

## **Ethnicism and State Creation in Nation Building: An Appraisal of Facts and Farce of Federalism in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Traditional sociological wisdom claims that ethnic pluralism is an ephemeral problem. It assumes that inexorable historical forces, such as urbanization, industrialization and secularization, are bound to erode communal identities and produce an overarching loyalty to the state. Such nationalism will transform ethnically divided societies into nation-states. The experience of Nigeria demonstrates, however, that the pursuit of nationalist policies has the effect of further dividing rather than uniting ethnically divided societies. This paper discusses this paradox. Is it that ethnicity and nation-building and nationalism are incompatible? What is the relationship between ethnicity and the intended and unintended processes of nation-building? Why is nationalism divisive in Nigeria? The major issue explored is how multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria have held together despite their inability to become nations. Although some analysts have noted this paradox, but there has not been any systematic attempt to probe how these societies are internally maintained by their constituent ethnic groups or how ethnic and state sentiments have been reconciled. This paper explains with the aid of evidence assembled from interviews, observations, and primary and secondary sources, how it is that Nigeria has managed, since the war, to cope with either secession or domination by any one ethnic group. The major theoretical contributions pertain to how compatible ethnicity is with Nationalism and Nation-building.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Nationalism, Nation-building, Domination, State.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria provides evidence that federalism can either exacerbate or mitigate ethnic conflict. Much depends on the number of component states in a federation, their boundaries and their ethnic composition. Particularly important is the distribution of the political units. Ethnicity can be incompatible with nationalism and nation-building especially if the federal arrangement is that of a few numbers of large ethnic states or regions. This was the case in Nigeria in the 1960s. Legitimation of the Nigerian state proved impossible to obtain. It experienced a thirty month-long war involving a separatist attempt. The reason for this war was not just the existence of ethnicity. It was largely the fact that the central state was controlled by the economically inferior Muslim Hausa/Fulani by virtue of their domination of the giant Northern Region. The resources of the state were used by this group for its own benefit to the detriment of the other groups. This was particularly resented by the other two dominant groups, the Yoruba and Igbo, who possessed superior economic power and controlled two of the three regions of the federation, but who were denied political power at the centre. The Igbo in the east sought to wrest power from the Hausa/Fulanis but were repressed. They turned to secession to form a new state, Biafra, which was given considerable international support. Biafra was defeated in the Nigerian War (1967-70). However, the result was not a revival of Hausa/Fulani domination.

This paper examines how Nigeria has managed, since the war, to prevent secession and, also to resist any attempts to impose domination by any one or more ethnic regions. One major attempt is structural. This is the effort to make the federation more pluralistic through the creation of smaller State governments. To do this, the military took a federal system that reinforced the tripartite ethnic divisions in the country and divided it first into 12, then 19, and 21, 30 and now 36 states. In each of the three former ethno-regional blocks, there are now several states with different needs and resources, each with a separate centre of development, each imposing a unique line of cleavage across the once common bond of ethno-regionalism<sup>1</sup>. The uncommon ethnicity of the various minority groups who control almost half of the states has also been given prominent expression, breaking the dominance of the majority groups. Logically, all of this should mean “inflexible shifting alliances, depending on issues, instead of the old, rigid, geographically defined political positions. In particular, it means the end of

overt regional power that was such a deep source of insecurity and tension in the First Republic.<sup>2</sup> In short, it should undermine ethnicity and fears of domination by a sectional elite.

### **Conceptual Approach**

The ideological framework to be used in this paper is the Marxist political economy approach. This is basically because state creation is an ideology and being an ideology, it serves the interest of different classes in different ways. Furthermore, the basic starting point in the Marxist framework is the understanding and interpretation of society and politics. Every state thus represents a special apparatus for coercing people and it is therefore an organ of class rule. That is for the ultimate refinement of injustice and oppression.

The framework aids for explaining and understanding politics and internal dynamics it focus attention on class struggle. The fundamental question is how the economy should be controlled and used. It perceives capitalism, imperialism and the proletarian struggle against the ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange as the main tenants of politics.

