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Failed Aburi Agreement and Nigeria's National Integration

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

This study examines the historical impact of the failure of the 1967 Aburi Accord on Nigeria's national integration. Precipitated by the political crises, ethnic rivalries, and institutional distrust following the military coups of January and July 1966, the Aburi meeting in Ghana sought to resolve emerging conflicts by restructuring Nigeria's federal system toward greater regional autonomy. Utilizing a qualitative, historical-descriptive methodology, this research conducts a critical content analysis of secondary data, including scholarly texts, journal articles, historical documents, and official communiqués, to evaluate the post-conference fallout. Findings reveal that conflicting interpretations, mutual suspicion, and the failure of both the Federal Military Government and the Eastern Region to honor the accord severely damaged national trust, fractured Nigeria's federal architecture, and ultimately triggered the declaration of Biafra and the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). The study concludes that national integration cannot be realized through mere constitutional decree, but requires genuine sincerity, equitable representation, and structured dialogue. Furthermore, the underlying grievances that caused the collapse of the Aburi Accord, namely central domination, political marginalization, and resource control, remain central challenges in contemporary Nigerian politics. The study recommends strengthening the Federal Character Principle, enacting constitutional reforms toward true fiscal federalism, institutionalizing inter-ethnic conflict resolution mechanisms, and investing in civic education alongside regional infrastructure to foster enduring national unity and stability.

Keywords: Failed Aburi Agreement, National Integration, Nigerian Civil War, Political Crisis, Ethnic Conflict, Federalism, Regional Autonomy.

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Introduction

The failure of the Aburi Agreement of 1967 is believed to be one of the deadliest political mistakes in Nigeria's political history due to its consequences on the nation's integration. The Agreement was necessitated by the political crises that resulted from suspicion, hatred, and rivalry among Nigeria's three ethnic major ethic groups after the January and July 1966 military coups. Fearing domination and determined to win the confidence of Nigeria's ethnic groups, then head of the military junta, Yakubu Gowon hosted Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (leader of defected Igbo military officers) at Aburi, Ghana in January 1967. The meeting which was meant to find a lasting solution to the crises resulted in an agreement to restructure Nigeria's federalism to allow more autonomy to the regions, while maintaining Nigeria as one sovereign state (Achebe,

2012). Although many Nigerians and international observers welcomed the idea of Aburi, disagreement later developed over the interpretation of some resolutions of the conference. Conflict and mutual suspicion soon developed between the Federal Military Government and the Eastern Region as each side accused the other of breaching the agreement (Forsyth, 1969). The mutual suspicion not only hampered national integration efforts but also led to the declaration of the Republic of Biafra in May 1967 which eventually escalated into a full-blown civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970 (Madiebo, 1980). Consequently, Nigeria's weakness federal system was glaringly exposed as Nigerians of different ethnic extracted threatened the country's integration. The lessons of Aburi are still widely discussed in scholarly works because it remains the greatest example of how lack of trust, fairness, dialogue, and sincerity can destroy efforts at national integration in Nigeria. Also, the events leading to the failure of the Agreement serve as a reference point for discussing issues on conflict resolution, constitutional governance and reasons why political leaders should avoid repudiating agreements in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The failure of the Aburi Agreement deepened the existing mistrust among Nigeria's ethnic groups, hindered the efforts towards achieving national integration, promoted political instability, and generated serious threats to Nigeria's unity. Although signed by the leaders of Nigeria to bring an end to the political crisis caused by the July and January 1966 coup and reaffirm the country's unity, disagreement over the interpretation of the communiqué issued at the end of the conference weakened the federal structure and promoted hostility among Nigeria's political class. The inability of both parties to keep to the word of the agreement not only marred efforts at national integration but led to the secession of Biafra and the Nigeria civil war. Therefore, the study seeks to find out how the failure of Aburi Agreement hampered Nigeria's national integration.

Aim of the Study & Research Question

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of the failure of the Aburi Accord on Nigeria's national integration. As such, the study will provide answers to the questions of what were the effects of the failure of the Aburi Accord on Nigeria's national integration.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is historical and descriptive. This study relied on secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journal articles, past military communiqués, previous government publications, newspapers, and opinions from academic libraries that relate to the political crisis that led to the meeting at Aburi, causes of the Nigerian Civil War, and Nigeria's national integration. The data gathered from the secondary sources will be subject to critical content analysis to draw conclusions on how the failure of the Aburi Accord affected Nigeria's national integration.

Literature Review

The Aburi Agreement

The origins of January 19th 1967 Aburi Agreement have attracted critical attention from scholars because of its linkage with the Nigerian Civil War and problems of national integration. Available studies have perceived the agreement as one of Nigeria's crucial efforts towards sustaining the country's unity during a political crisis triggered by the 19th June coup and inter-ethnic violence. Scholars largely agree that the failure of the agreement exacerbated political tensions and led to weakened trust, which largely diminished Nigeria's ability to integrate as a nation. Majority of scholars agree that the Aburi meeting resulted from political and ethnic crisis that threatened Nigeria' unity as a country. Chinua Achebe (2012) asserts that hostilities against Igbos residing in Northern Nigeria following the July counter-coup engendered fear and apprehension among citizens of the Eastern Region. Achebe argues that failure of the Federal Military Government to assure Easterners of their safety

fueled calls for regional autonomy in Nigeria. He further notes that the Aburi meeting was convened as a means of restoring confidence and averting the collapse of Nigerian federation. According to Achebe, the agreement provided a unique platform for Nigeria political class to convene, dialogue and reach a consensus.

