

I ENDED the discussion last week with a promise to start this week on the vital need for both the Buhari administration and IPOB (and all separatist movements and organizations in the country) not to ignore rational, convincing ideas and arguments in making their respective cases to the nation and the world. Well then, here goes: why this emphasis on reason, on rationalism?

This question arises at all because, as is well known, both in the making and the breaking up of nations, reason or rationalism plays a weaker, secondary role to emotion and sentiment. As a matter of fact, it is usually long after a nation has been created or, conversely, broken up, that the reasons, the justifications are found and provided, often long after the event has taken place. Indeed, our country is a very apt illustration of this fact, this truism of political history all over the world. More than a century after our country was created by Britain in 1914 through the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria, we are still hard pressed to find powerful and inspiring ideas and arguments for the nation's united existence. The emotion and the sentiment, the dream and the hope are there, but very few Nigerians know of the fact that there are written and published ideas and arguments for the existence and the unity of the country.

The same thing is true of those who have struggled for either total or partial separatism in our country: the emotional and symbolic expressions have been loud and clear, but little is known by the public of the fact that powerful reasons and arguments have been advanced for its realization. In this respect, IPOB stands as a telling illustration of the divorce between emotion and reason in the experience of separatism in our country. How so? Well, as far as I know, IPOB has made little or no references at all to the Ahiara Declaration of June 1969, even though this is unquestionably one of the finest documents providing rational ideas and arguments in justification of secession within Nigeria itself and from any nation-state in Africa and the modern world.

Please note that this document was produced barely six months before the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war. This means that it was produced long after the declaration of secession, precisely because by that time, Biafrans had discovered that they had to rationally rearticulate to themselves the justness of their struggle for survival and the validity of their claims to being a democratic and responsible member of the comity of nations. Indeed, this is why the Ahiara Declaration was/is such a magnificent historical document: it carefully lays out what was wrong with Nigeria with a promise, a vision that those "Nigerian" errors and blights would not be reproduced in Biafra. Of course, whether the vision would have been fulfilled if Biafra had not been defeated, whether in fact the vision had already been compromised before the defeat of the secessionist new nation is another matter entirely.

Fortunately or unfortunately for IPOB, it cannot wait for long before producing its own "Ahiara Declaration". This is because in the months ahead, especially as its push for a referendum gathers momentum, IPOB



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•Buhari and Oyegun, Are these men united behind a single vision of the unity and corporate existence of Nigeria or are there deep divisions on how to keep the nation together between the forces they represent?

will have to provide powerful and convincing rational arguments that would be equal, if not superior to the achievement of the Ahiara Declaration and of relevance to the contemporary situation in Nigeria and the world. This is assuming that IPOB intends to achieve its goals and objectives through a referendum, a plebiscite and not through war. In a plebiscite or a referendum, you have to win both the hearts and the minds of the people of "Biafra" and also of the world. That being the case, it remains to be seen whether or not the federal government itself - specifically, the Buhari administration and the APC - deems it necessary at all to provide rational and convincing ideas and arguments to counter what IPOB and other separatist or devolutionary movements and organizations are saying at the present time.

This is the heart of the matter because so far, nothing that has come from the government on this issue has shown that it has the ability, the will or the good faith to meet this crucial obligation. Indeed, I contend that the time has come for Nigerians and the whole world to ask the Buhari administration and the APC to provide the rationale, the ideas, the arguments and the vision for the continued existence and unity of our country. In very concrete terms, beyond the empty and almost meaningless abstraction of the inviolability of Nigerian unity, what do the government and the

APC have to say to those who want to make an exit from Nigeria and those, like the "Arewa Youth Forum", that have ordered Igbos living and working in the North to leave the region by a certain date? Do the government and the APC themselves have a unified position, a rational and convincing vision for the unity and continued existence of our country in the modern world around which all the members of Buhari's cabinet and the leaders of the APC can be united?

