



# Socio-Political Reform and Entity Identity: Nigeria's Struggles Towards Stability

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**Abstract**— Nigeria is in a crucial transition. This is particularly in its economic, social and political areas. The blame for the country's woes is sometimes put on the military. Nevertheless, the present civilian era seem to bring certain newness; the realization by the people of their own potentials and rights (in particular). The cumulative events of the past and bottled-up bitterness now find expression in democratic governance. The National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) of 2005 and Sovereign National Conference (SNC) 2014 organized by the respective governments of former presidents, *Olusegun Obasanjo* and Goodluck Jonathan to address all forms of unfairness turned out to be the stage where the country's weaknesses are exposed and in the midst of a US-released report on the country's imminent break-up in the next few years<sup>1</sup> and the scourge of terrorism from *Boko Haram* ravaging the North-East of the country. Within a conglomerate of political, economic and social problems, the country took the challenge as it confronts its own future at the 2014 Sovereign National Conference in a bid to bring permanent stability to the nation.<sup>2</sup> This paper takes a look at the NPRC 2005, examines its discourses and its implications to further conference discourse and the stability of the Nigerian nation.

**Keywords**— Nigeria, Federalism, Political, NPRC, Constitution

## I. INTRODUCTION

When in 1914, the Sir Lord Fredrick *Lugard* amalgamated the North and the South parts of Nigeria, little did he knew that he was planting a seed whose tree though large will be shaken by boisterous winds of conflicts.<sup>3</sup> The story today has confirmed this as the country experiences one conflict after another ranging from religious to ethnic, political and economic. The threats of secession have never stopped coming since the first ended in a civil war in 1967. the Kano riot of 1953 arising due to disagreement over independence advances,

<sup>1</sup> In 2005, the United States Intelligence in a released document titled 'Mapping sub-Saharan Africa's Future' had predicted that in 15 years' time, Nigeria would fail [1].

<sup>2</sup> The Sovereign National Conference (SNC) organized in 2014 under the government of the former president, Goodluck Jonathan, was a follow-up to the 2005 NPRC. The conference was aimed at bringing the varied interests within the Nigerian nation together and agreeing on its political, social and economic arrangement for the sustainability of the country [2].

<sup>3</sup> Nigeria was until January 1 1914 an un-united colonial protectorate (North and South) though under same British government. The appointment of Sir Fredrick *Lugard* as the Governor-General in 1912 was to effect the amalgamation of the two protectorates.

the census crisis of 1962/63 over suspected inflation of census figures in favour of the northern region, parties and elections crises, and the civil war of 1967 to 1970 over the secession move of the south-eastern part of the country. These issues have outlived the country's ancestors as the shadows left behind include principally, a weak Nigerian structure and protracted conflicts of (common) identity.

Today, Nigeria's self-helplessness is more pronounced as civil strife grows by the day. Assessing the country's structure therefore, one will find a mix of nations: itself not a nation but a state. It is wonder why nationalists are rare in the country, and this is the impediment to its development. A common culture is the foundation for national integration and social cohesion, but where a country (like Nigeria) has such volatile ethnic groups as *Ibo* (or *Igbo*), Hausa and Yoruba with distinct cohesiveness, her legal entity is questioned in the midst of political and social conflicts. The nationhood that inculcates the spirit of unity and nationalism is one crucial element missing from the Nigerian environment.

This article lays bare the real bone of contention in the country's quest for stability in the midst of these social, political and economic challenges, considering the issue of imminent break-up raised by the US. This paper will assess the basis of the several economic and political threats from the Niger-Delta region and a possible scare from the *Biafra* militant group advocating for *Biafra* Republic.<sup>4</sup> The implication of the present political structure will be examined. In addition, the processes towards a genuine redress of contentious issues will be assessed.

It is important to note that while tangible outcomes came out of the NPRC 2005, which of course formed the bedrock of a number of public policies and governance, the government did not give any attention to the SNC 2014. With this in mind, this article concentrates on the NPRC 2005 in analysing Nigeria's travails and the struggles to stabilise it.

<sup>4</sup> Biafra (or Republic of Biafra), from Bight of Biafra (the Atlantic bay to its south), is essentially an Igbo-tribe agitated country. It was an unrecognized secessionist state in south-east of Nigeria that existed between 30 May 1967 and 15 January 1970. The agitation for Biafra led to the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970. Some commentators have attributed the motivation for the agitation to the large mineral deposits in the south-south region, a close-by south-east neighbour which the Igbos hope to be able to secede with, other commentaries hinged the agitation on the Igbos not being able to hold a central political portfolio at the Nigeria political centre. In recent time and after over four decades of civil war, another Biafra agitation has started in the south-east. See [3] for more information on Biafra.

