Ethnic Agitations and Restructuring Question in Nigeria: The Aftermath of 2015 General Elections

[1]PAUL, Salisu Ojonemi; [2]AUDU, Enojo & [3]Eri Kayode

[1]Doctoral Student of Public Administration, University of Nigeria Nsukka
salisunelson@yahoo.com

[2]Doctoral Student of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria
enojomay@gmail.com

[3]Training School, Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria, Ikeja-Lagos

ABSTRACT
Agitations in Nigeria continue to take different dimensions from the cries of power sharing, economic and infrastructural development distribution, states and local governments' creation, resource control, religious manipulation to restructuring of the current federal construction. This qualitative paper adopted the Split-Class Marxian Theory to analyse this ugly development in a political independent nation like Nigeria. The paper highlighted that the socio-political and economic implications of this ugly phenomenon is better imagined than being real. They include civil unrest; and war, social, political, and economic crises; emergence of a failed state and persistence of corruption. It argues however that, none of these things can equal to the call to rise up and save this nation from the trajectory that make a break-up a viable option though none of us in this generation was present in the theatre of amalgamations. It is recommended that there should be a reconsideration of "Amended Regionalism and Native Authority Systems", removal of "State of Origin" from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, inter-tribal marriage, and federal constitutionalism and law enforcement.
 Keywords: Amalgamation, Ethnic Agitation, Federalism, Regionalism and Restructuring

1. INTRODUCTION
After many years of the first and second amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorate in 1906 and 1914 respectively by Lord Lugard, Nigeria has never rested from agitations by her ethnic groups. First, it was between those who referred to themselves as the 'majority' –the Hausas/Fulanis, Yorubas and Igbos. However, the relegated 'minority' ethnic groups who reside in the North East, North Central, South-South and Ondo State started to agitate as a result of marginalisation. This led to the creation of Mid-Western region and other subsequent states and local governments' creation exercises. According to Ekot (2010:59), Nigerians on 1st October, 1960 became the official rulers of the gigantic entity called Nigeria put to together by the British with heaps of unresolved problems. The 'carry-over' of these problems made Sultan Abubakar (2017) to categorically said, the recent ethnic agitation is a symptom of a rotten system. The manifestations are obvious. They seeds of disunity sown at amalgamation are growing every day, the signs are ominous and emphasis is now on micro-loyalties rather than macro-loyalties. In addition;

> ...there have been waves of unrest in which erstwhile neighbours are pitted against each
> other and those assailed are told to "go home' and are expelled from specific geo-physical
> spaces. Furthermore, the assailed ethnic groups are frequently referred to as 'settlers' by

other groups who claim to be Indigenes' of particular geo-political settings (PAUL, Alih and Eri, 2014: 88).

In these contestations, the same language once used to rally Nigerians of diverse origins in the colonial struggles has resurfaced (Alubo, 2001, 2004:136, in PAUL, Alih and Eri, 2014: 88).

A major assumption that underlies the study of ethnicity and national restructuring question in Nigeria is that, it constitutes the fundamental basis for multiple identities, diversity, and the framework of a single, integrated political system in the country (Suberu, 2001:126; Ebun, 2014: 106). Therefore, the background of this study ranges from the fact that;

...in Nigeria, the fear of domination of one region by the other is lively. Marginalisation and tribalism are still noticeable. The level of development in the country is still very low. Agitation for state creation is on the high. Religious conflicts are still common in the country (Ebun, 2014: 106).

Therefore, ethnic agitation, protest for power sharing, economic advantage and restructuring of Nigeria since the emergence of federalism in 1954 till date has assumed a contemporary issue within the governance circle and recently, the 8th Republic (2015 – Date). Again, the colonial masters have been blamed by some school of thought for this situation that created a national unity question which Suberu (2001:126) wrote involves the challenges and dilemmas associated with accommodating multiple identity communities within the framework of a single, integrated and national political system. Nnoli (1978), in Anugwom (2000:63) perceived along this insinuation that ethnic rivalry is a product of the colonial contact situation. According to Osimen, Akinyemi and Adenegan (2013:79), Lord Lugard said;

...on my part, I later had a second thought I could not explain how and why I sent such a memo to London. But what is both puzzling was the decision of the thirteen egg heads in the commonwealth office to consent and approve the amalgamation...