The answer to this last question is, as most Nigerians either know or suspect, a ringing "No". Beyond routine invocations of the unity and indivisibility of Nigeria, the Buhari administration and the APC have, so far, had nothing of substance to tell Nigerians and the world. On what basis am I making this very alarming claim? Well, in the first place, I take it that if there was indeed a vision, a rationale for Nigeria's continued existence and unity, the government and the APC would be only too eager to share it with Nigerians and the whole world. To keep Scotland in the United Kingdom, the British government had to campaign hard, it had to convince the Scots that it would be much better for them to stay *with* and *in* the United Kingdom than to leave. But the Buhari administration and the APC feel no such obligation, no such pressing need, even in the face of mounting waves of disunity in the country. Far more crucial, far more dis-

turbing is the fact that we know that between different or diverse elements and forces within the government and the ruling party there are substantial differences on the question of Nigerian unity and continued corporate existence, even if there has never been any concerted efforts by politicians in office or power to address these differences or contradictions within their ranks.

At this stage in the discussion, let me pause, dear readers and compatriots, to confess that as I write these words, I desperately wish that what I am stating here, what I am declaring loudly is wrong or mistaken. In other words, I am hoping that perhaps sooner or later, perhaps sooner rather than later, someone influential and authoritative in the government and/or the ruling party will step forward and issue a comprehensive statement that would demonstrate to Nigerians and the whole world that Nigeria's rulers have a powerful and convincing vision for the country's unity and continued existence in the modern world. I look and look and look to find a single member of the administration or the APC leadership to whom Nigerians and the world can turn for an articulate and inspiring expression of the basis of Nigerian unity and I cannot think of a single person! In great trepidation but not without any hope at all, I turn to the known differences and contradictions on the question of Nigerian unity within the ruling party in particular and the country's

political elites in general. What do I find? In answering this question, I plead: let reason be our guide.

I find that the government, the ruling party and the political elites, from all four corners of the land, are unwilling and unable to stop the wanton looting and wastage of the nation's wealth, assets and resources, a fundamental causative factor of disunity in our country. I find that the broad division within the ruling party itself and the political elites in general between those who are for a strong center and those for a loose center is more imagined than real, that everyone is in government and in politics for personal self-enrichment, not for their "people", their "tribe" or their "nationality". Most pertinent of all, I find that though in general the North is for a strong center and a strong presidency while the South is for a loose center and a presidency with greatly reduced spheres of authority and sovereignty, our politicians vigorously pursue these positions only when they are not in office or power; as soon as they become part of an incumbent administration or ruling party, they considerably tone down their avowed views and positions.

Let me express this particular trait in concrete and graphic terms. Thus, of the politicians from the North, I say that only when they felt the specter of being kept away from the presidency for a long time on account of the death of Umaru Musa Yar' Adua did they finally accept that a national conference was necessary; now that a northerner is back in power in the presidency, they are considerably chary of calls for "restructuring". What of the politicians from the Southwest? Their calls for restructuring and genuine federalism are not typically made by those in office; and if they are made at all by such politicians, they are made not thunderously but with a whimper. Finally, the politicians of the Southeast: their charges of marginalization, of a "Wazobia tripod" that has had only two legs since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war are made not as matters of principle but as bargaining positions for the spoils of power and office.

Of course, since Nigeria is bigger than the two-legged "Wazobia tripod", the contradictions and challenges of Nigerian unity are multiple and diverse. In other words, we are talking not of a geopolitical centipede but a millipede! As I observed in last week's piece, IPOB thinks of Nigeria in terms of three "nationalities" only: Arewa, Biafra and Oduduwa. Indeed, although he is not completely silent about the fact of Biafra's multi-ethnic identity, only very rarely does Nnamdi Kanu talk of the other "nationalities" within the Southeast and South-south zones, the geographical and demographic focus of his ambitions and desires. In this, in being so hegemonically "Wazobian", Kanu is being quintessentially Nigerian.

We cannot of course get rid of or ignore the "Wazobian tripod". But neither can or must we be restricted to it when the subject of discussion is the question of Nigeria's unity and corporate existence. Are we caught on the horns of the dilemma of there being no choice between a broken tripod and a mere millipede whose status in the hierarchy of nature is well below the soaring skies of the bald eagle, our national symbol? Yes and no. This will be the starting point in next week's concluding essay in the series.

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THIS was the concluding paragraph in last week's piece in this column: "We cannot of course get rid of, or ignore the 'Wazobian tripod'. But neither can or must we be restricted to it when the subject of discussion is the question of Nigeria's unity and corporate existence. Are we caught on the horns of the dilemma of there being no choice between a broken tripod and a mere millipede whose status in the hierarchy of nature is well below the soaring skies of the bald eagle, our national symbol? Yes and no. This will be the starting point in next week's concluding essay in the series".

