



The Politics of Restructuring and the Nigerian National Question

by

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Abstract

This study examined the prospects of further restructuring as a panacea for resolving the Nigerian National Question. It chronicled the various instances where restructuring has been carried out even before the country became independent till date. It was discovered that all those efforts have not resolved the ethnic sentiments and agitations that has been the bane of social integration and national cohesion in Nigeria. Using the historical descriptive method, it was recommended, among others, the constitution of a sovereign national conference to enable the various peoples that make up the polyglot called Nigeria to determine their fate and future.

Key words: National Question, Restructuring, Self Determination, Federalism, Sovereign National Conference.

1. Introduction

The Nigerian National Question is a composite of several questions, all relating to the challenges of national integration and citizenship rights. Some of the sub-categories of the question include the following: To what extent do citizens and groups feel a sense of identity within the Nigerian State? Does the State protect citizens' interests? Is justice and fairness preserved in the manner in which the State relates to every section of the citizenry? To what extent is justice dispensed in the distribution of proceeds of resources extracted in certain territories of the Nigerian State? To what extent is the political leadership of the Nigerian State just in its decisions and execution of matters affecting various groups and constituencies? To what extent are Nigerians able to express their uniqueness as a group (culturally, religiously and economically) without being hindered by the structure of power in the country? The national question therefore, is a conjecture as to whether Nigerians will be better off to remain together in the present configuration of the country or whether they would be better off to go their separate ways and maintain their separate identities as it was during the pre-colonial period.

The Nigerian national question, according to Ajayi (2016:1) has become a byword "...for all the controversies, doubts and experimentation that surrounds our search for stability, legitimacy and development." According to him,

the National Question concerns the fundamental basis of our political existence, that is to say, our constitution as the basic law, which governs the co-existence of Nigerians and individuals and cultural groups within one political system or state. It involves the sharing of power and management of our resources in terms of access, control and distribution. It therefore involves not only such issues as revenue allocation and the creation of states and local government areas, but also education, religion, language and cultural policies.

Ayokhai and Peter (2016:247) put it this way:

Nigeria's effort at nation-building has been severely challenged by the protraction of the 'national question'. The national question is conceived by scholars as consisting of the political mobilizations and struggles by dissatisfied and aggrieved groups to redress and exact more just and equitable accommodation from the Nigerian nation-state. It is also seen as being multidimensional, involving religious and ideological conflicts, fear of northern domination, the hegemonic contest among the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and the Igbo, as well as the struggles of the ethnic minorities. In fact, nation-building efforts of successive governments and regimes have been frustrated by the national question.

The term 'The National Question' was popularized by Professor Obaro Ikime's (1986) famous lecture titled "Towards Understanding the National Question." The discussion, often heated and intensely polarizing, has tended to focus on the competition and conflict between different ethnic groups to control the political power and resources of the nation. This paper will adopt a historical descriptive method to examine the politics of restructuring and the Nigerian National Question.

Nigeria was born on a faulty foundation with the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 by Sir Frederick Lugard. This exercise, which was meant to provide administrative convenience for the colonial government was not in the interest of the amalgamated peoples. It was done in total disregard of the different language and ethnic affinities and therefore was not geared towards the integration of the natives into a unified nation. Since then, Nigeria has undergone several phases of restructuring, all aimed at giving a sense of belonging to the component parts. Three regions were created in 1946, the Northern Region, the Eastern Region and the Western Region. Following the creation of the three regions, demands for further regional creation were mounted by the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) in the North, the Mid-Western Movement in the West and the Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) Movement in the East. Unfortunately, the creation of these regions resulted in the creation of more minorities in each region as the larger ethnic groups in the different regions overwhelming

the minorities therein. This heightened the fear of domination among the minorities in the newly created regions and ultimately to more agitations.

These agitations led to the setting up of the Wilkins Commission in 1958. The Commission opposed further regionalization in preference for constitutional guarantees against neglect in the form of fundamental rights and the establishment of Development Commissions such as the Niger Delta Development Board (1959), similar to the Niger Delta Development Commission. Unfortunately, this did not satisfy the yearnings of the minorities for autonomy expressed as separate states of their own. Therefore, the fourth region, the mid-western region was created in 1963 by constitutional amendment. Yet the demands continued unabated. Persistent pressure brought about the creation of many more states and this brought the number of states to 12 states in 1967, 19 states in 1976, 17 states in 1987, 30 states in 1991 and 36 states with 774 local government areas and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja in 1996.

The foregoing constitutes the background that informs the provision of section 3(1) of the 1999 constitution which provides that: “there shall be 36 states in Nigeria. Similarly, section 3(6) of the same constitution provides for 774 local government areas, including the six Area Councils in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.” However, this has not assuaged the demands for the creation of more states and local government areas in the country.