The overall aim of this paper therefore is to assess Nigeria's struggles against the forces created by political, economic and social factors. This is done against the backdrop of the NPRC 2005 which was the bedrock for the SNC 2014. A review and comparison is made of the several past events that are themselves threats to the continued statehood of the country, examining citizens' perceptions and participations, in the context of the legal and political framework that have emancipated in the country over the years. The impact of all these is measured on the country's stability and sustainability.

## II. THE POLITICAL DIVIDE

It is important to clarify that Nigeria's actual political conflicts derive from social mis-conglomeration of the Northern and Southern parts of the country. However, the root of the social crisis is itself found in the political structure not being accommodated by the diverse ethnic groups in the country. This is confirmed by the way the politicians behaved in the 1979 election as the political leaders strive only to protect own tribal interests. Moreover, while the 1960 independence agitators were united in their cause, the nationalistic or Nigerian spirit was not in them. It is unfortunate that this seed was sown into the hearts of succeeding generations and today, the story is the same.

Examining the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria which stated its purpose as being '...for the promotion of the good government and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of Freedom, Equality, and Justice, and...Consolidating the Unity of our people' [4], the declaration however lacks substance, reality and good will, as the then political leaders were self-seeking. This was confirmed by events following the presidential elections of 1979. The 1979 Constitution (Chapter II, Sections 13-22) recognizes the volatility of the country when it defined the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy on the social, political, economic and educational objectives. These four-stand objectives have in fact today, become the bane of the progress of this nation.<sup>5</sup>

Nigeria is a complex country with myriads of problems; many inherited, which place it at the edge of imminent collapse. Its federalism harbours many problems that are perhaps capable of making the system crumble like as it was with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Yugoslavia. The constituent of this form of government and

<sup>5</sup> Two clarifications are necessary here to understand the direction of this paper. First, the four-stand objectives from the 1979 Constitution defined in social, political, economic and education refer to what has defined the elite class today where the political class controls the economy, defines the educational landscape and dominates the social class through the instruments of deceit, selfishness and corruption. The middle class is unfortunately, annihilated and the largest population below them is left to wallow in poverty and wants. Second, while Nigeria has indeed not attained nationhood in the real sense, yet it is unavoidable in the usage of the term here, being employed interchangeably to refer to the country. Nevertheless, where the paper mean to clarify nation and state with respect to the country, emphasis is used.

the eroding of true federalism add to the imminent problem the country has continued to encounter in its political adventure. The Nigerian political structure was thus weakened right from its very foundation as the 1954 Constitution provided though for a power separation between the three regions and the centre, but was part of the "deceitful" 1914 amalgamation referred to as a sheer artificial creation and quick sand on which no solid edifice can really enjoy any stability and durability [5].

Thus, right from the very beginning, at the amalgamation in 1914, was a conceived imperialist brainwave designed to centralize and simplify political administration, and maximize economic profit for British home government. This British-injected "virus" is a factor in the problems still affecting the country's unity till today. The root of wrangling and disagreements in the system even when they are trivial issues is traceable to some previously unresolved but insensible political rivalries, self-induced conflicts and frictions (with disregards to whatever was perceived of the British intention of the amalgamation).

In the First Republic (between October 1960 and January 1966), the seeds of individualism and ethnicity (or regionalism) were sown by the country's political leaders of this time into the future. Controversial issues that require positive compromise were handled on the platform of self-desire. The ideals of nationalism or "*Nigerianism*" were missing in their post-independence subsequent aspirations and actions. These seeds have today bore wild fruits, which are the realities of the country's present generation. Stories are told, the bad ones thereof, and the effect is a mind-influencing outcome on the upbringing of the youths, who would later become future leaders, carrying on the negative perceptions that have perverted their minds. This of course, was the start of tribal and non-liberal minds in the country. The Republic collapsed because the whole system was divided against itself, while the independence objectives were thrown overboard.

The nationalistic spirit and zeal which, were in everyone during the pre-colonial times waned when it was time to share political power. The root of this whole political division is identified not only in the political structure but also in the leaders' non-nationalistic actions. And unfortunately, the Second Republic (1979-1983) manifested these ordeals of the First Republic as it also collapsed. Here, the minority tribes emerged to demand a place in the country's political entity. Today, the political zoning formulae, the federal character system in the appointment of public office holders, et al., are all offshoots of ethnicity and tribalism.

## III. FEDERALISM VS CON-FEDERALISM

To most people, Nigeria operates a characteristic federal system of government, which has such crucial features like formal division of powers between the central and the regions, supremacy of the constitution, fundamental human rights,

denial of rights of secession and mutual involvement of all levels of government in amendment procedures, among others. This is another political deceit as evidence has proved that except the unifying of the country, the country has not been operating federalism.