Well then for starters in this concluding piece in the series, what are, respectively, the "Yes" and the "No" responses to the loaded question of the dilemma of there being no choice between a broken tripod with only two legs and a millipede whose fate is to crawl and forage for food in the undergrowth of the earth? I am of course assuming that most of the readers of this piece and of the series to which it belongs, know exactly what these metaphors stand for: the tripod as an image for the dominance of the three biggest ethnic groups on the African continent in the human and demographic composition of Nigeria; the millipede as a trope for the fact that beside the big three, the country's demographic identity is made up, literally, of hundreds upon hundreds of ethnicities. However, given the possibility that a younger generation of readers and compatriots might not have the lived experience that would conduce to a rich and nuanced perception of what these metaphors of the tripod and the millipede stand for, a quick gloss or explanation might be useful.

Thus, we could start from the little-known fact that Nigerian federalism dates back to the early 1950s when the three big regions of the North, the East and the West came into being. Please take note, dear readers and compatriots, that even though the Nigerian nation-state came into existence when the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated in 1914, Nigerian federalism does not date back to that event; it dates from the early Fifties of the last century when limited self-rule under colonialism began to pave the way for independence and full nationhood in 1960. Please note also that long, long before the three regions came into existence to lay the foundations of Nigerian federalism, the big three "Wazobian" ethno-nationalities of Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo had historically been in existence, albeit in profoundly different stages of economic, socio-political and cultural formations than what we know of these groups today. At any rate, what is pertinent is that for good or ill, the spatial and demographic spread of these big three groups more or less coincided with and dominated the three big regions of the West, the North and the East respectively. They did not exclusively constitute the ethnic, linguistic and cultural complement of their respective regions; but their respective dominance in each of the three regions was indisputable.

Of course, in the period of four and half decades since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war, the three regions have been effectively broken up. In other words, it can be said that the tripod standing on three legs has gone. Enter the "millipede" with hundreds of legs, actual or potential. In other words, from those three huge regions of the Fifties and early Sixties, Nigerian federalism went, first, to four regions; then to twelve states; then to nineteen states; and finally, to the present thirty-six states, with possibly more to come. However, the memory, the resonance of the three regions and the ethno-national Wazobian tripod continues to haunt all discussions of federalism and restructuring in our country. No secessionist or devolu-



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tionary group or movement represents this residual metaphoric power of the three-legged tripod more than IPOB does.

As I have stated many times in this series, for IPOB, there are only three "nations" in Nigeria: Biafra, Oduduwa and Arewa. Since IPOB is not one jot interested in Nigerian federalism, it may be argued that what the secessionist organization thinks on the matter should not concern us. But it is also the case that beyond IPOB, most groups and individuals vigorously debating the thorny and convoluted issues surrounding Nigerian federalism today also draw on the tripod metaphor, some explicitly, others implicitly; some in support, others in rejection. For instance, the regionalists and zonal advocates of both the Southwest and the so-called "core North" (Northwest and Northeast) for the most part base themselves on versions of the Wazobian tripod.

The "rejectionists" are mostly those who never in the first place accepted either the validity or the usefulness of the tripod metaphor as an appropriate representation of where our country was and/or where it is headed in our search for a genuine, robust and equitable federalism. Their problem, their dilemma comes from the fact that if the tripod is not acceptable as a metaphor of Nigerian federalism, neither is the centipede or the millipede exactly an endearing image of a robust federalism: hundreds of tiny legs with which to stand or walk in place of three, this is not a reassuring image of national identity and robust federalism! In other words, mere numbers acting

as metaphors, whether large or small, do not in themselves conduce to viable and equitable federalism. The recognition and acceptance of this limitation of metaphor - all metaphors - nudges us towards a radical critique of the (existing) politics of Nigerian federalism of which we can only provide the barest outline in this piece.