2. Statement of the Problem

In spite of the numerous restructurings that Nigeria has undergone since independence, the agitation for self-determination and separate existence by the over 250 ethnic nationalities that make up the ‘amalgam’ called Nigeria continues unabated. In spite of constitutional provisions on national integration in the First Schedule of the Nigerian Constitution, ethnic loyalties die hard. The above schedule provides for and promotes national integration and also ensures that loyalty to the nation overrides sectional loyalties. The constitution does not just promote national integration in the abstract. It sets out what should be done concretely to give effect to national integration. This notwithstanding, ethnic attachment still supersedes patriotism to the nation.

Bush (2018:1) puts it this way:

A century and counting since British colonial overseers welded them, the southern and northern protectorates have not only failed abysmally to blend into one nation that Nigeria may have been expected to be – that is, if she was not programmed to fail ab initio – but it would seem both regions have also further unbundled. With the south now better known by its south-south, southeast and southwest splinters, ditto the north (north-central, northwest and northeast), this country has been running without the lubricant called cohesion or synergy, a fundamental ingredient in nation building. In fact, things are much worse: Nigerians prefer their individual smithereens (village, local government area or state) to the country!

Sagay, as quoted by Briggs (2017) argued that the Nigerian National Question is further compounded by the over centralization of the country's federalism and this impedes the development of the component units. This, according to her necessitates the call for "...the practice of federalism that Nigeria claims to be and for restructuring" (Briggs, 2017:2). Federalism gives a measure of autonomy to the component units. This is not true in Nigeria. A situation where the states have to go cap in hand to beg for money gotten from the resources mined from their shores smacks on federalism and this further creates disaffection in the body-politic. Every effort, including the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Quota system, national character, etc., to integrate the various peoples of Nigeria into a unified whole have proved abortive. The promotion of national integration as reflected in the provisions of section 14(3) and (4) and section 219(6) of the constitution which seeks to promote the participation of members of all ethnic groups in the governance process at all levels have not been able to solve this problem. Military coups before 1989 as well as corruption and improprieties in public life can be traced to this fact.

According to Ojiako (1981) as quoted by Nyoyoko and Essien (2012), the faulty foundation upon which the disparate ethnic groups were crammed together to form the country today called Nigeria has created the central political problem for the country since independence. That is, the problem of ethnic pluralism. It has been difficult to find a means of bringing about real integration of these disparate peoples. "From Akwa Ibom State in the South South to Sokoto in the North West and from Bornu State in North-East to Lagos State in the South West, one still encounters the diverse tongues and conflicting cultures" (Nyoyoko and Essien 2012).

Thus, Nigeria is a highly pluralized and fractionalized nation-state. It is not only split along ethnic lines, but also along cultural, linguistic and religious lines. Due to this segmentation and cleavages, conflicts connected with cultural values, social identity, material rewards, etc., are deep-rooted in the country's body-politic. Ethnic conflicts and communal divisions between the Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria have bred a lot of ills in the country.

The political hegemony of one section of the country over the rest has engendered a lot of disaffection among the citizens in Nigeria. The injustice in the creation of states by the military regimes of the time has further given the north an edge over the south. All the northern states as at 1976 have been split several times and funded by the income generated from the south while the states in the south that were created the same time have remained the same and continue to receive same allocation. For instance, Lagos state which was the same with Sokoto state in 1976 in terms of number of local government areas still remains just a state with its original 20 local governments while Sokoto state has been split three times into four (4) states with 83 local governments from its original 20 local governments. In 1976, Niger state was carved out from Sokoto state. In 1991, Kebbi state was again carved out from Sokoto state; and in 1996, Zamfara state was carved out from Sokoto state. These four (4), states have between them 83 Local Governments. Niger State consists of twenty-five (25) local government areas; Kebbi State consists of twenty-one (21) local government areas; Zamfara State consists of

fourteen (14) local government areas; and Sokoto State consists of twenty-three (23) local government areas. This has increased the revenue allocated to the northern states vis-à-vis the allocation to the southern states.

Such political hegemony has become difficult to abolish, in spite of the provisions of section 14(3) of the constitution which stipulates that:

The composition of the Government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

Most administrations since independence have not obeyed this constitutional provision. The composition of the Buhari's administration, in particular does not seem to be in consonance with the provisions of this section of the constitution (see Table 1 on page 16).

3. Aim and Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To examine the various demands for restructuring as a panacea for resolving the national question.
- ii. To show the need for the constitution of a consultative and participatory process for the resolution of the national question.
- iii. To examine the possibility of successfully restructuring Nigeria without violence or war.

