

Nigeria's Federal Structure and the Rise of Separatist Movements in the Fourth Republic

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Abstract. This study examined the nature of the Nigerian federal political system with the view to identifying how the defects inherent therein have spawned a series of separatist movements from almost every part that makes up the federation. The study made use of data obtained from secondary such as textbooks, journal and newspapers. It adopted a framework of analysis anchored on the principles of shared rule and self-rule. The argument canvassed in this study is that the defects in the Nigerian federal system whose foundation was laid during the colonial era, centralisation introduced by the military and embraced by successive governments as well as distorted patterns of governance have been spurring separatist movements in Nigeria. They have distorted the principles of shared rule and self-rule, hence the increasing separatist movements from nearly every part of the nation. The study concluded that the increasing spate of separatist movements portends danger for the corporate existence of the Nigeria State. The study recommended among other things that there is the need to restructure the Nigerian State, reinvent the patterns of governance as well as total commitment to good governance and nation building. These have the capacity of dousing the spate of agitations for separate entities in the Nigerian State.

Keywords: Federalism, Federal Structure, Governance, Restructuring, Secession, Separatist movements.

1. Introduction

Nigeria's current federal structure can be linked to the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution, which formally made provision for the division of powers between the central government and the constituent units, namely, the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions. Though the practice of federalism in Nigeria has

spanned over sixty years, it has at various times continued to be threatened by agitations for local autonomy and secession by different groups from the various ethnic nationalities.

In the early 1950s, the Northern region threatened to secede from the country twice if the conditions they clamoured for were not granted.(Okoh, 1999) The first attempt was at the Ibadan conference, and the second attempt was the aftermath of the self-government in 1956, which led to the popular eight-point programme signalling the intention of that region to quit the union.(Awofeso, 2017). Similarly, the Western region also threatened to secede if the colonial authorities failed to rescind the decision to excise Lagos from Western Nigeria. (Okoh, 1999) The most blatant attempt at a succession that was actualized was when the Eastern region under the leadership of Lt. Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu seceded from the Federal Republic of Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra.

In the current Fourth Republic, Nigeria has witnessed a series of separatist and secessionist movements. Prominent among these groups include various militant organisations in the South-South region that have been agitating for resource control and development of the oil-rich Niger Delta region. Others include the most obvious ones from the Igbo dominated Eastern part of the country where we have the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra(MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra(IPOB). They have continued to agitate for the actualisation of Biafra. The activities of IPOB being led Nnamdi Kanu had on many occasions paralysed economic activities in major towns and cities in Eastern Nigeria following the series of sit at home orders to inhabitants of the region by the leadership of IPOB.

Agitations for local autonomy and threats of secession have equally come from the northern and western parts of the country. In the South West, there is the growing clamour for the practice of true federalism and lately the creation of the Republic of Oduduwa. Similarly, on June 7, 2017, some Northern Nigeria youth groups issued what they called the 'Kaduna Declaration,' where they gave orders to all Igbos residing in the North to leave within three months. They equally directed northerners residing in the South-East to vacate that region before October 1, 2017. The Northern youth groups said they would commence the implementation of what they called 'visible actions' to prove that they were no longer part of the federal union that includes the Igbo(Chiedozie and Isenyo (2017; Akhaine, Alabi, Njoku and Olumide,2017)

All that the preceding depicts is that the practice of federalism in Nigeria for over sixty years has not translated the Nigerian State to an enviable polity cherished by all and sundry. Instead, it has been characterized by mistrust and suspicion. It is against the backdrop of the resurgence of separatist movements that this study examines how the defective federal structure has spurred separatist movements in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In doing this, apart from these preliminary remarks, the remaining part of the study is divided into five sections. The first segment focuses on conceptual and theoretical issues. The second segment delves into the origin and growth of the Nigerian federal system. The third section focuses on separatist movements in Nigeria with emphasis on how defective federal structure, centralisation and distorted pattern of governance are spurring separatist movements in Nigeria. The fourth section discusses how to douse separatist and secessionist agitations in Nigeria, while the fifth section concludes the study.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

2.1 The Concept of Federalism

There is a rich and vast literature on federalism generally, but one discernable thing that is clear is that the concept of federalism suffers from definitional quagmire (Idahosa and Aghahowa (1999) and as rightly pointed out by Elazar (1995),the terminology of federalism is characterised by a revealing ambiguity(Elazar,1995). The cogency of these observations can be discerned from the multiple definitions of federalism and its conflation with related concepts such as federation, federal political order which have been extensively discussed in the literature by various writers such as Eleazar(1995)

Watts(1998), Jinadu(2002); Law (2013) Kalu & Bing (2016) to mention but few.

