders of mass organizations such as trade unions, important voluntary associations, and politically consequential mass movements (Higley, op cit).

In the identification of the elites therefore, most identifiable elites seem to have one thing in common; the pursuit of power (Cited in Adeforiti, 2016). More so, the elite are believed to have

some attributes which distinguished them. In line with the above, Mosca (cited in Higley, op cit) emphasized the ways in which tiny minorities out-organize and outwit large majorities, adding that “political classes” – Mosca’s term for political elites – usually have “a certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority” over those they govern. Pareto (cited in Higley, ibid) postulated that in a society with truly unrestricted social mobility, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals; but in actual societies elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections. Michels (cited in Higley, ibid) rooted elites (“oligarchies”) in the need of large organizations for leaders and experts in order to operate efficiently; as these individuals gain control of funds, information flows, promotions, and other aspects of organizational functioning power becomes concentrated in their hands. In Nigeria, there are series of resources under the control of the elite. One of the many resources used is ethnicity. In the words of Osaghe (cited in Adeforiti, 2016),

Ethnicity is not a resource only for the elites and the non-elites are not the passive materials of ethnic manipulation.... However, the elites are still predominant ethnic actors largely because they are in the forefront of political and economic competition and it is they who use ethnicity to get the big things that attract attention- contracts, appointment and promotion to top position in the public and private sectors, securing electoral victories and so on.

The integration of the inherited state (Nigeria) will depends majorly on the integration of her elite. What then are the characteristics of elite integration? Putnam (cited in Gulbrandsen, 2012) identified six "integrative factors "or" dimensions of integration" to include; social homogeneity, common recruitment patterns, personal interaction, value consensus, group solidarity and institutional context, of which, according to Putnam, value consensus is perhaps the most central (Gulbrandsen, 2012). Also, Kim and Patterson (cited in Gulbrandsen, 2012) maintained that an elite group is integrated if its members share common social origins, educational and career experiences and recruitment paths. They also added that an elite group could be integrated by sharing basic values.

### **Evolution of Electoral Commission in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>**

The origin of Electoral bodies in Nigeria can be traced to the period before Independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct 1959 elections. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), established in 1960 conducted the immediate post-independence 1964 (federal and regional) and 1965 (federal and regional) elections respectively.

The electoral body was however, dissolved after the 1966 (January 15) military coup. In 1978, a new Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was constituted by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. FEDECO organized the elections in the Second Republic.

In December 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha, which earlier dissolved NEC in 1993, established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which also conducted another set of elections; Local Government councils to National Assembly. These elected institutions were however not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha

aborted the process. In 1998 General Abdulsalam Abubakar's Administration dissolved NECON and established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The body organized all transitional elections that ushered in the fourth republic in 1999 (on May 29). As a permanent body, INEC comprises the workforce recruited since 1987 under the defunct National Electoral Commission (NEC). Its presence has been established in all the 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory as well as in the 774 Local Government Areas of Nigeria.

### **Republics in Nigeria: 1963-1999.**

The existence of a state in the perception of the social contractualists (namely: Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau) is based on the consent of the people. Nigeria, in like manner, became a republic through the enactment of the first republican constitution by the virtue of Act 20 of the constitution, titled 'An act to make provision for the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria' the people declared as follows

Having firmly resolved to establish the Federal Republic of Nigeria, With a view to ensuring the unity of our people and faith in our fatherland,  
For the purpose of promoting inter-African co-operation and solidarity,  
In order to assure world peace and international understanding, and  
So as to further the ends of liberty, equality and justice both in our country and in the world at large,  
We the people of Nigeria, by our representatives here in Parliament assembled, do hereby declare, enact and give to ourselves the following constitution (FGN, 1963)

The enactment of the constitution made Nigerians to elect their head of state (the ceremonial president) through an indirect election. The head of state was appointed by the Queen of England prior to the independence constitution. More so, under the independence constitution, appellate cases still goes out to the Privy Council in London for resolution. The promulgation of the 1963 constitution made Nigeria a republic (and as such first republic). The constitution declared in Section 34 and 35 (2), as follows that

There shall be a president of the republic, who shall be elected to office in accordance with section 35 of this constitution and shall be the Head of state of the Federation and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the Federation.

The president shall be elected by secret ballot at a joint meeting of both House of Parliamentary held for the purpose of electing the President (hereafter in this section referred to as an "election meeting"); and each member of Parliament shall be entitled to a single vote in each ballot for the election of the President taken at such a meeting (hereafter in this section referred to as "presidential ballot")

The first republic was cut-short through the intervention of the military in politics. The military government under Major-General JTU Aguiyi-Ironsi (as contained in Tell Magazine a, 2011 p. 9) declared as follows;

The government of the federation of Nigeria having ceased to function, the Nigerian Armed Forces have been invited to form an interim Military Government for the purposes of maintaining law and order, and of maintaining essential services.