In 1967, the civil war broke out after the survival edict announced by the then eastern region to break away to form Biafra Republic. The move was quashed by the then military government which later sub-divided the existing three regions into 12 states for easy administration. Today, the ashes of this war are yet to be removed as reminders are made to it, and rebelling attempts made to break away keep re-surfacing. The south-west (comprising of Lagos, *Ogun*, *Ondo*, *Osun*, *Oyo*, and *Ekiti* states) have also made some secession attempts after the death of the former head of state, *Sani Abacha* between 1998 and 1999, following the continued detention and subsequent death of M. K. O. *Abiola* who was the presumed winner of the June 12 1993 presidential election.

It is important to assess how government has been able to handle these recent succession attempts. Or, what actions has the federal government considered in its bid to keep the country one entity?

The federal system without doubt, is vital to Nigeria's continued existence as a nation-state. This is because of its ability to accommodate ethnic multiplicity, which requires the principle of decentralization only possible by federalism. And while such nations like Ethiopia and the USSR may have broken up despite adopting this system, it is imperative to note that Nigeria is the only surviving federation in Africa despite the problems it is confronted with. The country, having been ravaged by deep ethnic and regional divisions characterized by their distinct mode of governance, has till been able to survive till today.

History has it that Nigeria was a mere geographical entity and that ethnic groups were separate entities with virtually nothing in common hence the need for federalism. This heterogeneous and pluralistic nature of the Nigerian society makes it expedient to adopt the federal system of government. It is seen as an immediate solution to unite the diverse ethnic groups. The *Yorubas*<sup>6</sup> operate a centralized system with a king and members of the cabinet otherwise called chiefs. The *Ibos* operate a segmented system, which involves a clan, and village system of administration. The *Hausas/Fulanis*' (both groups are always regarded as one) system is operated based on the Islamic tenets. The British colonialists however came and imposed a different administrative system alien to the three groups. The parliamentary, presidential and the military

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<sup>6</sup> The Yoruba tribe of the south-west is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Others are the Ibo (South-East or simply Eastern part) and Hausa (North) groups. The Hausa tribe is also grouped with the Fulani's due to cultural sameness and geography. The country actually has about 400 ethnic divisions speaking about 250 distinct languages, and a population of about 179 million people [6].

systems of government have been operated over the last forty-five years since independence.

What options does the country have in the face of the present political crisis? If the nationalists and British colonialists thought federalism to be the best form of government for Nigeria, why has it not worked?

In 1998, after the demise of *Sani Abacha*, the south-west, led by the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group, *Afenifere* proposed a confederal system whereby the states are stronger than the central (federal) government. It sometimes reflects a near-system operated in Nigeria but it is nevertheless different in many ways. *Afenifere* advocated for such things like states own security and political and socio-economic independence of each state's jurisdiction. Sentimental tensions which have always build around religious, political, economic and cultural factors, which can result in inter-state conflicts and subsequent breakaway by the component units were considered as the reasons for rejecting this system. Most states would also not be able to develop, as a lot do not have the natural resources and investment capital to make growth possible.

The fundamental reason for the adoption of federalism stems from the analyses of the two reasons above. However, this assertion is still being debated as a foremost nationalist, *Obafemi Awolowo* in 1981 when he described the British-imposed federalism as 'an abominable, disruptive and divisive British heritage,' concluded that 'Nigeria is not a nation...there are no Nigerians' [7]. *Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, also a first-generation nationalist, in 1962 echoed *Awolowo's* opinion that 'since amalgamation,...Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper..., it is still far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British self-actualizing intention for the country' [7]. In addition, *Sir Ahmadu Bello*, also a first generation nationalist, recognized the problem with Nigerian federalism when he commented that 'the mistake of 1914 has come to light' [7]. The story today unfortunately, after 54 years, is one that sends fears into one's spine as the relationship between the northern and southern regions continues to wane.

One important question to ask is, 'what is really so fascinating in federalism that Nigeria has operated since 1954, survived all shocks that came with it, is still bedevilled by its attendant challenges and yet, the country stuck to it?' A second relevant question is, 'what alternative model could work Nigeria out?' *Tell* magazine of May 17 1999 quoted *Tam David West*, a university professor, who lends his voice for an alternative model that '...the laboratory of Nigerian politics has eloquent data to impel us to try other models of governance'.

*Tell* magazine, on 20 May 2004 reported *Bola Ige*, one-time *Oyo* State governor in the south-west and federal minister, as saying that '...I think many youths, male and

female, think that may be, the option is for different groups to go their ways, but we have better options instead’.

Several other calls for alternative models put forward consensus government, or natural government, or diarchy, and so on.

The above calls led to a consensus among certain pro-democracy activists during the military days for a true sovereign national conference (SNC) that would reflect the wishes and aspirations of all people, where political and economic solutions will be addressed. And even though the federal government opted for the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) in 2005 instead, pro-SNC advocates were not satisfied as the federal government did not accede to the request in the light of continued relevance for the centre the need to continue to retain certain features of existing polity, as well as promote near-even development and oneness. The organization of the SNC in 2014 did however ensure government bowed to the agitators’ request but did not solve the country’s problems.

