MINORITY QUESTION IN THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Given the monumental friction, tension and acrimony occasioned by minority question in Nigeria's governmental process, the paper is aimed at encapsulating the dynamics of minority question as it affects/impact the governmental process of Nigeria. It argues that minority question in Nigeria, just like other parts of the developed world, including Australia for example, reinforces itself in the culture and pervasive nature of ethnicity, defined in terms of group interest, sectional polarization, self-esteem and identification. Findings revealed that, Ethnicity is therefore considered as the epicenter of minority agitations as each of these groups struggle not in the nation's interest, but in the interest of identifiable groups and regional hegemony for recognition and control oil resources. The paper concludes that the minority question can not be divorce from governmental processes, because it has become a part of socio-political fabric of the Nigerian state, hence, the need for a virile federal structure that recognizes and responds positively to the interest of the minor groups is essential. The paper is a survey of literatures from existing works of scholars, generated to enhance the understanding of the subject matter under review; as such the methodology is strictly based on content secondary data.

Keywords: Ethnic Conflicts, Regional Politics, Sectarian Division, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of minority and its implications on the process of governance has attracted wider scholarly debates across the length and breath of the globe in recent times. The magnitude and extent of this debates finds expression in the commonality or otherwise of the subject of minority and its attendant impacts in the making and unmaking of a governmental system and structures at whatever level of analysis. Barth(1969), Osaghae(2001), Dawson(1969), Cawte (1968) have argued variously that minority question is a global phenomena affecting virtually all secularized and heterogeneous societies mostly in the Third world states, including Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin American entities, respectively. In the same token, Nurcombe (1967), Dixson (1965), Lacey(1971)and Ogundiya (2010) have corroborated the positions held by world view scholars, and argued further that developed nations , in many cases are trapped in the aura of minority quagmire and, hence, this tendency has literally conditioned and shaped

the direction of internal politics of these political entities in many instances. Thus, countries like Australia, United States of America, and several Scandinavian states are all victims of minority question (Eteh, 2001, Okpaga, 2002, Nnoli, 1978, Nurcombe, 1970). This situation is not different when compared to the Nigerian scenario, which dates back to the era of colonial conquest way back. The question of minority in Nigerian politics is as old as history itself.

The issue of minority has been a part of political equations since the inception of Nigeria as a country (Osaghae, 1998). Minority question therefore became a salient political issue after the conception of regionalism during the Richards Constitution of 1945. Regionalism therefore is believed to be the premise for ethnic minority problems in Nigeria. It can be argued from the above that at the heart of regionalism lies all forms of minority ethnic consciousness because the process entrenched the grouping of ethnic nationalities within three antagonizing regions. Thus, each of these regions was dominated by major ethnic groups namely, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Conversely, the regions composed of the North, East and West, respectively. Significantly, however, issues bothering on minority questions in Nigeria reinforces itself in the competition for space, scarce resources and fear of domination by other larger groups in the socio-economic scheme of things; Worsley (1984) distinctiveness- puts it better as "strategy or weapon in competition over scarce social goods". For a better understanding of the processes of governance in Nigeria, it is only appropriate to discern on such discourses against the backdrop of the very many centripetal forces within the Nigerian 150 million people. On the average, however, this figure has been watered down to several other minority groups namely, Kanuris, Ibibio, Tiv, Ijaw, Edo (Beni)s, Nupe, Urhobo, Ebira, Gwari, Alago, Ogoja, to mention but a few. These groups one way or the other, have their interests to protect within the nation's political system. The result of the ensuing contestation and agitation is directly or indirectly a force capable of making or unmaking the political process. (Nolutshunga, 1996; Aaron, 2003; Ifeka, 2000).

