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The Ibibio Agitation For State Creation In Nigeria: 1928-1987

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Abstract

The fear of the Nigerian ethnic minorities of perpetual domination, discrimination and marginalization by the majority ethnic groups has been re-curent since the introduction of regionalism by the Richard's Constitution in 1946. Indeed, the 1953's "civilian coup d'etat," plotted by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in the Eastern Regional House of Assembly, Enugu, which resulted in the removal of Professor Eyo Ita as the Leader of Government Business of the Region, precipitated the crystallization of the irreversible advocacy by the Eastern minority groups under the auspices of the Ibibio State Union, for the re-structuring of the Nigerian polity through the creation of states. The Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (C. O. R.) State agenda was vigorously propagated, hence, the Colonial Government, in 1957, acceded to the request by instituting the Willink's Commission to enquire into the fears of the minorities and the means of allaying such fears. However, the exercise was marked by intrigues and sabotages by the N.C.N.C. led Eastern Regional government, which never wanted any state to be created in Eastern Nigeria. The consequence of not creating more states before independence proved fatal to the nation and contributed to the demise of the First Republic in 1966. The Federal Military Government cleverly adopted the visionary state creation agenda as a potent weapon in torpedoing the Biafra rebellion. Subsequent state creation exercises have been well received and the agitation for more states has not abated. This paper examines the agitation of the Ibibio for a distinct state, up to 1987, when Akwa Ibom State was created for them.

Introduction

Although Nigeria now has 36 states structure, the British colonialists bequeathed to her three regions, namely: the North, the East and the West. During the First Republic, one additional

Region – the Mid-West was created out of the former Western Region to bring the number to four. These groups formed a wobbling tripod on which the nation stood.¹

The quest for the creation of more states in Nigeria was a direct consequence of constitutional development in Nigeria. One constitution which provoked the agitation for the creation of new states was the Richard's Constitution, which created three political units in Nigeria, styled regions. In each of the Regions, one ethnic group was dominant. In the North, the Hausa/Fulani, was dominant, while in the East and West, the Igbo and the Yoruba were dominant, respectively. Yet, in each of these regions, there were mosaic of other ethnic groups with varying degrees in size, cultural divergence and political influence struggling to acquire identity.²

Once the Richard's Constitution became operational, several aspects of marginalization and iniquitous policies by the majority against the minorities became operational; hence, the situation was enough to fire the zeal and instigate the oppressed to demand for the re-structuring of the polity through the creation of states. Indeed, one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria which gave the state creation agenda its form and currency were the Ibibio of Eastern Nigeria.

Administrative Re-organization in Nigeria up to 1946

The history of administrative re-organization in Nigeria can be traced to 1900 when the Colonial Office assumed control over the territories of the Royal Niger Company. These territories comprised what came to be known as the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The Northern Protectorate was split into nine provinces by the end of the first year in order to enhance administrative efficiency and control. These nine provinces were Ilorin, Kabba, Middle Niger, Lower Niger, Upper Benue, Nupe, Kontagora, Borgu and Zaria. By the end of 1903 after effective establishment of British rule in the Hausa states, the number of provinces was increased to include Sokoto, Gwandu, Kano, Katagum and Borno. Meanwhile, the Middle Niger Province was abolished and in its place four provinces, viz, Bassa, Muri, Bauchi and Yola were created.³

In Southern Nigeria, Lagos was amalgamated with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria to become the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906. This unit was divided into three provinces designated the Eastern, Central and Western Provinces. No major re-organization was undertaken by the government until the decision to amalgamate the country was taken. The assignment for working out the proposals for the amalgamation of the country was given to Sir Fredrick Lugard. Sir Lugard returned to the country in 1912 with the title of Governor-General and with the primary responsibility for drawing up the scheme of amalgamating Northern Nigeria and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The amalgamation scheme involved not only the division of the country into administrative units but also detailed proposals on the structure and pattern of administration of the country.⁴

