

Civil Society Groups and the Paradox of Nation-Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

The much vaunted nation-building for plural societies remain a mirage in Nigeria. Plagued by divisive features like primordialism, existence of ‘dual citizenship’ and prioritization of ethnic indigeneity over national citizenship, the country is torn between clashing centrifugal forces. This study examined how ethnic based civil society groups (CSGs) act as centrifugal forces that thwart nation-building in Nigeria. Case-study research design was adopted to focus our analysis on three selected CSGs: Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo, Afenifere and Arewa Consultative Forum. Content analysis was employed to analyze data collected via documentary approach. We anchored our study on the group theory and Marxian theory of postcolonial state. The study found that the selected CSGs thwart nation-building by entrenching primordialism and ‘dual citizenship’ through integration of the people at the subnational level based on ethnic cleavages, primarily for the purpose of accessing power and oil-dominated economic resources concentrated at center of Nigeria’s lope-sided federal system. We recommend that CSGs should focus on mobilizing the people for economic production and contribution rather than distribution. There is also need to address the imbalance in the federal system to enhance autonomy of the federating units and avoid hegemony of any federating unit.

Keywords: Civil Society Groups (CSGs); Nation-building; Primordialism; Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo, Afenifere; Arewa Consultative Forum

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Introduction/Problematique

Nation building is a complex but centripetal process as well as a strategy of welding together groups of diverse ethnic, cultural, traditional, historical and religious identities, into a nation-state with common identity and interest (Igwe, 2005). Like many other African states, nation building has remained a major challenge for Nigeria since her independence in 1960. Despite various mechanisms and institutions put in place by successive government to eke out a nation out of the diverse groups that make up the area known as Nigeria, the country remains a mosaic torn apart by constantly clashing ethnic groups and principalities. Thus, after over fifty years of independence, Nigeria still suffers from divisive factors like primordialism and prevalence of ‘dual citizenship’ in which Nigerians see themselves first as citizens of their ethnic groups and secondly as Nigerian citizens. Why is this so?

Although federalism was adopted as the most viable form of government for Nigeria in view of her ethnic diversity, Nigeria’s federal system deteriorated over the years to become an impediment to the unity it aimed to advance. Nigeria’s federal system is characterized by a vicious circle of imbalance in which the structural imbalance amongst the federating units, and between them and the central government exacerbates a horizontal and vertical fiscal imbalance in the system. Why is this a problem? The lopsided federal structure enables the central government retain so much fiscal and political power such that the federating units are entirely dependent on the center for development. Again, one of the regions is bigger than other regions put together such that it gets bigger share of the resources from the center and has more control over the center by virtue of being more represented at the center than regions. Beyond the problematic structure of Nigeria’s federal system, Kendhammer, (2014) have demonstrated that powersharing institutions like the Federal Character Commission created to enhance nation building through promotion of federal character principle have only succeeded in undermining nation building by entrenching the ‘dual citizenship’ syndrome.

The imbalance in the federal system and its failure mitigate ethnic inequality and marginalized have continued to stimulate agitation from various ethnic groups within the country. Hence, while some ethnic groups call for restructure of the system to take care of their demands, others call for dismantling of the Nigerian state, yet others call for retention of the status quo from which they benefit. Such agitations have increased with return to democracy rule

since 1999. This surge in agitations can be linked to the increase civil society activities which is the hallmark of democratic societies. Conceptually, civil society is the space outside the state, the market and the family which enables the citizens to pursue their common aspiration and participate in the overall development of the society (Clarke, 2016; Froissart, 2014). Thus, CSOs provide channels for participation of the citizens in the civil society. Structurally, Falton cited in Ikelegbe (2014:7-8) in trying to explain the character of CSOs in Africa, classified them into three structural strata – predatory, quasi-bourgeoisie and popular CSOs. While, the predatory and the quasi-bourgeoisie CSOs are made of rent-seeking elites who seek to protect their interests, the popular civil society is made of the masses resisting reforms that undermine their welfare.

In line with the foregoing, this study examines interrogates the challenge of Nigeria's nation-building project within the context of the activities of ethno-regional Civil Society Groups (CSGs) which have been in existence since the colonial era but became more pronounced in the post transitional era following enlargement of the democratic space. With specific focus on three CSGs - Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and Oha-na-eze Ndi-Igbo - the paper describes most of CSGs in Nigeria as being predatory in character because of their attempt to eclipse other ethnic groups (especially the minorities), monopolize regional power; and serve mainly as channels for appropriating power and resources concentrated at the center of Nigeria's lopsided federal system. Accordingly, two research questions were provoked for interrogation in the study, viz: Did the imbalance in Nigeria's federal structure engender emergence of predatory ethno-regional civil society groups? Does the predatory character of ethno-regional civil society groups undermine their capacity to enhance nation-building in Nigeria?

The study is divided into eight sections. The introduction is followed by a review of relevant literature, methodology and theoretical framework, the fifth section problematized Nigeria's federal system, the national question and the emergence of ethno-regional CSGs. In the sixth section, the study demonstrated how the predatory character of the CSGs undermines nation building in Nigeria. The seventh and last section presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study respectively.