Minority question has been one of immense debate not only in the political realm of the nation's life. It also finds a pride of place in the process of resource allocation, employment, state creation, federalism and devolution of political offices to all and sundry. Side by side this argument is the fact that the Nigerian system is heterogeneous and pluralistic in nature, comprising over 320 ethnic conglomerates. It is instructive therefore to see why such an entity is most of the time overheated by the very clamor for relevance by contending groups in the affairs of state. Of cause, the multiplier-effect of such a diverse arrangement is often, the strongest lording it over the most weakest in the society, in which often the minority is at the receiving end. The twin concepts minority and majority are relative and relational, minority exist only in relation to a majority and vice versa. Eriksen (2002) encapsulate an ethnic minority to be a group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population in the society, which is politically non-dominant and this is being reproduced as an ethnic category, this view is also being taken up by Agbese (2003) in his work on federalism and minority question in Nigeria, who observed that Minority are defined almost exclusively in ethnic terms. As always the case when distinctive population live in the same society, and especially when their relative distributions change, tension and conflict erupt, it highlights the fact that ethnic discrimination is a fundamental feature of human society as espoused by Aguirre et'al (1995) in their study of 'American ethnicity'.

Jerome (2004) wrote that governance as a concept is not new. The concept has existed in both academic and political parlance several years ago. Thus, the complex nature of governance has made the concept to be generic in both character and content. In the absence of clear-cut definition, governance is often used as an umbrella concept under which elusive and ill-defined political processes and concerns as well as desirable goals and value preferences can be subsumed. The World Bank (1992) defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of the country's economic and social resources for development.

However, this definition is rather too vague. At broader level of analysis therefore, governance portends the use of political authority and exercise of control over a society and the management of its resources for social and economic development. It thus encompasses the state institutions and structural arrangements, decision-making process and implementation capacity and the nature of relationship between individuals, groups and the rulership Jerome (2004:206). This definition is all-encompassing because it sees governance as emanating from some degree of consensus, input, conversion processes and feedback. The essence of governance therefore is in the interest of the people over and above self, personal whims and idiosyncrasies. Governance creates an enabling environment for individuals and groups to subsist on the basis of equity, mutual trust, peaceful co-existence and value consensus. It is also instructive to say that for any government to function adequately, the entire civil societies, communities, tribesmen and women, religious bodies, politicians etc, are well represented in the policy making processes with agents of state acting as facilitators in the process of interactions, thereby fostering national cohesion, integration and stability. This scenario has the tendency to free up the Nigerian political system and open up the same for the healthy, less aggressive competition between and amongst the social sects making up the system- for anything less than this bargain could jeopardize the social arrangement thereby tinkering with the much desired national peace, harmony and tranquility.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

For the purpose of this discourse, liberal political theory will be used as a framework in the analysis of minority question in Nigeria's governmental process. Anugwom (2005) argue that liberal paradigm as a tool of analysis is anchored on a view of citizenship as reflecting the legal membership of a nation-state. This means the individuals are perceived as having equal moral rights and worth in the affairs of state and therefore, any form of alienation or domination of one group by the other either at the level of social superiority or economic advantage is grossly antithetical to the provisions of the constitution. Thus, in the opening preamble of the Nigerian Constitution 1999 (as amended), the legal document unequivocally stated that:

> We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: having firmly and solemnly resolved: to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God… and to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people…

The excerpts above define the obligations of the Nigerian state to cater for all persons and groups irrespective of their socio-political and cultural affinities. Interestingly, the liberal school of thought underscores the importance of the existence of ethnic or sub-national groups who are themselves part and parcel of Nigerian state and are therefore supposed to derive maximum provision and protection from the machinery of the state (Awolalu, 2000; Ifeka, 2000; Ujomu, 2002). The liberal perspective logically gives fillip to the constitution as a legal document that has no peculiar obligation or loyalty to any sub-national group but rather national interest. Such constitution usually guarantees equal rights and opportunities for all citizens irrespective of social and cultural, geographic and ethnic backgrounds. In such a circumstance, the nation-state is conceived as the arena of citizenship formation and practices. Again, the state exists as the equal property of all; treats all citizens as equal and every citizen equally identifies with such a state. It goes without saying that on the premise of the above, the sub-national group

becomes largely irrelevant while the nation-state becomes the bastion of solidarity for all persons and groups within the system. In this context, the governance question becomes a two-way traffic as supports freely flows from the citizens into the system, thereby enhancing relative peace and mutual co-existence between government and the Nigerian people at large (Ekeh, 2004; Ujomu, 2002).