Accordingly, the unification of Nigeria was purely economic in its purpose, class phenomenon and exploitative in nature and above all to ensure colonial economic policies consolidation (Nnoli, 1978 in Anugwom, 2000:64; FRN, 2010:35; Ekot, 2010:61). As a result, Ozoigbo (2008:68) to an extent stated that if the south had been left alone and vice versa, the current problem would not have arisen.

Remarkably, the pre-independence Nigeria witnessed a scenario where the North was complaining of marginalisation by the south especially from the time of federalism in 1954. This fear of domination was the remote factor that informed the refusal of the North to agree with the south to demand for political independence in 1956. It has to be equally stated that the case of domination was not only in the area of cabinet formation and other federal appointments but as seen by Ozoigbo (2008:67) was also in the area of revenue allocation. The current cries of agitation assumed a centre-stage because as it is now, an ethnic group that captures state power corners all the material benefits that flow from such power (Agbese, 2001:246). This of course accounted for one of the factors Ekot (2010:62) alleged, made the nationalists who took over the leadership of the country to fail in recognising the complexity of the nation handed over to them. Presently, there has been clamour and reported complaint, on the overbearing influence of the federal government in intergovernmental relations – the federal government, the state and local governments as in the case of resource control, revenue allocation and cabinet formation.

1. **The Root**

British divide and rule tactics, as well as favouritism towards the North, did not help matters. Fear of offending northern of Islamic sensibilities resulted in the unequal educational development of the Nigerian polity.

The system of "government" and "opposition" inherited at independence, more or less, provided an organised forum for free flow of ethnic tantrums and the formulation of policies that were intended to cut "political enemies" down to size (Akinola, 2017:20).

Iwaloye and Ibeanu (1997), and Anugwom (1997) in Anugwom (2000:66) argued that languages and ethnic groups do not necessarily coincide. Anugwom noted that while language may be one of the important factors for defining ethnic groups, some in Nigeria have lost their original linguistic roots, while retaining identity, as a result of intense interaction with larger socio-ethnic groups. This is affirmed in the nineteen states of the North, Apoi, Ilaje and Ijaw people in Ondo and Lagos States who are losing their languages to Hausa and Yoruba respectively.

Therefore, ethnic squabble that has become an ugly recurring socio-political decimal often results from poor management of these differences. According to Akinola (2017:20), the possibilities of a major conflict were always evident in the contradictions of ethnicity, religion, culture and language that were cobbled together by the colonial masters. Falola et al (1991:119) identified the fact that, Nigerian nationalists on their part did not positively promote national consciousness, commitment to genuine unity, selflessness, the patience and capacity to wield the Nigerian society except when it suited their personal interests and ambitions. Hence, Tanumo (1998:13) in Ozoigbo (2008:68) argued that the history of ethnic agitation in Nigeria may be traced to the period of the unfortunate amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Regions in 1914 by Lugard. It can be observed at the time that, the south no doubt was more sophisticated and advanced politically than the north due to the influence or gains of western education and the presence of the Europeans in the axis. Therefore, the amalgamation made the North to rightly feared domination by the South and was very suspicious about any dealing with the south. In validation, Balewa (1959) in Olawole (1999) cited by Ozoigbo (2008:68) said;

> The south with its many schools and colleges is producing hundreds of academically and technically qualified people for the public services. The common cry now is Nigerianization of public services. It is most important in a federation that the federal service shall be fully representative of all units which make up the federation... I have not been able to obtain the figures of northerners in the service but I very much doubt if they even amount to one percent... Unless some solution is found it will continue to be a cause of dissatisfaction and friction...

From the foregoing, Nigeria as a nation has from its origin the seed of marginalisation and ethnic agitations; initially the south over the north in public service appointments in both the regional and federal level but later, the agitations surfaced among ethnic groups that formed the nation. Balewa (1952), quoted by Adeleye (2012) posited that;

> The Southern people who are swarming into this region daily in large numbers are really intruders. We don`t want them and they are not welcome here in the North. Since the amalgamation in 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people are different in every way including religion, custom, language and aspiration. The fact that we`re all Africans might have misguided the British Government. We here in the North, take it that `Nigerian unity` is not for us.

