

NATIONAL QUESTION AND POLITICAL RECESSION IN NIGERIA: A CASE FOR HOLISTIC RESTRUCTURING

Iwara Eno IWARA¹ and John Anyabe ADAMS²

^{1,2}Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Calabar, NIGERIA.

Abstract

The paper intervenes in the persistent agitations for the resolution of the contentious issue of Nigeria's nationality, which was largely the result of the British forceful amalgamation of Nigeria's ethnic nationalities. The paper notes that the growing fusion of the ethnic-nationalities over what is considered as the faulty or lopsided structure created by the colonial powers, raises questions which challenge the foundation of Nigeria's nationality. The paper adopted the descriptive method of analysis having collected data from secondary sources. The analysis accentuated the fact that the shift in political awareness among the people and the recurring socio-economic existential problems, continue to beckon on the government of the Nigerian state to restructure the country and avert political recession. However, the paper argues and submits that, because of the internal contradictions in the geopolitical zones of the country which are also plural demographically and culturally, the restructuring of the country should be holistic, encompassing both intra and inter zonal restructuring.

Key words: Geopolitical zones, National Question, Nationalities, Political Recession and Restructuring

Introduction

Nigeria is a multinational state inhabited by over 250 ethnic groups with more than 500 dialects spoken in the country, and with a wide variety of cultures (Otite, 2007:26). It is a country with two dominant religions, while a minority of the people practices religions that are traditional to Nigeria. For instance, Akinwale (2015:4) stated that Nigerians who live in the Southern part of the country are largely Christians, while most of those that live in the Northern part are Muslims. With this multi-ethnic and

multi-religious composition, it is not amazing that the country is confronted with socio-political challenges of nation-building.

It is also not amazing that the various ethnic nationalities that were assembled to form the Nigerian nation-state by the British Colonial powers were not static and did not engage in equilibrium relations prior to the arrival of the colonialists. This is not to say that these pre-colonial societies were not aware of the existence of each other, but what is clear is that they were either consciously or un-consciously unable to adequately explore the interdependences that existed between them, and for which they could have provided the socio-cultural framework or for which they would have set the process for the emergence of a nation-state or even a nation. Perhaps, the unfortunate moment that befell the process of forming the Nigerian nation-state was the forceful amalgamation of the heterogeneous societies of the southern and Northern protectorates to make up what the British Colonial administrators called 'Nigeria' in 1914. The premature amalgamation of the disparate nationalities into a Nigerian nation-state, put together by the British, contradicts the basis for the evolution of a nation. For Caren (n.d: 18), for instance, the establishment of a nation is determined by the sharing of commonalities in language, culture, and traditions, and by a range of national groups which have engendered habits of cooperation among one another overtime".

The case of Nigeria, given Caren's basis of formation of a nation, appears abnormal. The Nigerian heterogeneous societies were basically not ready to share commonality, appreciate each other's culture and tradition and did not develop sufficient habits of cooperation and had little or no experience in these regards. As we have come to find out, these deficiencies have come to define the country's problems. The problem of Nigeria's nationality is also made clear in Akinwale's clarification of the concepts of nation and nation-state. Akinwale (2015:2) espoused that a nation is an association of peoples who share the same core ideals. For him, these core ideals are exemplified in the belief that such society of people: "Would arrive at the actualization of their individual potentials through the actualization of their Collective potentials, and at the fulfillment of their individual aspirations through the fulfillment of their collective aspirations". If one makes a cross-examination of the above ideals of a nation's formation pointed out by Caren and exemplified by Akinwale, with the situation in Nigeria, one would discover that the process of Nigeria's nationality is violated at two levels. The first was at the level of dialogue, which was not promoted to allow the various societies to negotiate based on their values, interests and resolve. The second concerns the violation of equity or the failure of the heterogeneous members to institute a corporate nation-state that recognizes their rights to a share in common history, values and sense of belonging to one political community. The Nigerian nation-state, in view of these infractions, loses the constitutive essence of its

formation, with one of the problems it throws-up being a faulty or fraudulent structure imposed by the colonial masters in favour of a section and over which that section feels endowed with political power in Nigeria. Thus, what is observable is that the sustenance of the lopsided structure depends largely on gun points and totalitarian political dogmas such as 'the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable' or 'the indivisibility of Nigeria is not negotiable' which have come to exemplify the totalitarian and authoritarian dispositions favoured by the dominant ruling class.