To buttress the aforementioned, chapter II of the Constitution 1999 (as amended) on the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy stated inter alia that the conduct of the affairs of Nigerian state shall be done in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states over the other. It further stated that:

> The state shall foster a sense of belonging and of involvement among
> the various peoples of the federation, to the end that loyalty to the
> nation shall override sectional loyalties (Cap 15 (4).

Besides the arguments above, the pluralists have criticized the liberalist, stressing that the latter argument is grossly inadequate in the understanding of minority question in Nigeria. Incidentally, this viewpoint, while recognizing the importance of the sub-national community in providing a primary identity to the individual, promotes consciousness of this primordial group that breeds ethnicity. In any case, the recognition of the sub-national membership of citizens creates a scenario whereby some members are considered disadvantaged since citizenship rights in the larger political community are particular and reflect the norms of stronger 'ascriptive' communities who share a common way of life and can command influence in the nation-state's political process. This means that the existence of some stronger or dominant sub-national communities or class make fairness and equality far-fetched or a mere mirage.

In Nigeria, the pluralist conception of citizenship has led to a situation where the possession of state power is seen as a contest between different sub-national groups, while those in charge of state power use it to favour their own sub-national groups. But even more interesting is that the realization of the fact that the sub-national group offer a more valid definition of citizenship makes the holders of state power more pliable and amenable to the desires of their sub-national groups. The pluralist conception of citizenship has also determined the allocation of resources. Thus, part of the minority ethnic groups on whose soil the nation's wealth is got are incidentally marginalized from the centre of power at the state level. In this situation, the distribution of resources has followed a political process that enables the major ethnic groups in possession of state power to decide both the policy and processes of resource distribution. The process of distribution of the state's commonwealth and the formulae adopted goes a long way in defining the relationship that will exist between the centre and the adjoining sub-groups. This medium also shapes the character of the Nigerian state and precludes the relative harmony or acrimony that will follow eventually in the administration of state policies.

In the contemporary world, virtually everybody is forced to take on an identity as a citizen- and within each state are ethnic variations which are frequently defined by the dominant group; this goes to sure that ethnicity or categorization in society is not restricted to specific societies, but has a global dimension, though differ from one place to the other in terms of intensity, effects and state's response. Erikson's work on 'ethnicity and nationalism identified some of the strategies adopted by states in dealing with minorities to be Domination and multiculturalism; while domination implies segregation on ethnic grounds, i.e the minority being removed from the majority or dominated as the pluralist theory will suggest- "multiculturalism" on the other hand entails an ideology where citizenship and full civic rights need not imply to a particular cultural identity but a national interest or a high degree of local

autonomy to the various inclination (Erikson 2002). Hirschmann (1970) opine that minorities may respond to domination strategy in three principle ways- exit, voice, and loyalty'. The minorities in Nigeria have explored all the three principles at different times; the Biafra experience was an attempt to 'exit' from a system that has majority dominance. 'Loyalty' is always being agued to be difficult because of what others term Nigeria to be "a marriage of inconvenience" or mistake of 1914, as Aguirre (1995) will say "people who define each other as "deferent" often have trouble developing harmonious relationships, as it is the case in Nigeria. The voicing is the aspect that has continuously generated and is still generating rancor within governmental processes and the system as a whole.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adopted by consensus in 1992, the United Nations Minorities Declaration Article 1 refers to minorities as based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity, and provides that States should protect their existence. There is no internationally agreed definition as to which groups constitute minorities (Berndt, 1961, Onimode, 2001). It is often stressed that the existence of a minority is a question of fact and that any definition must include both objective factors (such as the existence of a shared ethnicity, language or religion) and subjective factors (including that individuals must identify themselves as members of a minority).The difficulty in arriving at a widely acceptable definition lies in the variety of situations in which minorities live. Some live together in well-defined areas, separated from the dominant part of the population. (As in the case of the Aborigenes in Australia). Others are scattered throughout the country (as in the case of Nigeria, though with different kind of affinities and agitations as well as interest for resource control at the centre). Some minorities have a strong sense of collective identity and recorded history; others retain only a fragmented notion of their common heritage. The term minority as used in the United Nations human rights system usually refers to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, pursuant to the United Nations Minorities DeclarationUN, 2010). All States have one or more minority groups within their national territories, characterized by their own national, ethnic, linguistic or religious identity, which differs from that of the majority population.