Furthermore, Marxist political economy approach is characterized by the method of dialectical materialism. This method has certain important features which makes it feasible as a scientific method of analysis. First, it regards material production as the bane of socio-political activities. Economic need is man`s primary activity, hence every society is saddled with the task of production. Every society at different stages of development has different mode of production corresponding to the objective material condition. Each mode of production develops its own productive forces and production relations in the sense that it puts the interest of the producers at cross road with the interest of the owners of the means of production. In effect, the two are in antagonistic relations with each other. Thus the dialectical method not only recognized the primacy of material production relations and more importantly the dynamics and contradiction inherent in different production system. These important features will be useful in the analysis of the reasons behind state creation in Nigeria.

First, in the causes of state creation in Nigeria, we shall not fail to dig out the socio-economic basis of the conflict. That is, how the socio-economic structure of one country generated or contributed to state creation. In other words, the fundamental relationship that exists between the economic structure of our society and the problem under study. The importance attached to classes in the Marxist political economy framework will enable us to tackle such questions as:

1. To what extent does dichotomy or sectionalism serve the respective interest of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria.
2. Which ethnic group benefit most from the politics of state creation?
3. Which action(s) of the privileged domineering ethnic group exacerbate the agitation for state creation?

Secondly, the dynamics of this method will help us to trace the development of ethnicity or sectionalism in Nigeria. Societies and all social processes are always in motion, their development determined by contradiction inherent in them. With this method, we shall try to attempt to explain various contradictions in the society that generate state creation. This method will also help us to understand not only how the problem of sectionalism started, but also its dynamics over time. Thirdly, the relatedness of elements of social life as emphasized by this method will help us in finding out the extent the economic process along with how other processes affect and in turn affected by ethnicity (state creation) and also the extent to which ethnicity can assume a dynamism of its own.

### **An Overview of State Creation in Nigeria**

The idea of creating more states was first proposed in the 1950s by members of minority ethnic groups as a safeguard against domination by the three major groups. The proposal was rejected by the colonial government. Their Nigerian successors were no more in favour of the idea than were their alien predecessors. What the regional governments dominated by their respective major ethnic groups were really against was the creation of states within their own regions. They supported and often instigated

minority disaffection in rival regions. In 1963 the Igbo-dominated NCNC and Hausa/Fulani-dominated NPC conspired to carve out a fourth region, the Mid-West Region, from the Western Region, the territorial base of the opposition AG. In 1967 the four regions were reconstituted into twelve states. The Nigerian leader, Yakubu Gowon, announced the new federal structure a few hours before the Eastern Region announced its secession from Nigeria. The plan was to de-stabilize the Eastern Region and to provide the minorities within the region with good reason to dissociate themselves from the secessionists. Like in the 1963 exercise, ethnic differences had been exploited to create more states. Gowon, however, claimed that the exercise was guided by the need to achieve unity and stability in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> This claim was given further credence by the Murtala Mohammed regime which ousted Gowon in 1975. The Irekefe Commission appointed by Mohammed to investigate the issue of creating more states hailed state creation as a guarantee for political stability in Nigeria and recommended the creation of more states in the federation up to 19 states.<sup>4</sup> General Mohammed, while announcing the new 19 states in 1976, observed that the exercise was to bring government nearer to the people and ensure even development throughout the country.<sup>5</sup> The creation of more states therefore became justified on three related grounds: the need for unity, the need for peace and stability, and the need for even development and popular participation in government. Thus, what was initially rejected by politicians came to be popularised by military nation-builders as the foundation for a new Nigeria. The 1979 transfer of power from the military to politicians provoked an unprecedented number of demands for new states from nearly every existing state. It became evident that the agitations for more states were no longer a minority affair. As many as fifty-four requests from both ethnic minority and majority groups had been received by the national assembly in 1983. The avalanche of requests led to the establishment of two committees in May 1983 to investigate the issue. Before the politicians could create any more states, the military deposed them.