The dominant ruling class and the ethno-geopolitical zone laying claim to political power in the country have a harmony of interest in the sustenance of the lopsided structure of the Nigerian Nation-state. They have constantly jettisoned dialogue for correction of the structure, and have constantly done so either by the use of the military, which of course they dominate, or by the use of politically motivated constitutional convocation delay tactics. However, this present Nigerian nation-state structure assembled by the British colonial rulers has consistently been seen by most of the ethno-regional groups in the country as going parallel with their ethno-national interests. This has thrown-up agitations or crises for the rejection of the colonially created basis of nationalism in the country. The immediate post-independence agitations and the contemporary demands for restructuring of the Nigerian nation-state present us with a potent picture of understanding the cross-purposes between the geopolitical zone that the present structure favours, and others that feel the structure is parallel to real federalism. The latter category is of the conviction that there is no clear reason why their geopolitical zones must remain in the present structure of Nigeria.

Indicators of forceful rejection of the present structure gained popularity with the Tiv riot and the Adaka Boro led secession attempt which challenged the Nigerian State (Adekanye, 2001: 12). The early antagonisms were followed by a more popular and loaded secession of Eastern Region of Nigeria led by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in 1967. It was an attempt to move the Eastern Region, now made up of the south-east and parts of the south-south geopolitical zones, out of Nigeria. The precursor of the civil war was the growing fusion of the stiff divisions and suspicion promoted by the major ethnic nationalities against one another, particularly in the competition for political power and skewed distribution of natural resources. Apart from the secessionist bid of the then Eastern Region, other agitations which have occurred in recent times are predicated on requests for autonomy/fiscal federalism, and in sum, restructuring as noticeable in the persistent calls by the Afenifere Renewal Group of the south-west, and others from the south-east and south-south geopolitical zones. There are also other misgivings emitted over marginalization and injustices by some nationalities, such as in the statement made by Major Orkar in his 1990 military coup which he led to sever the northwest and the northeast from the rest of Nigeria.

In the south-west of Nigeria, the Oodua People’s Congress {OPC} has been holding sway as a reactionary movement to protect the south-west interests. The group’s activism was typified by the unjust annulment of the 1993 presidential election which the group perceived that Chief M.K.O Abiola an indigene of the south-west won, but was cancelled by General Ibrahim Babangida an indigene of the north-central zone. The OPC like the Pan-Yoruba socio-political group – Afenifere, has been ardent advocate of restructuring of the Nigerian contemporary state. The most potent agitation or action from the north-central region of Nigeria over the unacceptable structure of the Nigerian federal state occurred when Major Gideon Orkar’s led coup attempted to separate the south and the middle-belt (north-central) from the north-west and the north-east of Nigeria in 1990. Major Orkar in the incident of the coup stated that:

On behalf of the patriotic and well-meaning peoples of the Middle Belt and Southern part of the country, I, Major Gideon Orkar wish to happily inform you of the successful ousting of the dictatorial, corrupt and ... administration of General Ibrahim Babangida... this is not just another coup, but a well conceived, planned and executed revolution for the marginalized, oppressed and enslaved people of the Middle Belt and the South.

Major Orkar’s position was indeed received with admiration by many people in the north-central, south-east, south-south, and south-west of Nigeria. Most of the sentiments and realities emitted by Orkar are still very much present in contemporary Nigeria. The various agitations or demonstrations, either by civilian movements or military coups, over the foundation of the Nigerian nation state eventually ignite the moral outrage which characterizes the level of instability and impunity in contemporary Nigeria. The agitations can be linked to five of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Further clarifications on the contentions of geopolitical zones and their platforms for agitation are presented in table one below.

