Ethnic pluralism and internal cohesion in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigerian society is seriously afflicted by cultural, economic and political diversities. Sufficient efforts have not been intensified to inculcate in the citizenry a sense of national consciousness. Instead of emphasis on those things that can unite the different entities together, most leaders have sort to expend their energies and efforts on those things that differentiate the various ethnic groups, particularly important of those weapons of disunity they use are religion and ethnicity. Hence citizens tend to pledge their loyalty and allegiance to their ethnic group rather than to Nigeria. There are so many loopholes that remained unplugged in the relationships which have blocked reaching out to one another on the socio-economic and political terrain. A chain is as strong as its weakest link, like the chain all the various ethnic groups in the system are all needed and vital to the collective survival of Nigeria.But the various links are tense and have become very weak. Hence the socio political unrest experienced within the national system.

Keywords:: Ethnicity, Cohesion, Pluralism, Political Diversity

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere eographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English," "Welsh" or "French." The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.

(Awolowo, 1947)

The expression above points to the maladroit conception of colonial Nigeria and unfortunately, since then, no appreciable effort has been made to redress the issues so basic, and so fundamental to the architecture of the nation. Nigeria did not emerge from the general will of the constituent ethnic groups but an imposition by the imperialists; this is one of the obvious reasons why there has been deep mistrust, fear of domination of an ethnic group, sharp competition for political positions and ethnic patronage which have driven a dangerous wedge of fragmentation in the fragile unity of the nation.

Nevertheless, it is hard to find a country that is virtually untouched by one ethnic problem or another, but some cases are principally enlightening because of the way they shed light on general issues and because of their insightful implications. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation and therefore a strikingly plural society. Interestingly perhaps what may first startled the visitor is the medley of peoples–Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, Ibo, Ijaw, Tiv, Idoma, Nupe, Urobo, Birom, Ibibio, Efik, Anang, Ebira, Ekiti and a lot more, thatspace will not allow to mention. Without any iota of doubt, it is in the strictest sense, a medley, because the peoples of Nigeria to a large extent mix but do not mingle in so many respects. It is not hard to notice that each ethnic group holds its own culture, language and religion, its own values, ideas and patterns of human relations.

At individual levels they meet and relatively associate in the 'market place' in buying and selling. Nigeria is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit.Evidently, there exists the likeness of division of labor along ethnic lines in economic and commercial endeavors. However, in contemporary time one factor that seems to unite the peoples of Nigeria is the game of football; they are found united when it comes to the act of playing and watching the game either at home or abroad. At this level there is no discrimination against any one on the basis of religion, ethnic, economic, political and other social proclivities.

2. The State failure in Nigeria

Without reverence for the political tradition, which helps to build reasonable unity among diverse peoples joined in a polity, political life becomes chaotic, and unsettled; a nation fails when there is lack of internal cohesion. Citing the Oputa Commission of Human Rights Fasheun (2003), observed that the three decades of military rule did untold and unimaginable harm to social, interpersonal, and inter-ethnic relationships in Nigeria; the harvest of which is ripe in our socio-political and economic lives. State failure manifests itself not only in the political and administrative spheres but also in provision and delivery of public goods and services. The state has also demonstrated its ineptitude in providing security of lives and property across the

nation. The neglect of security to life and property of most Nigerians has led to a continuous rise in crime, mostly armed robbery.

Alemika (2003) maintained that: if failure persists, it can lead to the erosion of socio-political cohesion. He further stressed that state failure is often associated with economic crisis that triggers inter-communal (ethnic, religious and regional) rivalry and conflicts which if not effectively curtailed can evolve into ethno-religious violence that may lead to civil war, fragmentation, or disintegration and emergence of insurrection and war-lords in parts of a territory. To him the soft version of the usage of state failure is akin to the concept of the weak state. Buzan (1991) makes a useful distinction between strong and weak states on one hand and strong and weak power on the other. Accordingly, "when the idea and institutions of a state are both weak, then that state is in a very real sense less of state than the one in which the idea and institutions are strong", therefore "weak or strong state, states will refer to the degree of social and political cohesion".