Insight from Extant Literature

Kendhammer (2014) located the prevalence of ‘dual citizenship’ and primordialism within the context of Nigeria’s institutional design. Specifically, the study blamed the Federal Character Commission (FCC) as a powersharing institution that entrenches dual citizenship by first ensuring that citizens are first identified as citizens of any of the federating units before being accepted as national citizens to access state power and resources. Thus, by prioritizing ethnic citizenship over national citizenship, the FCC reinforces inequalities among citizens by linking the formal institutions of the federal government with the informal ethnic patronage networks that most Nigerians depend on for state resources and power. As a result of the emphasis on ethnic citizenship, the author contends that ‘Nigerians demonstrate some of the lowest commitments to national pride and identity of any citizens on the continent’ (Robinson in Kendhammer, 2014:412). The challenge with this study is the tendency to blame institutions for disunity in the country without interrogating the social forces and informal groups that tend to entrench disunity resulting from persistence of dual citizenship despite the effort of the nations institutions like the FCC to wed the various ethnic groups into a nation-state by attempting to ensure adequate representation in federal offices through the quota system as a guiding principle. While Kendhammer stressed on ‘dual citizenship’ albeit entrenched by institutions as the bane of nation building in Nigeria, Olayode (2012) focused on the quest for self determination by ethno-regional organizations as a major divisive factor in Nigeria. Focusing on four ethno regional organizations – Egbe Afenifere, Ohanaeze, Arewa Consultative forum, and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSSOP) – Olayode stressed that the quest for self determination by the groups became intensified and resulted to widespread violence in the post-transitional era following the inability of the newly installed democratic regime to address the national question so as to meet the expectations of the people especially the groups that feel marginalized within the state. Interestingly, Olayode’s analysis alluded to the structural injustice that fans the embers of the quest for self-determination in the country, there is need for deeper interrogation of how Nigeria’s federal structure marginalizes some groups while empowering a particular group which tends to oppose any call for self-determination. Again, it is important to note that the activities of the ethno-regional groups as centers for political mobilization predates Nigeria’s independence.

Evidently, CNGs have been used as veritable tools by political giants in Nigeria for ethnic mobilization and support during elections and political transitions. In line with this, Ojukwu and Nwaorgu (2013) identified Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo as one of the formidable CNGs in Nigeria that has continued to shape Nigeria's political landscape especially during transition. The authors chronicled the activities of the CNG from the military era especially during the June 12 1993 election and the aftermath, its call for and contribution during the 1995 National Constitutional Conference (NCC), its roles in the transition programmes of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1999 and its participation in democratization in the early days of Olusegun Obasanjo civilian regime. The study demonstrated that the seizure of Ohanaeze by political elites as a tool for pursuit of their selfish interests reflected in the conflicting role of the CNG during the various transitions in Nigeria. For instance, while the group was clamouring for late Gen. Sani Abacha to hand over power to democratically elected government, some of its members persuaded the late dictator to contest for the Presidency. Again, while some members were against the annulment of the June 12 1993 election, others supported the annulment. The authors alluded that the internal contradiction within Ohanaeze result from the quest by political leaders to use the for their selfish interest undermined the capacity of the group to produce a consensus Igbo Presidential candidate during the 2003 and 2007 presidential election despite clamour for Igbo presidency. A major challenge of this study is the restriction of analysis of CNGs' activities to political transitions which tends to reduce CNGs to groups that are activated only during transition. Much as the study rightly portrayed the CNGs as tools in the hands of the elites, it failed to interrogate the dynamics of Nigeria's political economy that necessitate the emergences and potency of the CNGs and their day to day impact on the political system not necessarily on in periods of transition.

Uadiale (2011), noted that prior to the birth of the fourth republic, CSOs' activism began with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election. This period according to the scholar to the emergence of various CSOs including the ethnic based CSOs from the three major ethnic nationalities in the country clamouring for a re-validation of the election and at same time a Constitutional Conference to discuss the basis of Nigeria's unity. Since then, CSOs have continued to play important role for democratic consolidation and nation building in Nigeria.

In another development, Nwabueze (2014) brought in an interesting dimension to the argument by contending first that, ethnic plurality on its own is not a problem, but the politicization of the ethnic plurality and ethnicization of politics are factors that threatens nation building. Secondly, that agitations by ethnic militias do not necessarily threaten nation building but acts as a strategy for addressing structural injustice possibility of national disintegration. This according to the study is because such agitations serve as conflict management and peace-building devices by drawing attention of various groups to the need to treat one another with respect. He concluded that activities of militia groups like MOSOP, MEND, NDPVF in the Niger Delta, OPC, MOSSOB and APC have ‘operated to stabilize the situation confronting their regions’. Much as this study draws on the use of violence as a strategy for addressing marginalization, it tends to be too idealistic for assuming that the activities of militia groups enhance nation building because they draw attention on the need to negotiate with the violent groups. The study failed to cite any example of any structural injustice that have been addressed as a result of the violence by the militia groups.

Uduma (2013) argued that ethnonationalism in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial era. However, the surge in post-transition ethno-nationalism is attributed to grievances among the various ethnic groups over access and control of resources. On the basis of this and contrary to the assertion of Olayode (2012), the study identified three dimensions of ethno-nationalism in Nigeria to include Islamist ethno-nationalism pursued by the northern elite, self-determinist ethno-nationalism pursued by the Igbo and middle belt elite, and militant ethnonationalism represented by the Yoruba/Niger Delta elites.

Based on the analysis of voting behavior in the 2015 General elections in Nigeria, Olayode (2015) has argued that ethno-regional cleavages undermine development of national parties and national identities since voters tend to vote based on their ethno-regional cleavages while contestants sort and got support mainly from their ethnic groups.