Since Nigeria became a Federal state in 1954 after the termination of Macpherson constitution in 1951-1952 and subsequently the Federal Constitution of 1955, the struggle for ethnic development and dominance over the other started (even) along regional divides. Precisely, the "minority groups-struggle" surfaced. The result of this agitation as noted by Suberu (2001:127) and (Ozoigbo, 2008:69) manifested in the creation of Mid-western region in 1963 with its headquarters in Benin; twelve states in 1967; nineteen states in 1976; twenty one States in 1987; thirty States in 1991 and thirty six States in 1996 and the current cry for additional one state to the present day South –east geo-political zone. All these states creation exercises pointed to the steps taken to moderate the effect of ethnic agitation within the Nigeria political structure. Nonetheless these developments, some ethnic nationalities have little or no respect for upholding the unity of Nigeria. With states creation, consideration of nation of national unity assumed secondary interest (Attoh and Soyombo, 2011:42).

In another development, the history of ethnic agitation in Nigeria has not been free from the manipulative tendencies of the elites of the first generation. This is pictured in the formation of political parties along ethnic extractions. Attoh and Soyombo (2011:42) wrote that;

By 1953, the three major political parties in the country namely the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons, Action Group and Northern People's Congress had become associated with the three major ethnic groups –the Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbo respectively. This reflected an attempt by the regional elites to carve out economic spheres for themselves. The regional elites succeeded in creating the false impression that the political parties were the champions of the interests of various ethnic groups.

Recalling the view of Nnoli (1978) in Anugwom (2000:67), ethnicity is pronounced in societies where the inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources is the rule, particularly when inequality is accepted as a given way of living and wealth is greatly celebrated. Also, the unity of the country since political independence was troubled by the propagation of ethno-religious and political uproar dictated on one hand by cultural, communal and religious differences, and on the other hand by fear of political supremacy nursed by the major ethnic groups (PAUL, Alih and Eri, 2014:94). From the foregoing, ethnic agitation is as old as the Nigerian nation.

2. The Restructuring

Every geo-political zone has its own interpretation of restructuring. To the South-East, restructuring means creation of an additional state. For the South-South, restructuring means resource control. For the South-West, it means devolution of power and the North may see it differently, but whatever is the case, we are better off as a united Nigeria (Okorocha, 2017).

Though the concept of restructuring has assumed different meanings across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria following the renewed agitations, it is however challenging to establish a common meaning that will be acceptable to all. This resulted from the fact that Nigeria emerged in 1960 as an independent nation with a three imbalance regional configuration, autonomy and hegemony for the so-called majority Hausa/Fulani–North, Igbo–East and Yoruba–West. Even in the pre-independence, Okoli (2004) in Edino and PAUL (2015:61) noted that each ethnic group was operating its own different political, economic and administrative system. This metamorphosed into regionalism which empowered dominant ethnic groups in the three regions. This arrangement was criticised notwithstanding. According to Suberu (2001:126,127), the palpable casualties and predictable critics of this trilateral federalism were the country's estimated 250 smaller or "minority" communities, which constituted approximately one third of the regional and national populations. He submitted further that, the secondary victims of regional federalism were the South-Western Yoruba and South-Eastern Igbo groups, whose regional security was menaced by the demographic preponderance and the political advantage that Hausa-Fulani-dominated Northern Region enjoyed over the two southern regions respectively.

Fifty-six years after independence, calls for the restructuring of the country have dominated national discourse with a lot of interest and obsession. In the First Republic, restructuring took the form of Region and Native Authority governments' creation. Presently, stakeholders are currently placing emphasis on the entrenchment of fiscal federalism, resource control, state police, equity, justice and fairness. The issue became topical, following the drastic reduction in the nation's earnings at the birth of Buhari's civilian administration, with the slump of the price of crude oil and the return of militancy in the Niger Delta region, the growing menace of Fulani herdsmen and the bid to review the constitution (Odoshimokhe, 2017).

It is observed that Nigerian elders who witnessed the pre-independence and First Republic allude to the glorious days of the First Republic, when there was healthy rivalry and competition among the regions. The Regions as they were had relative advantages that revolved around rich agricultural resources and animal husbandry. It is reported in Nigeria at 50 Compendium (2010:40-41) that;

Long spells of dry weather interjected by shorter periods of rains in the year gave the arable Northern Region abundant yields of Shea butter, groundnuts, millet, sorghum, maize, beans, yams and many others. The Middle Belt ranges produced unending heaps of yams, cassava, rice and millets. At its average height, cocoa farming engaged over 40% of the entire productive labour force in the Western Region. Up to 70% of earned government revenue was derived from the export of the cocoa beans.

> On its part, the Eastern Region latched onto its dominant economic tree – the palm tree – to drives its economic engine. Although the colour and race of the civil masters had changed, regional governmental revenue inflow had remained static and predictable though not in volumes but in substance (2010:40, 41).

