

Endless Circle of Self-Determination Rumbling: When the Stick-and-Carrot Strategy Fails, Is Nigeria's Collective Journey Still Non-Negotiable?

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Abstract - Agitation for self-determination is as old as the Nigerian State. On a large scale, it has led to a civil war, and subsequently, a pocket of ethnic insurgencies across all regions of the federation. The Federal Government strategy has often been oscillating between wielding the stick of force through military engagement in combating the often militant agitators and pacifying them at other time with a round-table carrot via monetary inducement, contract awards or superficial bogus amnesty package. These strategies have always served an interim purpose because the gamut of trigger-root causes for further agitation has not been fundamentally addressed. Even series of National Conferences organized by successive administrations were often necessitated by political exigency with a Nigeria's-Unity-not-Negotiable caveat for the handpicked conferees. This essay seeks to interrogate those artificial and natural variables that may have held the country together since independence in 1960 in the face of violent agitations and the prospects, or otherwise, of its continued inseparableness amidst wobbling strategies and seemingly exclusive governance. In this essay, I explore the essence/thesis of self-determination in the current wave of ethnic militancy in Nigeria and argue that political decentralization which has been successful in reducing ethnic conflict and secessionism in some democracies has proved otherwise in democratic countries like Nigeria. Thus, the need for state-organized referendum with a view to giving all aggrieved ethnic groups the opportunity to determine their status within the Nigerian State.

Keywords: Self-Determination, Agitation, Fragile Union, Federation, Stick-and-Carrot

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is synonymous with deep divisions which cause major political issues to be vigorously and violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic, religious and regional divisions. Issues that raise the most dust are those regarded essential for the existence and the validity of the state (Osaghae and Suberu; 2005:4). Opposing and contending assemblages have a tendency to assume an exclusionary winner-take-all approach. These issues include the "control of state power, allocation of resources and citizenship. As a result, states with such divisions are disposed to be delicate and unstable because almost by definition, they have very little in common with regard to convergence and harmony which are necessary to reduce the centrifugal forces that rip them apart" (Osaghae and Suberu; 2005:4). Culturally, Nigeria is a multi-tribal system in which every tribe wants to excel or suppress the other, so they are not on the same level playgrounds. Every person in politics is regionalized and people are capitalizing on that. Once leadership is zoned in the country, one cannot expect to get the best,

but Nigerians are trying to live with what they presently have. There are more than 300 different tribal groups in Nigeria, "all of which belong to the political definition 'Nigerian' but are distinct from one another in terms of cultural practices. Added to this are economic disparities among the various groups, as well as potential for conflict on religious grounds" (Ejimabo, 2013:1).

Oil has made government the best business venture in Nigeria, and because oil, and not taxes, accounts for most of the state's revenue, it also makes politicians unanswerable. A newspaper in 2012 estimated that since President Jonathan entered office in 2010, \$31 billion have disappeared (Verini, 2013). Amidst the opulence and ostentation of political office holders, poverty is still prevalent. Life expectancy in Nigeria is only 47 years, one of the lowest in Africa. Its natural resources have motivated and fueled conflicts. Revenues from the exploitation of natural resources have been invested in weaponry to continue the fighting, to the benefit of a few individuals.

Fifty years after the Nigerian Civil War officially ended, emergence of Radio Biafra with its very sentimental attachment to issues bordering on Nigeria's nationhood should ordinarily be a source of serious concern. The stresses and strains that have attended the health of politics and the polity since independence and culminated in the bitter experience of the Civil War are linked to the nagging contentious issues of nationhood which remain unresolved. Unfortunately, political experiments rather than resolve some of these issues have largely expanded the frontiers of divisions with much less opportunities for lasting engagements (Daily Independent, 2015). For many years, "successive administrations have maintained a portentous imbalance and inequitable structure that disfavors meritocracy. They have glossed over the continuous capitulation of the political class in a progressive fashion to a point of disaffection. And by so doing they have fostered a forced unanimity" (The Guardian, 2015:12).

In Nigeria, as in other democracies, the new arrangements provided for freedoms of expression, religion, association, etc. Ironically, some Nigerians used these new democratic freedoms as a justification for advancing separatist sentiments, including religious fundamentalism and other potentially antidemocratic, destabilizing ideologies (Omo-Bare, 2005). The numerous security challenges confronting Nigeria were among the most prominent issues that dominated debates during the 2015 election campaign. This prompted the various candidates and their parties to propose remedies to address not only the social menace arising from the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents, but also other security problems in the country (CDD, 2016). Today the separatist impulse is prevalent more than ever before in parts of the country. Ethnic and regional champions are fundamentally questioning the structure of the federation. It is in this light that this essay seeks to probe into the following posers: What triggered the recent surge of agitation for Biafra independence? Is the new agitation a plot by the elites of eastern extraction to create greater political space for themselves under President Buhari? What actually necessitated the emergence of the Niger Delta Avengers? Will a referendum be necessary to determine the fate of Biafra? It is also important to examine those artificial and natural variables that may have held the country together since independence in 1960 in the face of violent agitations and the prospects, or otherwise, of its continued inseparableness amidst wobbling strategies and seemingly exclusive governance.

METHODOLOGY

Adopting a mixture of qualitative examination of secondary data and participant-observation methods, this paper interrogates those artificial and natural variables that have held the country together since independence in 1960 in the face of violent agitations

and the prospects, or otherwise, of its continued inseparableness amidst wobbling strategies and seemingly exclusive governance. Information from secondary sources includes library and archival documents, official gazettes, monographs, journals, Internet materials, government publications, newspapers, magazines and periodicals.

Background to Ethnic Militancy and Biafra Agitation

Geographically, Nigeria is a country located in the Western African region, bordering the Gulf of Guinea, between Benin and Cameroon. It is made of three major ethnic tribes, the Hausas (occupying the north), the Yoruba (occupying the west), and the Ibos (occupying the east). It has a total area of approximately 923,768 sq. km as well as 4,047 km in land boundaries (Eme and Onyishi, 2011). "Nigeria is a country of overlapping regional, religious, and ethnic divisions. Rifts between the North and the South of the country, ethnic groups, and Islam and Christianity often coincide and have sometimes resulted in sectarian violence. This has been the case particularly in its geographical center and in the Niger Delta region. In the Middle Belt, as the former is called, bouts of retributive bloodshed between Christian farmers and Muslim pastoralists erupt with some frequency. In the Niger Delta, an insurrection against the Abuja government has been raging for more than a decade over regional, ethnic, and environmental grievances" (Campbell, 2010:1).