Despite the seeming controversies surrounding the meaning of federalism, many writers have adopted definitions that stem from its conception in terms of alliance or as a decentralized `political arrangement where there are different layers of government. Central to such arrangement is the division of powers between the central government and constituent units. Some of the definitions are presented below.

Similarly, Watts (1998), defines federalism as a political system characterised by two sub-systems. One is the central government and the other is state governments, in which the components government are coordinate in the sense that neither is politically subordinate to the other but which interact with each other at many points both cooperatively and competitively.

K.C. Wheare (1963) gave a classic definition of federalism, which has been adopted as a rewarding point of departure by many writers. He defines federalism as "the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each within a sphere coordinate and independent" (p. 11). This conception of federalism implies that under a federal system, the general and the constituent units each have an autonomous sphere of power that can be exercised independently of the other level. Wheare holds the view that the powers of the central government are exercised directly over individual citizens rather than indirectly through the states or provinces. Therefore, neither the central /federal government nor the state/regional government is subordinate to the other in legal authority (Wheare, 1963).

The view expressed by Sagay (nd), is not at variance with that of Wheare (1963), Watts (1995), and Elazar (1995) highlighted above. He avers that federalism refers to an arrangement whereby powers within a multi-national country are shared between a federal or central authority, and a number of regionalized governments in such a way that each unit, including the central authority, exists as a government separately and independently from the others, operating directly on persons and property with its territorial area. He asserts further that such a government has a will of its own and its apparatus for the conduct of affairs and with authority in some matters exclusive of all others (Sagay, nd).

Despite the variation in the views expressed by these writers, there is the agreement that federal system

refers to an arrangement where there is constitutional division of power between layers of governments. Certain conditions have widely been identified to be supportive or conducive for the creation, sustenance, and continued existence of ideal federations. These are:

- The desire of the diverse units for the union
- The desire for the autonomy of the constituent units
- The capacity to make the federal system work
- The absence of marked economic inequalities among the federating units
- A sense of military insecurity and its attendant need for a common defence.(Adefulu, 2001, p.59)

2.2 Separatism and Secessionism

Before delving into the causes of separatist movements in Nigeria, there is the need to differentiate it from the concept of secession. Though, these concepts are related and have often been conflated with each other in the literature, they are nevertheless different. Ryabinin (2017) advances the view that separatism is the movement for the territorial succession of a part a country with the purpose of creating a new state or receiving a certain degree of autonomy as for language religion and national issues (p.) Horowitz, (cited in Taiwo 2017) avers that separatism can best be described as a form of agitation for greater autonomy. The view expressed by Pavkovic & Cabestan (2013) is not at variance with those espoused by Ryabinin and Horowitz. They aver that separatism is a political movement that aims to reduce the political and other powers of the central government over the population of a targeted population and that the ultimate goal of separatism is succession. What then is secession?

Secession, according to Crawford (cited in Pavkovic & Cabestan, 2013) is the creation of a new state with the use or threat of force without the consent of the former sovereign state. This understanding of secession is that it goes beyond mere agitation for local autonomy to encompass total withdrawal from a state and the creation of a new state. Awofeso (2017) asserts that regardless of the nomenclature employed, secession of separatism describes a group behaviour seeking withdrawal from a larger political entity with the view to creating an independent new state separate from the one they belong. He advances the view that methods adopted by those groups to achieve their goal could be peaceful, violent and even armed struggle.

Flowing from the above, it could be seen that there is a different between separatism and secessionism. While the former aimed at reducing the control of the central government over a local territory, the ultimate goal of secession is the creation of a separate or new state different from the former sovereign state. From this understanding, separatists can be pacified by the devolution of powers to the sub-nationalities which have the potentials of addressing local peculiarities and preferences. However, secessionists believed that it is the total withdrawal from the former state that can guarantee their threatened interest and identity.