#### IV. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISIS: UNSETTLING THE ENTITY

*This is it – they are going to arrest us all and execute us. All for Shell (Ken Saro-Wiwa, May 1994).<sup>7</sup>*

The above-stated quote reflects both the sentimental and realistic picture of the Niger Delta where Nigeria’s oil wealth is sourced from. The region is a parable of the Nigerian nation where you possess it all but cannot have it all (or even, any of it). It is the story of the economic hardships faced by people whose land houses the oil wells that feed the country.<sup>8</sup> The pathetic story surrounding injustice cannot be buried as Ken Saro-Wiwa sums up in his final statement to the military tribunal that sentenced him and his eight other colleagues to death;

*‘I and my colleagues are not the only ones on trial.... The company (Shell BP) has, indeed, ducked this particular trial, but its days will surely come... for there is no doubt in my mind that the ecological war that the company has waged in the Delta will be called to question sooner than later and the crimes of that war be duly punished. The crime of the company’s dirty wars against the Ogoni people will also be punished’ [8].*

Indeed, the Ogonis and generally, the Niger Deltans have not fared well over the past. This is the reason for the frequent insurgences in the region. Corporate accountability and democracy are what they are demanding to meet their rights.

<sup>7</sup> Ken Saro-Wiwa was one of the nine Ogoni activists in the Niger-Delta executed by Sani Abacha in November 1995 following their continued outcry against environmental degradation of the region by Shell BP [8].

<sup>8</sup> The situation in Nigeria is such that the economically ‘advantaged’ areas’ net benefits are always negative. The social and private benefits are always so little compared to the losses these people incur.

In 1997, over 3000 Ogonis’ deaths were recorded, 30,000 internally displaced and 1000 are refugees in neighbouring countries, with some others are outside Africa [8]. This is the gruesome picture of what the voiceless people face in Nigeria. The truth is that oil exploration activities in the region have caused so much devastation to the environment such that the rivers and agricultural vegetation of the local place are spilled with oil wastes.

The socio-economic rights of these Deltans have been denied them over a long stretch of over four decades. The unconscionable destruction of forests, oil spillage on farm lands, pollution of water sources, the distortion and destruction of natural rivers to assess oil facilities and the incessant flaring of gases – all constituting threats to the health and survival of the indigenous people who have no livelihood means other than agriculture and fishing. With government’s passive attitude towards addressing these issues in a creative and on permanent basis, and with the execution of the environmental activists from the region, it was alleged that the government conspired and collaborated with the oil multinational companies, trading away the rights of its people for money. Today, this minority and helpless group has become a major threat to the country’s stability.

As it were now, over 70 percent of Nigeria’s 170 million population live below extreme poverty of US \$1.25 (or, NGN250.00 in equivalent exchange rate of NGN200 to the dollar), having increased geometrically over the years from 52 percent in 2004 to 61 percent in 2010 [9,10]. The nation’s future is threatened by high poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity problem, growing public health problems, infrastructure decay and huge water scarcity [11]. Government reforms, which have been the bane of development over the years, is thought to be conceived to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. The country’s per capita income has been hovering around US \$300 until (about a quarter of its mid-1970s high) until recently when its gross domestic product (GDP) was rebased, though with no impact on the poverty level of the nation [12].

The advent of the military over the last years did not also help matters as it has distorted both the economic and political rhythm of the country. As *Gbenga Adefaye* puts it to Africa Recovery, (cited in [13]), ‘Military rule over the past fifteen years has left the nation in ruins. The soldiers cannibalized the economy and they ruined us politically and psychologically. We are hoping to sort out our lives after they leave.’

The ethnic clashes among the three tribal groups may have slowed down growth, but the military worsened the situation by injecting more obvious inequality into the system, like federal appointments and resource allocation, that favours the northern region, while embittered economically-powerful southern region reacted. Within this is located the fourth dimensional ethnic group, the Niger Delta who have become increasingly restive, demanding political self-determination and a greater share of Nigeria’s oil revenue. Not much

significant intervention to alleviate poverty in these oil-producing areas where inhabitants are among the poorest peoples in the country has been made (in spite of the large billions of dollars the country reap from oil). The anger, following their neglect and the environmental degradation of their lands has led to attacks on oil installations in the region, resulting in serious and costly disruptions to oil production.

The capitalistic cankerworm may have taken over the country's leaders, as corruption becomes rife creating a huge inequality. Reference [7] calls this 'the-self-alone-bug creed' and reads as 'I don't care whatever happens to anyone or anything else so long as I make my money and take care of me and my family!'