Forsyth (1969) also notes that the Aburi meeting was organized as a way of relieving tension between the Federal Military Government and Eastern Region through constitutional consensus. He argues that resolutions at Aburi proposed a loose federation where the regions were allowed to retain substantial autonomy while still remaining part of one Nigeria. However, Forsyth affirms that confusion arose over interpretations of the agreement particularly with regard to supremacy of military might versus the powers of the central government. He indicates that these differences widened the gap of distrust between the regions weakening the eventual process of implementation. The question of interpretability and its subsequent implementation appears to be one of debated issues concerning the Aburi Agreement. Madiebo (1980) claims that participants from Eastern Nigeria interpreted the Aburi Agreement as a legally binding political settlement that guaranteed regional autonomy and equality among Nigeria's regions. However, the Federal Military Government later issued Decree number 8 which altered the initial powers of the regions as spelt out in the Aburi Agreement. Madiebo (1980) suggests that this action left many Easterners with the impression that the Federal Government was not ready to implement the initial agreements they all agreed upon in Aburi. Consequently, political mistrust ensued and confidence in negotiating peace was diminished.

Recent publications on ethnicity and nation-building in Nigeria also provides valuable insight on factors that led to the failure of the Aburi Agreement. Research shows that ethnic rivalry and fear of political exclusion continue to threaten the process of national integration in Nigeria. Onwubiko & Nwachukwu (2024) suggest that ethnicity remains a major stumbling block to national integration in Nigeria because political competition and loyalty are often rooted in ethnic affiliation instead of nationalism. The researchers explain how Nigeria leaders have continuously failed to manage diversity which has resulted in increased conflicts and suspicion among ethnic groups. This perspective aligns with the issues that caused the Aburi Agreement because there was an existing mutual suspicion among Nigeria's regions.

Osimen et al. (2022) posit that Nigeria's quest for enduring national integration has been undermined by distrust in leadership, regional marginalization and centralized governance. The authors explain that majority of Nigeria's post-independence crises including the Nigerian Civil War stemmed from failure in political dialogue and lack of fairness in governance. According to this study inability of political elites to implement agreements reached in political dialogue have continually hampered efforts at integration and peaceful coexistence. This postulation affirms the opinion that failed agreement led to a breakdown of trust and diminished Nigeria's capability to integrate as one nation.

Wonah (2016) agrees that identity politics plays a significant role in Nigeria's experience with national integration. The author argues that ethnicity and regionalism continue to shape political decisions and often create divisions that threaten the process of national integration. While understanding one's identity can empower marginalized groups to voice out their concerns, threats to national unity are often fueled by how politicians instrumentalize identity politics. This postulation can be linked to the Aburi crisis because ethnic bias and regional fears significantly influenced the stance of both the Federal Military Government and Eastern Region.

In a similar view, Adebajo & Olawunmi (2022) assert that ethnic politics has continued to pose a great challenge to Nigeria's national integration in the Fourth Republic. They argue that political competition in Nigeria is mostly influenced by ethnic and regional backgrounds of political actors thus stunting the growth of national belonging. The study illustrates how lack of trust among ethnic groups in Nigeria suggests that Nigeria have not been able to overcome many of the problems responsible for the failure of the Aburi Agreement. Their analysis implies that lessons from the Aburi Agreement are still relevant to Nigeria's contemporary experience

with federalism, restructuring and managing diversity.

Additional scholarship on the Aburi Agreement mainly focuses on the issues of self-determination and constitutional restructuring. Asomugha (2025) argues that failure of Nigerian Government to implement the Aburi Accord spawned long-term political grievances which are responsible for the Niger Delta agitations and recent demand for Biafra Republic by some youths in southeastern Nigeria. According to the author failure of Nigerian leaders to uphold the spirit of compromises made at Aburi made many Igbos feel marginalized and distrustful of the Nigerian state. The study concludes by saying that constitutional flexibility, dialogue and regional autonomy will guarantee peaceful co-existence and enhance national integration in Nigeria.

Equally important perspective revolves around leadership failure and inconsistency in political action. Kirk- Greene (1971) argues that lack of trust among Nigeria military leaders affected the likelihood of implementing the Aburi Agreement. He suggests that absence of sincerity and compromise among leaders weakened relations between Nigeria's Federal Government and Eastern Region. Nigeria eventually faced a leadership crisis which led to the collapse of peace talk between the groups and later caused the Civil War. Falola & Heaton (2008) also argue that failure of Nigerian leaders to amicably settle political disputes is an evidence of how fragile Nigeria's post-colonial state was and how daunting the process of nation building has been in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

Based on the literature reviewed above, I believe that scholars have established a general consensus that the Aburi Agreement provided an opportunity for Nigeria leaders to settle their differences peacefully and reinforce national integration. However, political mistrust, disagreement over interpretation of the agreement, ethnic distrust, and inconsistency in political actions led to its collapse. Available literature also shows that impacts of the failed agreement were not limited to the Nigerian Civil War but had greater consequences on federalism, political instability, and nation-building in Nigeria. Therefore, lessons from the failure of the Aburi Agreement are vital to understanding the need for trust, constructive dialogue, constitutional clarity and sincerity when implementing agreed decisions for the sake of national integration in a diverse society.