Nevertheless, under the current dispensation, states simply go to Abuja monthly to collect handouts and spend it without recourse to the fact that they need to invest on their economies. Along this sad situation, when Nigeria is compared with Brazil, the Asian tigers and other notable nations who were at same level with her in the 1960s, Ndoma-Egba (2017) cited in *Thisday* (2017) said, the argument for or against restructuring is simply economic and that with the current structure, development cannot be definitely achieved since states were not created and administered on the basis of economic consideration. For instance, each state ought to maintain some measure of autonomy to be able to perform like the Regions during First Republic. The clamour for restructuring has become the political slogan that characterises the 8th Republic particularly from the opposition camp and well meaning Nigerians. However, the calls as Onaiyekan (2017), in *Thisday* (2017) observed is premised on the fact that many things in the country are not going well as a result of structural imbalance. He added that Nigeria's structural composition needs a rearrangement since the country has an imperfect constitution.

Since restructuring is now the "song of praise" in this political dispensation, the answer to the question of what happens to ethnic minority groups? Where will their religious belief be placed and which groups gain and loss? These questions are pertinent owing to the fact that regionalism and states creation exercises during the First Republic and several Military regimes only perpetuated the interest of the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups. For these groups, new, centrally funded state units represent more of conduit for federal economic and political patronage than an instrument for securing self-governance for the politically vulnerable communities (Suberu, 2001:128). Inevitably, the struggle for re-composition of Nigerian political structure by ethnic minorities of the country after the independence through the creation of states and local governments in order to assuage the fear of marginalisation by major ethnic groups failed. Hence, Suberu asserted that ethnic minority elites have severally condemned the increasing use of states-creation apparatus to advance the financial and political aggrandisement of the major ethnic groups, and to promote the economic dispossession and political re-marginalisation of the minorities.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Split-Class Theory, another version of Marxist Theory of Split-Labour which focuses on other end of spectrum and class with race subordinate. The theory believes that:

i.   Society is divided into two classes,
ii. Emphasis is on economic exploitation of the lower classes,
iii. Ethnicism is a mechanism used by upper class
iv. Operational class would be best served if put aside racial and ethnic divisions, and
v.   Strong racial and ethnic consciousness is risky.

Subsequently, the adoption of this theory is premised on the fact that Nigeria from its root of pre-colonialism, colonialism and post-independence was divided between the rulers and the ruled; majority and minority ethnic groups; educated and illiterates; Muslims and Christians; and the north and southern regions respectively. This situation transcended post-independence Nigeria.

Along these divide, the uniqueness of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic and religious nation emerged at the very moment of amalgamation in 1914. Scholarly and popular interpretations of Nigerian politics posit that the primary animating force in the country's political system is ethnicity (Agbese, 2001:246). It manifested during the agitation for political independence by the motion moved by Anthony Enahoro (A Southerner) in 1956 which was opposed by Ahmadu Bello (A Northerner). Corroborating this with the view of Ozoibgo (2008:66), Nigeria from the time of amalgamation of Southern and Northern provinces have witnessed cries of marginalisation and domination from one section of the country to another. Thus, during the independence in 1960, the agitation for regional and ethnic power equation in Nigeria took a

different dimension as it breaks to a competition which Olasupo and Olaofe (2017:13) noted was between Muslims and Christians, with the part-Muslim, part-Christian Yoruba of the South-West helping to hold the balance. They highlighted further that Nigeria has an interwoven of its ethnic and religious character such that the North is predominantly Muslims and comprises mostly Hausa/Fulani ethnic group exception of the middle-belt; the Western Yoruba are partly Christians and partly Muslims while the eastern Ibo including the Southern minority groups predominantly Christians.

Emphasis in Nigeria has been the case of an economic exploitation of the ethnic minorities and lower class by those in the majorities and higher class. It is obvious that ethnic groups that lose out in the power contest tend to get deprived of the opportunity to acquire wealth and resources through the instrumentality of state power (Agbese, 2001:243). However within each class are secluded segments or regions and thus subject to discriminatory practices – splits within each class along ethnic lines. In states and local governments' creation exercises in Nigeria, majority ethnic groups have often cheated the ethnic minorities. Ken Sero-Wiwa (1988) quoted by Suberu (2001:129) asked that;

> …why (should) one ethnic nationality … have five states while 70 others share one state…? …if the truth is to be faced, the only groups which need more states today are the minority groups… the Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa who live in contiguous territory should have one state each. [But] the military… split the majority ethnic groups into smaller units to enable them rob the minority ethnic groups of their… resources…

It can be summed up that the crises within the Nigerian state are either normally associated with problems of class, religion, politics, corruption, ethnicity, tribalism, inadequate education and poor infrastructure in the rural areas where the less privilege resides.