Methodology

This study employed case study design which enables us to carry out in-depth study of a small number of cases in their real-life context and understanding how the cases influence and are influenced by the contexts in which they exist (see Yin, 2009). Thus, we isolated and focused

our analysis on three major CSGs (Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and Oha-na-eze Ndi-Igbo) representing the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, Igbo) spread across the three major regions in the country.

Documentary method was adopted for data collection. The advantage of documentary method for a study such as this is that it provides mediate access to past events from which inferences can be made and causal relationships drawn (Mogalakwe, 2006). In line with this, the study relied on secondary data drawn largely from published articles contained in journals and textbooks, newspaper publications and other unpublished documents that gives insight into the activities of the various CSGs with regards to nation building in Nigeria. Content analysis was adopted for the analysis of data collected.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Group theory and the Marxian theory of Post-colonial state.

Marxian theory of Post-colonial state

Initially developed by Hamza Alavi (1972), other major proponents of the theory include Ekekwe, (1985); Ake, (1985; 1989; 2003). The theory of post-colonial state emerged mainly from political and ideological resistance and intellectual critique of post-nineteenth century imperialism and colonialism, including the legacies of Western exploits in the global South and the contemporary power relations between the global South and the global North (Omeje, 2015). The theory has been shaped by the works of leftist historical materialism (notably Marxist political economy and dependency theories of history and political science) such as Ake, (1982); Rodney (1972) which emerged as a critique of imperialist and nationalist historiographies on the *raison d'être* and consequence of colonialism.

Ekekwe, (1985), rightly captured the character of the post-colonial state when he noted that:

The post-colonial state rests on the foundation of the colonial state which, in turn had incorporated some important elements of the pre-colonial rudimentary state structures. The colonial state was an instrument of imperialism. However, much as it was an imposition, it had to have a modicum of support and acquiescence from some of the aristocratic and feudal elements who wielded economic and political authority in pre-colonial times. Gaining such support was imperative in order to minimize social dislocations.(Ekekwe, 1985:56).

Accordingly, the theory assumes the following:

1. That post-colonial state serves as an instrument of capital accumulation,
2. That post-colonial state is authoritarian, divisive, predatory, exclusive and an instrument in the service of the dominant capitalist class;
3. That post-colonial state is interventionist and involves in class struggle and, or politics;

The Group theory

Although the epistemological foundation of the group theory is traced to the doctrine of pluralism enunciated by some early twentieth century English writers like John Figgis and G.D.H Cole, the origin in its current state is largely attributed to the work of Arthur F. Bentley as contained in ‘The Process of Government’, 1908. The theory was further developed by scholars like Daniel Truman, Robert Dahl, Theodora J. Lewi and others. The central position of the theory is that power is diffused among many interest groups competing against each other in the society. A group according to Truman is simply a collection of individuals which: “...on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied in the shared attitudes...The shared attitudes constitute the interests.” (Truman cited in Verma, 1975: 164). The major assumptions of the theory include:

- Every society is comprised of groups in a state of constant interaction with each other;
- It is through the social system that the various groups seek to realize or maximize their interests since the society is simply a single universe of groups which combine, break, federate and form coalitions and constellations of power in a flux of restless alterations;
- Groups assume their true significance in relation to other groups, pursuing the same kind of interests or antagonistic interests;
- In spite of the constant conflict among groups pursuing their narrow self-interest, the society keeps on going as a result of “balance of the group pressures”.

Based on the foregoing, the Group theory and Marxian theory of Post-colonial state are employed to explicate the role of the CSGs in undermining nation building in Nigeria. First, the

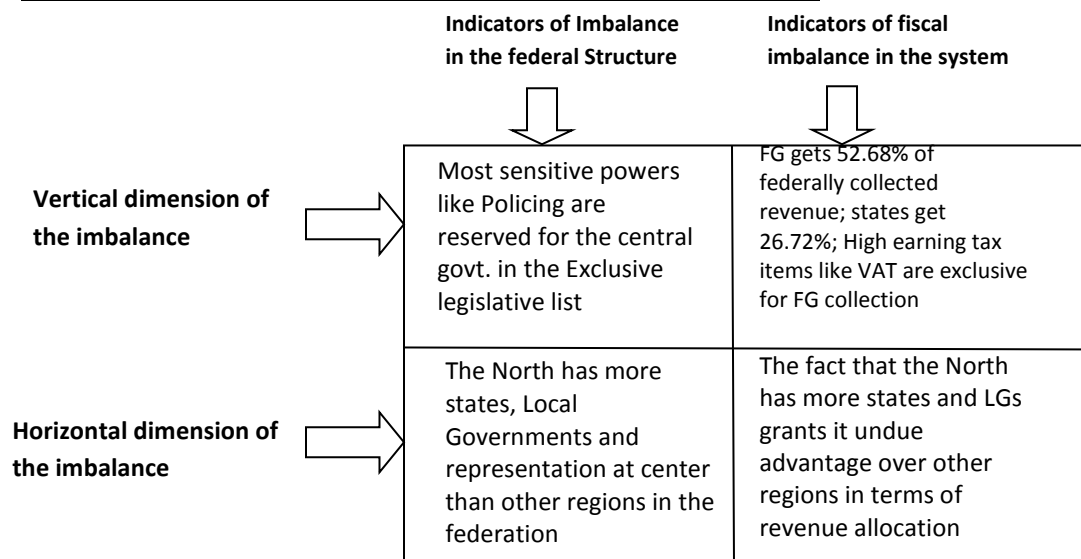
postcolonial state theory gives insight into the problem of Nigerian state being an amalgam of the colonial masters and how even after flag independence, the country still suffers serious setback with regards to evolving a nation-state. secondly, the group theory provides an analytical framework for appreciating the CSGs as groups within the Nigerian state which has emerged to serve as channels through which various political actors try to wrestle for state power and pursue other interests within the polity. It further provides the theoretical basis for understanding why Nigeria as an entity has continued to exist despite the antagonistic interaction among these groups.