Reasons for separatist movements are many and transcend economic and cultural differences (Spencer 1998;Suesse 2016; Roehner & Rahilly, 2016; Ryabinin, 2017). Contemporary separatist movements are seen as a reaction to political issues such as unhealthy rivalry among communities protection against ethnic cleansing and genocide. Separatist agitations may also be in a form of resistance by victims of oppression, including denigration of their language, culture, or religion. A times, agitations for separateness may be championed by those who hope to gain politically from intergroup conflict and hatred. Similarly, a particular group may decide to dissociate itself from the generally accepted stereotypes in order to have more time to create happiness for its group in its preferred order (Taiwo, 2017). A discontented group that feels economically exploited by other powerful group may resort to agitation for a state of their own. This applies particularly to the Nigeria's situation where the Niger Delta region has not been favourably disposed to the principles for allocating revenues in the country, hence the clamour by the people for resource control and separate state. Groups may equally resort to agitations for local autonomy and separate existence if they perceived a threat to their religion, language, or other cultural traditions. The Boko Haram insurgency may be likened to this form of separatist movements (Taiwo, 2017).

3. Theoretical Framework of Analysis

As discussed in the preceding section, federalism is a form of government where there is a constitutional division of powers between constituent units and the central government. Elazar (1995) unequivocally asserted that federalism is the epitome of shared rule and self-rule. It is therefore, little wonder that the principles of self-rule and shared rule have become the parameters for measuring and understanding federal systems. Writers such as Watts (1995), Mueller (2017),Benz (2018) and several others have written extensively of shared rule and self-rule in

federal political systems. Suffice to say that on the one hand, the principle of self-rule means that the constituent units have powers to formulate and implement policies that may even deviate from or contradict the upper-level standards, the capacity to raise revenue, the liberty to accept or refuse federal funding for specific projects, or the ability to implement national rules according to regional specificities. The objective of self-rule is to capture the peculiarities of each of the constituent units. (Mueller, 2017)

On the other hand, the principle of shared rule refers to three-dimensional issues. First, it measures the extent to which component units in a federal polity take part in the making of central decisions along with other units. The second dimension is concerned with the degree of horizontal cooperation among components unit at the exclusion of the central government while the third dimension refers to the powers and competences of the central government. Thus, shared rule, therefore, means the total power at the disposal of the central agency and how the central agency exercises such powers (Mueller, 2017).

The implication of the preceding is that in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria, the distortion of the principles of self-rule and shared-rule tends to sow the seed of discord, suspicion, and rivalry. Distortion of self-rule means that local peculiarities and conditions are not cherished and protected. If people have such a feeling that their existence is being threatened they may start agitating or clamouring for separate entity with the belief that in such new entity, their threatened identity would be protected. Similarly the principle of shared rule presupposes that the various constituent units take part in the decision-making process along with the other units on issues of common interest. A situations where members of a constituent unit are of the view that their voices would be not be heard or that there is domination, they may see their existence threatened and therefore resort to agitation for either devolution or transfer of powers to the constituents units or outright withdrawal from the union.

Flowing from the preceding, the position canvassed in this study is that the Nigeria's federal structure is highly defective, and coupled with the ascendancy of centralized tendencies and the appalling patterns of governance; the principles of self-rule and shared rules have continued to be distorted over the years. The attendant effects of these included the emergence of separatist movements from various parts of the country, particularly in the southeast and South-South regions of the Nigerian State. While some of the

groups have been clamouring for the restructuring of the current federal structure to make it more functional and relevant to all segments of the country (Abbas & Wakili 2018), others are agitating for outright withdrawal from the Nigeria State with the impression that the pattern of governance in the country suggested that their identity and interest are being threatened. To these groups, the best option for protecting their identity is to create a new state of their own.

4. Origin and Growth of the Nigerian Federal System

We need to state that the origin of Nigeria's federation is linked to colonial rule. Before colonialism, there were various empires and kingdoms which did not only exist separately but were at different levels of development (Anyebe, 2015). The Northern part of the country was made up of the Hausa State, the Kanem, Bornu Empire, the Fulani and the Tiv among others. The Western part composed of the famous Oyo Empire and the Benin Kingdom, with several other people brought under the dominance of these powerful kingdoms. In the eastern part, there were several segmented ethnic groupings such as the Igbos, Annang, Efik, Kalabari, and Ijaw city-states, which had been relating for several centuries back. The inhabitants of these empires and kingdoms were brought together under one colonial authority to form what is now known as Nigeria. (Idahosa and Aghahowa, 1999).