Table 1: AGITATIONS ABOUT THE STRUCTURE AND BASIS OF NIGERIA’S NATION-STATE.

Geopolitical Zone	Platform(S) / Auspices	Demand / Interest
Southeast	MOSSOB, IPOB	Sovereign state of Biafra and restructuring
Southwest	OPC, Afenifere	Restructuring
Southsouth	JNDLF, MEND, NDPVF, NDLM, NDA, MOSSOP, etc	Resource Control or Fiscal Federalism & Autonomy
Northcentral	Coup plot (G. Orkah) Coup d’état	Break up
Northeast	Boko Haram	Autonomy & Islamization
Northwest	Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), NEF	Support the status quo

Source: Compiled from the analysis of this work.

The above table reveals that only the north-west geopolitical zone has neither produced a platform for agitation against the present structure of the Nigerian nation-state, nor supported its discussions in view of the fact that political leaders from that zone are always of the view that, the present structure of the country is not negotiable. This was the case under Shehu Shagari and under Buhari following his jettisoning of the 2014 Conference report which attempted the discussion of some of the issues. To this end, the zone appears to be the benefactor of the contemporary structure of Nigeria, having produced most of the heads of the government of the Nigerian state since independence. The frequency at which leaders of government emerged from the zone eventually establishes a case of north-west dominance and hegemony over other geopolitical zones in the country. Table 2 below shows that, of the thirteen regimes that Nigeria has had since independence, Seven (7) have been led by the North-west while the rest five (5) zones in the country share the remaining six (6) regimes. This means that given this development, an element of domination has been established.

Table 2: HEADS OF GOVERNMENT AND THEIR GEOPOLITICAL ZONES SINCE INDEPENDENCE

Regime	Head of Govt/President	Geopolitical Zone
1960-1966	Alh. Abubarka Tafawa Balewa	Northeast
1966(Jan)-1966(July)	Gen. JFU Aguiyi-Ironsi	Southeast
1966-1975	Gen. Yakubu Gowon	Northcentral
1975-1979	Gen. Murtala/Obasanjo	Northwest/Southwest
1979-1983	Alh Shehu Shagari	Northwest
1983-1985	Gen. Mohammadu Buhari	Northwest
1985-1993	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	Northcentral
1993-1998	Gen. Sani Abacha	Northwest
1998-1999	Gen. Abdulsalami Abubaka	Northcentral
1999-2007	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	Southwest
2007-2010	Alh. Musa Yar`Adua	Northwest
2010-2015	Dr Goodluck Jonathan	Southsouth
2015- Till date	Gen Mohammadu Buhari(rtd)	Northwest

Source: Various sources of History/ Government of Nigeria

What is so far clear is that the norm of distributive equity is missing in the present structure of the country. It is also clear that the Nigerian nation-state is unable to address its political questions, and therefore bedeviled by severe political tensions over which Nigeria may slide into political recession. The study, in view of these mishaps, sets out with the claim that: if the mounting agitations seeking negotiation over the national question or restructuring of the Nigerian nation-state are jettisoned, then the country may slide into political recession. To this end, the paper is confronted with

two imperatives. The first imperative is the intellectual obligation of interrogating the national question in Nigeria and the second imperative is the obligation of explaining the connection between the national question and political recession. These two interrogative moments would lead to the submissions of the paper.

Interrogating the National Question in Nigeria

The national question is a concept used to describe the issues and crises associated with the foundation of Nigeria's nationality. These issues and crises arose from the diverse character of the country as a plural and multi-ethnic society. Historically, the concept is traceable to the structural defects of the amalgamation of 1914 which put the northern and southern protectorates together to form a united colony of the British Empire. The structural defects created by the amalgamation continue to linger on and grow in the post- independence era without real attention that would have involved the convocation of dialogue or negotiations that are not abridged by the government, among the ethnic nationalities. The national question is already generating more crises in Nigeria, with several movements or platforms emerging on a daily basis, that are making life unbearable for the people while several lives have been lost to these agitations. Perceptions that are emerging also show for instance that some people are of the opinion that the national question should be addressed based on reason of equity and that such a reason should prevail. There are also some people that have the perception that the agitations seeking the resolution of the national question are anti-Hausa/Fulani ([www.oodua pathfinder.com](http://www.oodua.pathfinder.com)). This may not be unconnected with the fact that the Hausa/Fulani do not support the restructuring of Nigeria, as no group from that part of the country ever came out to agitate.