Nigeria's Federal System, National Question & Predatory Ethno-regional Civil Society Groups

Problematizing Nigeria's Federal System

The problem with Nigeria's federal system is analyzed against the backdrop of the fiscal and structural imbalance both of which have horizontal and vertical dimension. Thus, the imbalance in the federal system is multi-dimensional, reinforcing and tend to favour a particular section of the federation since independence. We refer to this imbalance as the 'vicious circle of imbalance' in Nigeria's federal system as elaborated below and depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1: Vicious Circle of Imbalance in Nigeria's Federal Structure



Source: Adapted from Ugwu & Okoli, 2016

Historically, Nigeria's federalism is traced to 1954 Lyttleton Constitution which transformed the country from a unitary state it had practiced since 1914 to a federal system with three regions (Northern, Eastern and Western regions) and a central government based in Lagos. In addition to the fact that the country is ethnically diverse, some other immediate factors that led to the choice of federalism for the country include some constitutional and political crisis like the 1953 motion for 'self government now' by Tony Enahoro and the subsequent resignation of Action Group (AG) ministers; the 1953 Kano Riot; the 1953 Eastern regional crisis resulting from NCNC intra party crisis which eventually led to the dissolution of the Eastern House of Assembly; the choice of confederation by the NPC as contained in their Eight-Point Programme; the collapse of 1951 Macpherson Constitution to mention a few.

Although, from 1954 to the first Republic, the regions were administered by the respective regional governments, the fundamental structural challenge with the federal system was that the regions were unequal in size because the Northern region was larger than the other two regions (West and East) put together. Specifically, the Northern region dominated the rest of the regions both in geographical size (75 percent of Nigeria's landmass) and population (60 percent of total population) (Ngemutu cited in Arowosegbe, 2006). This situation was worsened with the creation of the Mid-Western region in 1963. The abortion of the first Republic by the military in 1966 eventually led to emergence of a 12-state structure with the Northern region balkanized into 6 states, the Eastern region into 3 states, the Western region into 2 and the Mid-Western region remained. The implication is that the number of states in the Northern region alone was equal to the number of states in the three other regions (i.e. West, Mid-Western and Eastern region) put together. Successive military regimes continued to weaken the federating units by creating more and more states without much consideration to the viability of these states. For instance, in 1976 additional seven states were created and the number subsequently increased 21, 30 and 36 in 1978, 1991 and 1996 respectively (Eboh, 2009). This balkanization of the regions into states vitiated the powers of the regions relative to the government at the center. Meanwhile, horizontal and vertical imbalance deepened in favour of the North which has more states and more representation at the center – the National Assembly, Ministries, Departments and Agencies. To illustrate, the 19 Northern states including the FCT produce 58 (53%) out of

the 109 Senators in the National Assembly while the South Produce 51. Similarly, in the Federal House of Representatives, the North also has 191 (53%) of the 360 members.

Furthermore, military incursion in Nigeria's politics from 1966 coalesced with increased revenue from oil in the Niger Delta which propelled fiscal hegemony of the federal government. Successive military regimes centralized the mobilization of critical revenue sources of the federation such that despite the provision of the Taxes and Levies (Approved List for Collection) Act 21 of 1998, the states and local governments are statutorily responsible for collection of revenue with insignificant financial value while the federal government retain collection of high-earning tax items like the import and excise duties, mining rents and royalties, petroleum profit tax, company income tax, value added tax (Eboh, 2009). Thus, between 1990 and 1999 average revenue of the states and local governments was just about 5 percent of GDP (Khemani cited Eboh 2009).

The fiscal imbalance is also reflected horizontally since the federal system is ab initio structurally imbalance. To illustrate, at independence, the Distributable Pools Account (DPA) - a federally collected revenue account established in 1958 – was increased from 30% to 35% and disbursed based on the following percentages: Northern region 42%, the Eastern Region 30%, the Western Region 20% and the Mid-Western Region 8%. following the creation of 12 states in 1967, Decree No. 15 of 1967 was promulgated to share the revenue in the DPA in an arbitrary manner: the six Northern states got 7 percent each (making a total of 42% for the North alone); East Central got 17.5 percent; Lagos, 2 percent; Mid-West, 8 percent; South Eastern, 7.5 percent; Rivers, 5 percent; West, 18 percent. This reflects horizontal fiscal imbalance among the federating units.

Although, since the return to democracy in 1999, couple of events have led to increase in share of revenue going to the states as shown in table 1, the central government still enjoys lion share of the revenue while the North put together still get more revenue than other regions owing to the existing structural horizontal imbalance in the federal system where the north has more states and more local governments than other regions.