In contrast, weak or strong powers will refer to traditional distinctions among states in respect of their military and economic capability in relation to each other … strength of a state neither depends on, or correlates with power". Several indicators of a weak state have been identified. The important ones are:

- High levels of political violence.
- A conspicuous role for political police in the everyday lives of citizens;
- Major political conflict over what ideology will be adopted to organize the state;
- Lack of hierarchy of authority;
- A high degree of state control over the media;
- Absence of "domestic political and societal consensus of sufficient strength to

Eliminate the large scale use of force as a major and continuing element in the domestic political life of the nation (Buzan, 1991).

All the elements above need not be present but at least a majority of them must be present before a state can be classified as weak. These indicators are largely present in Nigeria. Although Nigeria is said to have a free press, the condition is attributable more to the boldness of the media practitioners' than the media laws in the country which are in many respect obnoxious (e.g. Newspapers Registration Decree) and where they are not, they shield the government from accountability (e.g. the Secrecy Act). The large scale and conspicuous use of force is evident in the deployment of armed military and police personnel all over the country to combat crime, as escorts to public officials and to maintain order during most civil activities. The Nigeria state is facing contestation from diverse sources and lacks non-coercive bases for maintaining order and cohesion. The contest over the character and direction of Nigeria Federalism is an ideological disputation. In essence, Nigeria is a weak state (Alemika, 2003). An important feature of State failure is ineffectiveness in the delivery of public goods. According to Stoddard (2001:8):

A failed state results when the leadership and institutions of the state are weakened and discredited to the point where the state can no longer fulfill its responsibilities or exercise its sovereign power over the territory within its borders. The concept of the state is not confined to government and political systems but encompasses the basic structures on which political, civil

and economic life is conducted. The major responsibilities of states reside in the provision of public goods. In other words, a functioning state must be able to maintain law and order and protect rights within it borders, defend against threats from without, and provide (at a minimum) the infrastructure to allow for economic activity

The above conditions, as it does not imply the state of collapse, which is the terminal point of process of failure, are apt for Nigeria's situation. Some other specific indicators of sate failure have been developed. The social, economic and political indicators show vulnerability of a failed state becoming a collapsed state (Onishi, 1998). According to Alemika (2003), the indicators below are symptomatic of Nigerian situation.

- High incidence of political (ethnic, religious and other) violence, including violent crime, state violence etc.

- Failure to provide or deliver essential political, social and economic goods and services, reflected in low allocation of resources (% of GDP and national budget) to the social section – particularly health, education, and social welfare (Social Safety);

- Environment degradation (oil spillage and gas flaring resulting in marine, land and air pollution in the Niger-Delta; desert encroachment in the Northern states that are associated with failure to develop non-wood source of energy for cooking, deforestation in the southern and central parts of the country);

- Intrusion of ethnic and religious extremism into governance;

- Failures of development (poor economic growth, stringent or declining per-capital income, wide income disparities, high inflation, high level of unemployment among different categories of people, high external debt and debt service ratio, high and un-serviced domestic debt, depreciation of national currency, low wages, low capital inflow and high capital outflow, disinvestments, keeping poverty both in scope and intensity).

From the series of measures and indicators discussed above, the Nigerian state is weak and failing. In this study, reference to Nigerian state failure will only be in the soft connotation of the term. But even at that the effects of the failure or weakness of the Nigeria State have been wide-ranging, harsh and importunate. In its strong term, state failure refers to terminal condition where state is characterized by severe ethnic and religious violence and civil war such that the central government lacks total control over parts of its territory to 'rebels' and warlords. Examples of the countries that fit into the strong term usage of the term are Somalia, Sudan and Liberia where central authority is weak and is not in control of a sizable part of the nation's territory. Nigeria has not reached this point since the end of the civil war when the term appropriately applied to Nigeria (Alemika, 2003).

Nigeria is currently acutely divided along ethnic, religious and regional cleavages. The division manifests in lack of cohesion and violent religious ethnic and communal conflicts that have been experienced in different parts of the country in which thousands of people were killed. Ethnic and religious violence involving loss of many lives have been recorded during the past four years in many cities, including Kaduna, Lagos, Jos, Kano, Aba and Warri (Alemika and Okoye, 2002; HRW, 2001). The white paper on the report of

judicial commission of Inquiry into Kaduna State Religious Disturbances of February 2000 revealed 'that a total of 1,295 persons died, unspecified number were buried unidentified. While some others were declared missing". In addition, "individuals collectively suffered a loss of N4, 927,306,603.00, while organizations suffered loss of N1, 445,881,151.00" (Alemika and Okoye, 2002: 15). In spite of the reported colossal loss during the February 2000 crises over the introduction of Sharia criminal law, another equally devastating crisis occurred in May 2002 (Alemika, 2003).