Meanwhile, perceptions that nationalities hold over the national question, to a large extent have conditioned the crisis of mission in Nigeria. For instance, issues such as the fact that the south-east geopolitical zone has five states unlike other zones having six states, the Sharia provision in Nigeria's judicial system, the federal character principle/quota system in value allocation, identity politics in matters of state policy, etc, are all issues that are begging for resolution. The national conferences or talk shops convoked so far which aimed at resolving the crisis of the national question end up in political diversions being conditioned by the grouse of the dominant ethno-national class. The grouse of each major ethnic nationality in Nigeria appears to have contributed, in one way or the other though at different degrees, to constraining the probity and resolution of the national question. Each of these ethno-national grouses breeds some level of innerness which can be found to be different from their public utterances over the national question.

This inside and outside reaction dilemmas throw up fundamental contradictions which define the posture of inter ethnic biases in Nigeria. Unfortunately the role of

arbitration is conceded to one of the so biased ethno-national groups that control the state power. To this end, the resolution of the national question is infringed on two grounds. The first is that ethno-national agitations are unable to realistically confront the Nigerian state with the realities that reflect the collective interests of their ethnic nationalities. In view of this, we find an attitudinal disposition in which the overall strategy of the ethno-national groups is absorbed in an organized retreat from a position of strength. The second is that the Nigerian state is being controlled largely by a geopolitical zone of the country that is not disposed to the resolution of the national question. Unfortunately, it is the same zone that has influenced the legal framework, and the state apparatus of coercion that prevents the national question from receiving the attention of the government.

These two grounds or moments present a situation, in the first place, in which there is no definitive move by the ethno-national groups to face the obstacles attendant to the quest for resolving the national question. All these infractions constitute obstacles of insincerity and the disposition to ensure that the status quo remains. This disposition can be found in the outcomes of the talk shops or National Conferences such as the Niki Tobi's Constitutional Review, Abubarka's 1999 Constitution, Obasanjo's 2005 Constitutional Review, and Jonathan's 2014 National Conference, were instances of political diversions characteristic of the outcomes of the conferences, such that the real issues that characterized the crisis of the foundation of Nigeria's nationalism were jettisoned in order for the political leaders to maintain political control.

Like many other issues that characterize Nigeria's sphere of politics, the national question has also been seen from different culture boundal perspectives. The cultural differences of the various peoples of Nigeria also play a role in the diffusion inherent in the national question. Sagay (2014) holds the view that the national question is all about the control of political power and resources in Nigeria. For Obaro (2014) the amalgamation of 1914, which has always been a subject of discussion, endowed the North with the state of political dominance against the south of the country. This political dominance, according to Obaro Ikime, usually considered as the "birth right" has caused a lot of political disaffection in the country.

As has been observed, the Northern Elders Forum and the Arewa Consultative Forum have, on the basis of this "birth right", demanded that "power must return to the North". Although the so called "birth right" does not apply to all the geopolitical zones in the North, but the generalization of northern attribution is on grounds that when it comes to national political contestations, all the northern geopolitical zones are usually caught up in the same web, led by the northwest. This seeming unity enjoyed by the geopolitical zones in the North is largely due to the fact that the British colonial masters did not divide the North, but left the North intact as one region,

whereas the southern Nigeria was in 1939 polarized into Eastern and Western regions. It can also be recalled that the western region was later further divided into Western and Mid-western regions. It is on the basis of the lopsided structure of the colonially created Nigeria-state that most people talk about the national question. It is also on account of this structural disequilibrium that the 1914 amalgamation is described by many as a “mistake”. For the British colonialists, that “mistake” or amalgamation had to be so because of administrative and economic convenience of the then colonial government.