Table 1: Vertical Allocation of Federally Collected Revenue in Nigeria Since 1981

Period	% Share going to			
	Federal Govt.	State Govt.	Local Govt.	Special Funds
1981*	55	35	10	-

1989	50	30	15	5
1993	48.5	24	20	7.5
1994	48.5	24	20	7.5
1992-1999	48.5	24	20	7.5
May 2002	56	24	20	-
March 2004 till date	**52.68	26.72	20.60	-

*Revenue Act of 1981

** Sequel to Supreme Court verdict in April 2002 on the Resource Control suit, the provision of Special Funds was nullified in any given Revenue Allocation Formula. In addition, the nine oil producing states (Abia, Imo, Delta, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Edo and Ondo) get 13% of total oil proceeds based on the applied derivation formula.

Source: Eboh E. C. (2009:36)

The National Question

This vicious circle of multi-dimensional and self re-enforcing imbalance in the federal system since independence together with the associated marginalization and structural violence have generated series of grievances, questions and animosities among members of the federating units encapsulated in what is today referred to as the national question in Nigeria. The national question is essentially about the basis of unity of the diverse ethnic groups or nations in the country, and whether relations among the diverse groups should be geared towards integrating the groups into a single nation or granting self-determination to them. national question in most cases focus on resolving the contradictions arising from inter-ethnic and inter-class relations which manifests in form of fear of marginalization, injustice, inequality, domination etc (Okeke, 2015). It is implicit in most political orders in the contemporary state system, often leading to competitions between ethnic groups and classes usually over scarce resources (Igwe, 2005). As regards the history of national question in Nigeria, Osaghae cited in Arowosegbe, (2006) aptly noted that:

The origins of the national question lie, ... in the forced lumping together of the diverse groups by the British colonialists and the subsequent attempts, after independence, to force so-called national unity while keeping intact or in fact accentuating the, extant inequalities and contradictions that have historically militated against peaceful co-existence.

Although, the issue of national question in Nigeria tend to be analyzed in most cases within the context of the agitation of the three major ethnic groups – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba – and recently the Niger Delta people. The national question becomes more problematic in Nigeria

when we take into cognizance the issue of minorities struggling to avoid being eclipsed by the three major ethnic groups. Thus, right from the eve of independence, the national question has continued to stare Nigeria on the face. The fears of the minorities led to the appointment of the Royal Commission in September 1957 (headed by Sir Henry Willink) to look into the fears of the minorities. Accordingly, the commission noted that:

The fears of the minorities arose from two circumstances. First, the division of the whole territory into three powerful regions, in each of which one group is numerically preponderant and secondly, the approach of independence and, the removal of the restraints which have operated so far. (FRN, cited in Arowosegbe, 2006: 10).

Hence, the national question cuts across (but not limited to) the demands and fears of the three major ethnic groups but also the agitations and grievances of the minorities in the three regions dominated by the three major ethnic groups. At independence the fears and grievances of elites of the three major ethnic groups were expressed in the various proposals they put forward concerning the future of the Nigerian state. For instance, Nnamdi Azikwe (Premier of Eastern Region and Nigerian President between 1963 and 1966), proposed that Nigeria should practice federalism which should function as an administrative convenience and not as a means of recognizing ethnic diversity. Obafemi Awolowo (leader of the Action Group) argued that Nigeria was a mere geographical expression and that the ethnic diversity together with the varying economic levels of economic achievement should be recognized and accommodated in a near-confederal system built around the homogenous ethnic groups. The Yoruba leader specifically stated that:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are English, Welsh, or French. The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (West African Pilot cited in Olayode, 2012:9)

Similarly, Sir Ahmadu Bello (leader of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) together with other Northern elites demanded for a loose Confederal system that would preserve the large regional system which ensured the North's advantage in terms of population and land mass (Kendhammer, 2014). Meanwhile, it has to be noted that the dominance of these three major ethnic groups in the three regions was a result of British administrative decisions. For instance, in Northern Nigeria the British administrators empowered and isolated the Hausa-fulani elites

from the influx of other colonial subjects so as to ensure efficient collection of taxes was not threatened. The same was the case in Western Region where the Yoruba political elites were empowered by the colonial lords for ease of administration (Kendhammer, 2014).

The consequence of this British administrative product of creating three regions each dominated by a particular ethnic group was increased fear and agitation by ethnic and religious minorities. In the Western region dominated by Yoruba ethnic group which also controlled the Action Group (AG) party dominating the region politically, there were fears by ethnic minorities from the Mid-west and religious minority muslim community. The same was the case in the Northern region where the minorities feared the tendency of the Hausa-fulani Emirs to rule on the basis of Islamic laws and principles which contradicted the religion and belief system of other ethnic and religious minorities. Similarly, in the Eastern region, the minorities expressed fear of economic and political domination by the dominant and socially mobile Igbo ethnic group which controlled the NCNC (Arowosegbe, 2006).

Emergence of Ethno-regional Civil Society Groups (CSGs)

Apparently, the national question which emerged at the eve of independence in Nigeria and was not resolved even up to independence. The intervention of the military worsened the situation by stifling the space needed to resolve the national question and at same time worsening the factors that ignited the national question. It is against the backdrop of the unresolved national question that civil society groups (CSGs) emerged along ethnic lines as channels of ethnic mobilization and pursuit of the interest of the various ethnic elites. The three CSGs of interest in this study are: Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and Oha-na-eze Ndi-Igbo. We briefly below while demonstrating how each exhibits predatory character in the pursuit of members' interest.