National Integration

National integration refers to the political and social process of promoting cohesion, unity, and belongingness among individuals and groups within a nation-state regardless of ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural or regional differences. It aims to foster a sense of loyalty and commitment to the political community and political stability among citizens. Concepts such as peaceful coexistence, nation-building, and sustainable development are closely associated with national integration, particularly in plural societies. Nations with diverse ethnic populations like Nigeria have continually emphasized the importance of achieving national unity through mutual respect and concerted efforts of citizens from different backgrounds to achieve collective political goals. National integration implies that citizens can cooperate with each other irrespective of their socio-cultural differences while maintaining equality in political, economic, and social participation.

Different scholars have attempted to define national integration from various viewpoints. Deutsch (1966) viewed national integration as the process whereby people within a state develop a sense of community with one another. Citizens feel attached to the political community when they share common values, have faith in one another, and are willing to find a peaceful solution to conflicts. To him, communication strength, social relationship, and political participation promote national integration. Coleman & Rosberg (1964), on the other hand, define national integration as gradual reduction of social and cultural barriers that usually exist between various groups in a state. National integration aims at fostering social stability and political unity among citizens. Both definitions agree that national integration occurs at both emotional level as citizens develop loyalty to their nation and institutional level as citizens cooperate with each other to achieve common goals.

National integration has remained one of Nigeria's significant political problems since its independence in 19C0. Nigeria is populated by over 250 ethnic groups with diverse cultural, religious, linguistic, and historical backgrounds. Suberu (2001) posits that ethnic, regional, religious, and linguistic differences became deeply entrenched when British amalgamated Northern and Southern Nigeria in 19C4. Although colonial administrators created a political state, there was no nationalist consciousness to tie the people together. Consequently, ethnic groups identify more with their tribes than with the Nigerian state. Ethnocentrism poses a threat to nation-building and national integration as people focus on their social identities instead of developing feelings of national belongingness. Ethnicity continues to influence political mobilization, access to resources, and power distribution in Nigeria.

Scholars have outlined key elements that can guarantee national integration. Political inclusion and equality are essential ingredients for national integration to be achieved. Adebajo & Olawunmi (2022) opine that when citizens from different socio-cultural backgrounds feel equally represented by government and have equal access to political and economic opportunities, only then can national integration be said to have been achieved. Lack of political inclusion often creates feelings of marginalization among minority groups which could threaten the unity of the state. In Nigeria, there have been complaints of ethnic domination by political elites from different parts of the country. Many people feel that some regions of Nigeria are more developed than others due to political marginalization and inequality in the distribution of political positions. This perception triggers conflict and threatens Nigeria's national unity.

Onyechi (2023) identifies effective federalism as another critical factor that can enhance national integration. Federalism is a system of government whereby power and resources are shared between a central government and regional governments created by the constitution. Proponents of federalism argue that it was introduced into Nigeria's constitutional arrangement to manage the country's diversity and maintain national unity by granting autonomy to its constituent parts. Vertical concentration of power and resources at the expense of the regions was responsible for weakening federalism, leading to calls for restructuring and true federalism in Nigeria. The idea of regional autonomy was the basis for the formation of the Aburi Agreement of 1967. The inability of the federal government to respect the demands of the southeast weakened trust, thereby worsening an already tense political situation which eventually resulted in civil war. Therefore, lack of effective federalism can threaten national integration.

National integration is intertwined with the concept of nation-building. Nation-building refers to processes that aim to develop a national identity and ensure citizens feel attached to their country. Falola & Heaton (2008) argued that Nigeria as a nation has failed to inspire patriotism and common citizenship among its citizens. Factors such as ethnic mistrust, religious crisis, corruption, poor leadership, and lack of democratic institutions have hampered nation-building in Nigeria. Political instability resulting from military coup, brigand attacks, terrorism, and agitations for secession in recent times can be linked to weak national consciousness among citizens. Many citizens do not feel integrated into the larger Nigerian society; instead, they identify more with their ethnic groups or religious organization.

Ethnic diversity continues to pose a significant threat to national integration in Nigeria. Onwubiko & Nwachukwu (2023) note that political elites in Nigeria often channel their quest for power along ethnic lines. Political competition and access to resources are often skewed along ethnic lines, thereby endangering Nigeria's political stability. Politics of ethnicity was responsible for the creation of federal character clause in the constitution. Despite the addition of the clause to promote national integration by ensuring equity and justice for all ethnic groups in Nigeria, political elites continue to manipulate this notion to dominate other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Ethnic domination and unfair distribution of political positions have become major sources of tension among Nigeria's political class.

Several scholars have also recognized the importance of dialogue, justice, and trust in achieving national integration. They argue that

citizens must perceive their government as capable of administering justice and treating everyone equally. Osimen et al. (2022) posit that lack of trust in government and its institutions can breed impunity and stimulate separatist agitations. Unfortunately, this was the case during Nigeria's civil war. Many easterners felt that agreements reached at Aburi were not implemented, causing distrust between the Federal Military Government and the then Eastern region. This act worsened an already volatile political atmosphere in Nigeria, which led to civil war. Dialogue, justice, and trust are crucial factors that can promote national integration.