In our construction of such a critique, we could begin by asking the simple question: *who* or *what* are the federating units *in* and *of* the Nigerian nation? The same question could be posed and is indeed often posed to other federal or confederal nations of the world. Here, let us restrict ourselves to Nigeria. For the great majority of all the groups and individuals writing about and/or struggling for true and just federalism in our country today, the answer to this question is unequivocally this: the federating units or entities are the ethnic groups or nationalities that were there, that have been there long before "Nigeria" arrived on the scene of history as a multi-ethnic supra-nationality of many peoples, languages and cultures. Without in the least bit questioning the *validity* of this view, we must nonetheless question its *adequacy*. Why? Because in the modern world, in all post-tribal societies of the recent past and the contemporary present, federating units and entities include workers representing themselves as workers; businessmen and women representing their trades and enterprises; professionals representing their professions; students representing themselves as students whose interests must be protected; farmers representing themselves as

the ultimate guarantors of nation's food needs. There is indeed a philosophical or "theoretical" basis for this expanded view of the representation of federating units in all the nations in the modern world and it is this: the fundamental, irreducible units and entities that come together to "federate" in all the societies and nations of the modern world are human beings as they produce both the means of their own survival and the surplus they need to assure the survival of generations of their progeny yet unborn. Permit me to briefly expatiate on this idea, especially in the Nigerian context.

It almost seems absurd to say this, but all the same, it needs to be stated that just as, short of war, no ethnic or language group can and will be expelled from the physical space that it currently occupies in the Nigerian land mass, so is it also indisputable that all groups in contiguous physical and economic proximity will engage in trade and exchange of goods and services, within Nigeria or in any other arrangement of joint, associated nationhood. In other words, our peoples are not only "federating" as speakers of certain languages and bearers of certain ethno-national cultures, they are doing so as producers and consumers of goods and services; and they are doing so necessarily and inevitably. Who has not heard of trade and commerce across the bloody, tragic battle lines of the Nigeria-Biafra war? Which adult, literate, thinking Nigerian does not know that all our peoples, North and South, East and West, face physical, environmental and production challenges that can only be

resolved in cooperation, whether within the current Nigerian nation-space or another? The regions and zones that are completely landlocked, will they not always need access to the seas and the ports of the coastal regions? The regions and zones that face great, daunting pressure of scarcity of land in relation to high population densities, will they not travel and migrate outwards, whether the land they travel within or into is the present-day Nigeria or other nation-states altogether? And the regions and zones that depend on the movement of capital, goods, services and peoples, will this imperative not be there whether the nation be what we have now or a successor nation-state brought into being after the last talks, the last plebiscites may have ended the life and times of the country we now have?

If these questions seem to indicate that I am either dispensing with or downplaying the significance of language(s), ethnicity and indigeneity as representational or "federating" vectors, let me quickly dispel that idea. Nigerians are no different from the rest of humanity: we draw our identities from the language(s) that we speak; our hometowns; the places where we were born and have made our permanent residences; myths, legends and symbols of ancestry, cultural achievement, civic pride and breakthroughs in moral and intellectual insights. These will endure and for as long as they do, we will be locked into the competing metaphoric struggle between resonances of the Wazobian tripod and the centipede or the millipede. But the time has come to considerably broaden the terms, the vectors of the representational or "federating" units and entities. We must, I argue, now add the vector of *production*. I could add other indices like gender and age, but for now will limit myself in the present discussion only to - production. In particular, I wish to end with a brief discussion of how an emphasis on production, side by side with ethnicity and language(s), would substantially reduce the exclusion of suffering and poverty from the central place that it ought to occupy in current debates over federalism in our country.

Very briefly then, let us begin with the well-known fact that we waste and mismanage our national wealth and resources on a monumental scale. The looting, the squandermania is colossal and probably without equal in the whole world. Absolutely without any exception, the elites of all the ethnic groups, big and small, of the "tripod" and the "millipede" formations, are involved in these monumental acts of dispossession of our peoples in every inch of the land. Where "ethnicity" is the basic and perhaps the only basis of determining the "federating" entities, in the name(s) of their ethno-nationalities, these elites primarily if not exclusively, represent themselves and their own interests. This is why, dear readers and compatriots, the poverty and the suffering of the masses of our peoples have not, so far, featured prominently in debates and struggles over restructuring and true and just federalism in our country. The inclusion of *production* as a vector of federalism will not automatically bring this about. But it will be a beginning move of potentially decisive impact.

A strong center with a bloated presidency that is reproduced in the executive governorships of the thirty-six states; or a loose center with a presidency with vastly reduced spheres of sovereignty, authority and influence? Compatriots, which vector of federalism and "federating" entities, is more suitable to the realization of the resolution of this question than *production*?