4. Theoretical Framework:

This study examined the national question under the framework of "nationalism." Nationalism is coterminous with patriotism – a sense of loyalty and devotion to one's nation. Nationalism views the nation-state as paramount for the realization of social, economic, and cultural aspirations of a people. Nationalism is a spiritual sentiment that is manifested principally by a feeling of unity, oneness and communality among a people. Such feeling derives from common descent, common historical background, common language, and religion, etc. Members of a "nation" owe their loyalty to their clan, tribe, village, or ethnic group to which they have a sentimental attachment. The development of a sense of nationalism is built through nation-building or state-building. Nation-building refers to the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state while state building is the consolidation of state power through modernization and reconstruction. Nation building involves the development of behaviours, values, language, institutions, infrastructure aimed at the creation, concretization, protection and preservation of the national identity and distinction of the nation – the creation of patriotic sentiment in the people. Nigeria's attempts at nation-building has involved the implementation of the following policies: Federal Character principle, boundary

adjustment (creation of states), revenue allocation, protection of minorities rights, quota system in appointments and schools' admissions, NYSC scheme, etc. In spite of these efforts, one discovers in Nigeria that the citizens are more attached to their ethnic groups than to the country. In other words, Nigerians tend to be more patriotic to their nationalities than to the State. This accounts for the failure of all the national integration policies and programmes of the Federal Government to bring about social cohesion among the citizenry. The National Youth Service Corps Scheme, the Federal Character Principle and the Quota system, among others, have failed to bring about integration of Nigerians into a unified nation.

This problem is compounded by improvement in technology and communications which have broadened the awareness of the Nigerian people beyond their ethnic groups. Today political enlightenment has spread to the villages resulting in a wider political participation of people at the grassroots in the political process. With such enlightenment, people now know their rights and have expectations from the government. Rural groups who were once apathetic now get involved in the struggle for political power and also demand the opportunity to determine their fate as a nation and of sharing responsibility for the future well-being of the country. Unfortunately, these aspirations have not been met by the present system where the major ethnic groups usurp all the power and opportunities to better the lot of their people to the detriment of the minorities. This has heightened the agitation for national identity by the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. According to Samson (1999:9), "Nigerians individually and collectively tend not to have allegiance to the state imposed by the British in 1914.... Hence, most Nigerians irrespective of their nationalist claims have the tendency to first identify with their ethnic roots before identifying themselves as Nigerians". To borrow the language of Achebe (1958), it could be agreed with that the national question is no longer at ease and the falcon can no longer hear the falconer. Things have fallen apart. The center can no more hold as long as the national question remains unsettled.

In recent times, insurgency, terrorism, and genocide are all reflections of the unsettled national question. This study, therefore, seeks to resolve the following posers: what therapeutic measures could be adopted to heal the continued ethnic cravings for relevance in the Nigerian state? Will further restructuring (that is, the creation of more states or local government areas), on the one hand, or the granting of peaceful self-determination to the six geopolitical zones, on the other hand, settle the national question in Nigeria?

In the context of this study, the term, "the national question" relates to the possibility of welding the various components of the Nigerian state into a uniform nation with the characteristics that make up a nation – viz; common language, common culture, common religion, etc., with the resultant effect that the oppression of ethnic nationalities and or minorities is minimized. This will lead to an increase in patriotism in the body-politic. Therefore, a discussion of the term "minority" as well as other relevant terms used herein will be of benefit in explaining the national question.

Minorities

According to Capotorti (1977), a minority is a group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, and is in a non-dominant position whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristic, which differ from those of the rest of the population and who, if only implicitly, maintain a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language. It is also a term used for a variety of issues related to nationalism. The term “corporate existence” refers to the uniting of diverse and variegated peoples into one homogeneous body within a particular geographical entity or country. Due to the non-resolution of the National Question, the corporate existence of Nigeria has been seriously threatened since independence by various challenges including terrorism, electoral violence, fiscal federalism, ethnicity, corruption and secessionist movements.

Fiscal Federalism.

The politics of resource control and Nigerian fiscal federalism is one other major threat to the corporate existence of the Nigerian State. Section 162 (1) & (2) of the Nigerian Constitution promotes the marginalization of the minorities in resource allocation. The section states, in alia:

the Federation shall maintain a special account to be called “the Federation Account” into which shall be paid all revenues collected by the Government of the Federation, except the proceeds from the personal income tax of the personnel of the armed forces of the Federation, the Nigeria Police Force, the Ministry or department of government charged with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and the residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. (2) The President, upon the receipt of advice from the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission, shall table before the National Assembly proposals for revenue allocation from the Federation Account, and in determining the formula, the National Assembly shall take into account, the allocation principles, especially those of population, equality of States, internal revenue generation, land mass, terrain as well as population density.

