States Creation and the Ethnic-Minorities’ Conundrums in Nigeria: An Interrogation of the History and Realities for Nation Building

**By**

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**Introduction**

Nigeria a Federation with over 250 ethnic, sub-ethnic groups, multiple religious identities and interests in addition to varying cultural, historical and politico-economic experiences makes the agitation for States creation on certain parameters (solving minorities’ problem) an aspect of structural processes that requires not only to be historicized, but interrogated within the context of minority interests. The unending advocacy or agitations for States shows that there is a problem in identifying and app1ication of the mechanisms for resolving contentious political problems affecting Nigeria's federalism for a long time. From 1861 when the issue of creating colonial administrative units began among the various colonial interests, to 1957 when Nigerians began to partake in the matter till date, States creation and the agitation for more have been viewed variously but especially as a means among other things, to better protect and not to sacrifice the rights of minorities to expediency (Ashafa and Gora 2008).

History has shown that there is no modern or defunct nation in the world that has not taken its fair share of problems over nation-building. In this case, global menu of problems like civil wars, revolutions, counter-revolutions, secession, and regicide, genocide, ethnic and religious conflicts and so on had been experienced differently across the globe. This is also the case with our federation, which apart from the sad but needless civil war has been experiencing its own share of difficulties and problems especially in dealing with the so-called minority interests (Eteng 1996, Awa 1983). Ethnic minority agitations in Nigeria have been a problem even prior to the country’s independence. How to solve such problems have led to the creation of States, Local Governments, boundary adjustments, the institutionalization of the Federal Character principles as well as zoning and rotation in power sharing (Aku 1992; Osaghae 1998) to accommodate their interests and fears side-by-side with the interests of majority ethnic groups. Though States creation in Nigeria appeared to be an exclusive military terrain due to its dictatorial character, the end of military regime and the re-inauguration of democracy in 1999 have given pessimists an opportunity to express concern not only over the political and economic interests of ethnic minorities, but the fate of Nigeria’s unity as a nation. And because most of Nigerians attitude hardly seem to sincerely care much in solving these problems, once and for ever, the agitation for the creation of States has continued till date. That Nigeria is getting into deeper and deeper into troubles with its corporate existence as a nation is no comfort to millions of Nigerians, African men, women and children.

While it appears very ridiculous and nearly impossible to expect having separate States as administrative units for the more than 250 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in the Federation, States creation does not seem to bring to an end further minority problems and agitations once States are created. This paper is a historical presentation of the trends in the agitations for and creation of States in Nigeria. It is meant to be a mirror for understanding the past as we try to fine-tune a comprehensive political reform agenda for the country in the 21st century. In the light of the above therefore, the paper brings to the fore the genesis, trends and dynamics involved in the advocacy and creation of States in Nigeria.

The paper raises some vital questions. For example, to what extent does the State creation exercise addressed or solved the problem of minorities that was meant to?; What has been the basic criterion for the creation of States and to what extent could this be said to have been transparent and objective?; How do we say that the creation of States exercise have improved the poor man's lot?; Is the continuous multiplication of States the only mechanism Nigerians can think of and should continue to rely upon to resolve political problems arising from problematic federal system and to bring ‘development’ to the people in this 21st century?; What other principle(s) should we begin to look at and which is to be constitutionally appropriate and practicable to address the arrant multiplication of States as an old fashion means of addressing Nigeria’s minorities’ problems?

**Conceptual Analysis**

It should be understood *ab intio* that knowledge of history is produced through different conceptual perspectives and theories. Our conceptual premise in this Endeavour stems from the fact the Nigerian federalism has been problematic since its creation. This problem stems from the fact that nobody was assured that everybody would be happy with the Nigerian federalism. When Nigerians began to discuss and advocate for the creation of States, it was at a time the Regions then were built on a ‘majority’ tripod federalism. That is Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. For those who initially agitated for the creation of States out of the existing tripod Regional structure as in above, it was seen in a manner-like of an old man with three chickens, who take them to the market to sell. As long as the three chickens are tied together as it normally done, (as the Regions were), they can neither move nor progress in any direction as each bird tries to pull the other two in their different direction. In this manner the three birds can be left lying until it pleases the old man to sell them at the rate he would want them sold. This was the position of the Henry Willink Commission's Report that recommended for other solutions than the creation of States to allay the fears and apprehension of minority groups in 1957 (Willink Commission 1958).

However, the new political leadership in the country after independence accepted States creation in response to the agitation for minority rights protection. In this way and it was to get worst federalism was to make very few happy on patrimonial terms, which inevitably made dissent and counter-contestation part of Nigeria’s politics and political history. As the prospect for national unity became gloomy later, the military latched on States creation as a weapon of war designed particularly to weaken the strength and structure of Biafran rebellion. This was by providing a basis for Eastern ethnic minorities to rebel against the Biafran project (Mimiko 2001).

Consequent from this, creation of States should be understood as an elite affair, an enterprise contoured, prosecuted and employed by the elite for the satisfaction of their thirst for power, relevance and all the appurtenances that goes with these. That is why 42 years after the first State (Region) was created in 1963; the phenomenon has not been a genuine and functionally rewarding basis for resolving the National Question (Lemco 1991; Fashina 1998; Jason 1998). It has not also been able to address the problem of mass alienation from the political and economic processes of the nation, which States creation was presumably set out to do in 1963.

Truly, Nigeria's Federalism only developed through disparity rather than aggregation and unlike the classical federa1 models, Nigeria's never evolved by association or incorporation of external units to an initial core (Cassirer 1979; Oyovbaire 1985). The number of States in the country grew from 3 to 4 Regions the 1 to 12, 19,21,28 and the present 36 States as a result of the continuous fragmentation of pre-existing units, which once divided, developed or were endowed with rigorous identical functional characteristics. The continuous rising in oil revenue and the unexplainable passion of power relations, according to Panter-Brick (1970) have increasingly made the creation of new States compatible to their heavy and prostrating financial dependence on the Federal Government.

Even as this arrant lack of effectiveness in the creation of States remains a permanent feature in the political processes in the country, there has never been a transparently objective criterion for State creation. This therefore transformed States creation into an instrument of political and patronage. In particular, it is been used especially by the military regimes to enhance the competitive edge of particular tendencies and regimes at the different historical trajectory. This absence of transparent objective criterion for State creation makes the clamour, agitations and advocacy for new States an unending issue in the political processes.