Though the amalgamation could be seen as the first stage of the emergence of federalism in Nigeria, the administration of the amalgamated northern and southern protectorates between 1914 and 1946 showed the contrary. The introduction of the elective principle in the Legislative Council under the 1922 Clifford Constitution gave credence to this perspective. Provision was not made for the representation of the Northern protectorate because three of the four elected seats were for Lagos. The other one was for Calabar and legislation for the Northern part of the country was by imperial order (Idahosa and Aghahowa, 1999). Thus, it is apt to say that though the amalgamation sowed the seed of federalism, the colonial authorities administered the country as a unitary system for four decades.

However, images of Nigeria's federal system started appearing more clearly in 1939 when Sir Bernard Bourdillion, who was then the Governor of Nigeria, took some steps, which paved the way for the emergence of the Nigerian federation. Bourdillion

divided the country into three administrative unit's tagged Provinces in 1939, namely; the Northern, Eastern, and Western Provinces. These provinces were later called regions under the 1946 Richards Constitution, which incidentally brought the Northern and Southern protectorates together in the Legislative Council. Despite this development, Nigeria was still more or less a quasi-federal system. The 1946 Constitution succeeded only in introducing regionalism into the Nigerian government and politics.

The constitutional foundation of Nigeria's federal system was, however, laid in 1954 when the Lyttleton Constitution was promulgated. The 1954 constitution marked the beginning of the constitutional division of powers between the central and the then regional governments. It made provision for an exclusive legislative list containing items assigned only to the central government. The Constitution equally made provision for the concurrent legislative list, which both the central and regional government could make laws on, but with the proviso, that laws of the central government would prevail over that of the region in the events of the conflict. All other powers not classified as exclusive and concurrent were vested in the regional legislatures.

When independence was granted in 1960, the Independence Constitution retained the division of powers as enshrined in the 1954 Constitution. Powers were divided between the federal government and the regional governments. In 1963, Nigeria's federal structure was tampered with. A new region, that is, the Mid-Western region was carved out of the erstwhile Western region. Nigeria thus became a federation of four regions. This arrangement was in place until 1966 when the military government headed by Major-General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi dramatically terminated Nigeria's federal structure and replaced it with a unitary system. This was done through Decree No 34 otherwise called Unification Decree of 1966. When Lt Colonel Yakubu Gowon became the Head of State after a counter-coup of July 1966, he reverted to the federal system. In 1967, he divided the country into twelve states.

In 1976, Nigeria was further divided into nineteen states with the creation of seven states. That same year, that is, 1976, a nationwide reform of local government was carried out. Local government was designated as the third tier level of government with clearly stipulated functions and financial allocation from the Federation Account. When the 1979 Constitution came into being, local government was

legally recognised and its functions entrenched in the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution. The nineteen states structure was maintained until 1987 when the Babangida led military administration created two additional states. This translated Nigeria to a federation of twenty-one states. Nine and six states were created in 1991 and 1996, respectively, to increase the constituent units of the Nigerian federation. Currently, the Nigerian federation is made up of a federal capital territory, thirty-six states, and seven hundred and seventy-four local government areas.

What can be discerned from the preceding is that the growth in the number of constituents units of Nigeria's' federation did not result from the annexation of new territories but the balkanization of the existing ones. The increase in the number of constituents units to a large extent can be seen to have resulted from the desire to deflate the influence of the majority ethnic nationalities. While this cannot be contested, the creation of states has not succeeded in this regard. The north-south dichotomy that was prevalent in the colonial era is still very much common sixty years after independence.

5. Separatist Movements in Nigeria

It has been asserted that the British sold the idea of federalism to the regional leaders with the belief that the differences in language, religion, and historical background could be accommodated by a federal system where each region would maintain its identity and yet remain in a federal Nigeria (Babalola, 2013). Incidentally, the structure of the Nigerian federation has remained an area where, despite over 60 years of federal practice, the country is still characterised by confusion and misunderstanding (Jinadu, 2002.) Since the amalgamation in 1914 by Lord Lugard, the general belief that federalism is a solution to crises inherent in heterogeneous societies has been put to the test over decades in Nigeria. Lesson from the Nigerian federal system aptly shows that federalism is not a magical antidote for resolving problems and contradictions inherent in multi-ethnic societies. Fear of domination and mutual suspicions among the various ethnic nationalities have continued to hold sway in postcolonial Nigeria.