According to Alemika and Okoye (2002), State violence in the form of collective punishment for attack on security officials by some members of community has also persisted on intensified scale. Under Obsanjo regime, two communities were sacked, several people killed and scores of houses were burnt by security agencies as reprisal for attacks on security personnel by some members of community.During the invasion of Odi (Rivers State) in November 1999 and ZakiBiam (Benue State) in October 2001 by security personnel of the Federal Government, hundreds of people were killed and hundreds of thousands were rendered homeless (OMCT/CLEEN, 2002). These cases of state violence lend support to the argument of Rotberg that a failed state often preys on its citizens and "becomes criminal in its oppression of its citizens" (Rotberg, 2002: 87).

Anyone familiar with the plight of Nigeria cannot fail to observe those conditions of state failure enumerated earlier. Alemika also observed that in spite of Nigeria's independence and enormous revenue from oil from the 1970s onward, the "nations" economy remains underdeveloped, distorted and disarticulated," and consequently "the society is plagued by a very high level of illiteracy, mortality rates, absolute poverty; waves of crimes and violence, poor and inefficient but largely unaffordable transportation; communication, education and health care services" (Alemika, 1988:1).

Corruption is a very potent factor in the conditions of a failed state. Rotberg in his argument, says, failed "states have unparalleled economic opportunity, but only for a privileged few. Those who are close to the ruling oligarchy grows richer while the less-fortunate brethren starve" (Rotberg, 2002:89). In three consecutive surveys by the transparency International since 1999, Nigeria was rated either as the most corrupt or second most corrupt nation. Nigeria image has been tainted by corruption.

> *Corruption flourishes in failed states often on an unusually destructive scale. Petty or lubricating corruption is widespread. Levels of venal corruption escalate, especially kick backs on anything that can be put out to bid, including medical supplies, textbooks, bridges; unnecessarily wasteful construction projects solely for the rents they will generate, licenses for existing and non-existing activities, the appropriating by the ruling class of all kinds of private entrepreneurial endeavors, and general extortion. Corrupt ruling elites invest their gains overseas, not at home. A few build numerous palaces or lavish residences with state funds. Military officers always benefit from these corrupt regimes and feed ravenously from the same illicit troughs as their civilian counterparts.*
>
> *(Rotberg, 2002:89)*

Several hundreds of billion dollars had been got from the sale of crude petroleum during the past three decades or so, in Nigeria, but there is absolutely nothing to show for the accrued income. The successive rulers stole and wasted the national wealth through corruption. To sustain the corruption; repression and co-optation of opposition were widely pursued by the civil and military regimes. Corruption flourishes in Nigeria, not because of inadequacy of law but because of the weaknesses and failures of the Nigerian state, where the basis of accumulation among the nation's rulers is corruption.

No wonder then, the rising spate of ethnic criminal violence, insecurity, exploitation of the vulnerability and deprivation of the less privilege citizens, violent ethnic militias/vigilantes, cult violence, economic sabotage and religious intolerance in Nigeria. Viewing Nigeria precarious condition, Justice Aguda in a press interview in 1994 said inter alia "everything is wrong with Nigeria"

Ihonvbere (2003) posits that the continuing crisis of power and governance, the inability to construct hegemony or national project and depriving socio-economic crisis are all precipitates of state failure even state exclusion in certain spheres.

He went further by saying: The State-Nigeria-has never been able to build an appreciable degree of confidence among Nigerians, ensure some discipline within the ranks of the State elites, manage the economy in the interest of the people or construct the much needed platforms of inclusion, tolerance, and participation. As well, the state has been captured and privatized by a tiny fraction of the elite that use public institutions and resource to terrorize non-bourgeois communities, abuse human rights, and loot public funds and mortgage the future of the citizenry. Perceived as wicked, aloof, insensitive, corrupt and distant force, Nigerians relate to the State as an enemy. It is seen as an enemy that must, as opportunity permits, be subverted, avoided, cheated, dismantled and destroyed if the interests of the majority of the citizenry are to be guaranteed (Ihonvbere, 2003). The overall result of all this is not only the erosion of democratic values but also the subversion of the national project and intensification of conflicts. Ihonvbere, lamented, that at the eve of the twenty-first century, Nigeria has no national hero (es), hardly enjoys stability, no national identity, and the rate at which the youth abandon the country for foreign lands remains alarming. He stressed that at all levels, economic, political, social and ideological, even spiritual, the State and its custodians have failed woefully. Since political independence in October 1960, this has been the sad experience of Nigerians. The condition of marginalized nationalities in Nigeria comes from these described patterns above.