Much as this is true, the history of State creation shows that the exercise has not only failed to solve the problem of ethnic minorities but it had rather aggravated the emergence of new ones. It gave the unitarist leaders the military regimes were a veritable instrument to deal a fatal blow to Nigerian Federalism. Despite that a uniquely pluralistic polity like Nigeria could better be administered by a Federal structure, the different military leaders that ruled the country especially since the last 20 years were absolutely driven by the gullible desire to personalize or what an author best described as “myownised” the political power they had seized and would not want to part away with (Kukah 1999). The attendant primitive accumulative and 'divide and rule tendencies exhibited, have systematically, if not categorically under mined the structure of the Federal system by creating States, while posting their "military boys" as "Administrators". The emerging paradox and contradictions were what paralyzed the Nigerian political and development agenda.

Most Nigerians sees States creation as a mechanism for bringing development. This is indeed a glaring poverty of ideas and a sign of the none-viability of the Nigerian development project previously conceived which made the provision of basic infrastructure, the requisite for creation of States. This is to say, creation of States was to become a means of the so-called bringing development nearer to the people, which again informed the multiplications of these ‘development centers’ and the continuous advocacy for more. The agitations for States was assimilated into a developmental strategy capable of promoting the so-called better distribution of the national cake while also bringing administration closer to the people, making it the equivalent of development programme designed to benefit the mass poor. Thus, as long as we continue to perceive development as something that can only take place in a rural environment, only when a new development outpost with an effective and disciplined bureaucracy the States have become for so long we shall be confronted with agitation for mo re States in our political processes.

At another revel the history of Nigeria shows that creations of States in relation to the conduct of elections at the center through ‘majoritarian democracy’ had not a solution to minority problems. The creation of States, that is to say, have not guaranteed the protection of ethnic nationality identities, arrested the cry against political domination or deterred economic marginalization in relation to power balance and acquisition. Majoritarian democracy has not in fact, guaranteed equal sharing of power and resources between the different pluralist elements in the country and has not in any way, despite the multiplication of States, prevented the cries against marginalization and advocacy for more States as a solution to the problem.

In fact, the incessant fragmentation, if not atomization of Nigeria into an increasing number of dependent States and Local Government entities, while it initially contributed in containing certain centrifugal tendencies, has its own unwanted effects. The increasing transformation of Nigeria's original 3 Regions of 1954 into a myriad of States and Local Governments therefore means that the territorial space within which a Nigerian citizen can comfortably lay claim of indigenous status is now far smaller than it used to be in the 1950s. And it has equally reduced into second class citizen scores of Nigerians who should qualify as indigenes within a larger territorial political landscape. What we mean here is that the agitations for and the creation of new States have become perpetual with increasingly acute criteria of differentiations and the unfortunate continuous compartmentalization of individual Nigerians as compelled by the 'indignity' criterion of identifying citizens in a society with increasingly constrained boundaries. This is like building nationality at the expense of 'citizenship'.

In Nigeria, the issue of dominant ‘majority’ and dominated ‘minority’ has been constrictively discussed within the prism of numerical strength and weakness and subsequently politicized instead of in socio-economic circumstances and prism even as there are clearly discernible class dichotomy among Nigerians than in ethnic lines. In this paper, the polemical and energy dissipating than productive debate about ‘minority’, ‘majority’, indigene’ and ‘settler’ should rather be appreciated perhaps because rightly or wrongly, “we” feel that “some” or “others” among us had subjected “us”, “others” into unacceptable level of rewarding relationship in the federation. And therefore “theirs” had an overbearing impact on “our” search for the comfort zones federalism should naturally provide for all.

Consequently therefore in this paper, it will be argued that based on this historically trite conceptualization of States creation in Nigeria., the seeds of the ongoing political crisis, minority agitations and the claim for reforms and restructuring in the future will perpetually remain perhaps with negative impact on our collective interests, unless certain principles of power sharing are adopted in place of States creation. If put to test, these new principles may go a long way to guarantee the ongoing separatist agitations, without the trouble and high cost the multiplication of States in Nigeria have become. That apart, while federalism succeeded in bringing diverse plural nationalities together within the Nigerian project, our argument here is that it is true federalism than States creation that will keep them happily together.

**Understanding the Pattern of Agitations for States Prior to Independence**

The agitation and advocacy for States creation in Nigeria began in a manner as to alter the structure of the existing 3 Regions. In each Region there existed strong protestation against the arrangement based on certain existing circumstances, which we shall later come to see. The fears being entertained by the agitators who were also minority groups were later discovered by the Willink Commission to be legitimate and genuine in each of the Regions as we shall also come to discuss.

1. ***Agitation in the Western Region***

Here the agitation was to split the Region into two namely Western and Mid- Western Regions. The latter was to consist of the Provinces of Benin and Delta, with a little boundary adjustment that would add the villages of Sobe and Ijagba to the Benin Division. This was based on the notion that as people with distinct ethnic group and historical antecedent, that should be politic ally limited in one Region of homogeneous composition. Championed by the Mid-West State Movement, the agitation was that all Edo speaking people be limited in the new Region, while The Ibos of Asaba and Aboh be merged with their kith and kins in the Eastern Region as demanded by the Action Group while the Ijaws of the East and West be grouped in the Western Region (Willink Commission 1958).

2. ***Agitations in the Eastern Region***

The agitations were more proliferated as four new States were being demanded. These were an Ogoja State, a Cross River State; a Calabar-Ogoja-River State (COR) and a Rivers State. This could be attributed to the existence of various ethnic and sub-ethnic nationalities that made up the Region. Those who agitated for an Ogoja State consisted of the various minority elements of the former Qgoja Province and championed principally by the Ogoja Province Union (OPU). The main contention was to get separated from the central body of the dominant Ibo population, as well as the Efik and Ibibios whose relatively larger population combined together was a source of concern to the minorities.