According to a definition offered in 1977 by Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, a minority is:

> A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the State—possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show it only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.

While the nationality criterion included in the above definition has often been challenged, the requirement to be in a non-dominant position remains important. In most instances a minority group will be a numerical minority, but in others a numerical majority may also find itself in a minority-like or non-dominant position, such as Blacks under the apartheid regime in South Africa (Bemdt, 1959; Okpaga 2011; Cantle, 1978). In some situations, a group which constitutes a majority in a State as a whole may be in a non-dominant position within a particular region of the State in question; the case of Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups in Rwanda (central Africa) serves a good example of majority in a minority situation (Scherrer 2001). In addition, it has been argued that the use of subjective criteria, such as the will on the part of the

members of the groups in question to preserve their own characteristics and the wish of the individuals concerned to be considered part of that group, combined with certain specific objective requirements, such as those listed in the Capotorti definition, should be taken into account. It is now commonly accepted that recognition of minority status is not solely for the State to decide, but should be based on both objective and subjective criteria.

The question often arises as to whether, for example, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to certain political groups or persons with a particular sexual orientation or identity (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or inter sexual persons) constitute minorities. While the United Nations Minorities Declaration is devoted to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, it is also important to combat multiple discrimination and to address situations where a person belonging to a national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minority is also discriminated against on other grounds such as gender, disability or sexual orientation. Similarly, it is important to keep in mind that, in many countries, minorities are often found to be among the most marginalized groups in society and severely affected by, for example, pandemic diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, and in general have limited access to health services.

Similarly to minorities, there is no universally accepted international definition of indigenous peoples. Guidance in this regard can be obtained, for instance, from the work of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the provisions of Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the contents of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Various sources cite the following characteristics, either alone or in combination: indigenous peoples are descendants of the peoples who inhabited the land or territory prior to colonization or the establishment of State borders; they possess distinct social, economic and political systems, languages, cultures and beliefs, and are determined to maintain and develop this distinct identity; they exhibit strong attachment to their ancestral lands and the natural resources contained therein; and/or they belong to the non-dominant groups of a society and identify themselves as indigenous peoples (Berry,1970;Osadalor,1998,Bleakly,1961Berger and Luckman,1966).

While indigenous peoples can claim minority rights under international law, there are United Nations mandates and mechanisms dedicated specifically to protecting their rights. In its work, the United Nations has applied the principle of self-identification with regard to indigenous peoples and minorities. In practical terms, a number of connections and commonalities exist between indigenous peoples and national, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. Both groups are usually in a non-dominant position in the society in which they live and their cultures, languages or religious beliefs may be different from the majority or the dominant groups.

Both indigenous peoples and minorities commonly wish to retain and promote their identity. Situations can be found on the ground where an indigenous group could find itself in a minority-like situation and, equally, some minorities have strong and long-standing attachments to their lands and territories as do indigenous peoples. Minorities, however, do not necessarily have the long ancestral, traditional and spiritual attachment and connections to their lands and territories that are usually associated with self-identification as indigenous peoples.

In terms of rights, minorities have traditionally highlighted their rights to have their existence as a group protected, their identity recognized and their effective participation in public life and respect for their cultural, religious and linguistic pluralism safeguarded. Indigenous peoples, while also highlighting such rights, have also traditionally advocated recognition of their rights over land and resources, self-determination and being part of decision-making in matters that affect them. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples requires States to consult and cooperate with indigenous peoples to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before undertaking development activities that might have an impact on them, whereas the United Nations Minorities Declaration contains amore general

right to participate in decision-making and requires that the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities should be taken into account in national planning and programming. This publication does not address the specificities of indigenous peoples, as its main focus is on non-indigenous national, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.