Nigeria is a country of cyclical crisis – the history, dynamics and challenges of its development are deeply rooted in tension, conflicts, instability and insecurity. The Nigerian nation-state has never enjoyed an appreciable period of stability that could guarantee security and sustainable development. The closest was the immediate post-civil war – 1970 to 1984 - period. Even this period was punctuated by military coups, electoral violence, religious disturbances and ultimately the collapse of the second republic (Abdu, 2013). "Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed its share of conflicts, including a 1967– 70 civil war when the southeast tried to secede as Biafra. The numerous coups and attempted coups have often had a regional/ethno-religious flavor. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999 - the so-called Fourth Republic-insurgencies have flared up in the south-south (Niger Delta) and the northeast (especially Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states), postelection violence was serious in Kaduna in 2011, and in the Middle Belt, herder-farmer violence continues" (Paden, 2015:5).

Nigeria has a population of over 180 million people and an abundance of natural resources, especially hydrocarbons. It is the 10th largest oil producer in the world, the third largest in Africa and the most prolific oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Nigerian economy is largely dependent on its oil sector which

supplies 95% of its foreign exchange earnings. The upstream oil industry is Nigeria's lifeblood and yet it is also central to the ongoing civil unrest in the country, which gained worldwide publicity with the trial and execution of Ken Saro Wiwa, and eight other political activists in 1995. The contentious issue remains the equitable sharing of the country's multi-billion annual oil revenues amongst its population (who, in some areas, rank amongst the poorest in the world) and the environmental responsibilities of the oil multinationals. The civilian government of Obasanjo has committed itself to sorting out the problems within the oil industry (King and Lawrence, 2005).

Nigeria is a country of significant promise, but it also faces serious social, economic, and security challenges, some of which pose potential threats to state and regional stability. The country has faced intermittent political turmoil and economic crises since gaining independence in 1960. Political life has been scarred by conflict along ethnic, geographic, and religious lines, and corruption and misrule have undermined the state's authority and legitimacy. Despite extensive petroleum resources, Nigeria's human development indicators are among the World's lowest, and a majority of the population faces extreme poverty. Thousands have been killed in periodic ethno-religious clashes. In the south, years of social unrest, criminality, and corruption in the oil-producing Niger Delta have hindered oil production, delayed the Delta's economic development, and contributed to piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Perceived government neglect and economic marginalization have also fueled resentment in the predominately Muslim north (Blanchard and Husted, 2016).

Over the years, natural resources have motivated and fueled conflicts. Revenues from the exploitation of natural resources have been invested in weaponry to continue the fighting, to the benefit a fistful of individuals and reinforcing their political support. Critics blame the current rising poverty partly on the fact that productive and legitimate activities with citizen participation have been made unattractive and the prestige of politics raised as the fastest means to wealth. Nigerian national legislators, for example, are reputed to be the highest-paid in the world. Tunji Braithwaite, an eminent Lagos lawyer, describes Nigerian politicians as "a grouping of opportunistic self-seeking people who see government as a means of rapid self-enrichment" (Ezeh, 2013:53). This economic and political centralization promotes a zero-sum perspective on politics that deepens the divisions among Nigerians. This makes it harder to achieve consensus on issues of common good and the nation-state aspirations for a United Nigeria.

Ironically, amidst the opulence and ostentation of political office holders, poverty is still prevalent. In the "southern Niger Delta region, local grievances related to oil production in the area have fueled

simmering conflict and criminality for decades. The government's efforts to negotiate with local militants, including through an amnesty program, have quieted the restive region in recent years, but the peace is fragile and violent criminality continues. Some militants continue to be involved in various local and transnational criminal activities, including maritime piracy and drug and weapons trafficking networks. These networks often overlap with oil theft networks, which contribute to maritime piracy off the coast of Nigeria and the wider Gulf of Guinea, now one of the most dangerous bodies of water in the world" (Blanchard and Husted, 2016:1). In the decades since the war ended resentment has simmered, rising to the surface in the wave of ethnic grievances and frustrations that accompanied the return of democracy in 1999. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) emerged, alongside similar groups in other parts of the country: The O'odua Peoples Congress (OPC) in the southwest (dominated by ethnic Yoruba); the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) in the north, and the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA) in the Niger Delta (Ogunlesi, 2015).

Movements that call for a secession are scattered across southern Nigeria. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) fights for the independence of south-east and south regions of Nigeria. The Nigerian government has accused MASSOB of violence and his leader, Ralph Uwazuruike, was arrested in 2005 on treason charges. He was released two years later. The Biafra Zionist Movement, led by Barrister Benjamin Onwuka, was created in the early 2000s. It spun out of MASSOB, and advocates the legitimacy of Biafra. BZM declared a new state of independence on 5 November 2012, at an event during which at least 100 peaceful protesters were arrested. In 2014, BZM stormed a radio station announcing the rebirth of the Biafra Republic. In a statement released after the incident, the group explained it had lost faith in the country following years of neglect and continuous killing of Igbos (Iaccino, 2015). According to Edeson Samuel, national chairman of BZM:

"No amount of threats or arrests will stop us from pursuing our freedom – self-determination for Biafrans. We were forced into this unholy marriage but we don't have the same culture as the northerners. Our religion and culture are quite different from the northerners" (Iaccino, 2015:7).

A wave of renewed agitation for the creation of the sovereign state of Biafra has gained momentum and is sweeping across the south-east of Nigeria. The Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) is championing the cause. This resuscitated agitation for a sovereign state of Biafra takes a new dimension with the setting up of Radio Biafra and many other internet fora carrying on the struggle for the break-up of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria. As captured by the CDD's The Buharimeter Report (2016:25), "the agitation for the State of Biafra has continued in both the South East and South-South Regions of the country. This has become an added burden in terms of the security challenges facing the administration. Clearly, its campaign promises on security were principally predicated on fighting Boko Haram in the North East region of Nigeria. The almost sudden resurgence of pro-Biafra agitations makes the pursuit of that election promise even more complicated".