While this was so, the agitation for Cross River State was due to the de sire to unify the Efik language and the Ekpe society who were banded by year s of trade and mission activity, the COR State Had its strong support from various protagonists. To the protagonists of such a State, the combination of the various ethnic nationalities from these areas together minus the Ibos would give them equal advantage of population that none could actually predominant over the other. The ethnic and Historical affinity in Uyo, Eket, Enyong, Ikot, Ekpene, Abak, Opobo and Ogoni Division made it attractive for the non-lbo populace. But the Ibos were vehemently opposed to the demand for a COR State (Willink Commission 1958).

The Rivers State area as agitated for according to the Willink Commission finding was to consist of the whole Rivers Province, made up of such Divisions as Brass, Degema, Ogoni, Port Harcourt and Alioada in addition to the Ijaw Division to be detached from the Western Region, as well as such as Opobo, Andoni and Ndoki were to be included. These communities entirely lived in the creeks and swamps of the Niger-Delta. The Rivers State agitation was championed by the Council of Rivers Chiefs also known as the Rivers Chief and Peoples Conference.

3. ***Agitation in the Northern Region***

Unlike in the Eastern Region where the States agitated for were many, in the Northern Region it was only the Middle Belt State that was agitated for. The area to be covered by this separation was a bit complex to the Minority Commission, but the main thrust was that it should cover areas where pagans and Christian population were strong and Muslim population was comparatively weak in the Region. In fact, the area for this State fall outside the dominance of the defunct Sokoto Caliphate, and this area were to be detached from fiveProvinces, namely, Benue, Plateau, Niger, Adamawa and Zaria.

In other words the Middle Belt State agitated for was to consist of such areas as Ilorin, Kabba, Southern parts of Bauchi and Zaria Provinces, Numan Division in Adamawa as well as Muri and Wurkum Districts in Adamawa Province. The movement or agitation was championed by the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), whicI1 metamorphosed from the Non-Muslim League (NML) originally formed by Pastor David Lot (Dudley 1986 and Whitaker 1970).

As we shall come to discuss, even though the Willink Commission discovered the genuineness of the fears by the minorities agitating for states as a means of allaying their apprehension in an independent Nigeria, it did not recommend the creation of any single State. Rather, the Commission recommended for the entrenchment in the independent Constitution remedies other than the creation of States. These among others included the guarantee of fundamental human rights, and the absolute implementation of democratic practices to assume the apprehensions of the minorities (Willink Commission 1958).

The departing colonial regime that set up the Willink Commission in the first place was not favourably disposed to the idea of creating States in Nigeria. Capitalizing on the anxiety for independence with immediate effect, the regime made the creation of Sates conditional so that if States were created, independence would have be postponed. The nationalists agreed for independence without the creation of States and the British left Nigerians to solve their own problems on the matter their own way.

Originally, the fears of the minority ethnic groups prior to independence were what prompted the agitations in the first place. The tripod nature of the Regional Structure in which three major ethnic groups predominated in each was a serious source of apprehension to the minorities. In fact, they felt matters would be worse for themselves if independence was granted without restructuring the Regional arrangement, especially that their rights to self-determination could be sacrificed to expediency. In each of the Regions, there were certain prevailing conditions, which necessitated the fears and the agitations depending on the historical exigencies of inter-group relations amongst the minority groups vis-à-vis the majorities. But this could be seen under the followings:

1. **Fears of autocratic Governments** – In all the Regions, the major ethnic groups were in control of the parties and the Governments. And in each Region, there were accusations of certain dictatorial tendencies and less tolerance to the oppositions coming largely from the majority groups in Government against the minorities. In the Eastern and Western Regions for example, Azikiwe and Awolowo respectively, were alleged to be dictatorial, with a legendary zero-tolerance to the opposition groups (Willink Commission 1958). In the Northern Region, despite the ‘One North, One People’ slogan, the Premier’s party, the NPC, supported by the Native Authorities (NAs) and reinforced by the feudal nature of the emirs, was said to be allergic and contemptuous to opposition coming from the minorities. Thus, left as it were up to independence, the minorities feared they would be in for it.
2. **Resistance to domination and discriminations** – In the 3 Regions, minorities felt they were being subjected to mere second class citizens as they were made to bear deliberate and systematic discriminations when it came to opportunities in the public service. That the majority apart from their dominance of the legislative and executive positions, also filled up the public service by their proportional numbers and by virtue of being in control of the Governments. In the North even though the majority ethnic groups were left behind in Western education, the criteria for employment into the public service, was said to be rippled with the discriminative tendencies of the NAs. This, the minorities alleged, would strangulate their upward mobility at independence if separate State were not created and thus hamper their rights and in fulfilling the principle of self-determination.
3. **The fears of the future of Local Government system** - In the 3 Regions, it were the tendency of the Governments controlled by the majority ethnic groups to centralize, monopolize and to even gradually arrogate to themselves all the powers of the Local Governments. This also was to put the rights to self-determination for the minorities into a serious strain and so the agitations for separate States.
4. **The manipulation of public order** – The Willink Commission had confirmed its discovery of how the majority ethnic groups in the 3 Regions behaved in a manner as if their isolated group interests were synonymous with the Regional interests. And equally, they were confronted with the allegations that the majority ethnic groups hardly recognized the existence of other inhabitants in the Regions except themselves. Thus, the public and other law enforcement agents were alleged to be dominated by their groups who were subsequently used by the Governments to intimidate oppositions in the name of public order. In the Northern Region for example, the impartiality of the NA Police and Judges (*Alkalai*), the intimidating and unrestrained attitude of the emirs’ bodyguards or the *Dogarai* generated a lot of concern for the Middle Belt State agitations (Willink Commission 1958, see also Kukah 1994).
5. **Social and Economic Factors** – There was no restriction at which these factored in the agitation for States prior to independence. In the Western Region for example, the Government was accused of spending huge sums of budgetary allocations on developing and assisting in the production of cocoa, the major export commodity from the Yoruba area of the Region. This was said to be at the expense of, if not at the expense of rubber, palms and timber production in the Mid-West area. While perpetuating this, the same Western Regional Government again turned round to initiate a policy to introduce rubber production in the Yoruba area in a manner as to perhaps ruin the economic life-wire of the Mid-West people. In the Eastern Region on the other hand, the NCNC Government was said to be more disposed to awarding all contracts to the Ibos only. In the North, minorities were concerned with the flagrant use of detested and contemptuous expressions and social practices that affected them (Willink Commission 1958).
6. **The Issue of Legal System** – This generated a lot of concern among the minority groups as to demand for separate States of their own. In the Eastern Region for example, the changes in 1956 of the administration of justice, which gave the Minister power to appoint, suspend and dismiss members of County and District Courts provoked waves of protestation by minorities. In the Northern Region, there was a general apprehension against what was viewed as anti-Christian Missions as well as the Muslim law that discriminates along faiths and gender.