As noted earlier, explicit threat of secession first came from the Northern region at the 1950 Ibadan General Conference when leaders from that part of the country threatened to secede unless 50% of the seats in the federal House of Representatives was granted to the North, that nationally collected revenue should be allocated to the component regions

based on population, that no part of the Northern Region should be allowed to join the Western Region as was demanded by the Yoruba of Kabba, Offa and Igbomina; and that ministerial responsibility should only be introduced when the North was ready for it.(Okoh, 1999)

Leaders of the Northern region repeated the threat to secede in 1953 when a prominent member of the Action Group, Chief Anthony Enahoro, moved the motion for self-government in 1956. Sir Ahmadu Bello of the Northern People's Congress(NPC) amended the bill with 'as soon as practicable' followed by a motion for adjournment of proceedings which members of the Action Group(AG) and National Council Nigeria and Cameroon(NCNC) which later became National Council of Nigerian citizens considered as a delay tactic for the granting of independence. The AG and NCNC members walked out of the parliament. Representatives from the North were said to have been booed by Lagos crowd. This made them after meeting in Kaduna to come out with an eight-point programme expressing the exit of the Northern region from the Nigerian union.

Independence did not halt the agitations for separate entities. In post-colonial Nigeria, series of agitations for local autonomy and self-rule have threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian State. In the early days of independence, Major Isaac Adaka Boro, an undergraduate chemistry student at the University of Nigeria Nsukka and his fellow members of Ijaw extraction, declared the Republic of Niger Delta over the spate of neglect of the oil-producing areas. Though the Nigerian government succeeded in crushing the movement, it nevertheless sowed the seed for the incessant agitations in the Niger Delta region for resource control, true federalism, and even a separate state being witnessed in recent years. As noted earlier, the most visible separatist movement aimed at secession occurred on May 30, 1967, when the erstwhile Eastern region led by Lt Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared the Eastern region the Republic of Biafra, a declaration that led to a thirty-month civil war between secessionist eastern Nigeria and the federal government.

In the ongoing Fourth Republic which came into being in 1999, Nigeria has been witnessing series of separatist movements from nearly all the sections of the country. However, agitations around the actualisation of Biafra have eclipsed other separatist agitations given the wrong impression that Biafra is the only separatist threatening the corporate existence of the country (Adibe, 2017). The question is, how

does the nature of the Nigerian federal system explain the burgeoning separatist movements experienced over the years? .

(i) **Defective Federal Structure in Nigeria**

The Political Bureau noted among other things in its report that: "at independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a weak socio-political structure, a defective and unbalanced federation, an intensification of ethnic consciousness and rivalries, a subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture and above all, an inexperienced leadership"(FRN,1987:31) This observation by the Political Bureau among other things noted deep-seat imbalance the political structure of the Nigerian State stemming from the inequality of its component units, which placed one region in a dominant position in the federation. The defective structure of the Nigerian federation is visible in the following ways

First, the geographical size of the Northern region between 1954 and 1967 was more than the Eastern and Western regions put together. This started under the 1951 Sir John Macpherson Constitution wherein the Legislative Council made up of elected 136 members, the Northern region was allotted 68 seats while the East and Western regions were allocated 34 seats each. Sagay(n.d) noted that this omission of the colonial period has continued to affect the pattern of governance in recent years. For instance, in the House of Representatives, the North has 182 seats as against the South's 154, and this is replete in the Senate where the North has 57 while the South has 51. The implication of this as rightly pointed out by Sagay, is that no bill can pass through the House without the concurrence of the Northern states while at same time bills emanating from the north have the tendency to pass through the House even if the whole southern representatives oppose them(Sagay, nd). These constitutional provisions which skewed toward the North have continued to spur fear of domination and marginalisation which have been the major incubators for separatist movements and the clamour for secession by sections that have been feeling marginalised in Nigeria. As noted by Jinadu(2017), domination continues to reflect in the practice of federalism in Nigeria

Even though the erstwhile northern region has been divided into nineteen states, those states still see themselves as one when it comes to specific issues that border on north-south dichotomy. This arrangement, which negated the principle of federalism, has continued to breed agitations for the

practice of true federalism. Unfortunately, the calls for this reconfiguration of the Nigerian State have been seen in some quarters as the overture to the cessation of the Nigerian polity. Hence, successive governments have not summoned the courage to embark on restructuring the defective Nigeria's federal structure.