This section favours the north and northern rulers who have held the reins of power in the country over three quarters of the country’s 58 years and have exploited this provision by creating more states in the north as mentioned above thereby giving the leeway for the north to take a lion share of the revenue from the Federal Account.

The perverse and unfair treatment of the peoples and states in the Niger Delta region from where oil (the major export product of Nigeria) is extracted has led to agitations by the Niger Delta militants in the recent past. Quoting Ifeka (2001) and Oladeji (2005), Ayokhai and Peter (2016:253) reveal that:

This feeling against Nigeria’s fiscal federalism by the peoples of the Niger Delta has been rationalized on several grounds. From the perspectives of the oil producing areas,

there are many reasons for the struggle. Though shades of opinions tend to vary between the communities, the states and the various groups that claim a stake in the struggle, it includes the fact that 60 per cent of the dollar value realized from the petroleum sector goes to the Federal Government while the balance of 40 per cent goes to the multinational oil companies ... thus tilting the intergovernmental balance between the Federal Government and the states in the sharing of the proceeds from petroleum resources in favor of the Federal Government.

Quoting Mbanefoh, *et. al.* (1998), Ayokhai and Peter (2016:253) further argued that this problem

is compounded by the perception of the Niger Delta elites that the relegation of the 'derivation principle' is a reflection of the politics of the elites of the majority ethnic groups, particularly of the north, to perpetually subordinate them in the intra-elite struggle for power that characterized Nigerian politics. Hence, they have argued that the intelligentsia of the ruling majority ethnic groups consider derivation as excessively favoring the minority oil producing states and therefore capable of enthroning a radical shift in revenue from the very influential and powerful majority groups to the minority groups, a situation which could upset the status quo. The Niger Delta peoples have thus anchored their agitation for a fair fiscal federalism on the return to the 'derivation principle' that subsisted in inter-governmental fiscal relations prior to the ascendancy of petrol as the major revenue earner for Nigeria. By this they mean a situation whereby the state governments control the mineral resources found in their territories, retain fifty percent of earnings from the resources, while the federal government gets twenty percent and thirty percent goes to the 'distributable pool' as was the case before the civil war.

According to Ayokhai and Peter (2016:248), the politics of the Nigeria fiscal federalism is the threat to the Nigerian corporate existence:

One of the major dynamics held culpable for the intractability of the national question in Nigeria is the fiscal regime imposed by successive governments and the struggles of the ethnic groups, including the ethnic minority groups in the Niger Delta area, to overthrow it and enthrone a fiscal regime that does not only ensure social but also environmental justice.

Another source of discontent, according to Ayokhai and Peter (2016) is the fact that the revenue paid back to the affected states of the Niger Delta region from the derivation principle is grossly inadequate while the region is relatively underdeveloped and officially neglected. Also, the practice of the full implementation of the derivation principle before petroleum became significant seems to kindle the feeling of

marginalization in the peoples and states in the Niger Delta region. This is not helped by their knowledge of the practice in other federations and other oil producing countries which decentralized the ownership and control of mineral rights. The need for environmental justice is an added source of discontent in the Niger Delta (Ejumudo, 2014). The brutal response and the violent suppression of the peoples' agitations for social and environmental justice which the struggle against the regime of fiscal federalism in Nigeria represents equally intensified the peoples' feeling of alienation from the Nigerian federal state. Finally, the refusal of the Federal Government to implement the thirteen per cent derivation principle which is provided for in the 1999 constitution, according to (Ayokhai and Peter, 2016:254) "...further aggravates the angst of the states and peoples of the Niger Delta. These sources of dissatisfaction with Nigeria's fiscal federalism combined to alienate the peoples and states of the Niger Delta region and thus complicated the resolution of the national question in the country. This deprivation has provoked the minorities in the Niger Delta region to resort to insurgent activities and has further impacted on the vexed national question in Nigeria."

Ethnicity:

During colonialism, the colonial masters relied and made use of force as an instrument of subduing and subjecting the local people in exercising and furthering their parochial interests. This consequently was threatening to the indigenous people who were compelled to seek and look for assistance and survival in the traditional solidarity groups such as the ethnic and national groups thus: the beginning of ethnic identification, affiliation, and nationalism. The ethnic groups at this time served as the only way or platform for resistance to colonialism.