These were mainly synthesized from the lots of issues that factored the agitations for States prior to independence. Though the Willink Commission agreed that the existence of these grievances were genuine, it viewed that the creation of States would not be the solutions; instead genuine democratic practices would go a long way to solve them.

**A New Dimension in Post-Independence Agitations for States**

By 1st October 1960, an independent Nigerian nation-state had emerged on a feeble political foundation with what Claude Ake described as disarticulated economic structures (see Ihonvbere 1992). The defective, imbalanced and chaotic Federal system bequeathed was characterized prominently by inter-ethnic and inter-Regional rivalries. The country was being managed by inexperienced leadership in the governance of a complex society of the Nigerian type. The minorities whose agitations were left unattended to by the British remained steadfast in their opposition to the Willink Commission report and in their consistent advocacy and demand for separate States (Awa 1983). Using the condition insert ed on legislative powers as in section 4(1-5) of the Independent constitution, which states that the legislature can make any laws for the peace, order and good governance of Nigeria, the First Republic Government created in 1963 the Mid-West Region (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1960). This was made up of Benin and Delta Provinces as demanded by its protagonists. This was the yea r Nigeria also became a Republic with four Regions.

With the creation of the Mid-West Region the imbalance that was being cried against had further been widened. This was to constitute a new element in political discord, anxiety and suspicion. This bred the protestation leading to the instability that was becoming out of control. The non-creation of more States from other Regions in the post-1963 period was a major plank that infused the political instability in the country as the Western Region felt being short-changed. By this time the agitation for more States had come to acquire an additional justification to address the questions of Federal imbalance to curb the gloomy rainbow of political crisis appearing visibly on the horizon.

 **(i) *Gowon’s Regime’s Response to the agitations for States***

Prior to the 1967 States creation exercise Major General Aguyi-Ironsi who took over power after the January 1966 coup attempted to introduce a unitary form of government by enacting the unitary decree. It was intended to re-incarnate the pro-Regional boundaries, which means reverting to the old Provincial system as the political units of administration. This was not implemented as it was another major justification in the sub-Region of the Ibo agenda in the January 1966 coup, which also prompted the July 1960 coup that brought Gowon to power.

The cries for creation of States was not treated with the likely frivolousness when Gowon in September 1966 set up an ad hoc Constitutional Committee to make recommendations on the political future of the country to ensure the necessary stability that was becoming a mirage. The committee was almost unanimous in recommending for a loose federation for the country (Osadebay 1978). Drawn from the four Regions, the Committee delegation debated the issue of Federalism including the need to recommend for the creation of States.

When the civil war became inevitable, the Gowon regime had to weight the strategic imperatives of States creation as a weapon of war to weaken the strength of Biafran rebellion. Hence,12 States were created in 1967, as follows: Benue-Plateau; East-Central ; Kano; Kwara ; Lagos ; Mid-Western; North-Central ; North-Eastern; North-Western ; South-Eastern ; Rivers and South-Western States. This provided the Eastern ethnic minorities the platform to rebel against the Biafran project to support the Nigerian project. Thus, for the first time, the creation of States was used to tinker with the Federal structure by breaking the overbearing Regions into 12 States and Capitals.

Having made the 12 States an instrument of political restructuring of the Federal structure the agitations for more States became embedded in the country's political reform processes. It is true that the creation of States had broadened the base for political participation to some extent by removing certain imbalances and structural defectiveness in the political processes of power acquisition among some competing groups. It is equally that the exercise had to some extent gone a long way in providing some minorities the opportunities to have their voices in national affairs through some measures of representations.

Whatever it would be said, the creation of States by the Gowon regime was an attempt to deal with the problem of a federation in which the imbalances caused serious apprehension to minorities. In strategic terms however, it was an instrument of war designed to weaken the strength the minority nationalities would have given to the Biafran project. Yet this did not deter Biafra and a 30-month civil war had to be fought, which ended in 1970.

**(ii) *States creation under the Murtala-Obasanjo Regimes***

After the civil war, there were cries from virtually every corner of Nigeria for the creation of States in addition to the 12 created by Gowon. There was equally the clamour for boundary adjustments. What this meant was that the problems the creations of States previously done were not totally resolved. The agitation had reached a climax that the government of Murtala/Obasanjo when it came had to express a sort of commitment to create more new States. This was equally embedded in the new programme for military disengagement from governance. Consequently therefore, in December 1975 the Justice Ayo Irikefe Panel for the creation of States and for boundary adjustment was set up. And in line with the Report’s recommendations, 7 new States were created to make Nigeria having 19 States Federal structure as at February 1976 (Osadebay 1978).

In his first broadcast to the nation as the new Head of State, then Brigadier Murtala Mohammed assured Nigerians the readiness of the new administration to review the political programme while also setting up a panel to advice on the question of new states and the federal capital (New Nigerian 1975 and Dai1y Times 1975). On 7th August 1975 therefore the Government had announced the establishment of a Federal Government Panel on the creation of States and boundary adjustments, headed by Justice Ayo Irikefe a Supreme Court Judge, who later became the Chief Justice of Nigeria.

On 22 October 1975, the Panel submitted its report to Government .It recommended the creation of States as follows: Ondo, Oyo\_and Lagos from the Western State; Bendel and Rivers States from he-Mid-Western State; Cross River from the South-Eastern State; Enugu and Imo from the East-Central State; Benue and Plateau from the Benue-Plateau State. That Bauchi, Borno and Gongola should be carved out from the North-Eastern State; North-Central State be retained but to be rechristened Kaduna State; Kwara State to remain but Borgu and Igala areas be excised and then merged with the proposed Niger and Benue States respectively. The Panel also recommended that the North-West State be split into Rima and Niger States; while Kano State should remain as it was, but should be renamed Bagauda State (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1975).