Probably, were the general principles of a good administration and the necessary grand works for a purposeful and responsive government that would court and command the citizen's latent deep affection and respect for his country, wrongly applied or never set? That egregious slip might just be the root cause of the country's myriad socio-political and economic problems. The psychological problem becomes difficult to contain when in the midst plenty, Nigerians have had to struggle against a great deal of odds, to eke out a living and without any guarantee or easy access to the basic amenities of life, while a few ones wallow in oceans of wealth ill-gotten. The much social unrests, ethnic clashes, religious riots, et al., have their foundation in this rich-poor inequality.

The problem of poverty cannot be unrelated to corruption and greed. A system, which provides some reasonable amount of comforts and opportunities for people, corruption of course, will be minimal. The police are grossly underpaid by standard of living and also lack good welfare. The culture of kickbacks, embezzlements, bribery and nepotism has encouraged mismanagement and wastages of national resources and fuelled political instability by placing a high premium on the control of state office.

The constituent minorities appear to have the country's throat in their hands. A situation where women become involved in liberation struggle, especially when they are from the Niger Delta points to the fact that there is indeed there injustice played against them. It says a lot about an imminent revolution. Igbos' call against injustice and marginalization is also a sign of an on-going struggle within, which had been endured over the years. On the other hand, it is a higher sense of national responsibility that there is the south-south /middle-belt<sup>9</sup> partnership for political stakes in the country.

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<sup>9</sup> The south-south here refer to the oil-producing states of Edo, Delta, Rivers, Abia, Bayelsa and Cross Rivers but the Niger-Delta areas are principally in Delta and Rivers States. The Middle-Belt is the more multi-ethnic indigenous parts of the country lying as boundary between the South and the North. Like the South-South, the Middle-Belt is also a minority in Nigeria's political landscape.

The annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election opened a new chapter for the country as regional and tribal conflicts took a new dimension. Destructions were unleashed on lives and properties. Following this, a number of people were arrested and molested, reaching an all-high human rights abuse by the military government. Labour socialists and students were not left behind in these rights abuses as many were imprisoned. Generally, all citizens were terrorized. The subsequent death of M.K.O. Abiola who won the annulled 1993 election resulted in a wild civil unrest that held the nation to a standstill for nearly two weeks as government lost its trust and the south-west people demanded for *Oduduwa*<sup>10</sup> Republic, – a secession treat. And sooner, other issues cropped up as the north was accused of over-domination of political power; economic hardships bit harder on the people as different labour groups went on rampage with attendant hike in fuel price, and religious sensitivity becoming a major issue of concern in addressing ethnic disturbances. The country's membership (or non-) of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) came to the fore-front here, challenged by the Christian population which has an almost equal population as Muslim's, highlighting the low point of government foreign policy.

The OIC controversy dates back as far back as 1969 when the then Sultan of *Sokoto* mooted the idea for Nigeria's membership of the Islamic organization. The military head of state, Yakubu Gowon did not support the move and the team that went were left to themselves, and so were consequently denied accreditation to the conference by King Hassan of Morocco who hosted the meeting. Subsequent governments did not assent either until 1985 when a government backing triggered a nation-wide religious crisis. The warnings of *Olunmi Okogie* a Catholic Cardinal, that 'Nigeria's membership of the OIC would rupture the secular guarantee of the nation's constitution and cause disaffection among Christian community, and hatred to the Muslims,' and in *Vanguard Newspaper*, he emphasized further that, 'Politically, Nigeria's full membership of the OIC is bound to aggravate those centrifugal tendencies in the country's body polity that the country have been striving hard for so long to contain,' would later bear emphasis in later religious conflicts (*Vanguard newspaper*, October 15 1991).

#### V. AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY?

Many African countries are today faced with a number of internal conflicts, which are products of socio-economic, cultural, religious and various other socio-political differences. Some of these not well managed issues have exploded into violences, civil wars and complete disintegration of countries. Such countries like Liberia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Somalia, Rwanda and lately, Ivory Coast and Sudan have only managed to muddle through with alternating periods of conflicts and relative peace

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<sup>10</sup> Oduduwa is the historical ancestor of the Yorubas.

Coleman, 1998, cited in [14]). A common feature of most of these civil-strived nations is the heterogeneous nature of their populations composed of people with different socio-economic, religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Nigeria is an amalgamation of people with quite a different ethnic and cultural orientation as well as varying political backgrounds, which have influenced them over the years. And the problems inherent in these have resulted in acrimony between the three dominant ethnic groups and the emergent threatening minorities; the political stalemate between 1993 and 1999, and prolonged military rule, and also led to the Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970.

Succinctly, it is imperative to highlight the pressing issues, which place a question over the national identity:

- allegation of marginalisation especially in the allocation of political and economic opportunities and resources;
- scourge of poverty and illiteracy among the larger proportion of the population;
- political instability;
- incessant rivalries and conflicts between (and at times within) the various ethnic groups.

Where then does national identity have a place?