Before the amalgamation of 1914, divergent opinions were held about how the country should be structured administratively. Two important proposals were put forward by E. D. Morel, the influential Editor of the *African Mail*, in his book entitled *Nigeria: Its Peoples and its Problems*, published in 1911, and Charles L. Temple, the Acting Governor of Northern Nigeria. Morel's overriding criterion was that the division of the country into provinces must correspond as far as possible with natural geographical boundaries. He however argued that when applying this criterion, care must be taken so as not to upset the existing political division of the country. On the structure of the new administrative units, Morel provided a comprehensive proposal for the division of the country into four provinces as follows:

1. The Northern or Sudan Provinces consisting of Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Kontagora and Zaria emirates with capital at Kano;
2. The Central Provinces consisting of Plateau, Saruana, Adamawa and Bauchi with capital at Zungeru;
3. The Western Provinces consisting of today's South West zone plus Ilorin, Kabba and Borgu areas with capital at Oshogbo; and

4. Eastern Provinces consisting of the East and Central zones and the South-South states minus Edo and Delta States but extending to Benue River with capital at Calabar.

For the capital of the amalgamated Nigeria, Morel placed it at the summit of Mount Pati overlooking the confluence of the Niger and Benue River at Lokoja.⁵

Similarly, Charles Temple on the 1st of February, 1913, submitted a memorandum to Sir Fredrick Lugard in which he suggested the division of Nigeria into seven provinces. Each province was to be under a Chief Commissioner. Lagos was to constitute a province. The three existing provinces in the south, namely, the West, the Central and the Eastern were to remain and then the seven provinces in the North were to be re-grouped into three. The provinces in the North were to consist of Hausa states comprising, Sokoto, Kano, Zaria, the northern part of Bauchi, the northern part of Niger and the present Kontagora Emirate. The second province was designated Chad Province and the area of the province conforms fairly roughly with the existing Borno, Adamawa (less Muri Division), Saduana and part of Bauchi Province. The third province was what he called the Benue Province which extends over the area that is regarded as the Middle Belt area of Nigeria. This is an extensive area comprising Ilorin, Kabba, Southern Niger, Plateau, Southern Bauchi, Benue Province and Muri Division of the present Adamawa State.⁶

None of these proposals were accepted by Sir Fredrick Lugard. Instead, he decided to retain the basic division of the country, comprising northern part of the country and the southern part of the country. This meant therefore, that the old administrative units of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were retained and continued to maintain their own separate identities. Lugard also sought the authority of the Colonial Office to place the capital of Nigeria at Kaduna. This was because of his conjugal love for the political structure of the Fulani Empire which he used for his indirect rule and because of the weather of the North which he was used to. Indeed, Lugard had made up his mind to retain the North and cause

it to play a decisive role in Nigerian politics. For him, the amalgamation did not mean anything other than what Perham calls "the extension to the South of Northern system of native administration".⁷

The alternative to the creation of more administrative units was adopted by Lugard, by establishing a system of provincial administration. Provinces were created within the two administrative units of Northern and Southern Nigeria, and when the scheme of amalgamation was completed, 21 provinces excluding Lagos were created throughout the country. These provinces were Sokoto, Kano, Borno, Bauchi, Zaria, Nupe, Kontagora, Ilorin, Mun-Chi, Nasarawa, Muri and Yola, in the North; and Oyo, Owerri, Abeokuta, Calabar, Ogoja, Onitsha, Ondo, Benin and Warri in the South.⁸

As stated earlier, it was the Richard's Constitution of 1946 that sowed the seed of regionalism which triggered rough inter-ethnic and inter-regional relations. In 1951, the country took a new step in constitutional making process by adopting the Macpherson's Constitution. As a result of this development, each of the three regions was given a House of Assembly. There was also at the centre in Lagos, a Federal House of Representatives in which the Northern Region formed the majority. Each Regional House of Assembly constituted an electoral college from which Regional Representatives as well as Central Ministers were elected as members of the Central Council of Ministers responsible for the administration of the whole Nigeria. The Central Government in Lagos and the various regional governments were formed in January 1952, and functioned well all along until January 1953.⁹