3. The national question and the disparaging unity

In the urge to create political unity the tendency has been to negate ethnic, regional and cultural diversities rather than recognize them as building blocks in the construction of a civil society. The result has been often a façade of seeming unity at the cost of many unsettled wounds and denied identities.

(Mustapha, 1995)

What is national question? Ever before the coming of the British rule in Nigeria, the entire land space now called Nigeria was according to Akinyemi (2003), occupied by autonomous and independent nation based on clearly defined nationalities. These nationalities were in a state of war, some were in varying states of economic cultural and religious relationship. He stressed that they were never in a subjugative relationship among themselves even though the colonialists subjugated them. The British themselves have been involved in the question of how to define what the relationship among these different nationalities should be. Agbaje(2003) asserts also that communalism in public life is a second thread of continuity in the invention of the Nigeria tradition. He said, before the colonial rule was imposed, cleavage conflict in the areas now known as Nigeria tended to occur more within, rather than between, geographical zones occupied by ethno-regional constituencies now considered to be culturally united and homogeneous entities with colonial rule. However, what happened was 'a freezing of history as means of creating a governable state'. Thus, 'ethnic identity was regularized and manipulated to invent or at least rigidify tribal boundaries and divisions' with colonial historiography selectively emphasizing "inter-tribal", rather than "intra-tribal" conflicts (Ekeh, 1978).

Akinyemi (2003), maintained, that Nigerians were not originally consulted when the British overlords rolled out the various constitutions that were imposed to govern Nigeria, for example, the 1947 Richard constitution was imposed on Nigerians without consultation, no wonder, the constitution failed. At this, the Colonialists learnt and believed that a Nigerian constitution freely negotiated by Nigerians was the best option in order to avoid any further mishaps. It was right from the beginning of the constitutions, the Nigerians and the British confronted frontally the national question.

The proposals submitted by the British bore two questions encapsulating the national question.

- Do we wish to have a full, centralized system with all the legislative and executive power concentrated at the center, or do we wish to develop a federal system under which each different region of the country would exercise a measure of internal autonomy?
- If we favor a federal system should we return to the existing regions with some modifications of existing regional boundaries, or should we form regions on some new basis such as the many linguistic groups in Nigeria? It is on these two questions that the national question lies. One thing that is important to note here is that in different historical instances Northern leaders were successful in their use of brinkmanship according to Agbaje (2003), to extract concessions from the British Colonial regime while the only instance in which Southern elements initiated brinkmanship met with failure and this in the words of Ayoade (1973), 'sowed the seeds of future grievances in the other parts of the Nigeria federation'.

From this point onward there was deep-seated resentment of the preferential treatment of the North by the colonial administrators, the cumulative effect been a privileged position for the North in the political Calculus after independence, and southern views that now was the time to renegotiate the terms of Nigeria federalism, questioning the fragile sovereignty handed over by the despotic colonial power (Agbaje, 2003).

The last experience with brinkmanship according to Agbaje was and ironically triggered off under military rule and under Buhari's successor, General Ibrahim Babangida, in the context of a botched re-democratization process intended to end a decade of military rule. Babangida's decision to annul the result of

the presidential election held on June 12, 1993 to democratically elect a successor to him brought once more to the fore strong ethnic-regional sentiments and took Nigeria literally back to the pre-civil war years of the 1960's.The situation was not helped because it was the first election to have been won by a Southern Candidate (from the West) in the country's history and by the inability of Babangida, a military officer from the North, to offer credible and acceptable reasons for annulling the result of an election widely acclaimed by both local and international observers including Babangida himself as having been free and fair. Babangida's successor, General SaniAbacha, heightened ethnic-regional tension in his bid to perpetuate himself in office, using the forces of state terrorism against the Yoruba and other oppositional groups, in the process igniting forces that led to the formation of a Yoruba self-help security group christened OoduaPeople's Congress (OPC) which has been re-christened by the government of the day as an ethnic militia (Agbaje, 2003).