Education and enlightenment are crucial for attaining national integration. Civic education, national values, orientation, and interaction among citizens can help promote national unity. National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established to help in promoting unity among Nigerian youths from different parts of the country. Through the cultural exchange program, teaching, and learning of Nigerian history, among others, citizens can develop a feeling of oneness with their country. Although Nigeria has done fairly well to promote national integration among its citizens, continuous cases of ethnic conflicts and agitation for secession by some regional movements prove that more efforts are still required to achieve lasting peace.

Theoretical Framework: The Conflict Theory

The Conflict Theory is one of the most dominant sociological and political theories used in analyzing society. The theory emerged from Karl Marx's belief that society perpetually experiences struggle among the classes that constantly compete for political power, social control, economic resources, and dominance over each other. Theorists believe that such conflict negatively affects society as social order is maintained by power relations and force instead of consensus or cooperation. Conflict Theory has been dominantly applied to describe politics, ethnicity, nationalism, and episodes of violence and instability especially in plural societies where several groups constantly compete against each other.

Marx & Engels (1978) note that conflict erupts in society because groups competing for the same goals and interests do not always see their interests aligned. Marx believed that whoever had control over political and economic power subjugated the weak groups in society thereby causing inequality, exploitation, and resistance. While Marx emphasized mostly on conflict based on social class differences, scholars have since used the theory in analyzing ethnic, religious and political strife within nations. Conflict Theory in modern politics explains how competition between ethnic and regional groups competing for state power challenges national unity and ultimately weakens state politics.

Conflict Theory is premised on the assumption that society is bound to disagreement and instability because people have different interests, values, and goals. Coser (1956) suggests that social groups are bound to clash in society because humans live in societies characterized by divergent groups struggling to gain access to resources and power. Coser adds that such conflicts may emanate from economic inequalities, social exclusion, ethnic discrimination, domination, or contest for leadership positions. In ethnically diverse societies like Nigeria, conflicts arise when ethnic groups compete for access to state resources, power and leadership positions based on ethnic loyalty and regional superiority. This inevitably causes political instability as groups tend not to trust each other.

Another proponent of Conflict Theory was Ralf Dahrendorf who emphasized the role of authority and power relations as the root cause of social conflict. Dahrendorf (1959) asserted that every society consists of dominant groups that are superior while other groups are subordinates thus making their interests often conflict. According to Dahrendorf, dominant groups wish to maintain their positions of authority in society while the subordinate groups constantly struggle for more voice, recognition and equality. Dahrendorf's theory finds relevance in modern politics especially in developing countries where contest over state power causes political crises that destabilize politics. Nigeria has experienced contest based on political power, federal power, and control of leadership positions as major causes of ethnic distrust and national disintegration.

Conflict theory can be applied to analyze Nigeria's political crisis during the events that eventually led to the breakdown of the Aburi Agreement in 19 years of Nigerian independence. After the January and July 19 coup d'états in Nigeria, ethnic suspicion and competition among the elites from Nigeria's three dominant regions increased. Achebe (2012) notes that the constant change in leadership created fear, insecurity and lack of trust between Nigeria's north, west and eastern regions. With numerically superiority at the time, the North feared being dominated by the Igbo-led Eastern Region. Consequently, many Igbo officers were massacred in Northern Nigeria which made the Igbo's feel threatened and distrustful of the Northern-led government. These divergent interests among Nigeria's largest ethnic groups led to mistrust between the groups.

The Aburi meeting was an agreement reached in Ghana by leaders of Nigeria's different ethnic groups to find a way forward after the military coup. Using Conflict Theory to analyze this agreement, we can argue that both parties struggled for power and control of Nigeria hence could not trust each other to negotiate. Forsyth (1969) notes that disagreements between the Eastern delegation and Federal Military Government occurred when interpretations for implementing the Aburi accords were being discussed. While the East wanted more regional autonomy which would weaken the federal government, the federal government wanted more power which would weaken regional governments. These differences created room for mistrust among parties who were supposed to be working toward a peaceful resolution.

Conflict Theory can also explain how ethnic rivalry threatened national integration during the Aburi accord crisis. National integration connotes unity of different groups within a nation. This is largely achieved by promoting social cooperation, oneness and avoiding actions that can cause division among ethnic groups. Conflict theorists would argue that whenever there is perceived inequality, domination or deprivation among groups, national integration will be difficult to achieve. According to Suberu (2001), due to ethnic heterogeneity and disparate levels of political development among Nigeria's ethnic groups, power-sharing and access to national resources have always been a major cause of conflict. Thus, whenever such opportunities are presented, ethnic groups will strive to outdo each other thus threatening the process of national integration.