This invitation has been accepted, and I, General JTU Aguiyi-Ironsi, the Generel Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army, have been formally invested with authority as Head of the federation Military Government, and Supreme Commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

#### Suspension of Certain Parts of the Constitution

The federal military Government hereby decrees:

- a. The suspension of the provisions of the constitution of the federation relating to the office of president, the establishment of parliament, and of the office of prime minister
- b. The suspension of the provision of the constitutions of the region relating to the establishment of the offices of regional governors, regional premier and executive councils, and regional legislatures.

The coming to power of Aguiyi-Ironsi as the military head of state encouraged further military intervention in politics, created ethnic suspicion between the Eastern and Northern region, and thwarted Nigeria's hope for democracy in the aftermath of the first republic. Then came the military regime of Yakubu Gowon.

Nigeria was returned to a republic, after military rule which lasted for thirteen year. Nigeria was returned to the second republic in 1979 (1<sup>st</sup> October). The existence of the republic was through the people's declaration in the preamble of the constitution (FGN, 1979) that

#### We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Having firmly and solemnly resolve, to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God, dedicated to the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international co-operation and understanding

And to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principles of

freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people  
Do hereby make, enact and give to ourselves the following Constitution

The republic was ushered in with the enactment of the constitution. The republic was cut-short through the intervention of the military on 31<sup>st</sup> December (1983). The republic was hi-jacked. Allegations of corruption on the part of government officials, down turning economic activities, abuse of power, etc. were cited by the military government as reasons for intervention.

The 1983 (coup) gave way to the 1985 (palace coup) which ushered in the regime of General Badamosi Babangida. The regime promised to transit Nigeria back to a republic. As a result, the regime facilitated the transition through the enactment of the third republican constitution (1989). The people of Nigeria declared as follows in ushering the third republic (FGN, 1989)

We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Having firmly and solemnly resolve, to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God, dedicated to the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international co-operation and understanding

And to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people

Do hereby make, enact and give to ourselves the following Constitution

In the third republican constitution, section 219, 220 (1) of 1989 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria stated (FGN, 1989) that

No association other than a political party recognized and registered under this constitution shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election.

There shall be only 2 political parties in the Federation.

The political objectives of Nigeria as contained in the 1989 in section 16 (2) stipulated as follows (FGN, 1989):

Accordingly, national integration shall be actively promoted whilst discrimination on the grounds of place or origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited

The third republic, with the formation of political parties and funding of political activities by the government, was abruptly cancelled through the 1993 (June 12) annulment. The republic thus was declared missing in the history of Nigeria. The reason was because there were governor, local government chairmen, senators etc. elected and sworn-in to office but the presidential election which was suppose to crown it all was cancelled by the federal military government.

The ascension to power of General Sani Abacha according to his declaration was to save Nigeria. He declared on November 18, 1993 (as cited in Tell Magazine, 2011 p. 35) that

Sequel to the resignation of the former Head of the interim national Government and commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, Chief Ernest Shonekan and my subsequent appointment as the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief, I have had extensive consultations within the armed forces hierarchy and other well-meaning Nigerians in a bid to find solutions to the various political, economic and social problems, which engulfed our beloved country, and which have made life most difficult to the ordinary citizen of this nation.....

Nigerians were welcomed to another round of transition to a republic. The republic in question been transited to was not popular. The death of Abacha put an end to the transition. The ascension to power of General Abdulsam Abubakar fast tracked the transition of Nigeria to the current fourth republic. In a message delivered on the eve of the handover of government and inauguration of Olusegun Obasanjo, titled ‘Time to Break Cycle of Instability and Mistrust’, Genereal Abdulsalami Abubakar (cited in Tell Magazine b, 2011, p. 67) addressed the nation thus

Time to thank the Almighty God that I am able to address you today. This will be my last address to you as Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. But it is especially gratifying, that it should take place on the eve of a great national triumph. In matter of hours, the inauguration of a democratically elected president would have been held. And the process of restoration of civil rule to our beloved country would have been completed.

The people as such declared as follows in the commencement of the fourth republic (FGN, 1999), viz:

We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Having firmly and solemnly resolve, to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God, dedicated to the

promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international co-operation and understanding

And to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people

Do hereby make, enact and give to ourselves the following Constitution

The declaration ushered in the fourth republic in Nigeria. The formation of political parties has been done in accordance with the directive of the constitution and the constitution has put in place Independent Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC). The body oversees the conduct of political activities in the fourth republic.