The resources of what the colonialists considered the viable south had to be used to administer the North as well, which they considered to be less viable in terms of revenue generation and mineral resources. In the contemporary Nigerian state, three major factors appear in sum, to militate against the resolution of the national question: The oil and gas factor, the Northern Hegemonic factor, the Igbo Bourgeois factor. *The oil and gas factor*: The Nigerian state depends largely on oil and gas for the administration of the country. Oil and Gas account for over eighty percent of the country’s foreign exchange earnings. To this end, politics has taken the form of struggle to control the federal government in order to gain access and control of Niger Delta Oil and Gas which the military put under the control of the federal government, dominated by the North by virtue of the 1978 Decree now enshrined in the constitution of 1999 (Article 44(3)) as amended. The discovery of oil resulted in the abandonment of the other sectors of the Nigeria economy leading to the universality of state power and unified command structure (Eteng, 1977:1-31). It thus appears that unless the oil dries up or something drastic happens the national question would remain.

The Northern hegemonic factor: Apart from oil and gas, the north has invariably dominated political power since independence, and thus a beneficiary of the colonially assembled Nation-state known as Nigeria, as indicated in Table 2 of this work, the North has ruled this country more than the south of the country. On account of the advantage it enjoys over other zones or regions, it is opposed to the resolution of the national question involving the lopsidedness of contemporary Nigeria. Both the Northern Elders forum and the Arewa Consultative Forum that usually speak for the North, have consistently insisted that the structure of Nigeria as enshrined in the imposed 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, should not be negotiated and that the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable (Nigerian Tribune, July 11, 2016: 9). This mentality is getting very popular to the extent that it is sacrosanct that the present structure of Nigeria is untouchable. For the North, the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable in spite of the mounting agitations by other nationalities that the lopsided structure of the contemporary Nigeria is defective.

The Igbo Bourgeois Factor: The third factor that constitutes a constraint to the resolution of the national question involves the Igbo bourgeois class, who own property in some parts of the country, and are afraid of losing such in the event of restructuring. The Igbo nation is one of the three major ethnic groups in the colonial and immediate post-colonial Nigerian nation-state. The Igbo have been the most noted in the struggle for a sovereign state (Biafra). Unfortunately, the Igbo bourgeoisie who own properties in various geopolitical zones of the country have stayed out of this struggle to protect their properties. The experience of the 1967 to 1970 Civil war which rendered some of the properties of the Igbo as “abandoned” in some parts of the country particularly in Port-Harcourt and Lagos is still fresh in their memory. With the indifference of this class of the Igbo from the struggle to address the national question or restructuring of the country or for regional autonomy and self government, the onus of the struggle falls on the proletariat, peasants and a few members of the intelligentsia. The problem with this polarity is that the economic strength that is needed to prosecute the struggle is missing, and that also has affected its intensity. The situation of the Igbo southeast, like other zones of the country, shows that there are class polarities that have to be addressed before the restructuring of the country is begun.

However, what is clear from the interrogation of the national question particularly its inhibiting factors discussed above, is the fact that the dialogue of the ethno-national groups to reinvent Nigeria’s nationality, is inescapable. It is also clear that the ethno-national groups agitating for restructuring harbor internal contradictions which create a necessity for both intra and inter restructuring of the country.

Understanding Political Recession in Nigeria

A second major concept used in this work is “political recession” which is somehow scarce in the literature on recession. An understanding of the concept involves knowing the meaning of ‘recession’ and what is ‘political’. Recession generally means receding or withdrawal or a situation of setback (Encarta, 2007). On the other hand, what is “political” basically denotes struggle for power involving maneuvers and intrigues (Huntington, 1996: 207). The literature in the area of recession is economic dominated, while it is almost non-existent in political lexicon. It is usually associated with the economy of countries. In economics, recession refers to negative economic growth or economic contraction which results in general slowdown of economic activity. For economists, indicators such as a fall in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), low investment spending, low capacity utilization, low household incomes, and rise of inflation, are indices of economic recession which eventually explain the drastic drop in the economy.