Thus, it came about that after the general elections held in December, 1951, Professor Eyo Ita, an indigene of Akwa Ibom State, having won the election into the Eastern House of Assembly on the platform of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (later National Council of Nigerian Citizens) N.C.N.C. was appointed by the Colonial Governor of the Eastern Region, Commander R. N. Pykenott, to be the leader of Government Business and Minister of Natural Resources, which was then

equivalent to the office of Premier of the Eastern Region. Prof Eyo Ita was also a member of the Governor's Council. There were other ministers also nominated by the governor and elected by the votes of the members of the Regional House of Assembly as Members of the Council of Ministers at Lagos and members of the Executive Council in the Eastern Region.¹⁰

The origin of the Eastern Regional political crisis could, therefore, be traced to some political developments in the Western Region. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe at the time resided and did business in Lagos where he contested the elections. He had nursed the hope to compete for the office of the Premier and Deputy Chairman of the Western Regional Executive Council, at Ibadan. He also aimed at getting into the Central Legislature at Lagos, for which he sought to be elected from the Western House of Assembly.¹¹

Dr. Azikiwe was no doubt immensely popular in the N.C.N.C. also had substantial following in certain parts of Yorubaland.¹² He contested and won one of the Lagos seats in the Western House of Assembly. With him were four others, all members of the N.C.N.C. By the provisions of the constitution, Lagos was entitled to two seats in the House of Representatives. The other four were Yoruba who within the N.C.N.C. agreed to ensure the election of Dr. Azikiwe, the leader of their party, to the House of Representatives. The only way they could achieve this was for three of them to agree not to contest the elections. The three of them initially agreed not to contest the election. However, shortly before the elections, the three, obviously under ethnic pressure from the Yoruba majority in the Western House of Assembly, reneged on their agreement. Dr. Azikiwe found himself opposed by his own party men.¹³

Angered and frustrated, Dr. Azikiwe resigned his seat in the Western House of Assembly and went back to his kith and kin. Dr. Azikiwe became convinced that it was the Macpherson's constitution that had brought about his woes. If there had been direct elections into the House of Representatives, he would have stood and won the elections in Lagos. So he decided that the Macpherson's constitution must be wrecked. As the leader of his party, he asked the N.C.N.C. central and regional ministers to resign. The refusal of these ministers forced Dr. Azikiwe to drum

up enough (largely Igbo) support within the party to have the dissenting ministers expelled from the party.¹⁴

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, being neither a member of the Eastern Regional House of Assembly nor the House of Representatives, eventually succeeded in staging a civilian coup d'etat against Professor Eyo Ita's government.¹⁵ To make matters worse, Dr Azikiwe, used that episode to insult Professor Ita and in the process assaulted the sensibilities of Ita's ethnic group. He said thus:

Your behaviour on the question of your resignation is a shame to you and your race. It is obvious that no self-respecting party can associate with a person like you. You are hereby informed that you have been expelled from the party with ignominy and for life.¹⁶

But what was Professor Ita's offence, Okwudiba Nnoli has an answer. He writes about the affair thus:

In 1952, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the N.C.N.C. President had tried unsuccessfully to persuade Eyo Ita, the leader of the N.C.N.C. government in the Eastern Region and a Director of several companies in the Zik's group of companies to influence the deposition of Local Government fund in the African Continental Bank, in which Azikiwe and his family had controlling shares. In the power struggle within the party later that year, Azikiwe retaliated by rudely expelling Eyo Ita from the N.C.N.C.¹⁷