(ii) Centralised Tendencies.

It has been stated earlier that the military government led by Lt General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, terminated the federal structure in Nigeria and replaced it with a unitary system. Though this development was reversed by Lt Colonel Yakubu Gowon immediately he became the Head of the state; centralisation has continued to be the pattern of governance in Nigeria. Nigeria is seen as a federation on paper and unitary in practice. Centralised tendencies are parts of the factors spurring separatist and secession agitations in the country.

We need to state that the incursion of the military into the Nigerian government and politics has distorted the practice of federalism in Nigeria. This has been rightly captured by Suberu cited in Tobi (2013), who asserts among other things that, although soldiers have always expressed a firm commitment to uphold Nigeria's federal structure, the military unified and centralised command system resulted in the distortion of the country's federal institutions as well as their degradation beyond recognition. Suberu avers that the outcomes of this have been the complete subordination of constituent state administrations to the unified military power structure through the appointment and frequent deployment by the central military authorities. Others included the direct interference of the central military government in operation, composition, and reforms of local government, the manipulation of statutory intergovernmental revenue sharing arrangements in such a way that it reinforced the financial hegemony of the centre. (Tobi, 2013).

Other contradictions spawned by centralised tendencies in the Nigerian federal system can be seen in the division of powers in all post-1966 constitutions. There is the need to note that the essence of the constitutional division of powers between the central and constituent units is to ensure that both the federal and the constituent units, that is, the state governments are in all intents and purposes independent of each other. However, what is common to all post-1966 Nigerian constitutions is that the states are made subservient to the federal government. Instead of devolution that promotes

local initiative, centralisation that encourages dominant influence of central agencies has been intensified over the years, thus the increasing phenomenon of asymmetry central-local politics relations. Thus, despite the constitutional division of powers, Nigeria has been operating as a unitary system.

The dominance of the central government is aptly reinforced in the division of powers between central government and the states. The federal government has power to legislate on items on the Exclusive list and jointly with the states on the Concurrent Lists. In the event of conflict, the federal laws will prevail and the state laws will be declared null and void to the extent of the inconsistency. These Constitutional arrangements promote centralisation and central-local relations in which major policy decisions evolved from the central to the local with the attendant disempowerment of grassroots political actors. (Tobi, 2013). The cumulative effect of this is that participation in policy decisions on issues that affect the local dwellers have been the task assigned to central political actors. This trend has not only shrunked the space for participation by the local communities but created a situation in which programmes and projects executed are at variance with the needs and aspirations of the communities (Tobi, 2013)

Centralisation, as noted earlier, has equally undermined the functional existence of institutions of local governance. With the 1976 nationwide Local government reforms, the local government ought to be the engine of grassroots governance. This has not materialized because of the patterns of central-local relations, which made local government subservient to the state and local government. Local government lacks the autonomy to drive grassroots governance and development. The absence of local institutions to capture local peculiarities has fueled separatist movements agitating for greater autonomy to state and local governments in Nigeria.

The contradictions of centralisation are also visible in the realm of financial administration, usually called fiscal federalism. The sharing of federally collected revenue has tilted in favour of the central government and has been a source of fierce controversy and partisan politics among the federal, states and local governments in Nigeria. Apart from the issue surrounding vertical allocation, the horizontal allocation of revenue with little concern for the compensation for the environmentally degraded oil-producing states has ignited agitations for true federalism. It has equally spawned militancy, which

has not only undermined oil production but heightened insecurity in the oil-rich Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

(iii) Distorted Patterns of Governance

While there is no gainsaying that defective federal structure and centralised tendencies since 1966 have spurred agitations for local autonomy and secession, the pattern of governance has equally failed to address those problems and therefore heightened the already tensed up system. This has been very visible in the Fourth Republic, particularly since 2015, when President Muhammadu Buhari APC led government came into power. This period has witnessed more than other periods incessant agitation and declaration that acerbated acrimony between various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Commenting on the reawakened agitation for the actualisation of Biafra in the Eastern part of the country, Babalola advances the view that this resurgence can be explained within the context of the cry of marginalization and that Nigeria's federal system is characterised by lopsidedness, particularly in the allocation of national resources. Babalola argues further that the Igbo agitation for true federalism is about their perception of non-integration into mainstream politics since the end of the civil war in 1970, citing lack of federal presence in the region. He asserts further that

This sense of lack of belonging informs the views of some pro-self-determination groups like the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) that the Igbo people are no longer interested in being part of Nigeria and should be allowed to secede and form an independent state of Biafra.