A 'national' certainly confers on the people a common identity – the feeling of unity ("sameness" or "oneness"). National identity ensures that the people of a society notwithstanding their historical, cultural, political, economic and racial differences have a common feeling of belonging, unity of purpose and over all commitment to the pursuit of national goals. Fostering national identity in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria is a Herculean task. National identity signifies a common identity. Therefore, it is essential that loyalty be directed to the nation and not ethnic or primordial group.

#### VI. A HOPE? RECONCILIATION, REFORM AND POLITICAL NEWNESS

The non-partisanship political nature of the *Abdulsalami Abubakar* (a former military head of state until 29 May 1999)'s military government prepared the ground for the reconciliation of the divided Nigeria after the demise of former head of state, *Sani Abacha* in June 1998. When *Olusegun Obasanjo* later became the country's president in 1999, he met a threshold for the rejuvenation of the country. And being a southerner and a compensation to the Yoruba tribe for the 1993 annulled presidential election and of course the death of the election winner and co-Yoruba tribal man, *M.K.O. Abiola*, the stage was set for a hard won adventure into political newness.

The ability of a people to fashion out a democratic system that suits, soothes and compliments their peculiarities, as well as provide answers to their problems, is a good step towards

attaining complete emancipation – politically, economically and socially. And since most of Africa's problems find their roots in the political structure, the demand is therefore laid upon the political landscape to help bring value to the society.

The intention of former president, *Olusegun Obasanjo* to initiate a dialogue process between the Ogoni people and Shell was a Herculean task though, but then, the return of the remains of *Ken Saro-Wiwa* and the eight other Ogonis executed in 1995 to their families was a panacea to the peace-building process that had long been desired. Following reconciliation and rebuilding process by the post-military governments, *Bari-ara Kpalap*, who is the media officer and public affairs advisor to the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) has this to say:

*'We are happy without the oil companies because today no matter what, we have more greenish vegetation. We are experiencing some improvement in agricultural harvest. We are generally happy that we no longer have them. The issue of them creating social problems in Ogoni, like influencing young girls into prostitution has been minimized'* (Tell magazine, May 20 2004).

In addressing economic issues, *Abass* (2001) suggests multiple strategies with peculiar strategy for particular place, as well as integrated approaches to providing productive opportunities as against the general poverty alleviation strategies like the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS), which addresses issues only on macro-economic scale. While economic growth is very crucial and in driving poverty reduction strategies, its distribution is fundamental to the process of poverty reduction. This is the missing link in Nigeria's economic reform process as living standard has not been commensurate with purported increase in growth [10]. The real growth should trickle down to the most vulnerable group in the society. The accommodation of favourable agricultural production environment (land and capital), skills training for relevant productive purposes and rapid investments in human capital development (education and health care), provision of basic amenities and infrastructures, reduction in social discrimination, and policy consistency by the government – all these are necessary for micro-economic development.

The Niger Delta issues are contentious issues, which require cogent attention by the Nigerian authority. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) which was created to help catalyze economic and social development in the region seems inadequate. This portends an unending struggle as one minority after another rise up every time to demand rights which often lead to internal conflicts. With this, [15] comments that, 'every day you have the proliferation of ethnic groups demanding the devolution of power, the decentralization of the control of natural resources and an end to tokenism. This government will have to address these issues.'

When *Obasanjo* came into power in 1999, and three years into his government, he was still faced with disgruntled people calling for justice against the past. In response, he set up a Human Rights Violations Investigations Committee (HRVIC), headed by Justice *Chukwudifu Oputa*, a retired Supreme Court judge. It was expected to not only redress past issues but also address carried-over ones that are imperative for the future, so that the country could move on. The Guardian newspaper of August 5 2002 noted that in the end, because some people refused to show up on invitation by the HRVIC, the panel's report was rejected while the government was indicted as lacking insincerity in the constitution of the panel because unlike the South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, it lacked a legal status.

The reconciliation by the HRVIC though failed, it was a crucial part of the process, which did not warrant a compromise of the national identity. That linguistic groupings and tribal kingdoms pre-date what is now called Nigeria is obvious but however to assert that these groupings and kingdoms give Nigeria its sovereignty is mistaken [16]. Therefore, the Nigerian system may after all need a political solution. This line of thought drives the reflex refrain for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) where representatives of the tribal kingdoms and linguistic groupings would sit down to find solutions and chart the country's development pathway. This is to say that Nigeria is not yet dislocated from the past, as the country cannot move forward without looking backward when necessary. However, this is a deadly romance in itself.

The history of Nigeria and her present circumstances make it easy to offer informed solutions to her numerous problems and remove some of the inhibiting burden of emotional and psychological traumas it carries. Here, according to [16]:

*'...federalism, which is a gift to us from the original central government of the British colonialists, is, according to English political theorists, an efficient and emollient model of governance where there are diverse groupings in a national political context, ...and it would work best to reconcile the fissiparous tendencies of differing linguistic groupings in the Nigerian national setting'* (Guardian, August 5 2002).