Such was the pettiness exhibited by an acclaimed nationalist and Pan-Africanist and the ripple effect of his behaviour was fatal to Igbo-Ibibio relations, fatal for Igbo-Eastern minorities' relations and a throw weight consequence was the loss of the Nigerian-Biafra war by the Igbo, for the Ibibio and other ethnic groups in the East failed to support the succession bid.¹⁸

The Aftermath of the 1953 Eastern Regional Political Crisis

Before considering the aftermath of the impeachment of Professor Eyo Ita, it is necessary to mention that the Ibibio live in the South-

South geo-political region of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State (before September 1987) was part of Cross River State. The Ibibio number more than three million people and constitute the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria.¹⁹ **The Ibibio people were the first set of Nigerians to establish a powerful and formidable union with which they used for social mobilization in Nigeria.** The union was one of the earliest of such ethnic organizations in Nigeria which catered for the entire ethnic group, unlike the Owerri Improvement Union in Port Harcourt (1916), the Egba Society (1918) and the Onitsha Improvement Union, Lagos Branch (1920), all of which only involved segments of either Igbo or the Yoruba people.²⁰

In 1948, at the Annual Conference of the Ibibio Union, Dr. Egbert Udo Udoma who was sponsored by the Ibibio Union to the point of bagging a PhD in Law in the United Kingdom (the first Nigerian and probably the first African to have achieved such a remarkable feat) was unanimously elected as the National President of the Union.²¹ In the same year, the Union changed its name and particulars to "Ibibio State Union" and also adopted a written constitution. The introduction of the word "state" into the name of the Union introduced a new dimension into the political concept of the Union.²²

Based on this pedigree, it is obvious that by 1953, when the "Eyo Ita saga" occurred, the Ibibio people had been effectively mobilized to react to the oppression. The immediate reaction of the members representing the Calabar Province in the Eastern Regional House of Assembly was electric. All the Ibibio and Efik speaking members of the N.C.N.C. resigned en-mass in protest and formed a new political party known as the National Independence Party (N.I.P.) with Professor Eyo Ita as the President. This party later merged with another political party known as the United National Party (U.N.P.) led by Dr. Alvan Ikoku to become United Independence Party (U.N.I.P.). The party was composed of primarily non-Igbo members in the Eastern Region and eventually became an affiliate of the Action Group party.²³

Moreover, at a meeting of the minority representatives (from Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers Provinces) in the Eastern Regional

House of Assembly, held at Enugu, it was agreed that the minority representatives of the people of Ogoja, Rivers and Calabar Provinces should form a united front to fight for the survival of their people. For that purpose, the idea of the creation of Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers States out of the Eastern region was brought to fore by Dr. Udoma. Dr. Udoma was elected leader of the new group, Chief Harold Briye of Bonny was elected secretary, while Chief Bishop Davies Manuel of Degama was elected treasurer.²⁴

Ultimately, both the Houses of Assembly in the Regions and the Central House of Representatives were dissolved, thus, the Macpherson's Constitution finally collapsed. It then became necessary for another conference to be held in London for the drawing up of a new constitution for the governance of colonial Nigeria. As a result of the devolution of powers, Nigeria then emerged as a federation. The conference was presided over by Mr. Lyttelton, Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies.²⁵

In December 1953, Dr Udo Udoma in furtherance of the C.O.R. State agenda convened a conference of the representatives of the minorities in Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers Provinces. The conference met on the 19th of December, 1953, at the Roman Catholic Mission School, Afaha Oku, Uyo. The Conference unanimously agreed to submit to the resumed Constitutional Conference in Lagos a memorandum demanding that the whole of Calabar Province, the four minority divisions of Ogoja, Obudu, Ikom and Obubra in Ogoja Province should be grouped together with the whole of the Rivers Province to constitute a state for the minorities before the British imperialist government may consider the grant of independence to Nigeria. The conference then mandated Dr. Udo Udoma and Dr. Okoi Arikpo to present the memorandum on the creation of the C.O.R. State to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. A copy of the memorandum was forwarded to Her Majesty, the Queen of England.²⁶

During the C. O. R. State meeting, the following were elected as officers to pilot the affairs of the movement.