Afenifere

Afenifere is a socio-cultural organization of the Yoruba ethnic group formed in the 1990s mainly in response to long years of military rule in Nigeria, the political cum economic dominance of Northern elites in the country, the perceived marginalization of the Yoruba ethnic group in the country and more importantly the annulment of June 12 1993 presidential election

in which a Yoruba son – MKO Abiola – was declared winner. Afenifere is an offshoot of ‘Egbe Omo Oduduwa’ which itself a Yoruba socio-cultural organization formed in London in 1945 under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo with the central objective of uniting the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria during the colonial rule to pursue a federal system that allows for regional autonomy in such a manner that would preserve the Yoruba ethnic hegemony in the Western region (Olayode, 2012).

Hence, it was essentially the political and economic interest of the leading Yoruba elites that led to the emergence of Afenifere in the 1990s with Pa Abraham Adesanya as its pioneer leader. Other prominent members of the organization included Chief Bola Ige, Pa Onasanya, Ganiyu Dawodu, Chief Reuben Fasoranti to mention a few. Just like the ‘Egbe Omo Oduduwa’, the political agenda of Afenifere include: true federalism with strong regions, resource control by states and convocation of a sovereign national conference to debate the national question. The agenda of the group eventually became the manifesto of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), a political party formed by members of the group to actualize their political agenda.

The fact that Afenifere was able to birth a political party which in turn adopted the agenda of the group as it’s party manifesto is indicative of the fundamental aim of the Yoruba elites to eclipse minority ethnic groups in the West, mobilize the Yoruba ‘citizens’, and entrench Yoruba hegemony in West and also use the group as a springboard for appropriating power and resources at the center.

Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF)

Following the return to civilian rule in 1999, the Arewa Consultative Forum was formed in 2000 as a successor of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). The ACF is a political and socio-cultural association of Northern elites which aims essentially to promote the unity the North, protect their interest in Nigeria and at the same to ensure the political hegemony of the Northern elites in the country through the use powers of elected political office holders of the North.

The group emerged following a meeting convened at the Arewa House in Kaduna by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Maccido in March 2000 and has elites like Alhaji Muhammadu Dikko Yusufu as the Chairman and Gen. Yakubu Gowon as its chairman Board of

Patrons. Structurally, the Forum is divided into five (5) organs which includes Patrons, General Assembly, Board of Trustees, National Executive Council and Working Committee.

Following the formation of the Forum, terms of reference to guide the conduct of its operation were also developed as follows:

- a. Set up machinery for regular dialogue to ensure that issues likely to lead to breach of peace are settled amicably and promptly.
- b. Establish contact with the political leadership in the North in order to harmonise the approach towards a solution of the problems facing the North;
- c. Set up local committees to monitor the situation and coordinate efforts geared towards getting a solution in their areas;
- d. Establish contact and develop relations with similar organisation working in other regions of the country;
- e. Have the power examine and deliberate on any matter that can promote peaceful co-existence in the North in particular and the country in general.
- f. Have the power to co-opt any members who, in its new, can contribute in any way towards achieving its objectives (available online at [www.http://acf.com.ng/aboutus.html](http://acf.com.ng/aboutus.html) retrieved 29/09/2016).

The objective of the ACF to further Northern interest is unequivocally captured in its mission statement: “To protect the interest of Northern Nigeria and promote healthy co-existence that will sustain the environmental quality, livability, and economic vibrancy of the whole Northern region” (available online at [www.http://acf.com.ng/aboutus.html](http://acf.com.ng/aboutus.html) retrieved 29/09/2016). In line with its objective of uniting the North and maintaining its hegemony and pursuing its cause through the use of powers of incumbent political office holders of the north, the group requested the Sultan of Sokoto to send delegation to traditional rulers in the North (irrespective of ethnic affiliation) and to the 19 Governors of the Northern States as well as the Speaker of the House of Reps., the Deputy President of the Senate and other legislators in order to get their support.

The effort of the ACF to create a monolithic North and unity among the ‘Northern citizens’ who would be subservient to the dictates of the ACF which itself would be influenced by the Emirs indicates the predatory tendency of the ACF which tries to ensure that minority

ethnic groups are subjugated by the elites controlling the Hausa-Fulani Caliphate. Further, the strategy of utilizing the powers of elected political office holders of Northern extract to pursue Northern interest is indicative of the groups intention to accumulate resources at the center to the detriment of other ethnic groups in the country.

Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo

Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo is the apex socio-cultural organization of the Igbo ethnic group in Eastern Nigeria representing all Igbo communities in Nigeria and in diaspora. The group aims to unite members of the Igbo community and ensure fair representation and treatment of the Igbos in Nigeria. Although some literature attempt to trace the origin of Ohanaeze to the post civil war era, it is important to state that the group has a long history that can be traced to the colonial era. Thus, the origin of the group can be traced to 1934 when few Igbo elites formed the Igbo State Union in Lagos to advance and promote the collective interests of the Igbo people (Ojukwu & Nwaorgu, 2013). The Igbo State Union (ISU) later metamorphosed to Igbo National Assembly (INA), which was later banned by the Federal Military Government due to suspicion and antagonism to the group. After the civil war, the Federal Government of Nigeria was accused of genocide in which it attempted ethnic cleansing of the Igbo nation, the Igbo elites saw the need to create an apex organization that will unite and provide centralized leadership for the remaining Igbo people. This led to the metamorphosis of INA to Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo in 1976 following the meeting of Igbo elites including Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam, Prof. Ben Nwabueze, Dr. Pius Okigbo, Kingsley Mbadiwe, Chief Jerome Udorji, Dr. M. I. Okpara to mention a few. Structurally, the group is organized at four levels: (a) Town Unions and affiliate organizations (b) Local Government area Ohanaeze (c) State Ohanaeze and (d) National Ohanaeze. It also has Ohanaeze Wings which include Women, Youth, Transporters and Traders. The Standing Committees provided in Article 24 of the Constitution includes Planning and Strategy Committee, Outreach Committee, Welfare Committee, Research, Documentation and Publication Committee, Finance Committee and Disciplinary and Conflict Resolution Committee.

Evidently, the injustice meted to the Igbo people after the civil war by the Federal Government and their continued marginalization was a major reason for the formation of the group. This is aptly captured by Nwabueze who averred that the organization was formed to:

...lift ourselves [igbos] from our present marginalized position and realize our group interest in the fierce competition and struggle among the antagonistic ethnic nationalities comprised in Nigeria. ..in such an organization, lies our only hope of salvaging ourselves from the abyss into which we have sunk. Our defeat in the civil war and the consequent loss of much of our possessions certainly has something to do with it. But with an organization of this nature, the defeat and loss can be made good (Nwabueze, cited in Ojukwu & Nwaorgu, 2013).

Since its formation in 1976, Ohanaeze has continued to serve as a tool for mobilization of the Igbo people not just for political purposes but for creating awareness and pursuit of economic and cultural interest of the people. For instance, the group brought a petition before the Oputa Panel of inquiry on human rights violations in which they elaborated how the government of Nigeria attempted to exterminate the Igbo nation during the civil war, the continued marginalization of the Igbo people even after the war and also requested for compensation from the government for the pogrom orchestrated by the government of Nigeria. Even though, no compensation was obtained after presenting the petition to the Panel, the group was able to create awareness and further heightened since nationalism among the Igbo people.

Despite the republican nature of the Igbo society as demonstrated by the organization and activities of the Ohanaeze, it is also important to note that prominent among the agitations and contention by the group are: (a) the call for return to regionalism where all the South East and South South states would return to the old Eastern region; (b) the contention by some Igbo elites that most ethnic minorities in the South East and South South (especially Rivers and Delta States) which today attempt to claim different identity were originally Igbo and should regard themselves as such. These agitations and contentions are all indicative of intention of the Ohanaeze to create a monolithic Igbo nation where everyone is seen as 'Igbo citizen', appropriate the old Eastern region including most of the oil rich states in the Niger Delta where the hegemony of Igbo citizens over other minority ethnic groups would be maintained as was in the pre-independence era.

Having established the origin and character of the CSGs, we now to to analyze how the character of these CSGs undermine nation building in Nigeria.

Predatory CSGs and the Paradox of Nation Building in Nigeria

The foregoing section has illustrated that the three CSGs of interest in our study are predatory in character and orientation. It is important to add at this juncture, nation building in Nigeria has continued to suffer setbacks due to the predatory character of these CSGs which reflects the long standing attempts by the three major ethnic groups in the country to maintain hegemony in each region under their country by creating a form of ‘dual citizenship’ that sees Nigerian citizens first as ‘Hausa-Fulani citizen’ (in the Northern region), ‘Igbo citizen (in the East region) and ‘Yoruba citizen’ (in the West region) irrespective of the existence and idiosyncrasies of the minority groups existing within this region. This predatory character of the CSGs reflects the long history of attempts by the three major ethnic groups in the country to maintain dominance in the three major regions of the country since the 1914 amalgamation of the Colony and Southern Protectorate with the Northern Protectorate by British colonial administration. Kendhammer (2014) demonstrated how in pursuit of their predatory tendency, Azikiwe and Awolowo jettisoned their agitation for smaller federal units during the 1953-1954 London Constitutional Convention because they discovered that a federal system that allows existence of three regions with strong regional premier at the top “would ensure the continued electoral dominance of Igbo and Yoruba interests” Kendhammer (2014: 404).

The centralization of the federal structure by the military in the post independence era increased cry of marginalization by various ethnic groups especially the Igbos whose attempt to secede plunged the country into civil war in 1967. The return to democracy in 1999 was accompanied by a surge in ethno-nationalism as political elites exploited the ethnic divide to pursue political interests. It is within this context that existing ethnic based CSGs were re-energised while new ones were formed where there were formed by ethnic groups without any recognized or viable CSG. Thus, in the post transitional era, ethnic based CSGs not only became essentially portent channels for political mobilization and ethno-nationalism, they also stood out as gladiators with clashing interests and identities. For instance, while the North which benefits from the current lopsided federal system created the ACF as a channel protected the Northern advantage by calling for a centralized (not united) Nigeria, the East and the West which feel short-changed under the Ohanaeze and Afenifere respectively continues to clamour for ‘true federal’ in which the regions would be autonomous under the hegemony of the dominant ethnic

groups. What is common among the groups is that they continue to entrench 'dual citizenship' by ensuring that Nigerians are first identified by their ethnic cleavage before being identified as Nigerians. They create this awareness among members