In 1986 the Babangida regime set up the Political Bureau to make recommendations to it on the political future of the country. In its report the bureau recommended that six more states be created in the interest of national stability. It made a special case for the creation of "Wawa State" from Anambra State, pointing out that Igbo land deserved another state in the interest of justice.<sup>6</sup> The creation of at least one state in Igbo land should serve to reassure the Igbos that they have been reintegrated into the Nigerian political scene and thereby end the profound sense of frustration which led to strident calls for confederal arrangement by the Igbos. Two of the six recommended states were created in 1987, bringing the total number of states to 21. In announcing the new states, President Babangida stated that the decision had been taken within the context of national interest, and the increasing cost of running state governments. He warned that his administration would not tolerate any more agitations for states. Yet, in 1991 he was persuaded by persistent agitations for states to create nine new ones, bringing the total to 30 states. The quest for more State continued and Gen. Abacha in response to such agitation created six more State, bring states to a total number of thirty-six. It is very clear that the reason for state creation were mainly the domination of the federal government by a sectional group and domination by ethnic majority groups. Demands for the creation of more states between 1954 and 1967 were usually justified on the basis that it would ensure the unity of the country, particularly in relation to complaints about the practice of regionalism and the huge size of the old Northern Region vis-a-vis the rest of the country. One report concluded that 'until these two threats are removed, they labour in vain who labour for Nigerian unity and solidarity' Nigerian.<sup>7</sup> The huge size of the Northern Region has in theory ceased to be a problem since the creation of 12 states in 1967. However, the related problem of Hausa/Fulani domination of political power is still seen as a major problem.

### **Regionalism and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria**

Regionalism principles applied when enormous powers were exercised by the regional governments within the federation. The power and influence of the central government was weak in relation to the regions. The regional governments were therefore able to challenge its authority. This effectively ensured the domination of the regions by the large ethnic groups. To maintain and consolidate control of the regional governments, the three dominant ethnic groups and their respective political parties subjected their ethnic communities to political oppression, economic discrimination and cultural domination. Between 1947 and 1955 there emerged a number of minority parties that championed the

creation of states for these communities. The proponents of the new states expected that their creation would end such domination and allow their areas to achieve greater opportunities for cultural, political and economic development and a greater share of federal government resources.

It might be asked why there was intense competition for the central government since its authority was weak vis-a-vis the regional governments? Why did control of the centre mean so much to the groups? The answer is crucial to an understanding of nationalism for it shows that nationalism is a universal feature of human societies not just a manifestation of industrial rationalism. For the Nigerian political elites, who had successfully utilized the ideology of nationalism to oust colonial rule while creating national communities within colonial Nigeria, what remained to be established was who presided over the state taken from the British. In other words, the struggle for independence amounted to a struggle for succession to colonial power and privilege, that is the right to replace one elite with another.<sup>8</sup> National politics was therefore a battle for supremacy. The game was not to broaden opportunities for exercising power but rather to gain political domination. Political nationalism, which is essentially competition for power by exclusion, is a consistent and recurrent feature of human grouping. Traditionally, such nationalism among the constituent Nigerian groups largely took the form of war, with its prize as honour and wealth in slaves or land for hunting, animal husbandry or agriculture. Now, that competition continues within the boundaries of a state which itself claims a legitimate monopoly of the use of physical force. Such competition therefore seldom takes the form of war but rather centres upon competition for state power, the distributive source of honour and wealth. With disunity in Nigeria perceived as the result of disparities in the relative size and power of the regions and ethnic groups, it remains to ask to what extent the paper creation of a more plural federation has mitigated such disparities. The paper examines its effect on the dominant position of the majorities and that of the Northern Region with its related problem of Hausa/Fulani monopoly on power.