Dr. Alvan Ikoku (Arochukwu) – President-General
Chief (Bishop) Davies (Degema) Vice-President

Dr. Udo Udoma (Opobo Division) – Secretary General
Dr. Okoi Arikpo (Ogoja) – Assistant Secretary-general
Barrister O. O. Ita (Eket Division) Treasurer²⁷

At the 1957 Constitutional Conference held in London, the leaders of the C.O.R. State Movement, held a private meeting with Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Lennox Boyd. Also present at the meeting were, the Governor-General of Nigeria as well as the Governor of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, Sir John Stapledon. The Secretary of State assured the C.O.R. State advocates of the sympathy of the Colonial Office on the issue of the creation of states in Nigeria. Eventually, at the Conference, the decision to set up the Minorities Commission of Inquiry to look into the fears of the minorities and the means of allaying such fears, including the exercise of the creation of states was reached.²⁸

Sir Henry Willink was named as the Chairman of the Commission. Other members of the Commission were, Gordon Hadow, Philip Mason and J. S. Shearer. On the 26th of September, 1957, the Commission was inaugurated with the following terms of reference:

1. To ascertain the factors about the fears of minorities in any part of Nigeria and to propose means of allaying those fears, whether well or ill-founded;
2. To advise what safeguards should be included for the purpose in the constitution of Nigeria;
3. If, but only if, no other solution seems to the Commission to meet the case, then as a last resort to make detailed recommendations for the creation of one or more new states, and in that case:
 - a) to specify the precise areas to be included in such state or states;
 - b) to recommend the governmental and administrative structure most appropriate for it; and
 - c) to assess whether any state recommended would be viable from an economic and administrative point

of view and what the effect of its creation would be on the region or regions from which it would be created and on the federation.

- 4 To report its findings and recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.²⁹

The C.O.R. State Memorandum to the Willink's Commission

In their memorandum to the Willink's Commission, the minorities noted that the Igbo with a population of 4,942,530, form the majority in the Eastern Region. They gave a breakdown of the minority groups in the C.O.R. area and their population covering a total of contiguous territory of some 18,174 square miles as follows:

Calabar Province

Ibibio	709,788
Annang	435,210
Oron	123,404
Efik	70,571
Andoni	37,727
Ejagham	14,046

Ogoja Province

Ekoi-Yakur	98,256
Mbembe	37,214
Ukelle	21,488
Yala	25,640
Boki	29,237
Obanliku	14,334

Rivers Province

Igbo	305,198
Ijaw	239,675
Ogoni	156,118
Abuah	17,038
Nganni	5,680
Total	2,649,291. ³⁰

The document noted strongly that by 1957 the line of cleavage in the politics of the region was primarily "tribal" and faintly ideological. It also lamentably quoted a statement credited to prominent

N.C.N.C. leader Dr. M. K. O. Mbadiwe in the *Daily Times* of August 26, 1957 edition that the "demand for a C.O.R. State was a conspiracy against the Igbos". Dr Mbadiwe sounded the war cry during the meeting which was held in Aba and called on all Igbos to fight for their interests by fighting against the C. O. R. State idea.³¹

The fears of the minorities were heightened because of the Igbo domination in virtually all the areas of public life in the Eastern Region. For instance, there were 84 seats in the Eastern Regional House of Assembly allocated to the respective administrative divisions. The Igbo occupied 51 and produced the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, the Clerk and the Clerk Assistant, leaving the minorities with 33 seats. In the Executive Council, the Igbo constituted 12 members with the minorities sharing the remaining three positions. Also out of 14 Parliamentary Secretaries, 13 were Igbo, and two from the minority areas. The marginalization in the Public Service, Statutory Boards, scholarship awards, loans disbursements as well as the sitting of developmental projects in different areas of the region were also strongly alleged by the minorities.³²