In political terms therefore, political recession can be seen in terms of dwindling political fortunes involving the retirement or remission of the political system of the state, conflict suppression, gerrymandering, doctoring of election results, skewed productive and distributive capacities of the state, and politics of mutual exclusion in resource allocation. Just as recess, meaning 'going back' or 'withdrawing' or a break during a school day (Encarta, 2007), this paper is of the supposition that the political intrigues or maneuvers, as well as the agitations taking the form of militancy over the national question, is already leading the country to remission or retirement of some ethnic nationalities from the Nigerian nation-state. This implies that, if the political power holders in Nigeria continue to treat agitations over the structural imbalances put in place by the colonialists, with levity, as a way of jettisoning the accumulating agitations for restructuring, then political recession or a general showdown of political activity is imminent. There are already clear signals that some of these agitations would continue to have a telling effect on the country. For instance, the agitations for the creation of the sovereign state of Biafra, and the Niger Delta nation have been there from the colonial era, but intensified in the postcolonial Nigeria.

Historically, it has always remained a Herculean task trying to suppress nationalities' agitations for autonomy. The experiences of European nations speak volumes. Perhaps, the speech delivered by Harold Macmillan, the former Prime Minister of Britain in 1960 over the decolonization of British territories would remind the Nigerian political power holders of the needful. Macmillan, in a speech entitled "The Wind of Change" acknowledged that:

One constant fact of political life in Europe has been the emergence of independent nations. ...especially since the end of the war, the process which gave birth to nation-states of Europe have been repeated all over the world...fifteen years ago, this movement spread through Asia. Countries then of different races and civilization pressed their claims to an independent national life. Whether we like it or not this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact (Harold Macmillan, 1960).

Certainly, Macmillan's statement exemplifies the fact that the agitations for the restructuring of the country and the quest for ethno-national autonomy have historical linkages. It also implies that it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the holders of state power in Nigeria to continue to suppress the agitations with the use of arms. The situation in Nigeria as at 2016 is that Nigeria appears to be at cross-roads, where the country cannot move progressively unless the national question is addressed. It thus becomes obvious that Nigeria cannot peacefully continue to operate the present lopsided structure which has generated bitterness and has negatively affected the

emotional attachment of the ethnic nationalities to the Nigerian nation-state. The lack of emotional attachment to the Nigerian state has invariably stunted the development of the country. Technically therefore, the Nigerian nation-state is comatose, perhaps pending the restructuring of the country. For instance, the Afenifere Renewal Group ARG (*Nigerian Tribune*, July 11, 2016), posits that:

The insistence of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and by extension President Buhari to keep the nationality of Nigeria from being negotiated is a major cause of why the country is recording ceaseless agitations...Yoruba people will never agree to becoming slaves in their country and the peaceful agitations coming from their space on the restructuring of Nigeria, is to carefully underscore our belief in peaceful change.

The ARG's perception is shared by some other groups in the south of Nigeria, some of which have been reacting violently. Indeed, the situation in Nigeria as at 2016 reveals that Nigerians are facing the worst moments of economic and political recessions to the extent that people are withdrawing their interests from political participation. The opposition parties in Nigeria are already getting decimated, not just because of political witch-hunt over corruption, but because there is a general drop in the enthusiasm of the people to engage and checkmate the state, just as the receptors of the government are closed. Likewise, the Nigerian economy is experiencing wide ranging drop in foreign direct investment and the relocation of businesses from Nigeria to other African countries such as Ghana, Kenya and South Africa where they perceive that the environment is friendly. This is not unconnected with separatist agitations involving Boko Haram, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and the one Niger Delta militants over resource control and restructuring.