Kukah (2003) argued that when the state fails to continue to serve as a platform for the individuals to attain their potentials, human beings tend to find alternative means of creating a sense of belonging. Disengagement sets in according to Kukah, as men and women adopt new survival strategy ranging from belonging to armed gangs, cults and extreme religions or cultural groups, or they adopt false nationalist agenda cast in tribal and religious moulds. They then continue to unleash all forms of terrors on the state, its citizens and agencies.

Addressing the United States senate foreign relations committee in October 1997, William Twaddel, former United States ambassador to Nigeria depicted Nigeria as a state in which:

> *Rampant corruption, the lack of transparency in decision-making, rule by military decree and the precipitous decline of government institutions undermine prospects for Nigeria as a coherent state. Instability or worse in Nigeria could have profound humanitarian, political and economic consequences for West Africa and other regions including the United States.*

There is no doubt, that there have been repeated communal, ethnic, religious and debilitating intra-governmental conflicts since the transition to democracy in 1999. Olukotun (2003) averred that; the debates over the politicization of Sharia, over resource sharing, frequent communal affrays and contentions over ethnic and sub-ethnic arithmetic of appointments at federal and state levels suggest a milieu in which the prospect of democracy and of Nigerian project cannot be taken for granted (Momoh and Adejumobi, 2002). In spite, of the military strength of the state and the expansion of its security services, it remains completely incapable of providing leadership and direction towards the creation and nurturing of values, interests, aspirations, institutions and processes, which would support the cause of nationhood. People just dissolve directly and/or indirectly into their respective particular organizations, which begin to compete with the state for the loyalty, support, emotions and patriotism of citizens.

The national question is believed to be at the root of the crisis of the Nigerian state and the problem of peaceful co-existence. This question varies in time and in space, but may be viewed in two angles (Adejumobi, 2002):

The first is inter-group relations. That is the tensions and contradictions that arise from this relationship dwelling on the issues of marginalization, domination, inequality fairness, and justice among ethnic groups. The second is the class dimension. That is the exacerbation of class inequalities and antagonisms in society between the rich and the poor, the affluent and underclass, or to use the Marxist parlance, the bourgeoisie and proletariat. The latter sometimes reinforce the former and do increase ethnic conflicts and antagonism in society.

The two perspectives are apt for Nigeria but the former gain currency in the contemporary discourse of the national question in Nigeria.

The main issue of the national question in Nigeria is how to structure the Nigeria Federation in order to accommodate groups and guarantee access to power and equitable distribution of resources (Osaghae, 1998). The background to it is the perceived domination of some ethnic groups by the other engendered by the structural nature of the Nigerian Federation, the heavy lopsidedness in center-state relations, which to Wole Soyinka is highly "unbalanced, exploitative, and acquisitive" and the growing impoverishment, frustration and disillusionment of the people, which is viewed as a direct consequence of power structure and ruling class politics in Nigeria (Adejumobi, 2000). On the final analysis, Momoh noted rightly, that "the national question is fundamentally related to the question of rights of nations and peoples particularly in the context of oppression" (Momoh, 2002). The under-listed issues are very vital to the national question (Adejumobi, 2000:126).

- What should be the component units and tiers of government in the Nigeria federation?
- How should they be constituted, based on ethnic contiguity or administrative expediency?
- How should political power and administrative responsibilities be shared among the levels and tiers of government?
- How should the ownership of economic resources be structure in the Nigeria federation?
- What should be the acceptable formulae for sharing federally collected revenue?
- What should be the nature of inter-governmental relations in Nigeria?

In Nigeria today virtually all the various ethnic groups talk about marginalization and domination, hence all the ethnic groups are affected one way or the other by the national question. Momoh illustrated this thus:

For the Niger Delta and oil producing minority it is exploitation and environmental degradation; for the Igbo it is marginalization; for the Hausa Fulani, it is uneven development; for the minorities of the North, particularly the Middle Belt it is one of internal colonialism; for the Yoruba it is power exclusion. Hence everybody is demanding empowerment on the basis of one assumption – xenophobia.

(Momoh, 2002)

The fears and demands of ethnic militias have basically revolved around the issues of National question. For instance, the concern of MASSOB is marginalization of the East in the power equation in Nigeria; OPC is about "power shift", and restructuring of the federation and the quest for self-determination by groups such

as MOSOP, MEND and others in the Niger Delta region is based on the social injustice, neglect and marginalization that the area suffers in the Nigerian nation. In an important sense, these ethnic militias are offshoots of the national question in Nigeria (Adejumobi, 2003).