Unlike other initiatives directed towards achieving the same objective, the current attempt seems to have achieved greater notoriety and succeeded in galvanizing certain segments of the Igbo community who feel victimized and alienated by the current arrangements in Nigeria into a renewed hope and zeal for the secession of Biafra from Nigeria. The arrow-head of the group is the detained and erudite director of Radio Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu¹. Among other things, Kanu has been accused of advocating violence in order to obtain independence. Available online, Radio Biafra's reach has grown among pro-independence Igbo groups, who have become increasingly vocal and fervent spurred on by Kanu's rhetoric. While its backers say the radio caters for the needs of people from the region, the network is also known from propagating the ideology of the former secessionist Republic of Biafra.

Thus, the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) movement has now replaced MASSOB in the national consciousness. IPOB, headquartered in Spain, was recently founded by Nnamdi Kanu, a Nigerian emigrant to the UK, known by his followers as 'Director'. It is an incredibly media-savvy organization, operating or affiliated with an active diplomatic arm (Biafra Diplomatic Mission Worldwide), online TV (Biafra Television) and radio (Radio Biafra) stations (which the Nigerian government has unsuccessfully tried to silence, an online newspaper (Biafra Times), and active social media outlets (including a Facebook page with 223,000 Likes) (Ogunlesi, 2015).

IPOB draws its members and sympathizers from the teeming ranks of young ethnic Igbos within and outside the country. Fueling the disenchantment is the obvious, longstanding neglect of a region that has long proved itself an enterprising and inventive one (Ogunlesi, 2015). The response of the federal government through the regulatory agency the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to the Radio Biafra menace has been tepid. The Nigerian government has always maintained that Nigeria's unity is a priority for the country. But it must be emphasized

that the right to peaceful assembly and association, as well as the right of freedom of expression, is protected by the Nigerian constitution. International human rights standards also require that law enforcement officials must, as far as possible, apply nonviolent means. The Nigerian Constitution is unequivocal in its exclusion of the possibility of secession when it provides in its section 2(1) "Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state to be known by the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria". However, as absolute as that section may seem, it does not rule out the idea of negotiations and lobbying between the component units in the federation for an amendment of its provisions.

The Niger Delta Region: Pathetic Conditions and Causes of Agitations

Nigeria has experienced decades of underdevelopment and the Niger Delta has particularly experienced a chronic phase because of the side effect of drilling and oil exploration. From the late 1980's, the region occupying an area of 75,000 sq km; has been bedeviled by communal unrest, crime and violent conflicts, so much so that international interventions through NGOs, international organizations and civil society (amongst others) has yielded nothing or unappreciable result. The crisis of development in the Delta involves political, economic, social, environmental and security. The Niger Delta is highly susceptible to adverse environmental changes occasioned by climate change because it is located in the coastal region of the world.

The Niger Delta communities, as a result of these criminal neglect on the part of the Federal government and the oil exploring companies, responded initially through road blocking and shutting the gates of oil companies. When these did not produce the desired results, pipelines vandalization, blowing up of oil installations, bunkering and hostage taking were resorted to. As a result of the crises, "volume of oil exploration, is assumed to have reduced, oil workers operate in an insecure and hostile environment and frequently, the Nigeria Joint Military Force (JMF) and the Niger Delta youths had clashed leaving casualties on both sides. The government responses since 1957 when oil was first discovered in commercial quantities at Oloibiri had not abated agitation in Niger Delta. That is, Willinks reports of 1959 to the creation of Ministry for Niger Delta in 2008" (Idowu, 2012:5).

"The rise of militia groups with violent orientation was the trend in the 1990's. The Egbesu Boys, Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPUF) the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), NDPUF was established in 1998 by Asari Dokubo to assist development of the delta and remove environmental insecurity and marginalization. It engages in seizure of oil facilities, kidnapping and violent confrontations. MEND's demand is emancipation from colonialism by state oil company conspiracy. Engaged in hostage

¹ Kanu was released on April 24, 2017 following an order from the Federal High Court in Abuja. He has been in detention for almost two years.

taking and ransom, their media coverage arouses National and international attention to solution finding. Proliferation of militia movement enacted violent responses from the state. State attacks elicited harassment, death, physical assault, extortion, rape and brutalization of the citizens, the epic of which was the Odi massacre. Over two thousand people were killed, many injured, and several others displaced. There has been loss of property and psychological embarrassment” (Kumolu, Charles, 2016:23).

An amnesty program put in place by the government in 2009 with the aim of making the militant to sheath their sword and given training on a particular trade so as to rehabilitate them to the society actually tamed the violent agitation. According to Abati (2016:32), “for about seven years, under this program, introduced by President Yar’Adua and sustained by President Jonathan, Niger Delta militants were demobilized and disarmed. The top hierarchy soon became security consultants to the Federal Government, monitoring pipelines, and helping to check oil theft. The middle cadre was placed on a monthly stipend while those who could be trained were sent to technical colleges and universities in Southern Africa and Eastern Europe. The militants became rich and gentrified, and with their kinsman in office as President in Abuja, the people of the Niger Delta began to feel a sense of ownership and belongingness that no one in that region had felt since 1960”. With the advent of the new political administration, restiveness and destructive militancy have returned through the activities of a new group that calls itself Niger Delta Avengers in spite of the fact that the new government readily buys into the existing program. Abati (2016:12) explains the reasons for this:

“President Muhammadu Buhari approved funding and payments under the Niger Delta Amnesty program, he also appointed a Minister of Niger Delta and a Special Adviser on Niger Delta Amnesty, in addition to extending the amnesty initiative, beyond the initial December 2015 deadline to December 2017. But there is no program of patronage, the type that channels money into the pockets of Niger Delta militants, warlords or foot-soldiers, and since Abuja also seems to have become wasteland for the once-triumphant Niger Deltan, the Jonathan crowd, and the fisherman’s cap, the informal patronage that turned many Niger Deltans into king’s men and women, has vanished... It is also similarly on record that before and during the 2015 elections, certain Niger Delta elements also threatened that should President Jonathan lose the election, Nigeria would be made ungovernable for President Buhari. And again as promised, the South East and the South, President Jonathan’s main support centers, have thrown up major

security threats since President Buhari won and assumed office”.