**Table 1: States by Region**

Region	States 1967	1976	1987	1991	1996
Northern	Benue Plateau	Benue	Benue	Benue	Benue
		Plateau	Plateau	*Kogi Plateau *Jigawa	Kogi Plateau Jigawa Zamfara Kebbi
	Kano	Kano	Kano	Kano	Kano
		Kwara	Kwara	Kwara	Kwara
	North Central	Kaduna	Kaduna	Kaduna	Kaduna
			Katsina	Katsina	Katsina
	North Eastern	Borno	Borno	Borno	Borno
			*Yobe	*Yobe	*Yobe
		Bauchi	Bauchi	Bauchi	Bauchi
		Gongola	Gongola	Gongola	Gongola *Taraba
		Adamawa	Adamawa	Adamawa	
		Taraba	Taraba	Taraba	
	North Western	Sokoto	Sokoto	Sokoto	Sokoto
		*Kebbi	*Kebbi	*Kebbi	*Kebbi
Western		Niger	Niger	Nigeri	Nassarawa
	Mid-western	Bendel	Bendel	Edo	Edo
		*Delta	*Delta	*Delta	Delta
		Bayelsa	Bayelsa	Bayelsa	Bayelsa
	Western	Oyo	Oyo	Oyo	Oyo
		*Osun	*Osun	*Osun	*Osun
		Ondo	Ondo	Ondo	Ondo
		Ogun	Ogun	Ogun	Ogun
	Lagos	Lagos	Lagos	Lagos	Lagos
					Ekiti

Eastern	East Central	Anambra	Anambra	Anambra	Anambra
				*Enugu	Enugu
		Imo	Imo	Imo	Imo
				*Abia	Abia
					Ebonyi
	Rivers	Rivers	Rivers	Rivers	Rivers
	Southeastern	Cross River	Cross River	Cross River	Cross Rivers
		Akwa Ibom	Akwa Ibom		Akwa Ibom

### State Creation and Northern Domination

The area of the former Northern Region formed six of the 12 states created in 1967. It contained 10 of the 19 states created in 1976, and 11 of the 21 states created in 1987. These states have different needs and resources as well as separate centres of development. This should impose new lines of cleavage across the once common bond of regionalism. Such a condition should be favourable for undermining ethno-regional bonds. Murtala Mohammed in his inaugural address to the Constitutional Drafting Committee stated that “the fear of the predominance of one Region’ had been largely removed by the creation of more states.”<sup>9</sup> The empirical record controverts this assumption. Nigerians still complain bitterly about northern domination. Why?

Structurally, it makes sense to talk about northern domination. The share of the north in the ‘national cake’ is still greater than that of the south because of the principle of equality of states (adopted together with the creation of states) for the share out of national resources. As Table 2 shows, on the basis of equality of states, the Northern Region would have been entitled to 33.3 percent on independence and 25 percent in 1963 when the Mid-West region was created. In 1967 when it contained six states, it was entitled to 50 percent. In 1976, when it contained 10 of the 19 states created it gained 52.6 percent. With 11 of the 21 states, it still retained its advantage with 52.4 percent. The Northern states share of 19 and FCT out 36 states created as at 1996 gave it a share of 53.5 percent.

**Table 2: % of Total Share of National Resources on the Basis of Equality of States**

<b>Region</b>	<b>1954 – 1963</b>	<b>1963 – 1967</b>
Northern	33.3	25%
Western	33.3	25%
Eastern	33.3	25%
Mid-Western	33.3	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Other criteria used in the share-out of federated resources, in addition to equality, include population needs, the number of local government areas, and school enrolment. However, of all the distributive principles, two-equality and population have been elevated to the virtual exclusion of the others. What the federal government invariably does is to allocate 50 percent equally and 50 percent according to relative population among states.<sup>10</sup>

In the distribution of parliamentary seats, the same pattern is maintained. In the First Republic, the north had the same number of senators as the other regions. However, in the federal parliament it had 174 out of the 312 seats, that is, 55.8 percent. In 1963, when the Mid-West Region was created, its representation dropped slightly to 167 out of the 312 seats. During the Second Republic it had 50 out of the 95 senators in the Senate on the basis of 5 senators per State. Seats in the Federal House of Assembly were allocated according to population size. Consequently, the share out of assembly seats reflected the number of local government areas in the country. The northern states together had 240 seats out of a total of 445 making 53.9 percent. In the Third Republic scheduled for 1993, the northern states with about 53 percent majority (11 of 21 states and 16 of the 30 created in 1991), currently it is 20 of 37 and would still be entitled to more seats in the two national assemblies. The numerical power of the north in the parliament was as a result of its population. Today, nobody knows exactly what the population of Nigeria is or how it is distributed.