4. The Reality

> The end of the colonial era, however, does not mean that the objective realities upon which ethnicity was built have disappeared. The selfish need for the privileged classes to further their interests and subjugate the underprivileged by instigating and intensifying ethnic sentiments, still abounds. At best, one privileged group, the white colonisers, has been replaced by another privileged group, the indigenous agents of neo-imperialism...which was able to collude with the colonial power...even after colonial rule. And this may be the case in many African nations (Anugwom, 2000:64, 65).

Ojo (2017:21) said who does not know that the Igbo are different from the Yoruba; and the Fulani are poles apart from the Ikwere? Who does not know that the Kalabari are not the same people in tongues and values as the Hausa? What about the Nupe; are they the same as Itsekiri? He added that ethnic groups that make-up Nigeria are planets too far apart in all and every sense of it. Ethnic rivalry could be considered as prevalent throughout the socio-political history of even the most developed nations of the world (Anugwom, 2000:69).

Ethnic equality being a universal concept in social science has been believed to have reached an important stage in the assimilation of dynamism in a political system of a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria. In the conceptualisation of this phenomenon in internal political reality of Nigeria, Akinola (2011:1) posited that;

> Nigeria is a state of nationalities but not a nation of individuals. In which case, equating for survival within the sate internal system is as important as the balancing between states in the international system. Nigerian state...is in crises because the northern group of nationalities – under the leadership of the Hausa-Fulani nation – enjoys over – balance of political power, which it has used to threaten the security of other nations and nationalities within the system. The result is the wide gap between fact and value based on the assumption that what is good for the North is good for Nigeria.

Akinola further said ethnic equality implies an objective arrangement in which there is relatively widespread satisfaction with the distribution of power, so that no actor or a group of actors can hold other

to ransom 'with impunity'. The struggle for ethnic equality is not a strange phenomenon in the relationship between many nations that were members of the West African political collection, some of which later constituted the modern Nigerian State.

According to Smith (1990:3), the nation now called Nigeria before the arrival of the British colonial government was made up of many nationalities, among which between 250 – 350 were later brought together (to constitute a single country). Pointing to agitation for equality and independence among the various ethnic groups in the pre-colonial Nigeria, Smith (1990:4) sums up that;

> The area was naturally going through the process of ...threats. The Fulanis were involved in equality of power struggles with the Hausas; the Hausa-Fulani were involved in the equality of power struggles with the Yorubas, the Kanuri, and numerous nationalities in the middle belt area. The Yorubas were involved in similar struggles with Dahomeys (now Republic of Benin), Benin and Nupe Nationalities. The Igbos too were engaged in a balance of power tussle against Benin, Igala and some other nationalities. None of the actors was able to enjoy over-balanced power; and there was no consciousness to bring about a Nigerian nation-state. Fulani expansion was militarily in other north-east by the Kanuri of Bornu, and in the south-west by the Yoruba; while in the south-east impenetrable terrain bared the Fulani mounted Calvary.

Conversely, ethnic equality in colonial and post-independence Nigeria changed in character, strength and coverage in a situation when British colonial masters demystified the traditional equality administrative system and imposed Hausa-Fulani domination on other ethnic groups. This British unification process took the form of consolidating all the nationalities into one state system which is divided into three regions suspended over two societies (Akinola 2011:2). It is this assertion that made Graf (1988) in Akinola (2011:2) to say, Nigeria has an ethnic equality problem, fronted by the aforementioned three nations – the Hausa/Fulani, the Yorubas and the Ibos – whose particular configurations form the basic structural framework within which all other interest groups in the federation are forced to operate. Nevertheless, there is no equal opportunity in power and critical infrastructural development sharing, resulting in over-balancing to the advantage of the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo without recourse to the ethnic minorities' interests. Subsequently, Ojo (2017a:20) emphasised that;

> One thing most Nigerians agreed on this our current federal system is fundamentally flawed and skewed in practice. It does not guarantee equity, justice and fairness. There ample evidence to cite about the marginalisation, discrimination, criminal neglect and domination of one ethnic group against the other. The federal character principle which was designed to address the fears of the minorities and promote inclusive governance has been grossly abused by the operators of the system. Appointments and citing of projects are being done with heavy dose of politics and nepotism.