Ethnic consciousness gradually graduated into political consciousness because, ethnic-urban associations were able to provide the required leadership to the rural dwellers and above all political enlightenment. Also, these ethnic-based associations provided a platform for nationalist activities in the country as the first nationalist movement to oppose British colonialism. Ethnicity still dominated the political scenario after the 1960 independence in Nigeria. The political parties remained regionally (ethnically) based and when the then leader of the Action Group (AG) Chief Obafemi Awolowo attempted to expand the horizon and reach of the party to a national level, he received opposition from his very own deputy, Chief S. L. Akintola, who believed that the party should continue to maintain their regional symbol and sustain their grip on the ethnic factor and sentiments. This conflict of ideology eventually led to the breakup of the party and the formation of the United People's Party (UPP) by Chief S. L. Akintola which later aligned with the NCNC and became the Regional Premier.

The entry of the military after the military coup of January 15, 1966, which brought Major General Aguiyi Ironsi as the new Head of State, was believed to be ethnically inspired. The July 1966 coup was perceived as a coup against the Igbo residents in the Northern region. The two coups apparently led to the Civil War in 1967.

The Second Republic was not free from ethnic strife, though the military doused ethnic tensions, but it failed to suppress ethnic consciousness among the populace.

Contrarily, due to the coercive nature of military rule and its arbitrary power people were generally alienated from the state and cleave to traditional solidarities and this was also transferred to the Second Republic.

Another major event which portrayed ethnic division in Nigeria was the annulment of the 1993 general elections by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida which was widely believed to have been won by Chief Moshood Kasimawo Abiola. This annulment was widely interpreted as a calculated attempt to sideline the Southerners from the corridors of power in Nigeria by the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. This was greeted with a widespread rage and civil unrest in the Southwest and led to the transfer of power to the interim government of Chief Ernest Shonekan, a Yoruba. The bloodless coup of 1993 resulted in the takeover of power by the military and the abolition of all democratic institutions except the judiciary. The resistance to the Abacha junta served as a unifying factor for various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

This solidarity was expected to be consolidated with the democratic experiments since 1999, but quite unfortunately, ethnic consciousness and prejudice still reared its ugly head during each democratic administration. Regrettably, the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari does not seem to camouflage its ethnic bias. In spite of the hue and cry from the citizenry as well as other well-meaning leaders outside Nigeria, the Hausa/Fulani people have greater access to both political and administrative positions in different areas of the public sector.

This has heightened the marginalization of other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Today we have the Hausa-Fulanis in management positions in several public institutions in the country. This way, the Hausa-Fulanis of Nigeria have gained subtle control of every sector of the country. This situation will be difficult to reverse. It has given the northerners an undue advantage and opportunities in every part of the country and in every institution such as NIMASA, Nigeria Port Authority (NPA), Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and Regional Basin Development Agencies (RBDA). In every strategic position/department like Procurement and Finance, a Hausa-Fulani must be represented. It is a strategic agenda. For instance, in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) which was established to ameliorate the suffering of the indigenes of the Niger Delta from the effect of environmental pollution caused by oil exploration in the area, Hausa-Fulanis are members of board of directors. In the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) under the Federal Ministry of Environment, which was set up under a PDP administration to manage the clean-up of Ogoni land, there is also a Hausa-Fulani on the board of directors and by extension, there are Hausa-Fulani workers in that Commission doing daily office work. It is difficult for an Urhobo or Ijaw or Ikwerre man to get a job in that Commission, but Hausa-Fulanis work there, in a Commission that was established for the Ogonis. This arrangement will also ensure that the companies that will get contracts awards will either be owned by a Hausa-Fulani or have a Hausa-Fulani fronting for them. A survey of the Buhari's Federal Executive Council (FEC) during his first term as President shows that not only is FEC dominated by northern Muslims, but the Council of HYPREP is also dominated by northerners.

Table 1: The Federal Executive Council under President Muhammadu Buhari (2015 – 2019)