Just as these nationalities are engaged in agitations, the federal government on the other hand is engaged in intriguing of protecting the present structure of the country that is unacceptable to the agitating groups of the country. Not only does the federal government treat the agitators as criminals as they are often called, but it constantly deploys the military of the country to deal with the agitators. Thus creating the impression that, the nationality or unity of the country must be held on gun points (Akinwale, 2016) using the military logic and not through discussion, negotiation or dialogue. This prevailing military approach to suppress agitations of nationalities, clearly makes governance in Nigeria, a unitary system and not a federal system which the country publicly claims. The unitary system of government, which the government practices but has failed to acknowledge publicly, makes Nigeria to look like an entity that lives a lie. The system has led the country to endless socio-political and socio-economic existential problems. Thus, more than ever before, the anomalies

perpetrated by the skewed federal system make ethnic nationalities to feel marginalized, and see Nigeria as operating below equity. This essentially portrays the country as having a deficit of trust, in a country with plural and varied attributes. These anomalies constitute some of the reasons why the centre of dynamics in the realm of politics is beginning to shift in favour of the restructuring of Nigeria.

However, the intra-geopolitical zonal contradictions have created diffusion over the shape the restructuring should take. Vice President Osinbajo confirmed this diffusion when he stated that there is need for a deeper understanding of issues about the restructuring of the country (Nigerian Tribune, July 13, 2016 p5). In any case, from all observable indications, the diffusion that exists over the national question is that involving the thesis and the antithetical positions about the restructuring of the country. On the side of the thesis forces are the ruling class and the nationalities covered by the state power, which constantly dogmatize that the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable, or the indivisibility of Nigeria is non-negotiable, or to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done.

These dogmas have constantly been used to intimidate the nationalities that are not comfortable being part of the present structure of Nigeria. The dogmas have been on display after the first republic which ended in 1966. It is getting more lucid that, with the awareness of the minority groups of their resource endowment, it will be difficult for the holders of state power in Nigeria to continue with the use of brute force to secure the unity of the country. The shift in political awareness and the recurring tensions occasioned by militants like the Avengers and peaceful resistance movements such as the ARG, the agitations for restructuring, which are now being absorbed into a larger framework of socio-political and socio-economic existential problems that have plagued the country in recent times, holders of state power may be forced to negotiate. It is the dwindling fortunes caused by these existential problems and political setbacks that are herewith described as political recession. The recessionary situation, as currently being experienced in Nigeria, informs the supposition of this paper that the ongoing political recession in the country is fast-tracking the idea that restructuring the Nigerian nation-state is a way forward for the country. The danger of the state power jettisoning restructuring may further entrench the deficit of trust and throw up the anarchy of separatist wars in the country.

Restructuring as a Panacea to Resolving the National Question in Nigeria

The lopsided and pseudo federal system being operated in Nigeria has not been able to deliver political goods and services satisfactorily to Nigerians of various nationalities, as it in practice run like a unitary system. The dissatisfactions of the nationalities are implicated in the shift of dynamics re-engineering the restructuring of the country. There are clear indications however, given public statements by the various

geopolitical zones of the country, that the biggest obstacle militating against restructuring of the Nigerian State is not only about the thesis and antithetical forces at the federal level, but also the internal contradictions in the geopolitical zones of the country. Thus, whether restructuring would occur or not, would depend so much on the resolution of the intra geopolitical zones' contradictions or conflicts. These contradictions are not unconnected with the nature of the demographic and cultural make-up of the geopolitical zones and the ideational factors shaping political and class interests in the zones. Some instances which support this thinking would suffice.

The first involves the Southeast of Nigeria where agitations for the sovereign state of Biafra are perceived differently. The Igbo masses perceive that the governance of the Nigerian state is running parallel with their interests, especially over representation in the national government, the distribution of opportunities in the country and marginalization of the average Igbo man from the national scheme of things. In view of what they regard as marginalization, and the need to protect their values, they give-in to the struggle for self determination. The masses' contention runs counter to the views of the Igbo bourgeois or propertied class that own properties in various parts of Nigeria and do not wish that their properties are declared abandoned if the Igbo nation is separated from Nigeria. This class of Igbo prefers that Nigeria remains one for the sake of their properties. Apart from the class issue in the southeast, there are also issues of social differentiations involving tribal sentiments which may affect the distribution of power in Biafra if independence is allowed. All these contradictions have to be resolved before a country wide restructuring is carried-out.