Most of the ethnic nationalities share the same ideas with the civil society organizations on how to resolve the national question. For most of the groups, the immediate solution is through the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC). Osaghae noted; that the SNC would discuss the major issues and problems of the Nigerian federation. These include, "Northern domination, which became more vexing after the annulment of the June 12 1993, presidential election, believed to have been worn for the first time by a southerner, majority domination and oppression of minorities, the security of the state and the rise of religious fundamentalism, resource allocation, power sharing, distributive Justice" (Osaghae, 1995). He continues:

> *Such a conference is justified on the grounds that a federal union is a voluntary union and that the Nigerian federation as it presently exists is an anomaly because the various groups have not been allowed to decide whether they want to continue to belong to it or not since the British "forced" them into union in 1914.*
>
> *(Oshagae, 1995:343)*

The government in power during this time headed by General SaniAbacha criminalized the Sovereign National Conference (SNC); his government became paranoid about the SNC that he was prepared to systematically eliminate leaders of the group canvassing for the idea just as he eliminated some leaders of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). This is why National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and Oodua People's Congress (OPC) had to operate underground during Abacha's days.

The presidency in the current dispensation shares the position of National Assembly on the issue of a SNC, According to it, those clamoring for a SNC are either idle people, or those bent on fomenting trouble in the country. Its response to the national question issue is to institute a constitutional review process aimed at reforming the 1999 constitution. This view is just a window dressing offer, proposed to sweep the major and basic problem of Nigeria under the carpet, waiting for the umpteen time for it to explode with deleterious consequences.

An editorial of one of the Nigerian newspapers, the National Concord sums it up thus:

> *It is our view therefore that these issues cannot just be swept under the carpet. To do so is to indulge in an act of self-deception. It is politically wrong to foreclose discussion on such a grave national question as the mode of government under which we hope to live. Our country is a multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic nation. This means that we are all stakeholders in the Nigerian Project. This confers on us the right to discuss the mode of our relationship… Unless the issues that threaten to tear our nation apart are frankly discussed, our nation may not know peace, which is a vital condition for economic development and national progress. It is our opinion, that unless the issues of the national question are solved a more ban on the ethnic*

> *militias by the government will on the long run give strength to these groups to resurface for a renewed agitation.*

> *(National Concord, February 12, 2001:12)*

The state of bondage in which we find ourselves in Nigeria is not imposed by nature but by man. It is however, the natural impulse of men to seek for freedom, an impulse unacceptable to the beneficiaries of the unjust status quo. It is a fact that the benefactors who make peaceful change impossible will also make violent changes inevitable, thus the alienation, subjugation and obvious marginalization suffered by the other ethnic nationalities in the hands of the ruling ethnic group and their military allies, led to agitation and the fight for self-determination.

The rise of any marginalized group in any part of the world against the power block could be attributed to injustices and inequity which so many militias are still fighting in Nigeria. Adams (2003) a factional leader of the OPC said "We in the OPC, having also understood the contradictions and prevailing crisis in Nigeria, took the pain to challenge the force responsible for the massive repression, injustice, victimization and gross underdevelopment of our fatherland". It is therefore, clear that before there could be a fertile ground for any militia to germinate there must be a perceived or real injustice by one section of the society who has a way of expressing themselves other than the means recognized by international community as stated in No. 2 of Article 20 of the African Charter or Human and People's Right to which Nigeria is a signatory: "Colonized or oppressed peoples shall have the right to free themselves from the bonds or domination by resorting to any means recognized by the international community". The desire of the OPC to fight marginalization of its people the Yoruba emanates from the words of the great sage Chief ObafemiAwolowo, who said in one of his writings that:

> *"In order that she (Nigeria) may attain her natural birthright and destiny, Nigeria must be re-made and recreated. Every aspect of her existence must be revolutionized..."*

Fasheun (2003) believes in his writing too, that the national question must be properly addressed without which Nigerian unity will be futile and a chasing of the shadow. He said, *"Nigerian Unity is a function of the tribes. Ignore the tribes and there is no unity, no nation. A strong reason the tribes must turn up at some venue to address their problems".* To contextualize the National question, Ekeh (1997), in his work, says: Historically, Nigeria's 'federalism' has passed through several phases. First, there was a phase in which social and cultural barriers were imposed on other people to give them a stigma of "strangers" (example, is the colonial inspired creation of SabonGaris). Second, duality was created between the north and south, following from the protectorates. Third, when regionalism was imposed and the realities of Nigeria were viewed from the point of a trinity: North, West and East. Finally, the minority element became factored into the political calculus. This minority element has two sides to it, a political hegemonic and dominated element. The Fulani in the North, the Efik and Ijaw in the east and Delta region were all minority hegemonic groups in pre-colonial Nigeria (Ekeh, 1997).