However, in sustenance of the new understanding between the Federal Government and the oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta, the President Muhammadu Buhari administration released additional N35B to step-up the Amnesty Program in the region in May 2017. Although the FG had approved a N20B allocation for the Amnesty Program in the 2016 budget, President Buhari raised the funds, and as appropriated, to N55B with a release of additional N30B. The Amnesty Office paid up all ex-militants’ backlog of their stipends up to the end of 2016. The release of the additional funds came after presidential level interactive engagements in the Niger Delta, where the Buhari administration has enunciated a New Vision for the oil-producing areas based on the presentation made by the Pan Niger Delta Forum, PANDEF, to the President when he received leaders and stakeholders from the region in November, 2016. Subsequently, the President asked his deputy, Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, SAN, to embark on a tour of the region that saw him visiting several oil-producing States in the country (Vanguard, 2017).

Besides the monthly payment of about N65, 000 to N66,000 to the ex-militants, the funds would also go to the provision of reintegration activities under the Amnesty Program including payment of tuition fees for beneficiaries from Niger Delta who are in post-secondary institutions at home and abroad, payment of in-training and hazard allowances and vocational training costs. There are also empowerment schemes and self-help, self-employment support funds, including provision of needed equipment by the Amnesty Office. Equally, the funds would also support the training of pilots, aviation engineers, technicians, and motor vehicles mechanics from the oil-producing communities (The Nation, 2017).

Niger Delta Avengers is the name of a new group of militants in the Niger Delta who claim to be different from the former agitators and militants who operated between 2006 and 2009, largely under the umbrella of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (Abati, 2016). The NDA came to international attention after claiming an attack on an underwater pipeline run by Shell in February, forcing the Dutch oil giant to temporarily shut down its 250,000 bpd Forcados terminal. The upsurge in attacks by the group has coincided with a dramatic fall in oil production in Nigeria, traditionally the continent’s biggest producer. Petroleum Minister, Emmanuel Ibe Kachikwu said earlier in May 2016 that production had fallen by 800,000 bpd to 1.4 million bpd, the lowest in two decades (Gaffey, 2016). The violence shut down several oil wells, claimed dozens of lives and forced major companies such as Shell and Chevron to evacuate staff and halt production in some areas (ISS, 2016). The NDA had warned foreigners,

PENGASSAN and members of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, to “leave all oil fields and terminals in the Niger Delta,” saying things would “get dirty very soon” (The Punch, 2016:6).

More than any of the emergent groups, the Niger Delta Avengers have used their online resources to articulate the basis of this vengeance mission in such posts as “Operation Red Economy”, “We shall do whatever is necessary to protect the Niger Delta interest” and “Keep your threat to yourself, Mr. President” (Abati, 2016). The NDA follows the pattern of other groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation for the Niger Delta (MEND), which led the militancy campaign in the mid-2000s. MEND and some of its most notorious leaders, such as Government Ekpemupolo - an ex-militant also known as Tompolo who is wanted on money laundering allegations totaling 46 billion naira (\$231 million) - have disassociated themselves from the NDA. But according to Malte Liewerscheidt (See Gaffey, 2016), the group’s membership is likely made up of disaffected ex-militants who have not benefited from the presidential amnesty program that brought the previous campaign to a close in 2009.

Self- Determination, Secession Bids and the Familiar Route

The accepted view of self-determination is that it is a right exercised primarily by people living under colonial regimes, which could be exercised once and once only to remove the colonial regime in question. Essentially it was taken as referring to the right of a group of people, normally of one distinct territory, to decide collectively the manner in which they wish to be ruled or governed. However, even though the right to self-determination for all peoples is an apparently inalienable human right, it must be noted that it is not necessarily an absolute right. Most notably, its application to peoples living under non-colonial domination is not so apparent. As a starting point, “it must be established that the right to self-determination is a group right, but one of its main problem lies with its beneficiaries; who are the people to whom the rights ascribe? Due to the fact that the right is only exercisable by ‘peoples’, the law has to be satisfied that those who seek it meet the threshold of ‘peoples’ under international set principles. The meaning to be attributed to the concept of ‘peoples’ for the rights of people in international law in this regard includes, groups who enjoy a common historical tradition, racial or ethnic identity, cultural homogeneity, linguistic unity, religious or ideological affinity, territorial connection or common economic life. The group as a whole must have the will to be identified as a people or the consciousness of being a people” (Musawa, 2012:38).

All people have the right to self-determination, to decide their own destiny. Recognition of this right was

important in colonial struggles in the last century. According to current international law, ethnic and other minorities only count as separate ‘peoples,’ if they are systematically disenfranchised by the government of the state in which they live. This means “they are not able to participate in government either because they are not allowed to do so or as individuals suffer systematic and gross human rights violations so as to make this participation impossible. What this means in practice is rather unclear and seems to depend more on international politics than principle” (Nagarajan, 2015:9).

It is argued that “state failure to provide public services can lead to civil unrest, violence from communities and eventual armed conflict which could be sustained depending on how quickly corrective measures are mobilized. The failure of the state to deliver the expected services leads to the loss of confidence and doubts about the legitimacy of the state leading to instability. The state may respond with repressive methods and this could spiral into sustained violence and conflict. Thus, state effectiveness, authority and legitimacy are weakened by the damaging effects of violent conflict which may breed further violence and long-term fragility” (Economic Commission for Africa, 2012:15). Badmus (2006:192) submits that “ethnic militia movement exist as the extreme form of ethnic agitation for self-determination as various ethnic groups assume militant posture and gradually metamorphosed into militia groups each of which bear an ethnic identity and purport to act as the machinery through which the desires of its people are sought to be realized”.

Despite its federal status, Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously – some would say violently – contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country. The issues that have generated the fiercest contestation include those that are considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of a state in Nigeria; competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner-take-all strategies. These areas of conflict include the control of state power, resource allocation, and citizenship. Indeed, as posited by Osaghae and Suberu (2007:4) “the issue of self-determination has arisen in Nigeria, first out of ethnic deprivation, exclusion, exploitation, discrimination and disadvantage, particularly in relation to resource contribution and distribution, political representation and developmental attention”.

It took the colonialists about four key constitutional conferences to realize that for a modicum of stability to be established in Nigeria, a federal structure was indispensable in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Despite their tyrannously racial and condescending leadership style, Akinlotan (2016:64) argues that the colonialists managed to bequeath a

federalist structure to Nigeria, particularly along regionalist lines. They suspected nothing else would work. But after about six military coups, four (elected) republics, and a myriad of completed and uncompleted constitutional conferences, Nigeria's governing elite have burrowed deeper into Unitarianism, parochialism and hegemonism. Thus, in an orgy of buck-passing, Nigerians continue to blame their present woes on a vague and abstract past.