Largely but not absolutely guided by the Panel's recommendations the Government announced the creation of States on 3rd January 1976. While it created additional 7 States, it rechristened the earlier ones due to the boundary adjustments that were effected to make a total of 19 States. When the Government was announcing the creation of these States, it never claimed to have solved the whole problem associated with the agitations. It was fully aware therefore that while some would celebrate the outcome of the exercise, most others would be agonized. Consequently, the Head of State frankly observed that the issue of creation of new States has generated so much excitement and interest that Government is fully aware that its decision cannot please all those affected. The Government warned against any emotional outburst or provocative demonstration and celebration by any individual or group in support or against creation of new States in any part of the country (Daily Times 1976:1-2).

**(iii) *States Creation under Babangida-Abacha Regimes***

The First Republic civilian regime had succeeded in creating the Mid-West Region in 1963, while the civilian administration in the Second Republic also attempted to do same but failed. Since then the creation of States in Nigeria had become an affair of the military regimes. Between 1979 and 1983, the agitations for more States in a democratic dispensation resurfaced and the partisan sentiment exhibited had almost reached a feverish level in the two Houses of the National Assembly. This was particularly among those who felt that the previous exercises under Generals Gowon and Murtala-Obasanjo regimes ignored their agitations and interests and who also felt that as a matter of fairness, they deserved separate States of their own.

Before the demise of the Second Republic therefore, about 38 requests were processed for the creation of new additional States to the existing 19 States structure by the National Assembly (Ellah 1983). Even, though, most of the agitations could be said to be frivolous and informed as usual, more largely by partisanship than genuine matters leading to the resignation of Senator Joseph Ellah from the then Anambra State (Ellah 1983), goes to show how the agitation for States creation have been politically abused throughout. Even though it was legitimate and democratic to agitate, yet it equally goes to show how the matter had become engrossed in the political process in Nigeria. And even before any final decisions were taken on whether to create those States whose agitations for had been processed or not, the military had struck and sacked the civilian regime in December 1983.

That the creation of States is a major feature in Nigeria's political restructuring process is a fact. This is so because as States were multiplied to remedy certain perceive or imaginary structural problems in the Federation, fresh problems were also created leading to further agitations for more States. In fact, apart from the 1963 creation of the Mid-West Region, creation of States in Nigeria henceforth became a terrain only military regimes could march on. Such regimes used creation of States as an instrument to attract patronage in the process of seeking the legitimacy they always lacked and to continue to hold on to the power they began to persona1ized (see Kukah 1999).

This particularly featured most prominently under General lbrahim Babaginda’s nine year rule as well as General Sani Abacha five year period. General Babangida inaugurated in 9 January 1986 members of what it called Political Bureau Committee to gather collate and synthesize the contributions of all Nigerians in the regime's search for a new and viable political system for the coming civilian government under the chairmanship of Professor Samuel J. Cookey (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1987). The Bureau set out about 30 guidelines for the national debate and the issue of states creation featured very prominently. In fact, it was one major issue the Bureau had to contend with the way and manner Nigerians debated the question of create of States once again underscored 1ts continued relevance in the sentimental discourses of political restructuring in the country. Three major issues dominated the discourse on creation of States and they were as follows:

(a) Abolishing the States structure;

(b) Merging the existing unviable states with the viable ones retaining the 19 States structure; and

(d) Creating additional few States.

Majority of the members of the Bureau were more sympathetic with the last item, but were divided on the modalities for creating new States. While some were of the opinion that States should be created using the old Provinces as boundaries, some were more predisposed to the creation of States in a manner as to establish an organic Federalism. Other groups were of the opinion that States be created in a way as to achieve a near balance in terms of the number of States between the component ethnic configurations in the country. The last group recommended the creation of States using specific criterion other than ethnic nationality identity (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1987).

The Bureau received fourteen (14) specific requests or demands for presentation to the Government for new States (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1987). In making its recommendations to Government, three different views were reflected. The first view was that the then existing 19 States structure be strictly maintained by not creating additional States. The second recommended that only 2 States be created from the requests received and these were Akwa Ibom from Cross River and Katsina from Kaduna States respectively. The last view was that in addition to the 2 States recommended (i.e Akwa-Ibom and Katsina), Delta, Enugu, Kogi and Sardauna States be created. The Bureau however was unanimous that if the Government in its wisdom decided to create additional States, it must be done at least 3 years before it quits power in 1990. And once created, there should be a constitutional provision barring further creation of States for at least 25 years to come (Federal republic of Nigeria 1987).

Consequently, the Government announced the creation of 2 States in November 1987, i.e. Akwa Ibom and Katsina States with capitals cited at Uyo and Katsina respectively. This brought the number of States in the Federation to 21. Later in August 1991additional 7 States were created by the same regime with their capitals as follows:

State Capital

1. Abia Umuahia

2. Anambra Awka

3. Delta Asaba

4. Jigawa Dutse

5. Kogi Lokoja

6. Osun Oshogbo

7. Taraba Jalingo

However, the States from which most of the new ones were carved were renamed. For example, when the old Anambra State with capital at Enugu was split into 2, Awka was named the capital of the new Anambra while the old capital, Enugu was made capital of the State with same name; The remaining part of Bendel from which Delta State was carved was renamed Edo State; and when Taraba was carved from Gongola, the other half was named Adamawa State. This brought the number of States to 28. On 1st October 1996, the regime of General Sani Abacha created additional 8 States (Daily Times 1996:1-2, New Nigerian 1996:1-2) bringing the number to the current 36 States in Nigeria. These are:

STATE CAPITAL

1. Bayelsa Yenogoa

2. Ebonyi Abakaliki

3. Ekiti Ado Ekiti

4. Gombe Gombe

5. Kebbi Birnin-Kebbi

6. Nasarawa Lafia

7. Yobe Damaturu

8. Zamfara Gusau

**Military Regimes’ Interests in States Creation Exercise**

After independence however, the gamut of fears and apprehension observed earlier were transformed into issues of partisanship. This could be attributed as the major reason for the creation of the Mid-West Region in 1963. Since then Governments in Nigeria have been succumbing to the pressures of creating more and more States, given all sorts of rationalization for the exercise. Truly speaking, while the exercise partly solved certain grievances and doused other forms of tension, it created further problems. Ever since 1967 when States creation was used as a weapon of war against Biafra, agitations were informed by the political and economic opportunities doing so provides.