Under the provisions of human rights instruments, States have an obligation to protect the rights of all persons subject to or under their jurisdictions. Express exceptions to this principle relate, inter alia, to political rights. The Commentary on the United Nations Minorities Declaration by the Working Group on Minorities is important as it clarifies the interpretation of the substantive provisions of the document. Regarding citizenship for instance, it considers that "while citizenship as such should not be a distinguishing criterion that excludes some persons or groups from enjoying minority rights under the Declaration, other factors can be relevant in distinguishing between the rights that can be demanded by different Minorities For example, "those who have been established for a long time on the territory may have stronger rights than those who have recently arrived."It suggests that "the best approach appears to be to avoid making an absolute distinction between 'new' and 'old' minorities by excluding the former and including the latter, but to recognize that in the application of the Declaration the 'old' minorities have stronger entitlements than the 'new'.

In practice, under international law, certain minority rights have been made applicable to recently arrived migrants who share an ethnic, religious or linguistic identity. Their treatment is to be rooted in the customary international law principle of non-discrimination, which is fundamental in international law and is reflected in all human rights instruments and documents. Indeed, the right not to be discriminated against is guaranteed under several instruments of direct relevance to minorities. These include the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals Who are not Nationals of the Country in which they live.

A particular problem relating to minorities and citizenship is that all too often members of certain groups are denied or deprived of their citizenship because of their national or ethnic, religious and linguistic characteristics. This practice is contrary to international law, particularly in regard to article9 of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which states that "a Contracting State may not deprive any person or group of persons of their nationality on racial, ethnic, religious or political grounds." It is thus important to note that discrimination against a person on one of the aforementioned grounds resulting in the arbitrary deprivation of nationality may contribute to meeting some of the requirements in the determination of refugee status. Most of the world's estimated 15 million stateless persons also belong to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities.

Discrimination against minorities has frequently led to their exclusion from citizenship. Such exclusion is often experienced in newly independent States that define citizenship in a manner that excludes persons belonging to certain minority groups who 2 E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2005/2, paragraphs, 10–11 are considered as "outsiders" despite long-standing ties to the territory of the new State. Just as discrimination against minorities may be a cause of statelessness, the very fact that members of a group are stateless can undermine their exercise of a broad range of human rights. Although in principle most human rights are stateless persons, face obstacles in exercising these rights. These obstacles may be greater still if the stateless person also belongs to a minority group. Statelessness can be addressed by applying the norms set out in the major universal and regional human rights instruments, including those pertaining to birth registration, the right to acquire a nationality, non-discrimination in the acquisition, change and retention of nationality by men and women, and

the conferral of nationality on children. The Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness provides detailed guidance in this respect.

4. MINORITY PROBLEMS AND RESOURCE CONTROL

The underlying argument about the pervasive nature of minority question in Nigeria is that it has its roots in ethnicity. Thus, despite the existence of multiple bases of identity identified in the country, minorities are defined almost exclusively in ethnic terms (Agbese, 2003). Even at that minorities are not defined in absolute numbers but merely in reference to the three dominant ethnic nationalities of Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. Those tagged "minorities" are the categories of people that do not belong to these well-known majorities. Agbese (2003) has observed that while the three groups are called majority ethnic groups, all the other groups in Nigeria are simply compressed together under the aegis of minorities. The argument here is therefore that some groups so-called minority in the Nigerian federal system, for example, Tiv people of Benue State, Kanuri and Ijaw with relatively high population figures are all merged into the minority score card with groups whose members are a little above few hundreds in terms of numerical strength. Minority question is also best appreciated when a distinction is made between those in the category of the majority in terms of perceived socio-political disadvantages that faces most Nigerians.