The calls for the restructuring of Nigeria, up to and including the right of the contributing units to secession, is certainly not a new affair, with groups advocating permanent territorial separation – as done by Biafran agitators through a number of decades and more recently in the Niger Delta – and others simply clamoring for the renegotiation of the basis of our social compact as a country (Premium Times, 2016). In the century since its creation, Nigeria has experienced one form of reconstitution or the other, from the 1938 restructuring of the South into the two regions of West and East, to the demands for a more representative federation beyond a tripartite configuration corresponding to the major nationalities, and the creation of 12 states by the Gowon administration in 1967 to quell the civil war. A further 19 state structure was created in 1976 by the Murtala administration; then 21 and 30 states in 1987 and 1991 by the Babangida regime; and a 36 state federation by General Abacha. Historically, the fears of the domination of one group over the others, and concerns with managing our diversity and differences – essential aspects of which have been framed as the National Question in Nigeria – have resulted in agitations for restructuring. This had initially made politicians settle for a federal structure of government, but the successive state creation exercises of the military resolved into a 'quasi-unitary Jacobin state'. The Federal Government became overly strengthened and centralized at the expense of the state and local tiers of government (Premium Times, 2016).

A fact of Nigeria's democratic experience in the last 20 years is that every new political administration springs forth a new uprising from disenchanting interest groups. Such seems to be the case of the Muhammadu Buhari administration and the series of protests by youths of South eastern extraction seeking secession from Nigeria and demanding the unconditional release of Nnamdi Kalu (The Guardian, 2015). "Although Nigeria has a historical crisis of insecurity, the last few years of the return to democracy have been even more challenging" (Abdu, 2013:160). The response of federal politicians has been to send in the security forces to trouble zones. "Local politicians have turned to armed gangs - which are often involved in criminal activities - for protection. Hence, as in many other countries living off extractive industries, oil has drastically worsened governance problems in Nigeria" (Khakee, 2007:5).

The Buhari Administration and Politics of Self-Determination

The rebirth of democracy, as inferred in previous sections, "opened the space for various dynamics of social and political crises in that various ethnic and religious militias emerged to seek for social and political space and relevance, individual and collective rights, as well as ethnic and social equality among others" (Lenshie, 2014:155). According to Agbu (2004), the emergence of the phenomenon of ethnic militias as a specific challenge to the Nigerian nation-state project cannot be divorced from the opening up of the political space for the exercise of rights and for electoral activities. But it is argued that post-military Fourth Republic civil rule was inaugurated on very shaky foundation indeed. The martial culture of a militarized national psyche persists in virtually all the institutions of the state. Subsequently, despite successful elections witnessing regime transition and a historic regime change, Nigeria has never been farther away from the economic and democratic promise land (Alamu, 2017).

The obviously problematic connection between democratization, ethnic sub-nationalism, and violence is well captured by Anugwon (2000), who insists that ethnic conflicts negate the developmental function of democracy and may ultimately attack the roots of democracy in a society. He however, observes that the existence of minimal ethnic conflicts or rivalry in ethnically plural societies is to be expected. He further argues that when these conflicts are minimal or dissociated, they may be regarded as dynamic forces that help to propel the development of a society. Though conflict is a principal variable for explaining social change in the society, it becomes detrimental to the consolidation of democracy when it is extreme.

Since May 1999, the orgy of violence perpetrated by ethnic militias has been haunting many of Nigeria's urban communities. Indeed, these communities have become huge theatres of violence (Otite, 2012:812). These violent activities span different administrations in the last eighteen years. The fresh round of attacks came after President Muhammadu Buhari vowed to stamp out corruption and oil theft. They echo a campaign waged by the self-proclaimed Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta between 2006 and 2009, which cost the Nigerian government billions of dollars of lost oil revenue before the amnesty initiative as earlier pointed out. It would be recalled that some of the ex-militant leaders had, before the March/April 2015 elections, threatened to remobilize their militia groups if Jonathan was not re-elected. In my previous work on insurgency, I had warned that "such threats should not be ignored as other abandoned and impoverished foot soldiers might see any instigation or perceived neglect/marginalization as an opportunity to go back to the creeks for anticipated financial gain- in whatever way it comes" (Omilusi, 2016:216).

Simon Allison (2016) affirms that there is considerable geographical overlap between the Niger Delta and the would-be Biafran state. According to him, should the two movements join forces in a serious way, it could exponentially increase the scale of the threat to the Nigerian state. Given the ideological distance between the two groups, however, the challenges facing any such cooperation may be too great to overcome. Initially, the Buhari's administration had responded to the growing threat in an all-too typical fashion: with force and threats. On May 30, 2016, five warships and 100 gunboats were dispatched to the creeks of the Niger Delta, joining air force fighter jets and helicopters that were already there. Meanwhile, the army had occupied key community centers and displaced some local residents, according to Vanguard newspaper (Cited in Allison, 2016). As would be confirmed by the federal government's peace initiative led by the Vice President in early 2017, this strong military response could not deliver results, given the complexity of the Niger Delta's terrain and the delicate political nature of the agitation

Leaders of the oil-rich Niger Delta once warned that the government's delay in holding talks to address the challenges of the region made them doubt the sincerity of its desire to solve the region's problems. At a meeting which brought together leaders under the platform Pan Niger Delta Forum, a body that represented the region in the peace talks with the federal government, participants urged the government to show concern over the growing impatience of Niger Delta residents at the long-term failure to find a lasting solution to the lingering crises

It is not coincidence that this has been taking place since Muhammadu Buhari was announced the winner of the March presidential elections. Accusations of his activities as a soldier during the Biafra Civil War (denied by Buhari himself), the reaction towards power as represented by the office of the presidency transferring from 'their brother' to a Northern Fulani man and fears of a plan to 'Islamize' Nigeria are feeding this dynamic. Buhari's failure to appoint people from the South East at the beginning of his tenure has not helped. Rather, it has furthered perceptions that he is intentionally marginalizing Igbos from power, due to his own prejudices and in retaliation to the region's votes for Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent president (Nagarajan, 2015). As observed by Igbokwe (2015:14):

"Ever since former President Jonathan lost the presidential elections on March 28, 2015, which some of us knew he could never win based on the facts that we had access to and the statistics available, a majority of Igbo people have been unhappy and angry. They have been cursing and abusing the president and APC leaders, wishing that President Buhari never existed and APC was never

formed. Many of them have been so frustrated after the elections that they are now looking for ways to get back to the APC-controlled federal government".