According to Sklar (1999:7); Young (1976:274-326) cited by Suberu (2001:142), the multi-dimensional fluidity and complexity of ethno-territorial identities in Nigeria should be an asset, rather than a liability to the country's political development, integration and stability. However, they noted that in complicating and multiplying the "primordial" loyalties of Nigerians, the fluidity inherent in the "variable definitions" and permutations of ethnicity in Nigeria can help to pre-empt the "polarisation" and disintegration of the country along a single, fatal, fault-line of sectional conflict.

5. The Risk and Implication

> There is now virtually nothing that happens politically in Nigeria that is not interpreted and explained – at least by Nigerians – through ethnic nationalist categories. And that fact is in itself part of what is meant...by Nigeria not having a focus and appears to be 'failing' (Ekot, 2010:63). We have retreated into ethnic bunkers, complete with ethnic armies and champions. The national pendulum is swinging dangerously from its position of centripetalism to one of centrifugalism even though we may rhetoricise about the goodness of bigness and the strength of diversity (Ekpu, 2000).

Ekot (2010:61) wrote that ethnic nationalisms created by the political elites have spread like a virus and become very problematic for Nigerian nation-state. Otite (1990:145); Anugwom (2000:61); PAUL, Alih, and Eri (2014:88), and Edogbanya (2016:23) subscribed to the fact that the new challenges and

contentions amongst ethnic groups are identified as the bane of democratic experiment's survival, social crises and nation building struggle in Nigeria. According to Agbese (2001:247), intense ethnic competition for political power has attendant socio-political consequences including frequent political crises, massive corruption and lack of national unity. Though the situation is not only peculiar to Nigeria alone, Shola Omotola (2006a), in (2008:73) posited that the forces of identity, particularly ethnicity and religion, have equally contributed to the decomposition of states in Africa, as shown by protracted conflicts in trouble spots such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'voire and Sudan. To this end, Graf (1988:13) contended that wherever the Nigerian political system has most dramatically experienced breakdowns –constitutional crises, political immobilism, coups d'état, civil war, etc – these had always occurred within a context of inter-ethnic controversy. The events that surrounded the famous Kano riot of May, 1953 when the Northern Nigeria refused to follow the AG-led motion for independence was bloody (Osimen, Akinyemi and Adenegan, 2013:81).

Hence, the phenomenon of ethnicity, ethno-nationalism or, as it is popularly termed, tribalism, is thus a focal point of national political discourse. Apart from this, ethnicity has been perceived as a major obstacle to the overall politico-economic development of the country (Ekot, 2010:61). Therefore, since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democracy, there has been an unprecedented resurgence and expansion of violent conflicts that are mostly ethno-religious in nature (Omotola, 2006:3).

From the above development, almost all the major socio-political, economic and religious downturns in Nigeria are ethnically related. The continuation of agitation in Nigeria will dangerously result in a not far-fetched situation of:

    i.   Another civil war,
    ii.   Political, social and economic crises,
    iii.   A failed state, and
    iv.   Persistence of corruption

6. The Political Impact

> We have been robbed of meritocracy, excellence and unity; we are still battling favouritism, federal character or quota, zoning, catchments areas, state of origin... The Nigerian leadership is yet to produce a system of governance and blueprint that can exploit our differences... The suitability of the person is very, very secondary. He has to be from the right zones and for the spice belong to the 'right' religion (Osimen, Akinyemi and Adenegan, 2013:82).

As Agbese (2001:264) posited, within the context of viewing Nigeria politics as an unending competition among the nation's three dominant groups, some analysts also joined ethnic minorities as a fourth force. It can be reiterated that ethnicity is a social construct whose mobilisation for competitive purposes includes political parties, public intellectuals and university lecturers/students, the military, public bureaucracies' trade unions, etc. Consequently, the political parties in Nigeria which ought to be national in outlook were reformed as ethnic socio-cultural groups due to the entrenchment of the factor of ethnicity. This accounts for the reason why their agitation for power and positions always generate antagonism and hostility along ethnic divides. The deep ethnic fears are generated by in-built structures that promote unequal asses to power and resources which politicians in Nigeria are found of exploiting (Osimen, Akinyemi and Adenegan, 2013:82).