Fashina (1998) argued that the problem of ethnic minorities is that of members of a group (within a multi-ethnic society), having a common ancestry and being disadvantaged, exploited or discriminated against in the distribution of resources, rights, power, merely by virtue of their ancestry and their numerical disadvantage. The assumption from the foregoing is that the Fulani in Nigeria are numerically at par with many of the groups categorized as minorities, yet, the Fulani are not counted as minorities. This assumption is anchored on the premise that the Fulani do not suffer any socio-economic disadvantages despite their relatively smaller population. It is also heart-warming to note that the Hausa/Fulani fusion has practically distorted any meaningful disparities between the two as both are seen as one socio-political entity.

Consequently, scholars have argued that minorities who are harbored in the Nigerian state have been largely affected positively or negatively in the process of administration of government either at the state or local council levels. Issues bothering on state creation, resource allocation and political representation are all calculated around minority question. Many instances abound in Nigeria, for instance, the row over leadership tussle in most states of Nigeria including, but not limited to, the Ogojas and Ibibios of Cross River state, Tiv and Idoma of Benue, the Eggon and Alagos of Nasarawa state, etc. All of these groups have been either dominated or marginalized in the process of power sharing exercise, and the overall impact on the process of governance is better imagined (Usua, 1998; Eteng, 1996).

"Cultural traits are not absolutes or simply intellectual categories, but are invoked to provide identities which legitimize claims to rights. They are strategies or weapons in competitions over scarce social good" (Worsley, 1984:249).

Ihonvbere and Shaw (1998) wrote that minority agitations are based on the belief that ethnicity constitutes the basis for political competition. Thus, minority agitations have come to terms with several multiple contexts. First is the notion of imposition of alien 'rulership' on the indigenes as in the case of pre-colonial Hausa/Fulani sects who were believed to have been excluded from political and economic opportunities including control of markets. Second, it is also believed that the target of some majority is those in the minority group. The case of Tiv and Idoma is once again apt given the agitation by the Idoma way back in 1995 to have a state of

their own devoid of any form of domination by majority Tiv. Again, the many agitations in Nigerian history is rooted in the control and domination of resources, access to power to determine the courses of distribution of national wealth, marginalization of inferior groups by majority super-groups who apparently become owners of the Nigerian state, direct its internal/external affairs and virtually subvert the common good of state, this is summarily captured in the quotation above- Worsley's work on 'Culture and World Development, (Worsley 1984). Situations such as these have resulted in wild protests, litigation, and in some cases open violence, thereby disrupting the smooth conduct of governance in Nigeria.

It was Ken Saro-Wiwa who advocated and employed the concept of internal colonialism to help explain the plight of minorities in Nigeria. The essence of internal colonialism is used to mean the use of political power to transfer resources from territories of minorities to majority enclaves, marginalization of minorities in the affairs of governance, resource control and representation. Conversely, the removal of resources from minority areas creates a periphery of economically disadvantaged territories. It also follows logically that political power in the hands of majority translates to economic power, which in turn is used to simultaneously develop ethnic majority territories. At the same time, the same political power is used to arrest the economic development of minority territories. Usua (1998) argue that not only does the removal of minority resources deny minorities the means for economic salvation, the process of extracting the resources (largely petroleum), leaves the land ecologically devastated, and hence constitutes a threat to the means of livelihood and a problematic scenario to the affairs of state, arising from the tension it will breed. It is worthy of mention that towards the end of colonialism, the Willink Commission was set up to ascertain the facts about the fears of minorities in any part of Nigeria and propose means of allaying those fears whether well or ill-founded (Willink Commission, 1958). Minorities called for the creation of three new regions (Mid-West, Middle Belt) and Calabar – Ogoja-Rivers. The outcome of this demand brought about the establishment of a Niger-Delta Development Board and series of affirmative action programs to help in that regard. Nonetheless, the inability of the commission to fashion out new regions however, did not end minority agitations. Political parties were formed including the United Middle-Belt Congress, the United National Independence Party and the Benin Delta Peoples Party. All of these were vehicles for fostering minority demands (Okpan, 1977; Lemacherd, 1994; Naamen, 1995). These parties were also used as tools for alliance with other parties to press home their demands.