The major complaints against the Buhari's administration are in the realm of the lopsidedness of appointments, the growing insecurity, the activities of the Fulani herdsmen without convincing responses from the federal government, increasing youth unemployment and series of other reasons. Besides these, little attention to the principles of democracy which could have consolidated socio-economic development of all the sections of the country and foster national consciousness and virile nation-building devoid of all senses of political suspicions has spurred separatist movements in Nigeria. Related to this is the adoption of the presidential system of government with its winner takes all, and losers lose all and the application of federal character

principle which has not given equal opportunity to Nigerians but emphasizes place of origin. They have collectively continued to spur discontentment among Nigerians. Unfortunately, post 1966 constitutions that have upheld the presidential system and the federal character principles were engineered by the military and operated by conscious ethnic elites who lacked consensus on many national issues affecting the stability of the country.

6. Dousing Separatist Agitations In Nigeria

There is no doubt about the fact that the architecture of the Nigeria's federal structure is defective and has continued to witness a series of crises. The persistence and series of threats of eviction of the South-South and the South-East indigenes from the Northern part of the country at every slightest provocation have been continued to raise question or cast doubt on the continued existence of the Nigerian State. Discussion in this study has attributed the burgeoning separatist and secessionist movements to three factors. These are the defective and lopsided nature of the Nigerian federal system whose foundation was laid in the colonial era, centralization introduced by the military and have been upheld by successive civilian governments and the distorted patterns of governance that has not encouraged a sense of belonging to all segments of the country. Various mechanisms have been adopted by successive governments to promote unity, such as the establishment of unity schools, the introduction of the national youth service scheme, and the federal character principle to mention but few. These instruments of national integration have become counterproductive, particularly the federal character principle. They have failed to address the national question.

Similarly, the Nigerian local government system because of central-local relations in which local government is seen as a residual item of the State has not allowed for grassroots development or local self-government. The post-1966 Constitutions reinforced the dependence of the local government on the other two tiers of government in the Constitution (Adefulu, 2001). What this indicates is that the principle of self-rule is deficient in Nigeria's federal arrangement. The implication is that in order to reduce separatist movements, there is the need to have a revision of the Nigerian federal structure. This is where the calls for political restructuring come in. The calls for the restructuring of Nigerian State have been controversial because of the different meanings attached to it by different groups. It is wrongly interpreted to mean the cessation of the Nigerian

federation. Political restructuring should be seen as deliberate efforts at the reconfiguration of the structure of the Nigerian federation to engender the practice of true federalism where self-rule and shared-rule will reign supreme. This reconfiguration will address the imbalance in the federal structure, redefine the power relations between the central and the states, will make local governments function as an agent of grassroots development and governance and address current contradictions inherent in financial administration by fostering an appropriate revenue allocation formula that would promote not only unity but peace and justice in Nigeria.

In addition to the restructuring of the Nigerian federal system, there is the need to address governance deficit so that various groups, both the majority and minority ethnic nationalities groups, would have reasons to believe that it is more rewarding to remain in united Nigeria than to break away. This, as suggested by Adibe (2017), would mean to make secession less attractive to various groups. This reinvention of governance would entail a nation-building process that would focus on the people, where development would spread, and national policies that have been counterproductive such as the federal character principle would be redefined to serve as potent instruments of national integration.

7. Conclusion

The problem of Nigeria's federal system though attributed to colonial exigency has not been appropriately managed to promote self-rule and shared rule. The various separatist movements aptly showed that the Nigerian federation is not an enviable entity. Fear of domination, alleged marginalization, economic exploitation, among others showed that there is the feeling that as currently structured, the Nigerian State is not addressing the peculiarities of the various nationalities. The future of the corporate existence of the Nigeria state is very important. Suppressing agitations may deter the agitations for a while but will resurface if the causes of the grievances are not addressed. The root causes can be addressed if the demands of the various groups are considered objectively and not with sentiments. Such consideration can only take place if a dialogue is instituted to discuss the future of the Nigerian State rather than the mere cosmetics approaches of successive governments which have not been able to address the inherent problems. This is a bitter pill that is capable of healing the ailing Nigerian federal system. The history of failed federal systems is

mainly due to the non-adherence to the federal principle and failure to manage the federal project.

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