Momoh (2003) was of the view that many of the elites of the dominated minorities are in the forefront of and the politics of the current quest for restructuring of Nigeria. This is partly because they account for a

sizeable proportion of the nation's wealth and yet they are victims of exploitation without any commensurate compensation, representation and social amenities. Worst still, the Nigeria state creates the impression that it is wrong, if not criminal, of them to complain against their social and political condition.

One very central point, that must not be lost sight of, is the argument that the Nigerian 'Federation' has never been previously as threatened as it is today and the cardinal reason for this partly has to do with the militarist values and structures of the Nigerian State. This has overtime not only thrown overboard the gains made in the development process and consolidation of the attempts at nation-building or federalism, but it has in addition created centralizing and authoritarian values, institutions and structures that have posed a threat to the Nigerian 'Federation'. In one word, it is hard to talk of Federalism within militarist rather than democratic framework (Jega, 1997; Suberu and Agbaje, 1998). Federalism has always been statist prerogative and all attempts to root it in the people have been aborted by the ruling class, who turn around to claim being the mouthpiece of the toiling people.

4. Conclusion

The persistent ethnic and religious crises that straddled Nigeria socio-political and economic façade have forced in a wedge of division and fragmentation on the hitherto fragile unity, due largely to the successive administrations aversion to true federalism, equity and good governance. The sheer number of different local languages in Nigeria and the consequent cultural and religious pluralism makes the Nigerian political scene very complex. This immense cultural diversity tends to make the country look increasingly fluid and paranoid. Ethnicity has been found to be one of the most powerful forces shaping the political and social relations in Nigeria. On the basis of historic antecedents and the current crises in Nigeria, the nation has a very feeble internal cohesion; its diverse ethnic nationalities always look inward for political clientele support and survival in an inchoate and incoherent polity. Socio-political fragmentation was further encouraged by chauvinistic tendencies.

The survival of Nigeria as one and indivisible nation is unequivocally hinged upon solid and unwavering cooperation and solidarity among the constituent ethnic groups, particularly the tripod ethnic stands on which the Nigeria superstructure and relations within it are based. This can be achieved through the coming together of all the stake holders on a round table, to discuss the modalities of unity and internal cohesion instead of parading unhealthy and ridiculous palliatives. The present mutual fear of possible domination, subjugation and loss of power in Nigeria political space among the various ethnic groups should be put in the front burner and agreeable solution found.

The Holy Bible says in the book of Proverb 11:4 that riches profit not in the day of wrath and I think particularly, the wrath of the masses and the down trodden. Only justice and fair play can deliver our rulers from the impending conflagration that might be triggered by postponing or sweeping under the carpet the call for a National Sovereign Conference, where all the ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria can come together to discuss how they want to be together. Unity is not inherent in man but built through conscious efforts of men in their daily relations.

5. Recommendations

The people and government of Nigeria must rise up to the challenges posed by the structure of the Nigeria Federation in order to accommodate groups and guarantee access to power and equitable distribution of resources. The diversity in the nation should be used for strength and not for political polarization and ethno-religious conflict. For unity, stability and internal cohesion in Nigeria the different peoples must come together to discuss and decide the modalities of relating and associating together as one nation. Brotherly love and harmonious relationship should be the watch words of all and sundry. Anything short of this will lead to perpetual conflict and cataclysm.

Nigeria needs bold, selfless and disciplined leadership that exudes unambiguous refusal to corruption. These virtues will then radiate powerful sensations of well being and pride through the nerve and artery of national life upon which competence and merit are held as national values and ethos, instead of its adumbrations and the mendacious celebration of mediocrity. Justice must be seen to prevail, the welfare of all the people rather than the advantage of a few must be the cornerstone of public policy. It is my candid opinion as I have said before that the benefactors who make peaceful change impossible will also make violent changes inevitable.

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