Concerning the substance of the agitation, the veracity of a unified Biafra agenda is already being called to question by the absence of a clear-cut philosophy or any articulated strategy of effective social mobilization; the result of which is the emergence of various factions in the Biafra cause. Following allegations of sabotage, intimidation, pecuniary conflicts, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is said to have broken into Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), led by one Benjamin Onwuka, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), led by Nnamdi Kanu, and the United Eastern Congress led by Sam Ike, all of which work at cross-purposes (The Guardian, 2015).

Nigeria's Indivisibility and Federal Structure: Any alternatives?

Nigeria's plurality and secular characteristics offers a wide ranging and fertile ground for group relations, explaining why national diversities have been vigorously transformed and contested against the politics of national integration and stability. These politically salient identities became more pronounced and transformed since the emergence of democracy in 1999 in the country, given that the expression of identities for sectional or group sentiments during the military rule was effectively suppressed and the political spaces for agitation were contrived barring any interest groups and social-political formations from making any claims on the state (Fatai, 2012:127). While interest groups and social-political formations of the military years indoctrinates into the democratization process, the expression of ethnic grievances and diversities only gained wider expression since the enthronement of democratic rule. This resurgence is instructive given the spate of communal clashes, ethnic agitations, ethno-religious politics and violence which have exacerbated tremendously since the democratization era. The mobilization of ethnic tendencies and nationalism had given rise to the metamorphosis of different ethnic identities and militias all in the context of advancing their long suppressed interest in the democratic space (Fatai, 2012:127).

Nigeria presents the picture of a country in which divisionist tendencies abound and in which tensions and violence permeate state-society relations. The absence of a comprehensive constitutional resolution of these matters has led to a strategy of 'keeping the lid' on the smoldering cauldron, often through the forceful suppression of dissent. Frequently, violence breeds further violence, leading to an escalating cycle of disorder (Mustapha, 2013: vxii). Also, Nigeria raises the paradox of intensified conflict and violence

with the return to democratic rule. It is argued that “the capacity of the state to deal with this violence is being overstretched. Secondly, the point is made that in the social struggles between the state and segments of the society, force has always been the first response of the Nigerian state. Periods of military rule from 1966 have intensified this militaristic approach to security challenges. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, tensions over the division of political and financial powers between the different levels of the federal system, ethnic and regional grievances, and religious mobilization have all combined to fuel repeated cycles of violence across the country” (Mustapha, 2013:vxii).

While unilateral secession is not specifically prohibited, it is clear that international law does not specifically grant component parts of sovereign states the legal right to secede unilaterally from their parent state. Self-determination is clearly acceptable for divesting States of colonial powers but the problems arise when groups not in solo occupation of a given defined State territory choose to exercise self-determination. Although the policy of self-determination has had some notable successes in the post-colonialist era; for example, in Czechoslovakia where the population voted to separate and become two States, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, international law tends to lean towards territorial integrity in a clash with claims for ethnic, cultural and religious self-determination (Musawa, 2012).

Afenifere and Ohanaeze, which had been the traditional movers of restructuring, when blended with the new entrants, the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and Middle Belt interests, produce a non-ignorable synergy. The outcome of this concurrence, provoked by the activities of the IPOB and NDA, is such that observers think requires more than official aloofness. While the IPOB wants a sovereign state of Biafra, the NDA daily embellishes its vandalization of major oil installations with similar demand for the Niger Delta (Kumolu, 2016). Instructively, the activities of IPOB and NDA, when juxtaposed with their inherent self-determination noise, present a bigger picture of a curious kind of consciousness for Nigeria’s restructuring (Kumolu, 2016).

It is argued that the national government should allow a national discourse on Nigerian federation and re-examination of the parameters for operating the federal system, including issues on fiscal federalism. Even if this results in specific re-structuring of the polity it would serve the country better instead the present situation where many groups see themselves as being unfairly treated resulting in separatist movements. In 2014, the Jonathan Administration convened a national conference to discuss these issues. The 492 delegates also came up with over 680 recommendations addressing the myriad of problems that are afflicting the country. The recommendations came on the eve of

the 2015 elections with President Jonathan listing implementation of the confab report as one of his campaign promises, if re-elected. Although, it may be difficult to validate the genuineness of that promise (of implementation) considering the reservations many Nigerians had about the timing of the conference, what is not hard to observe is that agitations for the restructuring of the country, and in some cases, self-determination, in the post-2015 elections, have remained unabated. Some analysts also believe that agitation for restructuring of the country is a metaphor for Nigerians’ frustration with the Federal Government, even as they argue that such clamors would stop if government treats every section of the country fairly and equally (Agbajalike, 2016).

The socio-political evolution of the country, which dates back to the pre-colonial constitutional conferences, has witnessed a lot of conferences with some of the most recent being those of 1995 National Constitutional Conference, National Political Reform Conference in 2005 and the 2014 National Conference. While many prominent citizens have emphasized that the time has come for the much-awaited restructuring of Nigeria to be accomplished through the instrumentality of the constitution amendment exercise, others believe that the 2014 conference report was a ready tool to be explored (Agbajalike, 2016). In fact, in 2016, members of the National Assembly took a decision that deepen the crack in their relationship with President Muhammadu Buhari as they heeded to clarion call by Nigerians for the government to commence implementation of the 2014 national conference recommendations (The Pilot, 2017).

This is coming when President Buhari seems to have dismissed the 2014 Confab report and leaves the impression that the calls may attract nothing but official indifference. At the anniversary of his first year in office, the President did not hide his opposition to adopting the report. He affirmed that he had not even read the conference report and that it would remain in the archives where, according to him, it rightly belongs. Specifically, he described the conference as a misplaced priority by his predecessor Goodluck Jonathan. President Buhari (Cited in Agbajalike, 2016) said:

I advised against the issue of National Conference. You would recall that ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) was on strike then for almost nine months. The teachers in the tertiary institutions were on strike for more than a year, yet that government had about N9billion to organise that meeting (National Conference) and some (members) were complaining that they hadn’t even been paid. I never liked the priority of that government on that particular issue, because it meant that what the National Assembly could have handled was handed to the Conference, while the more

important job of keeping our children in schools was abandoned. That is why I haven't even bothered to read it or ask for a briefing on it, and I want it to go into the so-called archives.