For instance, the period of Nigeria's First Republican political system has more than 20 political parties' participation but to a greater extent, the competitive political organism as a whole was defined by the actions and interaction of only three political parties – Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG). Each of these three political parties was also considered to be rooted in one of Nigeria's ethnic groups–NPC-Hausa/Fulani; NCNC–Igbos and AG-Yoruba. The Second Republic (1979-1983) political parties formation (National Party of Nigeria, NPN –Hausa/Fulani; the Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN –Yoruba; Nigerian Peoples Party, NPP – Igbos; and the Great Nigerian Peoples Party, GNPP –Kanuris) were reincarnation of the political structures of the First Republic, because they possessed strong ethno-religious and personality appeals.

In reference to the political parties in the First and Second Republic, Nnoli (1980) was of the view that, their propaganda emphasised alleged conflict of interests among the various groups with each party claiming to be protecting and advancing the interests of the ethnic nationalities. Certainly, the failure of the party system in Nigeria to serve as vehicle for national realignment represented a proof of political and national systems failure. Subsequently, the voting patterns in subsequent elections since 1999 cannot be divorced from ethnic background. However the covert reasons for deploying ethnic propaganda by political leaders to canvass for votes had always been the diversion of national speciality of influence while weakening those of its opponents (Attoh and Soyombo, 2011:42). On this note, Okorocha (2017) posited that;

> ...my heart bleeds that at this 21st century, we are still choosing leaders based on ethnicity and zone. We must begin to choose people into offices based on their capacity and capability. What matters is not the ethnic group you come from or the religion you practice, what matters to us is the ability to put food on the table of the common man.

The learned members of the society always monitor government moves for the benefits of different parts of the nation. Most political conflicts that have occurred hitherto were not completely unconnected with ethnic differences. Example includes Jos/Hausa crises, Tiv/Jukun conflict, Ife-Modakeke, Aguleri/Umuleri, etc. In addition, it is observed that since majority ethnic groups in Nigeria controlled political power in both pre and post independence Nigeria, Agbese (2001:265) asserted that they always use their numerical advantages to acquire political power and through that means, divert all the nation's economic resources. In other words, ethnicity has been manoeuvred as a covering tool for corrupt practices which is one of the major socio-economic and political development challenges that has confronted Nigeria. This is possible because ethnic identity is both reviled and respected (Agbese, 2001:268).

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> I think you will agree with me that we all have a role to play in countering the voices of divisiveness and the elements who seek to take us down a bloody path. Let us continue to counsel the misguided elements among our youths, who think that ethnic confrontation is a game and that words can be thrown around carelessly without repercussion (Osinbajo, in The Punch, 2017).

It could be however, regarded that ethnic conflicts exists in a continuum, in which minimal ethnic rivalry may be considered as healthy for the development of the society (Anugwom, 2000:69). Diversity in any society ought to be a pathway to economic growth and buoyancy. It is supposed to be progress and all manner of advancements (Ojo, 2017b:21). Though agitations now pervades all the strata of Nigerian ethnic zones, it is believed that remaining strong and united is the only option for development of any geo-political zone. No one who witnessed the Nigerian civil war from 1967-1970 would want such destruction to happen through another war. In it all, the cause of the desire to disintegrate is less about one ethnic group that's deliberately left behind in the scheme of things, but about a nation that has been so amalgamated to unable to deliver the best to all its citizens irrespective of where they come from.

Every part of Nigeria is a victim of perceived marginalisation – the reason why creating another nation out of Nigeria is not the way out. This is represented in the perpetual and strong agitation for states, local governments, and electoral wards/constituencies creation by every ethnic group. As Suberu rightly illustrated, the Nigerian experience clearly shows that the so-called homogeneous, and that intra-ethnic or linguistic groups are internally quite heterogeneous, and that intra-ethnic or inter-linguistic cleavages can be real and as deadly as inter-ethnic or inter-linguistic ones.

Therefore, the current call and clamour for restructuring of Nigeria is not an easy task considering the background and points discussed so far. This is central because regionalism perpetrated the interest of major ethnic nationalities whilst states and local governments did same in another dimension. Following these developments, it is strongly recommended that:

i.   The call to return Nigeria back to an "Amended Regionalism and Native Authority Systems" should be considered with utmost priority. Essentially, the First Republican form of federalism (1963-66), which empowered regional government and made them independent of federal allocation, developmentally-focused and competitive, needs urgent resurrection contrary to what is now obtainable where the federal government controls virtually all sectors of the economy. Under this situation, interest of the minority ethnic groups should be seriously protected in this situation.

ii.   The National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly should erase the "State of Origin" from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended. It should be replaced with the "State of Residence". This will go a long way in curbing unnecessary tension and agitation.

iii.   There should be decisive federal constitutionalism and law enforcement in Nigeria.

iv.   Inter-tribal marriage should as a matter of fact be encouraged. This factor will practically bring unity in diversity to bear. The hate-speech will be stamped out.