S/No	Names	Portfolio	State	Region
1.	Chris Ngige	Minister of Labour & Employment	Anambra	South
2.	Kayode Fayemi	Minister of Solid Minerals	Ekiti	South
3.	Rotimi Amaechi	Minister of Transportation	Rivers	South
4.	Babatunde Fashola	Minister of Power, Works and Housing	Lagos	South
5.	Abdulrahman Dambazau	Minister of Interior	Kano	North
6.	Aisha Alhassan	Minister of Women Affairs	Taraba	North
7.	Ogbonaya Onu	Minister of Science and Technology	Ebonyi	South
8.	Kemi Adeosun	Minister of Finance	Ogun	South
9.	Abubakar Malami	Minister of Justice & Attorney-General	Kebbi	North
10.	Sen Hadi Sirika	Minister of State, Aviation	Katsina	North
11.	Barr. Adebayo Shittu	Minister of Communication	Oyo	South
12.	Suleiman Adamu	Minister of Water Resources	Jigawa	North
13.	Solomon Dalong	Minister for Youth and Sports	Plateau	North
14.	Ibe Kachikwu	Minister of State, Petroleum	Delta	South
15.	Osagie Ehanire	Minister of State, Health	Edo	North
16.	Audu Ogbeh	Minister of Agriculture	Benue	Middle Belt
17.	Udo Udo Udoma	Minister of Budget & National Planning	Akwa Ibom	South
18.	Lai Mohammed	Minister of Information	Kwara	North
19.	Amina Mohammed	Minister of Environment	Gombe	North
20.	Ibrahim Usman Jibril	Minister of State, Environment	Nasarawa	North
21.	Hajia Khadija Bukar Ibrahim	Minister of State, Foreign Affairs	Yobe	North
22.	Cladius Omoleye Daramola	Minister of State, Niger Delta	Ondo	South
23.	Prof Anthony Onwuka	Minister of State, Education	Imo	South
24.	Geoffrey Onyema	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Enugu	South
25.	Mansur Dan Ali	Minister of Defence	Zamfara	North
26.	Stephen Ocheni	Minister of State, Labour & Employment	Kogi	North
27.	Zainab Ahmed	Minister of State Budget and National Planning	Kaduna	North
28.	Okechukwu Enelamah	Minister of Trade, Investment & Industry	Abia	South
29.	Muhammadu Bello	Minister of Federal Capital Territory	Adamawa	North

S/No	Names	Portfolio	State	Region
30.	Mustapha Baba Shehuri	Minister of State, Power	Bornu	North
31.	Aisha Abubakar	Minister of State, Trade & Investment	Sokoto	North
32.	Heineken Lokpobiri	Minister of State, Agriculture	Bayelsa	South
33.	Adamu Adamu	Minister of Education	Bauchi	North
34.	Isaac Adewole	Minister of Health	Osun	South
35.	Abubakar Bawa Bwari	Minister of State, Solid Minerals	Niger	Middle Belt
36.	Pastor Usani Uguru	Minister of Niger Delta	Cross River	South
37.	President Muhammadu Buhari	Minister of Petroleum	Katsina	North

Source: *Vanguard*. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/11/see-full-list-of-buharis-ministers-and-their-portfolios/>

The table 1 shows that Northern Muslims occupy 19 positions; the South has 17 positions while the Middle Belt occupies 2 positions. Compare this with the composition of Goodluck Jonathan's cabinet in Table 2:

Table 2: The Federal Executive Council under President Goodluck Jonathan

S/No	Name	Portfolio	State	Zone
1.	Barrister Emeka Wogu	Minister for Labour	Abia	SE
2.	Hajia Zainab Maina	Minister for Women Affairs	Adamawa	NE
3.	Prof. Ita Okon Bassey Ewa	Minister for Science and Technology	Akwa-Ibom	SS
4.	Mrs. Stella Oduah-Ogiemwonyi	Minister for Aviation	Anambra	SE
5.	Senator Bala Mohammed	Minister for Federal Capital Territory	Bauchi	NE
6.	Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke	Minister for Petroleum	Bayelsa	SS
7.	Comrade Abba Moro	Minister for Interior	Benue	NC
8.	Hajia Zainab Ibrahim Kuchi	Minister for State for Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs	Niger	NC
9.	Alhaji Bukar Tijani	Minister of State for Agric and Natural Resources	Borno	NE
10.	Elder Godsdan Orubebe	Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs	Delta	SS
11.	Professor Onyebuchi Chukwu	Minister for Health	Ebonyi	SE
12.	Arc. Mike Onolememen	Minister for Works	Edo	SS
13.	Navy Capt. Caleb Olubolade (rtd)	Minister for Police Affairs	Ekiti	SW
14.	Professor Bart Nnaji	Minister for Power	Enugu	SE