Now, what is the role of the NPRC and SNC in creating a viable political newness for the country? What are the energy-sapping issues that may serve to be a building block to moving forward? We examine the discourse and outcome of the NPRC below.

For hopeful sensibility, the NPRC seemed heading for success, but for the walk-out by the delegates from the south-south region who protested following the non-agreement over oil revenue sharing formula (50 percent in asking as against popular proposition of 19 percent from the current 13 percent) between the federal and the respective oil-rich states in the

south-south region. This made issues on environment and natural resources to be inconclusive. The "hot" issues which of course have always kept the country on its toes and ethnically divided are resource control, rotational presidency and office tenure (single, as proposed) for the president and state governors, electronic voting system, ban on former military heads of state from contesting any further election in the country, et al.

Rotational presidency is another point of contention as the mode of rotation was hotly debated. The north-central (or middle-belt) went with the south-south, south-west and south-east delegates for zonal rather than north-south option. The south-west was also in support of resource control, which of course favoured the south-south. The south-east was also supported this position. However, the adoption was actually in favour of resource control by the committee in charge.

On the models and structure of government, the committee adopted a north-south rotation. The committee on power sharing and human rights adopted a rotation among the six geo-political zones (zonal line rotation).<sup>11</sup> The argument over political injustice with respect to geo-political zoning such that while the north has dominated the nation's political centre for most of its existence, the south-south, despite owning the land that produced virtually all of the nation's revenue has always been shut out. It is however notable here that the south-south is particular about resource control and power devolution from the centre to the federating units. The committee on power sharing and human rights crafted its recommendation thus:

*'The office of the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall rotate consecutively in such a manner that all the six geo-political zones in turn produce the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria alternatively between the Northern and the Southern parts of the country'* [17].

This recommendation was not acceptable to the south. It is ambiguous in suggesting that the zonal arrangement should enable all zones including minorities to take a shot at the presidency but that it should not be consecutive – but rather alternate, indicating a north-south presidency framework. On the other hand, the other committee recommended that:

*'The principle and practice of rotation along zonal lines based on equity, justice and fairness should be enshrined in the Constitution. The principle should be all inclusive that is it should embrace the interest of the minorities, youth and other physically-challenged Nigerians in the polity at all levels'* [17].

Mathematically, allowance would also have to be made for the underlining role of political parties in the choice of

<sup>11</sup> Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones namely North East and North West (in the North), North Central (Middle Belt) and the South-South, South-West and South-East (in the South) [17].

presidential candidates. This political reform agenda may not after all work out.

On resource control, the committee on revenue allocation and fiscal federalism emphasized the need for a jerk-up in the derivation percentage and the need to involve oil communities in control and management of resources. This recommendation was however vague as the northern votes shot down the south. The interpretation of this committee's statement was however given thus:

*'The various mineral resources should be controlled and managed by the government of the federation through an arrangement, which involves oil-producing states, local governments and the oil communities'* [17].

This statement lent itself to debate and will require further deliberation in future conferences.

A proposal was made for a single term of six years for president but was met with some disagreements. The north saw it as being able to short-change them if they were to produce the president in 2007. The 1995 Draft Constitution (which was unpopular with Nigerians) proposed the single-term government,<sup>12</sup> but this was believed to have been suggested in to extend *Obasanjo's* tenure in office. And the proposed ban on former heads of state also resulted in some controversies as it was assumed to be targeted at *Ibrahim Babangida* and *Muhammadu Buhari* who were aspiring towards the presidency. According to the committee:

*'...it is to purge the polity of the ills of the past,... and its immoral, and smacks of inordinate hankering for power by retired military leaders ... who seek to return in civilian garb'* [17].

On the issue of states creation, while 53 requests were said to have been received by the committee on models and structure of government, the conference chairman termed it as outside the conference agenda and so rebuffed it. The reason behind the conference may then be called to question here.

Some other issues that have and may still create ripples within the polity include the establishment of the *Shariah* Court (and of course its law) which compromise the secularism of the Nigerian state (the 1995 Draft Constitution, Section 264(1) allow for the adoption of the *Sharia'h* law in the Muslim northern states). This is why it was surprising that people reacted to the exercise of the law while actually it is legal. Moreover, while the governors and Islamic clerics of the states involved were the objects of criticism, it should have been otherwise directed to the federal government who has the wherewithal to address the loopholes in the country's constitution.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter VI Part I, Sections 138(2) and 182(2) of the 1995 Draft Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, cited as The Report of the Constitutional Conference containing the 1995 Draft Constitution. See [4].