On the other hand, by making States creation part of an expanded agenda in the so-called political reforms associated with the so-called transition programmes by the military regimes, creation of States equally became an exercise for the ruling elites to accommodate, reward or punish the major contending factions. In this manner, any creation of States exercise became a compromise between the major factions or alliance of the ruling blocs. Existing on the mercy of decrees during military rule, after the so-called transition, the States so created normally becomes constitutionally recognized and accepted as immutable.

Experience has shown that creating new States served to encourage the multiplication of the bureaucratic structures and the decision-making mechanisms that goes with it. This is in addition to the exploitation of public sector employment. For example, when regionalization was first introduced in 1954, the available manpower in the civil service was made to serve four civil services. These were the 3 Regions and the center in contrast to a unitary civil service. With the creation of the Mid-West, the civil service of the Western Region was split, which created opportunities for upward mobility in rank to fill certain vacancies (Ademolekun & Laleye 1982). That has become the convention especially that interest groups interested in these opportunities have little regards for the impact on the quality of administration in the service.

This was unlike in the pre-independent era when the Willink Commission was to asses not only the economic viability of but also the administrative implication of creating a State on the Region from which it would be created .It should be noted that a service cannot be cut up and also expects the different parts to function as before. It normally takes a length of time for such service to find its foot and to function reasonably well.

Furthermore, the argument has been that creation of states used to provide a permanent indefeasible devolution of government, which in the process it brings it nearer to the people. And that while it provides areas of reasonable size and population with the rights of relative self-determination, it equally encouraged the reductionism anchored in the ‘development theses’ towards the incessant agitation for States. That is to say that States creation quickens the pace of development. The attraction to this reductionist rationalization was the visible emergence of mushrooming petty contractors around such State capitals parading themselves as new influential personalities.

Conversely, Governments that succumbed to the pressures of the agitations and the leaders who themselves used the exercise for what we have said earlier on for patronage and for seeking the legitimacy they normally needed desperately, used to rationalize why creation of States became justifiable. This could be attributed to the lack of transparency in the objective criteria for doing so. For example, in creating States between 1987 and 1991, the Military Government rationalized the exercise on either of the following, viz:

1. To enhance greater stability of the country.
2. To strengthen the Federal structure of government.
3. To remove the existing disharmony and imbalances within the federal system
4. To right the wrongs against ethnic groups whose interests have tended to be sacrificed within the 19 States structure; and
5. As a means of strengthening the institutional bases for the proper development of the country by establishing more development centers within each of the major population concentration in the country.

Prior to then, when in 1976 States were created, it were such similarly unwieldy and monotonous rationalization that were offered, thus:

* 1. For administrative convenience, because of facts of history and to satisfy the wishes of the people.
	2. To bring the government nearer to the people.
	3. To minimize minority problems in Nigeria
	4. To maintain peace and harmony within the Federation.

These were taken from the Irikefe Panel Report that justified its recommendations for creation of States as follows:

1. As a framework, which would ensure rapid economic development among all the ethnic groups;
2. To increase participatory democracy as an assurance against political instability;
3. To promote and institutionalize a balanced and stable federalism; and
4. To remove the fears of the domination of the minorities which had tended to slow down economic and political development of the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1975).

Similar expanded but duplicated reasons were recommended by the Political Bureau for the creation of States exercise in 1987, namely:

* 1. In the interest of a much more balanced and stable federalism;
	2. Assist in the further extension of the democratization process initiated by government since 1967 when the exercise began;
	3. For the removal of a major source of political and social tension, which have bred instability and frustrated the country’s march towards true national greatness;
	4. As evident in some of the State capitals created in 1967 and 1976, States creation exercise, additional few States should result in a much more even spread of major development centers throughout the country.
	5. It will bring some sections far removed from the centers of development in a manner that greater devolution of political power and responsibilities will be impacted on the grassroots.
	6. It will remove existing pockets of discriminations, neglect, domination and perceived injustice within the existing Federal structure;
	7. It will take care of the unsystematic handling by the Irikefe Panel, which explained the spate of agitations and requests for new States, etc (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1987).

These and monotonous but never-ending justification could easily be applied in any State creation exercise anytime in the country. In fact, all the so-called criteria stipulated in the 1960, 1963, 1979, 1989, 1995, and the current 1999 constitution were so fluid, open-ended and manipulatable. This was in addition to their legal ambiguities (Akande 1982).

Other constitutional defectiveness perhaps easily gives room for the vociferous advocacy for States creation. That is to say, we can juxtapose creation of States with the nature of the country’s constitutionally stipulated ‘majoritarian democracy’. In fact, the Nigerian Constitutions cited earlier stipulated for example that a candidate for the post of the President of the Federal Republic shall be deemed to have been duly elected on certain majoritarian conditions. That the candidate should have not less than certain percentage of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the States in the Federation. *Ceteris parribus,* Nigerians see in this an opportunity for certain sections of country with the largest number of States to always produce the President of the country and by extension ‘marginalizing’ others.

Similar constitutional provision perhaps prompting the agitations for creation of States is the question of revenue allocation in the Federation. The creation of States in Nigeria is always associated with, if not assimilated to a strategy for the distribution of the much talked ‘national cake’. That is to say, the more either the Northern, Western or Eastern parts of the country have States the more the revenue that section of the country gets from the Federation account. This partly informed the agitation for restructuring the Federation and the revenue allocation in relation to the number of States in the country, which the democratic regimes since 1999 have been contending with.

**States Creation and Better Federalism in Resolving the Minority/Majority Conundrums**

We have noted elsewhere the nature of pre-colonial migrations, peopling of the Nigerian area and how there were intermingling, assimilations and intermeshing (Ashafa 2011). This we said resulted in the difficulty to actually make a demarcation of ethnic typology in the pre-colonial period. But even though colonial rule had changed this trend, it had not reversed it. In some cases, it rather augmented the movement of people through the establishment of ‘*Pax Britannica’* and other politico economic policies as in the exploitation of the tin resources in Jos.