REFERENCES
Adeleye, A. (2012). Amalgamation of 1914: Was it a mistake? *The Vanguard Newspaper, May 18*

Agbese, P. O. (2001). The middle-Belt and the national question in Nigeria. *Management of National Question in Nigeria, 126-148*

Akinola, T. (2011). Nigeria has a balance of power problem. *An Analytical Lecture Series.*

Akinola, A. (2017). Gowon and Nigerian unity. *The Punch Newspaper, View Point, Thursday, July 27*

Anugwom, E. (2000). Ethnic conflict and democracy in Nigeria: The marginalisation. *Journal of Social Development in Nigeria, 15(1), 61-78*

Atto, F. & Soyombo, O. (2011). The politics of ethnic balancing. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol. 3(2), 40-44*

Ebun, O. D. (2014). Resolving the crises in the Nigerian federalism and the 2015 elections. *International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies (IJPCS), 2 (2)*

Edino, O. F. & PAUL, S.O. (2015). Federal character principle in personnel recruitment/selection in the national inland waterways authority. *Human Resource Management Journal of Values and Governance, 7(1), 61-81*

Edogbanya, I. L. (2016:23). Ethnicity and the voting pattern of Nigerian electorates in 2015 general elections. *International Journal of Democratic Consolidation and Development, 2(3), 34-44*

Ekpu, R (2000). A broken beacon. *Newswatch Magazine, Lagos, 10 October*

Falola, T., Mahadi, A., Uhomoibhi, M. & Anyanwu, U. (1991). *History of Nigeria: Nigeria in the twentieth century.* Lagos: Longman Nigeria PLC.

FRN (2010). Nigeria at 50: A Compedium. Abuja: 1ˢᵗ October Publishing

Graf, W.D. (1988). The Nigerian state: Political economy, state class and political system in the post-colonial era. Heinemann Educational Publishers.

Nnoli, O. (1980). *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria.* Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers

Ojo, J. (2017a). My stand on restructuring of Nigeria. *The Punch, Wednesday, June 21, Vol. 41(21,463), 20*

_____ (b). Why much adversity in Nigeria's diversity. *The Punch, Friday, June 30, Vol. 41(21,470), 21*

Odoshimokhe, M. (2017). Politics of restructuring. The Nation Newspaper, October, 5. Retrieved 20/717 from http://thenationonlineng.net/politics-of-restructuring

Okorocha, R. (2017). Okorocha kicks against restructuring of Nigeria. *Thisday, July 18*

Olasupo, M. & Olaofe, M. (2017). Islamic Perspective of Change in Nigerian Political Landscape: Policy Implication on Attitudinal Change Among Nigerians. *International Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, 2 (4)*

Omotola, J.S. (2006). *Democratisation and ethnic tensions in Nigeria: The Kogi State experience.* A published paper, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Osimen, G.U., Akinyemi, B. & Adenegan, T.W. (2013). Ethnicity and identity   crisis: Challenge to national integration in Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of   Humanities   and Social Sciences, 16(4), 79-86*

Osinbajo, Y. (2017). *The Punch. Wednesday, June 21, Vol. 41(21,463), 10*

Otite, O. (1990). *Ethnic pluralism and ethnicity in Nigeria.* Ibadan: Shaneson Ltd.

Ozoigbo, B .I. (2008). Federal balance in Nigeria: A paradigm for sustainable democracy. *A   New Journal of African Studies, 3(2), 68-84*

PAUL, S. O., Alih, M.I. & Eri, K. (2014). Nigerian unity and the 2015 general elections: An   overview. *International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies (IJPCS), 2(2), 87-98*

Smith, B. (1990). Federal-State Relations. In Obasanjo, O., *Not My Will*. Ibadan: University   Press Limited

Suberu, R.T. (2001). The national question, State-creation and the reform of Nigerian federalism. *Management of National Question in Nigeria, 126-148*

Sultan Abubakar, M. (2017). *TVC News Nigeria, June, 28*

Thisday Newspaper (2017), Tuesday July 18