## CONCLUSION

Certain aspects of Nigeria (and indeed Africa)'s incessant civil conflicts are rooted in injustice created around social, economic and political structures which are though natural but are artificially constructed. The barriers to Nigeria's survival in these myriads of problems lie in identifying the particular parts where the body aches. The above-mentioned structures are however the diagnosis of these whole problems, also documented from a number of views and opinions as below:

Alex Ekwueme, former Nigerian vice-president in 1981,

*'...the needless venom and hate that pervade the inter-ethnic relationships, the orgy of violence that is being unleashed on innocent citizens in the creeks, ...call for one's heart to bleed and...weep for **the Niger Delta and Nigeria'*** (Tell magazine, July 12 1999, emphasis mine in bold italic).

Ben Nwabueze, former education minister and a university don,

*'The problem of governance in Africa is not so much in the failure of the ruler but in the context of the colonial system, a heritage that has held us all hostages...'* (Tell magazine, August 9 1999).

Lateef Adegbite, secretary-general, Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA),

*'If we continue to operate a very deceptive system, this country would face a very serious danger of survival because this constitution (the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria) cannot sustain this country'* (Tell magazine, May 17 1999).

Adams Oshiomhole, former president, Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and Edo state governor,

*'We are not talking about strike alone; more importantly, we are talking about justice. We are talking about family life and wages equal to our labour'* (Tell magazine, May 17 1999).

The words are striking; there is injustice in the land, which needs to be addressed. There are economic, political and social imbalances. The initial problems seemed to be caused by the colonialists but further injustice and what Nigeria is in today are caused by the expanding social, economic and political imbalances all orchestrated by its leaders. These have often put the country in the edge. However, these problems are not without appropriate solutions as the following proposals show:

Mike Akhigbe, former military chief of general staff (until May 1999),

*'...grievances and complaints become less threatening when they are freely aired and promptly addressed, but where*

*complaints are allowed to incubate, discord and disaffection ensue, giving rise to acrimony and instability*' (Tell magazine, May 10 1999).

Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of Nigeria (on assumption of office as president in 1999),

*'Nigeria has another chance to make it. It is an opportunity to redress some of the wrongs of the past and establish high standards for the present that future generation can build and improve on with pride and confidence'* (Tell magazine, July 12 1999).

Professor Bola Akinterinwa, director-general, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA),

*'The challenge of all the challenges is determining the type of Nigeria we want...and how to achieve...objectives set. Progress and development cannot be given on a platter of gold.... It must be desired and fought for'* (Tell magazine, May 31 1999).

The positions given above are that rather than blame Nigeria's problems on the colonialists or any other persons, the country should be forward-looking. This will involve addressing volatile issues like political imbalances, social inequalities, economic injustices that make the nation unstable. And Obasanjo is quick to add that a good political participation will enhance stability (this is despite his initial disapproval of the SNC, bringing in a substitute – the NCRP);

*'Democracy means participation, not just at election, but all the time. Have dialogue at the local level: state...and national...levels.... That is the beauty of democracy'* (Time magazine, June 7 1999).

Of course, Obasanjo is right but Bola Akinterinwa sees farther than that and advises:

*'...democracy can never thrive in any country where governance is based on injustice, ineptitude, uncontrolled corruption, and in short, to say it all, bad governance'*<sup>13</sup>.

The various suggestions documented needed to be acknowledged in the light that they signify the country's readiness for a change. Charles Efang (a lawyer) is deep in thought over the paradox of a biting economic hardship in a country blessed with a vast mineral wealth, and it still ranks among the world's poorest (per capita income is US \$300 a year, 25 percent of the level 20 years ago). The middle class having been wiped out, infrastructures in tatters, basic amenities almost inaccessible and corruption flooding all the

<sup>13</sup> See The African Guardian, November 2, 1992, vol. 7, No. 41, pp. 21 for Prof. Mkwugu Okoye; Tell, May 17, 1999, No. 20, pp. 18 for Alfred Ilenre, Secretary-General, Ethnic Minority Rights of Africa (EMIROAF); and Tell magazine, February 22, 1999, No. 8, pp. 16 for Anthony Enahoro.

land (African Guardian, November 2 1992) hence, he considers a noble path:

*'...the idea of a national conference where the entire relevant social forces in the country shall come together and speak for a new union predicated upon certain principle is inevitable. The nationalities will ... discuss the basis of their co-existence, as the present structure cannot assist to develop stability. All that has happened for the past...years in Nigeria is completely a bad experience.... And what is required... is to erect power sharing configuration, including equitable monitoring structures, rather than a mere transfer from one zone to another of the power to corrupt and misapply the instruments and organs of power.'*

The understanding however from all what is written and documented is to point out that Nigeria has a crooked path from the past. This is to identify the elements that formed its structure and work to rebuild with a non-ethnic but nationalistic mind. Therefore, the challenge emphasized in the words of Charles Efang is instructive:

*'This country will exist in the long run only by the will and commitment of its component people and on terms they work out freely among themselves'* (African Guardian, November 2 1992).

Therefore, the road to economic, social and political stability though tortuous requires discussion and commitment towards the Nigerian goal if it is to build a habitable and sustainable nation for generations to come.

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