However, minority demands assumed a different dimension when in 1967, Isaac Adaka Boro, Sam Owonari and Nottingham Dick and other groups took up arms against the state in an attempt to secede. Even when these groups were crushed by agents of state, the ideologies they professed lived on to date and has manifested in several other boisterous groups in the Niger Delta region. Saro-Wiwa, a leading minority rights advocates and a former president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peole (MOSOP), has argued in his submissions to the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Tribunal that:

> Self-determination or ethnic autonomy is enjoyed in abundance in
> Nigeria by the Igbo, the Hausa Fulani and Yoruba… their gains is the
> loss of all other groups who are forced to be administered in a multi-
> ethnic state where they suffer a clash of culture and their progress is
> stymied (2003:250).

Similarly, in the submissions by the Ogoni minorities as contained in the Ogoni Bill of Rights, it was stated unequivocally that:

> Political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the republic as a
> distinct and separate unit by whatever name called, provided that this

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autonomy guarantees the following: (a) political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people; (b) the right to control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development; (c) adequate and direct representation of right in all Nigerian national institutions… (Ogoni, 1991).

Balogun (1998) opine that the excerpt above represents a revolutionary idea in Nigeria's governmental process and that this position is capable of turning the nation-state around in the interest of all and sundry. This idea is reaffirmed when he maintained that:

If the Bill of Rights were to be applied to all of Nigeria's 300 or more ethnic groups, what Saro-Wiwa was in fact calling for was a fundamental restructuring of Nigeria's federal structures that would allow for genuine local autonomy everywhere, leading to federation of nationalities in which each component group would have direct access to a sizeable proportion of the income generated from local resources…. This is a revolutionary principle in the Nigerian context, because the parasitic existence of the elite group that have confiscated the apparatus of national government is rooted in their ability to divert oil revenue and other national resources in their private pockets… the looting activities of Nigeria's leadership elite would be severely curtailed (1998:16).

The notoriety of perceived revolts in Nigeria's Niger-Delta region is better appreciated sequel to the abrupt emergence of the various irate groups in the region. Thus minority sects such as Ethnic Minority Rights of Africa (EMIROAF), Ijaw Youth Federation, movement for the survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger-Delta; Ijaw National Congress, the Chikoko Movement, Niger-Delta Human and Environmental Rights Organization and the Niger-Delta Volunteer Force, (Agbese, 2003). These groups and other organizations that have come to be known by different nomenclature have demanded that the inhabitants of the Delta must control their resources. Thus, the central issue in the endless agitation is the ownership and control of the environment that generates the bulk of the national revenue – crude oil. It is on record that the Niger-Delta region is a devastated region owing to the reckless crude oil exploration and exploitation policies of the Nigerian governments in collusion with multinational oil corporations (IJN, 1999). Arguments arising from the foregoing points to the fact that there is a systematic and complete take-over of all facets of the oil industry by the three majority ethnic groups in Nigeria who do not produce oil, and also do not suffer the environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration. Neither do they know the pains of economic pollution suffered by the communities resulting from the huge disparity between their wages and those of resident oil company employees. The bottom line of this state of affair has further aggravated the existing tension in the Nigerian polity, entrenched rancor and acrimony, engendered anarchy and rebellion, dissuaded Foreign Direct Investment, and truncated the path to a stable, peaceful and mutual co-existence between and amongst Nigerians in the recent past. The attention of government has also been drawn to the activities of the Niger-Delta militia while billions of tax payer's monies have been spent on the recent Amnesty Program to forestall peace in the region and Nigeria as a whole.

The multiplier effect of all of these is that resources meant for infrastructural development are diverted into other areas of interest to the neglect of vital development needs. It also follows that such agitations is more or less continuous exercise as several other groups (the Boko Haram Saga with less ambiguous demands) continue to spring up in counter agitations.