The use of ethnic based CSGs to entrench ethnic divide in Nigeria played out glaring during the 1999 presidential elections. The political activities of the Yoruba's in West can be cited as a good example. During the elections, the Afenifere quickly formed a political party -the Alliance for Democracy (AD) – as a political platform for electing a Yoruba president. During the 1999 elections, AD had as its presidential candidate Chief Olu Falae, the Afenifere elites also used the to win all the governorship seats in the West since the Yorubas voted mainly for candidates endorsed by the group. Hence, AD governoship candidates, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Chief Olusegun Osoba, Niyi Adebayo, Chief Bisi Akande and Alhaji Lamidi Adesina and Adefarati, captured and ruled over Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Osun, Oyo and Ondo States respectively. Olusegun Obasanjo who contested under the umbrella of PDP did not get the support of the Yoruba people because he did not get the endorsement of Afenifere. However, following his victory, he was able to get his ethnic group through the elites in Afenifere to rally around him. To crown it all, Bola Ige a prominent member of the Afenifere and member of the AD was appointed as the Minister of Justice/Attorney General of the federation. With this, the Afenifere and Yoruba people began recognize the President first as a 'Yoruba citizen' that should supported in government. They gave him all the support including campaigning and voting massively for him in 2003 presidential elections during which the AD governors of the West and Afenifere members used their positions to campaign and mobilize votes for Olusegun Obasanjo from the Yorubas. The use of Afenifere by Yoruba elites to influence the Yorubas into voting for Obasanjo was aptly captured by Bola Tinubu, the then governor of Lagos who stated that: "We campaigned whole-heartedly to vote for Obasanjo in 2003. I supported him only for the people's democracy because Yoruba elders [Afenifere] throughout the country said we should give him a second chance ..." (see [www.http://nigeriaworld.com/articles/2007/aug/145.html](http://nigeriaworld.com/articles/2007/aug/145.html) retrieved 29/09/2016).

The activities of the CSGs during the 2014 National Conference further indicates how they serve as instruments for entrenching 'dual citizenship' and for undermining nation building. To illustrate, the CSGs continued to clamour for a system that would allow for their dominance

in their respective region. Hence, their demands and positions during the National Conference further made Nigerian to continue to see each other as different, incompatible people who have no reason being together under one entity. For example, while the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups through Afenifere and Ohanaeze respectively were making demands for ‘true federalism’ or restructuring Nigeria back to regional governments with control over resources, the North through the ACF vehemently opposed ‘true federalism’ or restructuring but called for retention of the existing structure because it tends to favour the Northern elites. For instance, as soon as the 2014 National Conference was scheduled, Afenifere made its position known and tried to mobilize delegates of Yoruba extracts to make such demands at the Confab. According to the National Publicity Secretary, Mr. Yinka Odumakin:

...all delegates to the conference must first answer the question: Do we still want to live together as a people? If the answer is yes, then on what terms? “For us in Afenifere, ours should be on the basis of federalism and once we agree that Nigeria should be a true Federal Republic of Nigeria, then the next thing to do is to draft a constitution that will spell out whether we want to continue to live together in harmony. As we speak now, all universities in Nigeria are under lock and key. If we have the six existing structures as regions and they manage the universities in their regions, there is no way ASUU will go on strike in the six regions at the same time... Let everybody develop at their own pace and within their areas, let the federal be lean and the regions be strong. We also believe in Afenifere that this federal structure is too costly... (Vanguard Newspaper, 3rd October, 2013).

However, the North also made known their position that the status quo must remain. The National Publicity Secretary of the ACF, Mr. Anthony Sani presented the position of the North which it said was not averse to “national dialogue that can help strengthen the Nigerian project, provided such dialogue is not in the form of Sovereign National Conference that amounts to vote of no confidence on our democracy and its institutions, which no group has the right to do anyway”

Obviously, after over fifty years of independences, Nigerians are still unable to primarily identify themselves as Nigerians and nation building remains far from being attained. The ethnic diversity continues to be pronounced over the unity of the nation. Everyone tends to first identify with his/her ethnic group because ethnic citizenship appears to be a prerequisite for identification as a Nigerian. The CSGs are not really working out how to build a stronger and sustainable

Nigeria, but they always think of a system that favours the ethnic group they represent to the detriment of other ethnic groups especially the minorities.

Conclusion/Prognosis

The study examined the role of ethno-regional CSGs in Nigeria's nation building project which has remained a mirage. The paper focused on the activities of the three CSGs representing the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria and argued that these CSGs are mainly predatory in character and therefore act as centrifugal forces which thwart the centripetal process of nation building in Nigeria. Again, the predatory character of these CSGs is linked to the vicious circle of imbalance in Nigeria's federal system and the failure of successive government to address the national question. Thus, it is the position of this paper that the CSGs fossilize the long standing suspicion among the ethnic groups and make self-serving demands of the CSGs which are antithetical to evolving a sustainable nation-state.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are articulated:

- There is need for vertical restructuring of the federal system to reduce the powers of the federal government especially with regards to revenue mobilization so that major sources of revenue like VAT, Company Income Tax, mining rents and royalties, excise duties, petroleum profit tax etc can be appropriated by the states. This will reduce dependence of states and make the ethnic groups to look inwards towards developing their states' capacity to earn.
- The existing CSGs should also focus on thinking out how to make their respective states accountable to the people on the utilization of internally generated revenue (IGR) and share of federal allocation.

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