The failure of Aburi Agreement is an example of how political distrust and suspicion can threaten the process of nation-building in a plural society. Madiebo (1980) believed that lack of faith in implementing agreed-upon resolutions by both parties soon after the meeting pitched them against each other leading to the announcement of the Republic of Biafra. According to conflict theory, this action was fuelled by the contest between the groups for security, power and political recognition. This study also apply conflict theory to describe challenges with national integration and political instability in Nigeria. Onwubiko & Nwachukwu (20 24) describe Nigeria as a society where ethnic rivalry remains one of the dominant causes of political conflict. The authors posit that because political competition in Nigeria revolves around ethnic and regional lines, citizens have continuously accused governments of ethnic bias and favoritism. According to them, policies perceived to be elevating one ethnic group over others or marginalizing some groups in Nigeria have continued to make ethnic groups distrust each other. Applying these contemporary thoughts on ethnicity and politics, it can be said that unresolved ethnic competition caused the collapse of the Aburi Agreement and eventually caused the Nigerian civil war.

Similar to the article above, Osimen et al. (2022) describes Nigeria as a country where poor governance, lack of trust and political exclusion have hampered the process of national integration. They believe that anytime citizens feel government actions or policies are biased against them, there is a likelihood that they will push back through agitation or violence. During the civil war and preceding events that led to its outbreak, there was mistrust between Nigeria's federated government and the Eastern Region. Using Conflict Theory to analyze this lack of trust, we can conclude that failure of one party to implement Aburi agreements as faithfully as they had promised weakened the confidence of the other party.

Scholars like Parsons (1937) and Coser (1956) have criticized Conflict Theory as hyper-focused on analyzing conflict while there are instances where people share similar values and coexist peacefully. Functionalists believe that societies experience conflict as well as stability because social institutions promote interaction and cooperation between citizens. While the latter may be true, Conflict Theory applies immensely to analyzing the root causes of political instability and disunity in Nigerian politics. This is because power relations, political competition and ethnic rivalry have been central causes of political instability before and after Nigeria's independence. Nigeria's unstable politics can be linked to competition among ethnic groups for control of leadership positions and access to state resources.

Conflict Theory therefore offers a suitable explanation as to why the Aburi Agreement failed and how it affected Nigeria's efforts at national integration. This theory explains how both parties struggled for political power and control, were ethnically distrustful of each other, experienced political inequalities and had conflicting regional interests. Additionally, conflict theory shows the connection between political conflict and poor national integration among diverse groups. By applying Conflict Theory to understand Nigeria's struggle with ethnic rivalry and national integration, it is safe to conclude that failure of the Aburi Agreement was not a disagreement over constitutional provisions but a competition for power, identity and recognition.

The 1967 Aburi Accord

The 1967 Aburi Accord can be regarded as one of Nigeria's most significant political meetings because it was convened to save the country's unity during the height of political crisis. The meeting held at Aburi, Ghana on 4th and 5th January 1967, involved Nigerian delegates led by Yakubu Gowon and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. This meeting was necessitated by ethnic tensions, political uncertainties, and fears caused by the January and July 1966 military coups. The purpose of the delegates' conference was to create opportunities for political solutions and avoiding eventual break up of Nigeria.

In January 1966, the first military coup led to assassination of prominent political leaders who were mostly from Northern Nigeria. Achebe (2012) observes that majority of northerners became skeptical of the January coup because they suspected Igbos of conspiring to take over political power in Nigeria. The distrust grew even larger following July 1966 counter coup that killed many Igbo army generals. Thousands of Igbos living in Northern Nigeria were either massacred or forcefully evicted from the region. According to Achebe, this incident left many easterners living in fear under the leadership of Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu. The Eastern Region consequently demanded for more security of lives, autonomy, and constitutional safeguards before continuing to remain in Nigeria.

The Aburi meeting was therefore called to create an atmosphere of trust and conference among Nigerians to avoid civil war. Forsyth (1969) states that all resolutions agreed upon at Aburi were mainly centered on redefining Nigeria's political system in ways that would assuage people's fears and promote peaceful coexistence. Decentralization of power was one of the crucial points discussed at the conference. It was resolved that each region would have autonomy over its affairs while limited powers would be reserved for the federal government. The accord also recommended consensus in decision-making among military administrators and recognized autonomy of regions in Nigeria.

Aburi Accord also touched on reorganization of Nigerian military structure. Madiebo (1980) observes that it was agreed that all decisions reached by the military administrator would have to be approved by all regional military governors. This decision was intended to allay fears of domination by a particular region or ethnic group. Enthusiasts believed that decentralization of power would boost confidence among military administrators. It was further resolved that legislature and executive powers be decentralized to enable regions play more significant roles in governance. Eastern Region's desire for a loose federation was the main motivation behind these resolutions.

Ideally, the resolution reached at Aburi conference would have gone a long way in restoring confidence among Nigerians. However, mistrust soon developed over the manner intended interpretations of the resolutions agreed upon by both parties. De St. Jorre (1972) notes that Ojukwu and Eastern Region believed that Aburi Accord had created a confederation government where powers of the federal government would be limited. However, Gowon and federal Military Government interpreted the conference resolutions as a mere temporary measure not to be firmly binding on the government. As a result of this disagreement, there were bitter feelings between the Federal Military Government and Eastern Region.

Misunderstanding over Decree No. 8 further worsened relationship between the Federal Military Government and Eastern Region. The federal government promulgated Decree No. 8 to provide legal backing for the implementation of Aburi Accord. Madiebo (1980) explains that General Ojukwu disagreed with the decree and as such called on his colleagues to reject the decree. According to Kirk-Green (1971), the Eastern Region felt cheated when they learned how the Federal Military Government had tactically modified the initial resolutions agreed upon during the Aburi meeting. Trust was destroyed and many Igbos believed that there was no longer any guarantee of their safety if they remained in Nigeria.