S/No	Name	Portfolio	State	Zone
15.	Alhaji Yusuf Suleiman	Minister for Sports	Sokoto	NW
16.	Prof. (Mrs) Viola Onwuliri	Minister of State for Foreign Affairs	Imo	SE
17.	Prof (Mrs) Ruqayyatu Rufai	Minister for Education	Jigawa	NW
18.	Dr. Shamsudeen Usman	Minister for National Planning	Kano	NW
19.	Arc. Mohammed Musa Sada	Minister for Mines and Steel Development	Katsina	NW
20.	Dr. Bello H. Mohammed	Minister for Defence	Kebbi	NW
21.	Mohammed B. Adoke, SAN	Attorney Gen. of the Federation/Minister of Justice	Kogi	NC
22.	Mallam Bolaji Abdullahi	Minister for Youth Development	Kwara	NC
23.	Mr. Olusegun O. Aganga	Minister for Trade and Investment	Lagos	SW
24.	Mr. Labaran Maku	Minister for Information and Communications	Nasarawa	NC
25.	Dr. Samuel Ioraer Ortom	Minister of State, Trade and Investment	Benue	NC
26.	Amb. Olugbenga Ashiru	Minister for Foreign Affairs	Ogun	SW
27.	Erelu Olusola Obada	Minister of State, Defence	Osun	SW
28.	Mrs. Olajumoke Akinjide	Minister of State for FCT	Oyo	SW
29.	Senator Idris A.Umar	Minister for Transport	Gombe	NE
30.	Dr. Yerima Lawal Ngama	Minister of State for Finance	Yobe	NE
31.	Amb. Bashir Yugudu	Minister of State, Works	Zamfara	NW

Sahara Reporters of July 11, 2011. Available @: <http://saharareporters.com/2011/07/11/jonathan-assigns-portfolio-31-ministers-creates-new-ministries-redeploys-minister>

Table 2 shows that under President Goodluck Jonathan, the appointment of Ministers was not based on ethnic consideration or religion. The five positions occupied by Ministers from North-East zone were filled by Muslims, so also were the six positions occupied by Ministers from North-West zone. The six positions for Ministers from North-Central zone were filled by both Christians and Muslims. This is also true of the five positions occupied by Ministers from South-West zone. The South-East zone also had five positions. Only the South-South zone had four positions. This shows equitable and dispassionate appointments.

Table 3: Constitution of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) Council

S/No	Name
1	Minister of Environment as chairperson
2	Minister of State for Petroleum Resources/Group Managing Director of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
3	Minister of Budget and National Planning
4	Minister of Niger Delta Affairs
5	National Security Adviser
6	Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission
7	Managing Director of Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (Ltd) and two alternates
8	One Representative of a Non-Governmental Organization dealing with environmental issues
9	One representative of the 9 Oil Producing States on two-year rotational basis
10	Two representatives of Ogoni communities and two alternates
11	Two representatives of Other Niger Delta Communities and two alternates
12	One representative of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) as observer
13	The Project Coordinator of the HYPREP who shall be the Secretary to the HYPREP Governing Council

Source: <http://hyprep.gov.ng/governing-council/>

This scenario is likely to affect the corporate existence of Nigeria. Ethnic factor is more often than not the ground on which Presidents are elected, Governors voted, Ministers appointed, and contracts awarded and even national policies decided. The socio-political belief is that one can only get himself or herself to power at the centre through ethnic connections or by fanning the embers of ethnicism. This has led to the formation of ethnic-militia groups which refer to the extreme form of ethnic agitation for self-determination as some ethnic groups assume militant posture and gradually metamorphose into militia groups with each having its own unique problems, plans, strategy, aims/objectives as well as ethnic identity and acts as the machinery through which the desires of its people are articulated and sought to be realised.

Ethnic Marginalization and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism

The persistent bloodshed and guided extermination of a section of the citizenry associated with the Boko Haram and herdsmen terrorism, among other factors, have accentuated apprehension for a break-up of the country along ethnic lines. This phenomenon has been compounded by the insensitivity and inaction of the Buhari administration. While President Buhari ignores the mass killings of other ethnic groups by Boko Haram and the herdsmen, he orders virulent and destructive martial actions against any form of dissent by any other group using Fulani-led armed forces. This has resulted in funny code-named military missions like “Operation Python Dance” and “Operation Crocodile Smile.” This raises a very critical question: should the oppressed ethnic groups fold their hands and wait till they are totally annihilated? Will restructuring in the form of

further balkanization of states end ethnic marginalization? Will it not be better for the various ethnic nationalities to go their separate ways or, at least, band with other ethnic groups with which they share close affinity in the six geo-political zones to form separate nation-states?

The self-determination movements like the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Afenifere are indices of the economic crisis of poverty and employment occasioned by the marginalization of some sections of the vast polity in the same way in which kidnapping for ransom and armed robbery experiences are in other parts of the country. These self-determination groups cannot be contained on an enduring basis by the application of physical force without addressing the root cause. Neither the establishment of social security schemes nor the distribution of welfare packages may solve these social vices and end ethnic nationalist pressures unless the national question is resolved.