The important question here is who is a minority? It should be noted that in the real sense, of the over 150 million Nigerians, the minority are those few hundreds of elites in the Presidency, among the Governors, the Legislatures, Political Parties and bureaucrats in the public and private enterprises who among others are enjoying so much from the enormous commonwealth of the nation at the expense of other larger number of Nigerians. And the majorities are those impoverished Nigerians outside the above categorisation. Because the majority is impoverished and pauperised, they hardly appreciate the relevance of tolerance and respect for civil and civic responsibilities. And because they feel deprived and marginalised, they viewed that the only way to access power and resources is in the process of competition, to deny everybody else but self, the status of indigeneship either individually or collectively as an ethnic group. Therefore being a ‘majority’ is a license to claim certain political office as a birth right because the ‘majority’ votes comes only from numerically larger ethnic groups, whose votes count who wins the elections. On other hand, being a ‘minority’ is to accept that second class status of citizenship to only qualify for those not so important political offices determined by the numerically larger ethnic groups because after all one belongs to those whose votes would only compliment than determined who should get what in an election. And because holding political office has been a means of acquiring stupendous wealth and to enrich whom one wants to be rich in Nigeria by whatever means legal, this spurred social movements like the *Boko Haram*, which sees the only licenses of getting such offices (Western education) as been bastardized. And if care is not taken, we shall be breeding the feelings of *Democracy Haram*.

On the other hand, the minorities as we seem to understand or misunderstood is non-existent, and if at all it does. Rather it is an admission of inferiority, a stereotype, psychological and political naivety by falling into the trap of the so-called majority. This is because anyone from the so-called grandiose and self-acclaimed and historically non-factual ‘majority group’ must have come from yet a small or assimilated clan, which itself cannot make a ‘majority’. Therefore, people would remain as a minority only when they lack the capacity while remaining docile to be so categorized. It should be noted that the politicians were the authors of this ‘minority’ ‘majority’ diatribe in Nigeria and not God who created the ethnic groups. Here, a group is a minority only when it prefers the stereotype of falling in the trap of been irrelevant in the political fate of greedy political office seekers and their godfathers.

We are saying so because no constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria ever said or impute anything on the opportunities, comfort, welfare and advancement of Nigerians based on their numerical affiliation. After all, will the Hausa in Sokoto, Zaria, Kano, Sokoto, Katsina etc be in majority without those years of assimilation of other minority groups into it as we’ve noted already? So too are the Yoruba or Igbo wouldn’t have been among the so-called ‘majority’. We only allow ourselves to be played around by politicians when they want to advance their comfort zones at our expenses and at the expense of germane federalism that requires equality in our collective aspirations.

The circumstances that led to the creation of States in Nigeria never made such measures to solve the problems with our federalism. Instead, when States were created in 1967, the former champions of ethnic minorities obviously became the avid beneficiaries. In this case, we argue here that states creation and the agitation for more has been an elites affairs to satisfy their guest for power and the wealth that comes with such power. This is so because the creation of states has sailed to solve the problems of ethnic minorities, but rather aggravated it.

Sadly, people come to see the creation of State and Local Governments as a means of bringing development to the people, which only means physical infrastructure. However, because there has been too much centralisation of wealth at the Federal and State levels, it then entailed that access to power and resources was only through inclusion at federal and State levels. Because States and Federal contracts involved enormous resources allocated for physical infrastructure in the name of ‘development’, the agitations for more State has continued unabated.

At the same time, the existence of these states as ‘development’ centers in relation to governance and conduct of elections further created the problem of minorities, majorities, indigenes and settlers. Our elections are based on ‘majoritarian democracy’, which has been unable to guarantee the protection of ethnic identities, and their interests to arrest the cry for domination, marginalisation etc in relation to power balance and power acquisition. This majoritarian democracy has equally not guaranteed equal power sharing and access to resources between the different ethnic elements at the federal, states and local government levels. Sadly because of this ‘majoritarian’ democracy, politicians neglect minorities because their votes were seen not too tangential in determining the outcome of a winner in an election. That was how ethnic minority areas have been transformed into Government Rejected Areas (GRAs) and the people became Government Rejected Citizens (GRCs), so to say. At least that has been the feeling all over the federation that generated the usage of such terms or phraseologies as ‘marginalisation’, ‘domination’, ‘neglect’ ‘exclusion’ etc into our political vocabularies.

Again also, the elite-induced States and LGAs creation as incessant fragmentation of Nigeria into political entities on majoritarian, not only created further ‘minority’ feelings, but further reduces the political spaces in territorial terms, which becomes smaller and smaller than it used to be in the 1950s within which Nigerians can comfortably lay claim of indigenous status. In this manner, it also reduced some citizens into ‘settlers’ and disqualifies some to be ‘indigenes’ within a larger political landscape. For example, a Southern Nigerian of the 1950s has today been reduced into an indigene of Lagos, Cross rivers, Bayelsa, Ondo, Ekiti, Imo or Akwa Ibom State as the case may be, in a manner that we are building nationalities at the expense of citizenship, which actually accommodates the elites’ political interests for maneuvering, power acquisition and wealth grabbing than anything to the contrary.

Federalism is only relevant in a plural society. Nigeria with over 250 ethnic nationalities is made a federation in order to meet the particular but various needs of the communities who agreed to its establishment. This is because it is only in a federal structure that one can find such conceptual phraseologies as ‘pluralism’, ‘unity in diversity’, ‘devolution of power’, ‘local people deciding on their local priorities’ etc. All these are meant to give the impression that in a federal structure; people will develop a civic culture, which is germane in the survival of the whole superstructure so that through good governance the image of collective identity, collective development and collective survival becomes the target than in rhetorical term that we seem to do our things in this country. Sadly, however because nobody seem to care about developing a sound and germane civic culture in governance and in inter-group relations, Nigerians were being divided into ‘minorities,’ majorities’, indigenes and settlers. This is specifically in order to allow few gluttonous people to exclusively participate in governance as a means to corner and monopolized all the political space and the resources that goes with doing so even if it means other citizens are denied same.