The failed implementation of Aburi Accord had negative consequences for Nigerian unity and national integration. Falola & Heaton (2008) assert that breakdown of the agreement deprived Nigeria of the last window of opportunity for peace talk before the outbreak of Nigerian civil war. During the height of political crisis, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu declared Eastern Nigeria an independent nation called Republic of Biafra on 30th May 1967. Not willing to allow secession, Federal Government ordered its military forces to reclaim the Eastern Region thus marking the beginning of Nigerian civil war which lasted from 19 67 to 1970. This war caused more division among ethnic groups, suffering of the people, and death of millions of innocent Nigerians.

The significance of the Aburi Accord has attracted numerous scholarly researches because of its roles in Nigeria's political history. For instance, Suberu (2001) asserts that Aburi Accord taught Nigerians lessons on importance of good governance, constitutional ambiguity, and power sharing in a diverse society. Failures of Aburi Accord brought to light how ethnic suspicions and power rivalry could destroy opportunities for political dialogues. The issue of restructuring remains a contemporary topic of discussion in Nigeria today. How power should be shared between the federal and state government continues to be debated. Resource control and true federalism are also contentious issues that could be traced back to the events that transpired during the Aburi Accord meeting.

The Failure of the Aburi Accord

The collapse of the 1967 Aburi Accord resulted from multiple political and military events that heightened ethnic suspicion, mistrust, and polarization among Nigeria's regions. Some of these events include the January 1966 coup d'etat, the July 1966 counter-coup, the massacre of Igbos in Northern Nigeria, the failure of political leadership in Nigeria, and disagreement over military and constitutional restructuring after Aburi meeting. The confluence of these events created tensions that resulted in mistrust and lack of a stable atmosphere necessary for implementing the Aburi agreement resolutions.

The January 15 1966 coup organized by young Nigerian army officers is the first important event that led to the Aburi conference. In this coup, several political leaders were murdered, most of them coming from the Northern and Western Regions of Nigeria. According to Achebe (2012), despite claims by coup organizers that they were working for national political reform, ethnic interests dominated the selection of coup members. The coupists were mainly from the Eastern Region of Nigeria, which alarmed Northerners who thought it was an attempt to make Igbos take over power. This act damaged Nigeria' national political integration and created suspicion among ethnic groups in the military and political leadership.

The second event is the July 19 counter-coup, which

significantly worsened ethnic relations between Nigeria' various ethnic groups. During the counter-coup, General Aguiyi-ironsi (the head of state who took power after the January coup) was killed together with many Igbo army officers. Achebe (2012) reports that the July coup was followed by mob action against Igbos living in Northern Nigeria. Thousands of Igbo citizens were killed, properties confiscated, and many others fled to the Eastern Region as refugees. The north' action created fear and suspicion among Easterners who continued to call for their region' safety and protection. Arguably, the massacre of Igbos in Northern Nigeria in 19B6 was an event that made the unity of Nigeria almost impossible. Madiebo (1980) notes that Igbo massacre in the North created serious humanitarian problems that the Federal Government could not ameliorate. This incident diminished Nigerians confidence in their country' ability to keep them safe and made Easterners believe that staying in Nigeria might endanger their lives. This incident shaped Ojukwu" decisions and rhetoric after the Aburi meeting.

The failure of Nigeria's political leadership also caused the collapse of the Aburi Accord. After the July 1966counter-coup, Nigeria was politically led by military administrators who were not constitutionally empowered to make or implement far-reaching decisions. According to Forsyth (1969), this constitutional weakness created confusion regarding the roles and powers of the federal government and the regions. As evident after Aburi meeting, both Gowon's and Ojukwu's teams disagreed over who had power to implement the decisions made at the conference. At Aburi, it could be argued that both sides reached an agreement on how to end the political crisis. The summit was officially communally successfully, but unknown to the conference organizers, the Eastern Region had a different interpretation of the agreement. Eastern Region military governor, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, thought that the resolutions provided for a looser confederation giving more autonomy to Nigeria' regions. According to de St. Jorre (1972), the federal military government led by Yakubu Gowon interpreted the Aburi agreement differently. They believed that the conference resolutions kept Nigeria strong and united. This difference in perception was one of the major reasons why the Aburi Accord failed.

After returning from the Aburi conference, the Federal Military Government enacted Decree No. 8, which detailed how power would be restructured in Nigeria. According to Madiebo (1980), Ojukwu felt betrayed because Nigeria's leadership introduced Decree No. 8. Ojukwu and his advisers thought it would change the power structure agreed upon in Aburi. Indeed, it limited the autonomy of regional governments. Decree No. 8 escalated the political crisis because Eastern Region rejected the constitutional order proposed by Gowon. This disagreement affected trust levels between Nigeria' political leaders, which eventually weakened the Aburi Accord. The final but notable event that led to the failure of the Aburi Accord was the complete breakdown of efforts to keep Nigeria one and indivisible. As political rivalry intensified, Eastern Region leaders began moves to declare political independence from Nigeria. Falola & Heaton (2008) observe that failure to implement the Aburi Accord made Eastern Region leaders believe that Nigeria was no longer safe for their people. By May 1967, Eastern Region declared the establishment of the Republic of Biafra, leading to the collapse of Aburi Accord and the Nigeria Civil War.