The Willink's Commission and the C.O.R. State Agenda

The Commission started work in November 1957. Its sittings were held in all parts of the country, almost simultaneously.³³ The C.O.R. State Movement engaged the services of two British lawyers to represent her. At a 7-day sitting in Calabar, in January 1958, arguments was held in support of and against the creation of the following new states in the Eastern Region:

1. Ogoja State, to be formed out of the old Ogoja Province
2. Rivers State, consisting of the Rivers Province with some additions
3. Cross River State, including Calabar and parts of Ogoja Province
4. Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers State, out of all the non-Igbo areas of the three provinces.³⁴

From the terms of reference of the Commission, it would appear that the Commission was set to create one or more states in Eastern Nigeria, but the whole exercise, especially in the Eastern Nigeria

was marked by intrigues, sabotages and high wired politics by the N.C.N.C. which never wanted any state to be created in Eastern Nigeria. To thwart and torpedo the exercise, the N.C.N.C. leadership resorted to the use of divide and rule tactics to break the ranks of the minorities.³⁵ In the course of doing this, they succeeded in setting one ethnic group against the other in the minority areas. One consequence of this was that a lot of new groups emerged overnight demanding for the creation of Cross River States, Ogoja State separately. As at that time, the creation of three states in the Eastern Region alone was unthinkable and the N.C.N.C. used the fact of many voices from the sidelines to mar the chances of the C.O.R. State Movement.³⁶

In its submission, the Commission acknowledged the fact that fears of the minorities of perpetual domination, discrimination and marginalization were indeed genuine. But the Commission refused to create states. Instead, it made the following recommendations:

1. The Calabar Province should be constituted a minority area with its Council.
2. The duties of the Council should be to foster the well-being, cultural advancement, economic and social development of the minority area and to bring to the notice of the Regional Government any discrimination against the area.
3. That provision should be made in the constitution for the protection of the following fundamental right:
 - (a) Right to life
 - (b) Protection against inhuman treatment
 - (c) Protection against slavery and forced labour
 - (d) Right to liberty
 - (e) Right to respect for private and family life?
 - (f) Right to public hearing and fair procedure in criminal charges
 - (g.) Protection against retrospective legislation
 - (h) Freedom of expression
 - (I) Freedom of peaceful assembly
 - (j) Freedom of movement

- (k) Right to marry
- (l) Freedom of religion
- (m) Freedom of religious education
- (n) Enjoyment of fundamental rights without discrimination
- (o) Protection against discrimination
- (p) The enforcement of fundamental right.³⁷

The recommendation of the Willink's Commission did not favour the C.O.R. State Movement. As a result of this development, the Ibibio State Union had a meeting to deliberate on the report, and consequently, passed a unanimous resolution rejecting the report and also strongly kicked against the proposed Minority Council for the Calabar Province.³⁸

The resolution which was moved by Mr. Effiong Okon Eyo and seconded by Chief Robert Umo-Inyang, went thus:

That the Ibibio State Union Annual Conference assembled here, at Ikot Akan in Ibekwe District, this day, 1st of September, 1958, having studied and discussed fully, the recommendations with its full implications for the Minorities Commission Report, totally rejects the same, and in particular, the proposals for the Council for Calabar Province with no legislative and executive powers and hereby urges the Action group and the U.N.I.P. delegates from Calabar Province to the Resumed Conference on the Nigerian Constitution to be held in London from 29th of September, 1958 to press unrelentingly for the creation of the C.O.R. State before there can be any question of independence for Nigeria in 1960.³⁹