Interestingly, the northern delegates to the 2014 National Conference had also called on President Muhammadu Buhari not to implement the conference's report, even though the President himself has never shown any interest in doing so: "The conference therefore commenced with the region that has the largest land mass and population grossly under-represented and brazenly treated unfairly. This engendered a deep sense of apprehension and justifiable suspicion. Above all, the action of that government (former president Goodluck Jonathan's government) raised the serious issues about the credibility in the outcome of the conference conclusions" (Oyeyipo, 2017).

Yet, the fact of the matter is that the ineffective implementation of several policies that were aimed at ensuring removal of all imbalances among groups and creation of national identity for the highly divided society had resulted in formation of ethnic militias, which further exacerbated identity crisis in the country. As observed by Oyeyipo (2017:27), "the widespread opinion among Nigerians has been that the country is suffering from structural defects which are considered as responsible for some negative tendencies such as violent agitations for self-determination, militancy and terrorism. The suggestion therefore is that even if not all the recommendations of the conference are considered, there are some germane ones urgently needed to bring about unity".

The point remains that millions of Nigerians are dissatisfied with Nigeria as it is presently constituted and it would be foolhardy to pretend that this is not so. At the broadest level, democracy, devolution of power and power sharing have been recognized as the three major institutional paradigms of ethnic conflict management (Otite, 2012:817). Democracy can indeed be an element in the successful resolution of ethnic minority grievances because it provides representation for various opinions through multiparty competition. The most common devolutionary mechanisms include confederation, regional autonomy, regional administrative decentralization and community autonomy (Gurr, 1993:299 cited in Otite, 2012:817). Even though, the problem of Nigeria is not only about the geo-political and ethnic structure (Komolafe, 2016), the restructuring of the country has been a topical issue in the last few years perhaps, as argued in some quarters "to stem the gradual slide into disintegration" (Mordi, 2017). The call for restructuring of Nigeria has been going on for years, especially by people of the South. What does restructuring really entail? Proponents of restructuring say it does not mean that a Yoruba man in Bauchi has

to return to the Southwest nor that the Hausa man in Onitsha has to return to the North. In the words of a socio-political commentator, Christian Udechukwu (Cited in Mordi, 2017):

"Nigeria will be like the European Union where citizens are able to exercise the freedom to live, work and play where they choose without prejudice. The proposed restructuring of Nigeria is to enable all of the six regions to decide on and have full control of matters of health, education, industrial development policy, power, agriculture, transport infrastructure, local policing, revenue mobilization, mining, investment guarantees, local taxes and then leave the Federal Government in Abuja to decide only matters like defense, foreign affairs, immigration, international cooperation, national security and others. No more free money from Abuja to the three tiers of government for unaccountable expenditure. Any region that wants to employ only their best and brightest to govern them can do so; and those who want rascals and illiterates in government can have them. Regions will be free and have power to name, shame and punish the criminals amongst them without recourse to ethnicity, religion and party politics at the center in Abuja. People can insist on local laws and order enforcement to protect their lives and property".

Sekoni (2017b) argues that it is trite to say that the 1999 Constitution has become an albatross around the neck of the nation and the nationalities that constitute it. He said many citizens in the last two decades have been calling for restructuring in the belief that the 1999 Constitution had de-federalised the country in a way that makes it unstable and economically stagnant. For him, the Buhari presidency will be the second administration during which members of the National Assembly have preoccupied themselves with constitutional amendment. Under Jonathan, they assembled some amendments that did not get Jonathan's assent. And in the last two years, returning and new lawmakers have been working at amendments which they now claim are nearing completion. Many citizens have observed that, with little interaction between lawmakers and citizens across the country on what type of constitution citizens prefer, legislators preoccupied with amendment may not be doing this for any reason other than to ensure that they upstage citizens calling for a people's constitution or restructuring (Sekoni, 2017a).

The principle of shared governance under the 1960 Constitution was destroyed by the 1999 Constitution. This is enough for citizens who experienced active governance at the regional level between 1960 and 1975 to feel alienated under a constitution that has reduced the states to mendicants running after handouts from a central government which has the function of dispensing funds from the Federation Account. Funds pooled into the federation account is

divided among states not on basis of productivity but largely on basis of landmass and population of each state. This is regardless of undying controversy over census since 1960. Further, local government creation which used to be exclusively under the jurisdiction of regions are cast in stone under the 1999 constitution (Sekoni, 2017b). As a result, all the changes in the relationship between central and subnational levels of government in the 1999 Constitution destroyed the principle of equal opportunity among the four regions to the extent of making citizens feel that their states have been turned into colonies of the central government. Again, the consequence of this arrangement is alienation of citizens from governance. Citizens in states that are not lucky to have supplied the principal executive officers and their legislative counterparts perceive themselves as orphans of the federal republic. Such citizens, regardless of their social status feel frustrated and suffocated by a constitution that they feel has denied them of the liberty experienced under the pre-1966 constitution (Sekoni, 2017b). While restructuring for better and more effective governance is desirable, Uko (This Day, June 16, 2016) cautions that “restructuring cannot and must not be positioned as the one solution to the problems we have in Nigeria”. He argues further:

As long as we do not change our rent seeking, welfarist – socialist mentality, we will not develop even if we restructure. The scourge of corruption, incompetence and indolence of both the leaders and the led are not factors that aid development. A comparison of Nigeria with countries at par in terms of resources reveals this fact. Further comparison with countries below us in terms of resources, natural, human etc. validates the point. We should not expect any gains from restructuring from the present crop of Nigerians.

As could be observed, it is usually the case in any politically charged discourse in Nigeria to discover that issues are looked at, first and foremost, from highly partisan, ethnic, and religious perspectives. According to Yaqub (2016:9), the debate that has so far taken place on restructuring the Nigerian political and governance landscapes has lived up to this billing. From the content analysis of the debate so far, it is obvious that the debate is largely between the southern protagonists who largely bay for restructuring and the northern antagonists who are apparently largely, on the other hand, opposed to restructuring. Adebayo (2017) contends that the disarticulation of the Nigerian populace from the clamor for devolution and fiscal federalism and the disinclination of the political elite to mobilize the Nigerian masses for the struggle for genuine restructuring have led to the whole thing becoming an elite talk shop whether as seen in the National Assembly, the so called National Conferences and even within the political parties. Given this elite loss of mental and political concentration, the initiative

has been seized by rogue groups led by anti-elite elements as seen in the Boko Haram insurgency, the Niger Delta militia and various self-determination militias springing up in the South of the nation. If they manage to overrun the elite establishment, then we will no longer be talking of peaceful restructuring (Adebayo, 2017).