From the discussion above, it is important to note that Nigeria's fragile federal system was another reason why Aburi Accord failed. Suberu (2001) argues that Nigeria' ethnic heterogeneity, uneven development, and weak state institutional arrangements discouraged political compromise. Ethnic competition and rivalry prevented trust-building among leaders at the national level. Since there was no assurance that no ethnic group would dominate others through political maneuvering, it became difficult to trust one another. As a result, the Aburi Accord failed because Nigeria lacked the foundational trust needed for a country so diverse as Nigeria to thrive.

Lessons from the Failure of the Aburi Accord

The Aburi Accord failure of 19th7 offers Nigeria several lessons on national integration, conflict

resolution, and political development. First, the crisis highlighted the importance of trust in politics and government. At Aburi, delegates met to find solutions to the political crisis caused by the 1966 military coups and subsequent ethnic violence in different parts of Nigeria. While delegates reached consensus on ideas aimed at keeping Nigeria one country, conflicting interpretations of outcomes and failure to implement agreed resolutions fueled mistrust between delegates from the Federal Military Government and those from the Eastern Region. Achebe (2012) notes that trust deficit between Nigeria's leaders made it difficult for them to live together peacefully which eventually led to the Nigerian Civil War. The experience at Aburi highlights the need for trust in politics especially when trying to resolve crises through negotiations.

Another lesson learned from Aburi Accord is that constitutional issues and communication are crucial to successful conflict resolution. The lack of common understanding of provisions reached at Aburi was a critical reason the accord failed. The eastern delegates believed that the resolutions provided for regional autonomy while Federal Military Government viewed the agreement differently (Forsyth, 19 69). Constitutional issues influenced by poor communication among political actors were responsible for failure of Aburi Accord. This lesson is important because ambiguities in constitutional provisions can undermine peaceful coexistence among citizens of diverse backgrounds. Political actors need to ensure there is a common understanding of the law in order to promote peace-building initiatives.

Aburi also teaches us that inclusive governance promotes national integration in a diverse society such as Nigeria. Nigeria is ethnically diverse, and its politics should reflect the interests of different ethnic groups. Politicians agreed to meet at Aburi because there were concerns about domination, marginalization, and insecurity among Nigeria's three largest ethnic groups. Suberu (2001) posits that Nigeria can only achieve national integration when all ethnic groups feel secure and included in politics. At Aburi, delegates reached agreements that were supposed to protect the interests of all parties involved. Consequently, learning from the events that led to the meeting will help promote inclusive governance, fairness, and power sharing among Nigeria's ethnic groups.

Ethnic mistrust was another lesson learned from the Aburi meeting. Nigeria's political crises after the failed accord were characterized by ethnic division along regional lines. Participants at the Aburi meeting could not trust each other enough to maintain their commitment to a united Nigeria. Falola & Heaton (2008) assert that ethnicity has remained one of Nigeria's biggest challenges since independence. Political divisions along ethnic lines continue to hamper the process of nation-building in Nigeria. The events leading to the Aburi meeting serve as a lesson that Nigeria needs leaders who are committed to promoting inter-ethnic trust and peace. Political leaders should rise above ethnic sentiments in order to promote national unity.

The final lesson Nigeria should learn from Aburi failure is that sincere dialogue, compromise, and forgiveness are critical to resolving political crises. The meeting at Aburi was one of the last chances Nigeria had to avoid political violence. Unfortunately, lack of commitment to dialogue and forgiveness among Nigerian leaders led to the failure of the accord and eventually escalated political violence that led to civil war. The lesson here is that political actors should always embrace dialogue as a way of resolving political disagreements. Contemporary Nigeria should borrow a leaf from the events that led to civil war by ensuring that political disagreements are resolved peacefully. Nigeria faces numerous political crises today, which require sincere dialogue and compromise to achieve lasting peace. National questions such as federalism, restructuring, resource control, and national integration remain contentious, and citizens should work towards resolving them through peaceful dialogue.

Relevance of the Failure of the Aburi Accord to Contemporary Nigeria

The Aburi Accord of 1967 is relevant to contemporary Nigeria because several of the issues raised at the meeting are still influencing national discourse in contemporary Nigerian politics. The

meeting was initially called to find lasting solutions to perceived problems of political exclusion, lack of regional autonomy, debates about federalism, insecurity, and lack of national integration. Today, discussions about restructuring, resource control, revenue allocation, power sharing, and national representation are still dominating Nigeria's political space. The enduring relevance of Aburi Accord thus indicates that Nigeria has not fully addressed key problems that threatened the nation's unity half a century ago.

Federalism and restructuring remain central themes in contemporary Nigeria, making the Aburi Accord relevant today. Delegates at Aburi met to find a middle ground that would grant Nigeria's regions more autonomy while maintaining national unity. Failure to implement this agreement eventually led to Nigeria's civil war and gradual centralization of political power under the military. Suberu (2001) explains that centralization of power and concentration of resources at the federal level have continued to generate demands for restructuring and constitutional amendments. Many Nigerians, especially groups campaigning for restructuring and resource control, make reference to the Aburi Accord as they agitate for a more decentralized federal system. In this regard, the accord remains relevant as Nigeria continues to debate the future of federalism in the country.