Based on the above observation and reality, it can be inferred that Nigeria's republic can be classified into 'Foundation' republic, 'Known' republic, 'Unknown' republic and the 'Missing' republic. The 'foundation' republic is the first republic ushered in through the (1963) constitution, 'know' republic are the republic that had a complete transition like the (1979) and (1999). The 'Unknown' republic is the republic associated with the transition of General Sani Abacha while the missing republic is the republic that existed partially in (1992) but was cancelled in (1993).

### **Constitution and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

The existence of a republic is believed to be in line with the provision of the constitution. The constitution in the words of Barnett (2011 p. 61) 'fulfils two related purposes-those of definition and evaluation'.

Understanding Nigeria democracy requires the examination of constitutions adopted overtime in Nigeria. A critical examination of the first republic constitution reveals that party system was not included in any section of the constitution. The constitution did make provision for an electoral commission in that section 50 subsection 1 declared that 'There shall be an Electoral Commission for the Federation' and Section 52 subsection 2 of the constitution stated that 'The registration of voters and the conduct of elections shall be subjected to the direction and supervision of the Electoral Commission of the Federation' but there was no provision for party system or criteria for the registration of political parties. More so, section 46 of the constitution, stated that 'the senate shall consist of

- a. Twelve Senators representing each Region, who shall be selected at a joint sitting of the legislative houses of that region from among persons nominated by the governor (FGN, 1963)

The provisions of the first republican constitution in section 46, might be responsible for the prevalence of ethnic-geographical based and centred political parties in the first republic. The

appointees, is believed in most cases will represent the interest of those that appointed them and most of the time; they are loyalist of the governor.

The (1979) constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defined political party and outlined the criteria to fulfil before a political association can function as a political party (FGN, 1979). The constitution stated as follows in section 209 and 202 (FGN, 1979) that

In this Part of this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires- “association” means anybody of persons corporate or unincorporated who act together for any common purpose.....

“political party” includes any association whose activities includes canvassing for votes in support of a candidate for election to the office of President, Vice president, Governor, Deputy Governor or membership of a legislative house or of a local government council.

No association by whatever name called shall function as a party, unless -

- (a) The names and addresses of its national officers are registered with the Independent National Electoral Commission;
- (b) The membership of the association is open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic grouping;
- (c) A copy of its constitution is registered in the principal office of the Independent National Electoral Commission in such form as may be prescribed by the Independent National Electoral Commission;
- (d) Any alteration in its registered constitution is also registered in the principal office of the Independent National Electoral Commission within thirty days of the making of such alteration
- (e) The name of the association, its symbol or logo does not contain any ethnic or religious connotation or give the appearance that the activities of the association are confined to a part only of the geographical area of Nigeria; and
- (f) The headquarters of the association is situated in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

More so, the constitution (of 1989) for the ‘Missing republic’ defined political party in a similar way and view with the (1979) constitution. The major differences is that the constitution in section 220 subsection 1 declared that

There shall be only 2 political parties in the Federation.

This informed the creation of two political parties by General Babangida’s regime. In the observation of Ojo, 2009 p. 100

The aborted third republic witnessed the emergence of centrist parties. Thirteen political associations sought registration from the National Electoral Commission (NEC) .....this development was aborted by the creation of two political parties

by the government- the Social Democratic Party and National Republican Convention (NRC).

The rational which Babangida sold to Nigeria and the international community was that with only two parties to choose from, the ethnic majority groups would have no option than to work together for better or for worse (Ojo, 2009 p. 100) but Nigeria is a multi-ethnic-religious state with diverse interest and the need to achieve integration. Two party systems have never been used before in Nigeria and its use will promote instability in Nigeria. The (1993) Missing republic resulted from basic ethnic sentiment by the ethnic status of the contestants.

In the second and fourth republican constitution, Nigeria maintained the same provision in different section in term of definition of political parties and the emergence of a political party.

## Conclusion

The paper conclude that for Nigeria and Africa continent to enjoy political peace, there is need for the respect of interest of the diverse ethnic groups constituting the country, government by whatever standard should not manipulate interest or insist on self sustenance in office as a criteria for peace and development. The provision of the constitution should be respected at all time by both leaders' and followers. Instrument of integration should be implemented and promoted rather than discouraged or frustrated.

## NOTE

1. This was culled from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) website as INEC History [http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page\\_id=43](http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=43) page was accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 2018.

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