Federalism is relevant to a plural society. It is designed to meet the particular needs of the communities who variously establish it. Through such conceptual phraseologies in a federal system like’ pluralism’ ‘unity in diversity’, devolution of power’, local people deciding on their local priorities’ et gives people in a federation a civic culture, which is germane in the survival of the whole system. Generally speaking, the political and economic culture of a federal system in terms of aggregate premises of governance is to a large extent, antithetical to the aspirations of individuals and interests that constitute it. That is why there is the need to work out a federalism to ensure that though nobody is fully unhappy but certainly not the type that everybody will be happy with the solution. But when federalism is allowed to work on injustices for the greater interests of a few, perhaps based on certain primordialities (ethnicity, religion, regional affiliation etc), then pockets of contestation would undoubtedly emerge to affect its inner logic of the federation.

In Nigeria, our federalism is not only in trouble but also seem too fragile to absorb the cancer of obvious disintegration at a time that the leadership seemed to be in a state of infirmity, if not paralysis. Beyond the questionable background to the Nigerian nationhood emanating from its colonial antecedent, today, the political, economic and social issues surrounding a pragmatic and better parameter of human development, comfort and welfare within the aggregate premises of good governance, are largely antithetical to the wishes, aspirations, dreams, goals and interests of the majority of the communities that formed the Nigerian federation. That is why in our federation, for whatever illogicality, only a few of the over 150 million Nigerians are happy with the way things are going in the country. Because most of us are being made to live below human levels, we tend to wrongly view our relationship as citizens base on disharmony or conflict on the ethnicity and geographical area of where we come from rather than in a manner as to confront those making the lives of generality of the citizens worthless and meaningless in a midst of plentiful but wasted resources. In this case, while it breeds the pockets of disturbing dissents, contestations and conflicts by creating identities to search for comfort zones being manifested in the form of ‘minorities’ vs ‘majority’ ‘indigenes’ vs ‘settlers’, among others, it means therefore that unless we collectively and genuinely address these problems most sincerely, we would continue to witness repeatable problems of crisis at the expense of our collective good and survival both as a people and a nation struggling to move ahead in the 21st century.

Be it federal or whatever, it is natural that man must live in a community and community life formed the foundation, which all civilisations sprawled and on which the 21st century is being built upon. While one can decide who to marry and live with, and which society one would want to live in at a point in life, nature has made human beings differently in a manner that nobody was given the opportunity to choose who his parents and great grandparents were or which from which ethnic identity one should belongs to. This made human beings to have peculiarity in their positive identities. But while some people elsewhere succeeded in transforming such different positive identities to enhance their capacities to transform their individual and societal misfortunes into bounteous opportunities, we in Nigeria are only capitalizing on our differences to further sink into the abyss of national misfortune and catastrophe. The polemical and energy dissipating than productive debate about ‘minority’, ‘majority’, indigene’ and ‘settler’ was perhaps because rightly or wrongly, “we” feel that “some” or “others” among us had subjected “us”, “others” into unacceptable level of rewarding relationship in the federation. And therefore “theirs” had an overbearing impact on “our” search for the comfort zones federalism should naturally provide for all.

**Conclusion**

What we labored to argue in this endeavour is that it doesn’t take much to understand that we live in a complex federal system that historically speaking is making it difficult appreciate and respect our diversity, so that majority of Nigerians rightly or wrongly either feel marginalised, dominated or deprived. Even though there is no nation that does not experienced difficulty in nation-building, ours seem too repeatable with no hope to its end. The Nigerian area for centuries had been a melting pot for people, cultures, polities and ideas that make the country complex today. The issues of minorities’ fears and interests have been causing a lot of havoc for political and economic reasons. This tends to over-value the question of States creation exercise in solving the problem. While we so much emphasised our differences than what binds us a people in a nation whose potentials had been wasted, in the form of ethnic identity interests the basis for the incessant agitation for more States one may if after 50 years of federal practice the country has anything to show for the presence of 36 States in terms of development and deserving peace apart from self-centered, self-imposed and God-defying and religious and political leaders, decayed infrastructures, wide-spread corruption, destroyed educational institutions, death traps we call roads, lack of electricity, kidnappings, banditry and armed robbery, total environmental degradation and infrastructure collapse?

Today Boko Haramists are insignificant minority groups whose deadly activities have once again ignited the question of national unity and survival. This means we must not sweep the genuine fears and aspiration of what we generally refer to ‘minorities’ in our federal set up. We must believe in ourselves and ability to solve our problems. And while doing so, we don’t need to look elsewhere or upon others. No person, country or organization for example saved Yugoslavia when it was disintegrating. Even the OAU could not save Ethiopia when Eretria seceded after more than a decade of warfare. Even Sudan is still battling with what they could have sat down with Southern Sudan to resolve. That Nigeria is daily sinking deeper and deeper into trouble is no comfort to millions of African men and women and children.

Today as the world is mushrooming and creating wealth and ideas through diversity, but we in Nigeria have been isolating ourselves from one another by way of States creation. The power and enormous wealth of the United States today is because of its diversity, which it transformed into a pragmatic homogeneity. The 21st century is a century of diversification. The ICT being enjoyed today that makes the world a global village came from the exploits of peoples of diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures and ideas, which our agitation for States in Nigeria seem separate.

That goes to show that the 21st century Nigeria will need what we can collectively offer to ourselves and the world and not as disparate minorities, majorities, settlers or indigenes. Can we answer the question then that why is it while across the globe today businesses thrives on integration; we are more concern with separatist agenda and rejecting our collective potentials? If therefore people out there are progressing by drawing diverse peoples into their scheme of things to meet up with the challenges of the 21st century, why do we appear ‘comfortable’ in holding preciously the anachronistic view of what we are not: minorities, majorities, indigenes and settlers?

Therefore, it is important to note that what we refer to as the Federal Question and the crisis that surrounds it today is neither because some Nigerians are majority or minorities in an ethnic group nor whatever primordial attachment, rather, it is rooted in the politico-economic and social injustices that the actual majority of Nigerians are made to live in, so that at the level of governance, true federalism has long been compromised throughout the protracted military regimes in the country in a manner that it hardly keep people happily together over the past 50 years. While federalism succeeded in bringing diverse plural nationalities together within the Nigerian project, our argument here is that it is true federalism than the unrealistic States creation that will keep plural Nigerian ethnic nationalities happily together. In this sense, a better or true federalism rather than the incessant multiplication of States will better resolve the minority conundrums been loaded over by the majority ethnic groups.

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