It seems apparent that the voluntary union of the component ethnic groups making up Nigeria is no longer possible because of lack of respect for basic democratic rights of citizens manifested by those who were given the mandate to protect lives and property, but who, in an avowed effort to entrench the domination of their ethnic groups, show no regard for sacredness of life, but turn around to use that same mandate to oppress the very people they were meant to protect. Then the people have no choice but to agitate for self-determination. Unfortunately, the response of the Federal Government to this democratic self-expression was the use of the military against the people making such rightful expression. Unfortunately, this is the only legitimate way of promoting united struggles by the oppressed classes against exploitation of all ethnic nationalities.

Under the Nigerian constitution and under international human rights law, there is recognition of the right of the protection and promotion of the existence of national, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identities in individual geographic units. It is right to state categorically that international law recognizes the right to self-determination of peoples. What needs to be clarified is that there are two aspects of self-determination, namely: external and internal self-determination. External form of self-determination relates to a colonized people fighting to shake off the chains of colonialism or for secession from a nation-state. Internal form of self-determination has to do with autonomous self-government within a nation-state. It is the internal form of self-determination that international law unequivocally recognizes. The ethnic groups that have adopted their own flags, anthems, etc are exercising aspects of internal form of self-determination, a form of community or collective self-expression within the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This work has dealt with the issues of the National Question which has threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria and has shown that the centrifugal force of ethnicity has increased with each successive administration since independence. The future of the country tends to hang on a balance. It is clear that the union of all component ethnic groups in the country is no longer possible and as long as the government does not respect the fundamental rights of citizens, the struggle for self-determination may be inevitable.

Nigeria should recognize the right of minorities to secede. Perhaps this may put pressure on the federal government to recognize and respect minorities' rights in order to avoid such minorities exercising their right to independence.

The number one political challenge in Nigeria today, therefore, is how to deal with the national question. This study agrees with Agbaje, Diamond and Onwudiwe (2004) that the political hegemony of some ethnic groups over others and the marginalization of ethnic minorities have precipitated deep political fault lines and congealed interest on both sides of the political divide. On the one hand are those that are benefiting from the current status quo and see no reason for a change. On the other hand, are those that feel that the Nigerian state can no longer protect their lives, property and economic wellbeing. Their past has been squandered, the present mortgaged and the future so uncertain that it is no longer safe to fold their hands and hope for a better Nigeria where the welfare of one will be taken as the welfare of the other. Consequently, there is need for a re-negotiation and re-compacting of relations between the various ethnic groups that were forcefully crammed together by the British to make up Nigeria. There is need to evolve an all-inclusive process of remaking the constitution in order to ensure that those issues that affect them and their communities are not trivialized or relegated to the dustbin of political decision making.

This work advances one argument in order to address the national question in Nigeria; the political elite can no longer be trusted to do the right thing. To safeguard even its own narrow interests, the power elite must concede to an open and popular re-compacting of the constitution. Only a truly consultative and participatory process can put the national question up for democratic debate and negotiation without resort to violence. Such a consultative process could be utilized to mobilize and educate the people politically, establish new rules of politics, reconstruct institutions and redefine the foundation of governance.

Given the historical suffocation of civil society, the privatization of the state, the arrogance of privatized power, and a situation where elected politicians and appointed officials appear impatient with democracy and continue to see politics as an opportunity for very rapid primitive accumulation, the contemporary challenge for all Nigerians is how to institute popular political debate that will draw popular opinions from the different ethnic components of Nigeria that will determine either the continued coexistence of the disparate peoples that make up the country or the dismemberment of the country's corporate structure to make for self-determination of the different peoples as separate nations.

Given the extent of socio-economic deprivation of the minorities in the last three years as well as the height of political repression and marginalization of the entire southern Nigeria, the culture of corruption, mismanagement, insensitivity to the plight of the poor, elite privatization of the state, and the subversion of civil liberties, this study recommends the restructuring of Nigeria into six different nations or at best, provinces along the current six geo-political zones.

To successfully carry out this restructuring without violence or war, the study recommends the constitution of a Sovereign National Conference, by an Act of the

National Assembly, where the members will be popularly elected and given the liberty to discuss the corporate structure of the country. This study adopts the popular opinion on social media that Nigeria should be restructured into the following provinces: (i) The Northern Province, (ii) The Middle Belt Province, (iii) The Oduduwa Province, (iv) The Eastern Province, (v) The Niger Delta or Atlantic Province, and (vi) The Central Government at FCT. It is believed that if this is done, it will lead to inter-province competition instead of on-going nepotistic competition to loot and outdo the other tribes. The provinces will look inward and harness the natural resources in their domain and tap the inherent capacities of their populace for economic expansion, solid minerals development, exports processing, tourism development, technological development and food production. Nigeria will therefore be moved away from a mono-cultural economy as the major focus will no more be on oil alone.

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