Whatever arrangement is subscribed to will have to be one that transfers more power to the people. Certainly, this would necessitate some form of structural realignment and devolution of important powers from the federal to the other levels of government, freeing up the center, and making it less attractive to the desperation of political capture. The restructuring of Nigeria needs to be one carried out for greater clarity in the powers and functions of the various levels and tiers of government, in a manner that effectively deals with the concerns of various people and groups (Premium Times, 2016). Nigeria is a member of the Forum of Federation with its headquarters in Canada. But what is practiced in Nigeria today is still too far from federalism. It is over-centralization. And that is why a leader can sit down in Abuja and allocate oil blocks to privileged citizens at his own whim and caprice. Even if most of the oil blocks are allocated to Niger Delta, that will not bring peace and justice to Nigeria. Only federalism in its purest form can.

CONCLUSION

Though, assembling ethnic groups with dramatically different cultural and political assumptions under the umbrella of a nation was a flawed tactic, a mistake that plagues the nation till this very date (Oko, 1998:365), the problems of today are much more a function of the ineptitude, poor vision and unpreparedness of Nigerian leaders than a function of colonial tyranny and structural distortions. Akinlotan (2016:64) contends that though the colonialists arrested nation-state formations and built a questionable and highly disputed and conflictual foundation for Nigeria, and have reprovably stood as guarantors of that suspect edifice and inspirers of those who wear the leadership mantle from time to time; but Nigerian leaders have themselves underscored the race theory of development, especially the Eurocentric perspective, by being unable five decades later to extricate themselves and their country from the stranglehold of external puppeteers (Akinlotan, 2016:64).

Concerning the Niger Delta, it is a fact that attacks on oil facilities in the oil rich region may not be new, but the fact that the renewed zeal of the Federal Government of Nigeria to engage the militants in dialogue continually suffers a major blow affecting the peace and security of the region presents a unique problem. The Nigerian government's top-down approach to the development of the oil-bearing areas has not been people-centered and participatory. Thus, the nature of current and future environmental

problems requires new governance mechanisms that alter incentives in favor of environmentally sound choices.

However, I strongly believe there is need for Niger Delta residents to always demand accountability and transparency from the governing elite in the area on the basis of funds that are regularly accruable to the region through different developmental initiatives of the Federal Government. If poverty and underdevelopment have long associated with their existence, then there are, indeed, no reasons to trust the power elite from the area, as they have been the major drivers of the ad-hoc development plans from OMPADEC through the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to the Ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs. All of these interventionist establishments have not made much difference in the area. Perhaps, this partly validate Eme and Onyishi's (2011) warning that decentralization cannot be equated with democracy, increased influence and people-centered development. Decentralization, according to them, "brings the danger that power and resources will be captured by local elites or vested interest groups". As rightly captured by the Guardian Editorial (2017):

The weightier matter of governance is how to dream big for the Niger Delta and all of Nigeria beyond oil resource appropriation, allocation and sharing unjustly by the central government in a warped federal system. Even as posterity or indeed history reserves a harsh verdict for past leaders of Niger Delta extraction who have wasted unlimited opportunities to improve the lot of the people, there should be a realistic and big agenda for the Niger Delta. Above all, political leaders from the area and those who desire peace in Nigeria should also note that the most pragmatic solution that all Nigerians will benefit from is a recourse to (fiscal) federalism that will make regional development plans easier within the context of resource and land ownership in a proper federation.

In the final analysis, it is time for a bipartisan congregation to re-examine the structural configuration of the nation (Alamu, 2016:3). Political decentralization which has been successful in reducing ethnic conflict and secessionism in some democracies may have proved otherwise in other democratic countries like Nigeria. Thus, there is the need for a state-organized referendum to give all existing or aggrieved ethnic groups the opportunity to determine their status within the Nigerian state. The country is presently witnessing agitations from various groups and it is widely believed that these agitations can be curtailed by restructuring the country, even if, expectedly, it would not put an end to all agitations and problems. Yet, it should be stated that social equilibrium cannot be imposed on society or attained through constitutional reforms alone. Nigeria must

devise strategies for counteracting the constraining effects of social forces that promote ethnicity and other fault-lines. Constitutional reforms, by themselves, scarcely produce stability because legal rules, however efficacious, cannot alter the psychology of citizens (Oko, 1998:367). Yet, there are lessons to be learnt from countries that have collectively negotiated their unions through peaceful means.

For instance, three lessons are deducible from the Brexit and Scottish referendums. Firstly, the referendums have established that no union, no matter how intricate, should be by force. Secondly, the right to self-determination exercised through democratic means has been reinforced as the only legal and civilized approach to resolve contentious issues of nationhood. Thirdly, nationalism has again been proven to be the major causative factor in the push for self-determination. In organizing both referendums, the British government like all civilized, lawful and successful societies abided not only by the ultimate dictates of democracy which vests all power in the people themselves; it also respected article 1 of the United Nations founding Charter which states that "all peoples have the right to self-determination, and by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (Nwobu, 2016). Nigeria, according to the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, is a mere geographical expression. As pointed out earlier, the nations and peoples of Nigeria existed separately and independently for centuries until they were forcefully brought into the artificial state called Nigeria.

To all intents and purposes, I do not infer here that restructuring the polity or recognition of the right to self-determination will solve Nigeria's problems. Far from that, as the country is bedeviled by more fundamental systemic problems. As some people have argued, the dissolution of the present union will only ensure that the problems will manifest and multiply themselves in the different emergent entities. While restructuring may guarantee an improvement on the political architecture of the Nigerian conglomerate and return the nation to the path of genuine federalism, only the transformation of the people's mindset to imbue in them a patriotic and visionary disposition can bring about a stable, peaceful and prosperous nation. While a restructured system of governance - that embraces devolution of power and elimination of duplicity - may reduce the cost of governance and increase the capital expenditure in a constitutional manner, more emphasis should be placed on elevating the capacities of the citizens to enable them play more vital roles in the country.

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