This phenomenon has the capability of truncating the nation's young democracy, deplete its resource base in favour of trivial national matters and put the nation on a glimmer, less prosperous pedestal in her quest for greatness few years from here.

The Nigerian Constitution 1999 (as amended) in its fundamental objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy has declared, albeit that the legal document provides for all Nigeria irrespective of age, sex, geographic affinity, ethnic affiliation, e.t.c (Chapter 15(2). Accordingly, the constitution becomes a veritable platform upon which the Nigerian people are guided and resources of the nation equitably harnessed and distributed. Osaghae (1998) has also noted that state creation exercise right from the civil war era in 1967 has been part of attempt by government to cater for the diversities making up the Nigerian state. It is equally important to state here that recent agitations by persons and groups for creation of more states are a negation of the ideals of the exercise as a sine qua non for national cohesion and integration. Similarly, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), now known as Education Tax Fund (ETF), has not faired any better to resolve the lingering national question in Nigeria. The communiqué of the Urhobo Economic Summit (1996) observed that:

> Organs have presently only created room for excessive administrative money transfer and handling between parallel and unconstitutional agencies of government thereby whittling down the funds before getting to the communities. The PTF's (as it was called then) nationwide micro-management strategy from far away in Abuja in particular has been a total failure. PTF and OMPADEC cannot supplant the simple principle of community mineral ownership with the payment of mutually agreed taxes by them to the various tiers of government. This is in consonance with the laws of true federalism which are abandoned following military incursion into the body politics of the country (Commique, 1998 as cited in Aaron et al, 2003).

Apart from the above, government of Nigeria has revisited the revenue sharing formula in line with the principles and tenets of derivation. Of late, the Niger-Delta region has been allotted 13% share of the revenue from the Federation Account. Government has also created the Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as well as the Ministry of the Niger-Delta. All of these are avenues designed to placate the Delta region thereby curtail aggression against the state.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper x-rays the dynamics of minority question as it impacts on the nation's governmental process, not just in Nigeria but also in advanced countries of the world as well as the place of minorities in the international Law. It has been argued here that the Nigerian Federal System, just like many other nation-states, has suffered serious setback over the years arising from the multiple cases of minority agitations. The bottom line of agitation however, reinforces itself through ethnicity which further translates to the politics of resource control. Nigeria being a mono-cultural economy with Oil as the backbone of all activities including national revenue, therefore presents oil as the epicenter of this mutual conflict because every activity within the Nigerian nation state has come to be defined in terms of oil.

The exploration of oil mineral and the exploitation of the same, either by the oil prospecting multinationals and their domestic elite collaborators, have all contributed to

bolstering agitations by minority groups who feel short-changed in the socio-political and economic affairs of state. It is the position of this paper that minority agitations in Nigeria has come to stay, and it is pretty difficult to divorce this monster from the socio-political fabric of the Nigerian state. Several other agitations recently by groups in the Nigerian system allude to this. The agitations for more states, competition for space, terrorism, arson, high level of crime, corruption, moral decadence, injustice, violence either before, during or after elections, religious sentiments, and religious war, etc. All these are pointer to the fact that the need to create a virile federal structure that recognizes the interests of adjoining minor groupings is still a far cry.

It is instructive that government needs to do more, especially as it pertains to the Post-Amnesty deal. The same gesture should be extended to those behind recent bomb blasts that have ripped across the length and breath of Nigeria in recent times. There is no gain saying that excessive violence caused as a result of minority agitations will eventually drag the nation's image into disrepute, destabilize the bureaucracy, breach the security, discountenance the policy thrust and direction of government, discourage investments and further deplete the dwindling economic fortune of the Nigerians state in general. The spiraling effect of this is that Nigeria's quest for survival in the era of global economic crunch is adversely affected while the entire process of governance is largely soiled with stress and friction capable of truncating our collective aspiration as an indivisible entity, thereby reversing the trend of progress backward, in reminiscence of the Hobbesian state of nature where life generally is bloody, brutish, nasty and short.

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