In the Southsouth, the challenges are multiple, ranging from multiplicity of ethnic configuration of the area, to mediated territorial contiguity. What this portends is that the Southsouth is difficult to isolate territorially, as one cannot move round the south-south without passing through the southeast. The linguistic balkanization of the zone coupled with identity issues breed complexity that may affect political control and cohesion needed to run an independent nation in the south-south. These issues and problems have to be discussed and addressed before the restructuring. In the north-west, the elders have always maintained that the present structure of Nigeria is not negotiable. Even as supportive as the state power has been to the course of the northwest agenda, the northwest zone notwithstanding, harbours internal conflicts which occur in the relations between the Hausa-Fulani and the Kataf, Kuteb and Jukun, Hausa-Fulani and Mambila, Jukun and Tiv pastoralists and farmers and so on (Kalid, 2013).

In the south-west geopolitical zone, political interests along ideological differences, are quite manifest. The zone is also not devoid of tribal sentiments and polarization. Though, such tendencies have not been violently pursued, but have created political blocs that may affect a coherent national system. For instance the

Ondo-Ekiti axis of the zone is normally suspect of the Lagos-Ogun axis especially in the post Awolowo politics in the south-west. Also noticeable in the Southwest is a kind of class and mass politics which can be seen in the development of interests groups in the zone such as the Afenefere Renewal Group (ARG), which is a pan-yoruba elders group and the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC). These differences are bound to have negative impacts in the event of the creation of a south-western autonomous state, if not addressed before the country-wide restructuring.

As a matter of fact therefore, in all the geopolitical zones of the country is found internal contradictions which could degenerate into violent contacts, and which need to be settled before general restructuring. It is after the geopolitical zones might have settled their differences through discussions and have produced geopolitical zones' constitutions that the country-wide restructuring can be embarked upon. The argument of this paper is that, it is only when the geopolitical zones acquire this type of collective value that they can discuss the restructuring of the country from positions of strength, since again they will be guided by their constitutions.

Conclusion

The growing fusion of the ethno-nationalities of the geopolitical zones of the country over what is considered the faulty structure of the Nigerian nation-state; implies that restructuring the country is fundamental to the stability and continuous existence of Nigeria. In view of this, the paper adopted an interrogative analysis approach in examining the national question and political recession, particularly with regard to their causal nexus. The analysis of the paper elucidates the fact that the national question is compounded by three main factors: (i) a culture of ethnic clientelism seemingly promoted by the ruling class; (ii) instability of institutions, which are in fact the fundamental source of crisis of national unity. For instance, the military institution through its decrees, which undermined and dismantled true federalism in Nigeria (Suberu, 1999:86); and, (iii) the failure to explore the links or interdependences that exist between the nationalities of Nigeria to provide the socio-cultural framework for a nation-state.

The analysis of this paper has proven that the national question does not seem to be merely about the thesis and the antithetical forces of negotiating the country's nationality, but more deadly rather, about the internal contradictions in the geopolitical zones of the country. Therefore, whether restructuring the country will be realistic or not, would so much depend on the resolutions of the contradictions in the geopolitical zones. It is instructive that the geopolitical zones resolutions produce acceptable intellectualist people's constitutions that would protect the rights and aspirations of the geopolitical zones. To this end, the submission of this paper is that, because of the demographic and cultural make-up of the geopolitical zones, and the

ideational factors shaping opinion in them, the restructuring of the country should necessarily take the form of holistic restructuring.

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Biographical Notes

Iwara Eno IWARA, *PhD*, is a visiting Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Calabar, NIGERIA. Email: iwarae2006@yahoo.com

John Anyabe ADAMS, *PhD*, is a Senior Lecturer and the Head, Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Calabar, NIGERIA. His area of specialization is international relations and strategic studies. Email: anyabe2003@yahoo.com.