Within the same month that the Ibibio State Union passed the resolution, the C.O.R. State Movement held another conference in Uyo and thoroughly rejected and condemned the Willink's Commission Report. Meanwhile, at the Glover Hall in Lagos, a few days later, minorities from southern Nigeria met and created The Minorities United Front, under Chief Anthony Enahoro. The Resumed Constitutional Conference in London considered the issue of creation of states and arguments on its desirability or

otherwise raged for five days. At the end of the day, the issue was again postponed till after the achievement of independence in 1960. But at the insistence of the minorities, a provision for the creation of new regions was inserted into the new constitution. The immediate beneficiary of this provision after independence was the Mid-Western Region. Even though states were not created before and immediately after independence, the Ibibio State Union indeed succeeded in entrenching the principle of respect of fundamental Human Rights into the Independence Constitution of 1960.⁴⁰

In the post-independence period, the country began to experience tremendous difficulties in administration. For instance, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the Action Group was gaoled for treasonable felony. On January 15, 1966, the military staged a coup d' etat under the leadership of Major Kaduna Nzeogwu and this resulted in the death of many Nigerians. Consequently, General Aguiyi Ironsi took over power and proscribed the Ibibio State Union. Yet, the agitation for state creation persisted.⁴¹

Following the counter coup of July 29, 1966, which led to the emergence of Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon (later General) as the Head of State and the unfolding turbulence in the polity, the then Military Governor of the Eastern region, Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, announced the secession of the former Eastern region as the Republic of Biafra. However, on the 27th of May 1967, the Federal Military Government pre-empted the declaration of Biafra and announced the creation of 12 States in the country. The result of the exercise showed that two states, South Eastern and Rivers were carved out of the C.O.R. State area.⁴²

State creation was so popular throughout the whole country that at the end of the Biafran war, Nigerians asked for more. In February, 1976, the General Murtala Mohammed's led Federal Military Government increased the number of states in the country to 19. During the exercise, South Eastern State was renamed Cross River State. The exercise was based on the recommendation of a panel headed by Justice Ayo Irekefe which was set up in August 1975.

The agitation to break the post-Irekefe Cross River State into two or more states unfortunately and unnecessarily created bad blood

among and between individuals, groups and sections of the erstwhile Cross River State. However, following various representations, the Federal Government agreed to create Akwa Ibom State out of the existing Cross River State in 1987.

In retrospect, the creation of Akwa Ibom State represented the fruition of the agitation by the people of Akwa Ibom for a political arrangement within which their interest can be protected. This was aptly acknowledged by the former Military President, General Ibrahim Babangida, during his maiden visit to Akwa Ibom state thus:

The creation of Akwa Ibom state was the realization of your long and cherished dreams. The demand was genuine, consistent and lawfully pursued, with zeal, patience and commitment. The positive nature of your demand for state considerably assisted the Armed Forces Ruling Council to examine the request objectively and arrive at the historic decision to create the State on the 23rd of September, 1987. I tremble to think of what would have happened if after 60 years of vision, dream and agitation, you still did not have a state of your own in the 1987 exercise...the movement for the creation of this state predates all states creation movements. Indeed, the entire question of new states in Nigeria began here even before the formal inauguration of the Ibibio State Union in 1928.⁴³

Conclusion

The creation of more states in the wake of the Nigeria Civil war was one powerful weapon that the federal government of Nigeria used to keep Nigeria one. By the time the 12 states structure came into existence, the Biafran enclave was completely enclosed by Nigerian territories and by implication, the exercise made Biafra to be a land locked "country" and a territory sharing no frontiers with sympathetic countries. Therefore, through the creation of states, an Ibibio legacy, Nigeria escaped dismemberment in 1967. Today,

Nigeria has 36 states structure and no state is in a position to threaten the central government with secession as it used to occur in the past.⁴⁴

Ethnic nationalities in Nigerian now see the state creation of exercise as the option for self determination. During the just concluded National Conference, one of the key issues that came to the front burner of national discourse was that of state creation. This suggests the fact that the demand has not abated and will continue in the future. Despite the desirability of state creation, such exercise should be guided by certain rational criteria; principal among them should be the viability of the proposed state.

Endnotes

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