National integration and political inclusion are also significant aspects of the Aburi Accord that are still relevant in today's Nigeria. Many ethnic and regional groups continue to feel marginalized and unfairly treated by the Nigerian government. Adebajo & Olawunmi (2022) explain that perceptions of marginalization and lack of equal representation can easily fuel ethnic tensions and weaken national unity. Events that eventually led to Nigeria's civil war began when ethnic leaders felt threatened and politically marginalized. Similar agitations can be observed in Nigeria today as regional groups feel excluded from political participation. Therefore, lessons from Aburi are still relevant to ensuring inclusive governance, equitable political appointments, and fair distribution of national resources in Nigeria.

Dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, and agreement-building are crucial aspects of the Aburi Accord that are still relevant to contemporary Nigeria. The meeting itself was an attempt to find a lasting solution to Nigeria's political crisis through dialogue and agreement. Although it failed, the delegates were able to come together and find common ground to maintain Nigeria's unity. According to Osimen et al. (20 22), enduring peace in plural societies depends on leaders' abilities to foster dialogue and continuously build on negotiated agreements. Nigeria is faced with several security challenges that threaten the nation's stability, such as agitations for separatism, communal violence, and political intolerance. Therefore, the need for dialogue highlighted by the Aburi Accord remains relevant to finding lasting solutions to Nigeria's political crises.

Ethnic relations is another reason why the Aburi Accord remains relevant to contemporary Nigeria. Nigeria is still facing challenges associated with ethnicity because it continues to play an influential role in Nigerian politics. Ethnicity influences voting patterns, public opinion on national issues, and access to political positions. Achebe (2012) posits that Nigerian ethnic groups are still haunted by the events of civil war, and unresolved historical animosities continue to affect their relationship with each other. Nigeria's leaders failed to trust each other after Aburi which weakened their ability to form a united front. Contemporary Nigeria needs to learn how to promote national trust, justice, and consciousness in order to attain lasting peace and unity.

The Aburi Accord therefore remains relevant to contemporary Nigeria because many of the lessons it provided are still applicable in today's politics. National questions such as federalism, restructuring, resource control, security, and ethnic inclusion still shape political discourse in Nigeria. As long as the underlying problems that led to the Aburi meeting are not adequately addressed, the lessons it provides will continue to be relevant in Nigerian politics. By analyzing successes and failures of political agreements such as Aburi Accord, Nigeria can chart a new course towards unity, stability, and democratic governance.

Conclusion

The unsuccessful nature of the Aburi Accord of 1967 heralded a dramatic period in Nigeria's political history and dealt a serious blow on national integration. Not only did the parties involved in the agreement differ in their understanding of how it should be implemented but trust was lost between them as the resolutions reached at Aburi were not honoured by both the Federal Military Government and Eastern region thus leading up to secession and the Nigerian civil war. Therefore, the inability of political leaders to find lasting solutions to the disagreement that arose from the 1966 military coups and distrust amongst the major ethnic nationalities fractured the young nation's federal system and set the stage for civil war. As a result, national integration was affected as ethnic suspicion, political exclusion and lack of creative conflict resolution approach in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria became pronounced.

It can therefore be concluded that the Aburi experience has shown that national integration cannot be achieved by mere constitutional fiat but through justice, sincerity, inclusiveness, dialogue and fair treatment of all groups that make up the Nigerian state. Also, findings from this research have shown that the issues which led to the collapse of the Aburi Accord are still very pertinent today as the nation grapples with the challenges of federalism, restructuring, resource control and political marginalization amongst others. Improving our national integration will require promoting good governance, effective federalism, civic education, economic development, and non-violent resolution of conflicts. Political leaders should learn from the past by being sincere in their dealings, respect negotiated agreements and always put the interest of the nation above ethnic, religious and personal interests.

Recommendations

i. Political appointments, recruitment into public service, and policy execution must be firmly anchored on fairness, justice, and equity. The Federal Character Principle should be strengthened to ensure no ethnic, religious, or regional group feels dominated or marginalized. By prioritizing broad-based inclusion over sectional interests, the government can build public confidence, reduce inter-ethnic friction, and foster a genuine sense of national belonging among all citizens.

ii. Government should implement constitutional amendments that reinforce true federalism, power devolution, and fiscal autonomy for constituent units. Granting greater regional autonomy over local affairs and resource control addresses long-standing grievances regarding central domination. Restructuring inter-governmental relations will allow local issues to be managed more effectively while preserving overarching allegiance to the Nigerian state.

iii. Sustained avenues for inter-ethnic dialogue, mediation, and proactive peace-building mechanisms must be established to resolve political and communal disputes. Political actors and community leaders should embrace peaceful negotiation and consensus-building over aggression or non-adherence to agreements. Learning from past political missteps requires maintaining transparency, honoring accords, and addressing simmering tensions through constructive engagement before they escalate.

iv. National integration must be actively nurtured through civic education, national orientation programs, and equitable economic development. Educational bodies, government institutions, and civil society should enhance initiatives like the NYSC scheme to promote patriotism, mutual tolerance, and civic responsibility among youth. Simultaneously, targeted investments in infrastructure, social amenities, and job creation across peripheral regions will eliminate economic disparities and reinforce national cohesion.

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