With development projects the north still predominates. On the basis of equality of states, the northern states together would still be entitled to a greater share than all the southern states put together. Not much has changed. In the First Republic there were complaints that most developments in the 1962-68 development plan were concentrated in the Northern Region.<sup>11</sup>

A recent development project that has caused much ethnic disaffection is the relocation of the capital from Lagos to Abuja. The site for the new federal capital about 400 square miles right in the middle of the country was chosen by government for its national symbolism. Its central position was expected to reassure the various groups of its neutral ethnic status. But it is still seen by some groups, particularly the Yoruba, as a symbol of northern domination due to its location in the area of the old northern region. During the 1979 elections it was made a crucial political issue with the Awolowo-led UPN leading the anti-Abuja campaign. It was in order to avoid this sort of interpretation that the government chose a majority of Yorubas to serve on the relocation committee.<sup>12</sup>

Politically, it makes sense to talk about the north in the context of contemporary Nigeria. Northern elites, in particular, the Hausa/Fulani, have deliberately ensured that the idea of 'One North, One people, irrespective of religion, rank or tribe', promoted by the defunct NPC is not forgotten despite the creation of states. The group interests of this elite, especially Islam and the maintenance of political power, has compelled them to seek to preserve the status quo.<sup>13</sup> Between 1966 and 1979 they consolidated their power under the banner of 'northern interests' in contradistinction to 'Islamic interests' which they championed in the First Republic.

Many institutions have helped to guard, defend and consolidate northern interests from encroachment. Prominent among them are the New Nigeria Newspapers and the Federal Radio Corporation Kaduna, originally established by the Northern Region to champion its interest. Under the 12-state structure the idea of one north was advanced through the Interim Common Service Agency for the Northern States. Murtala Mohammed abolished the agency and nationalized the New Nigerian (jointly owned by the northern states) in an attempt to create a more conducive basis for national integration. Despite its nationalization, the New Nigerian still champions northern interests albeit within the wider context of national unity. Under Shagari, in 1982, Kaduna Polytechnic, jointly owned by the northern states, introduced new fees discriminating against southerners.<sup>14</sup> Under the corrective military regime of Muhammadu Buhari representatives of northern states met regularly to discuss matters of northern interest. These meetings were subsequently stopped by the government after complaints that they were inimical to national unity. The idea of the north as one solidary unit is still maintained through newspaper and magazine campaigns. The Hotline magazine was established in 1985 to articulate and promote northern view points on national issues. One of its editorials defended its ethno-regional stance thus:

*We see no need to dismantle our solidarity or weaken our power base. Effective compromise or collaboration is based on positions of strength. And we must be strong to participate in meeting the challenge of a viable one Nigeria. .... We therefore disclaim the attempt... to dismantle Northern solidarities and create the impression of disunity to facilitate dubious Southern incursions into Northern political strong holds.<sup>15</sup>*

The continued use of former geo-regional formations, and the reference to the north as a corporate group with common interests that had to be championed, attest to the inability of many Nigerians to transcend parochial loyalties. Even in the present fourth Republic, the Miyatte Allah and Arewa groups are unrepentant in the pursuit of sectional ambitions.

It is important to point out that northern solidarity is only an euphemism for Islamic solidarity. Non-Muslims in the region have been politically insignificant, being used by the Muslim ruling group as mere pawns. There has never been a solidary in north. The minorities within the north have always opposed the Hausa /Fulani rulers as evidenced by the Tiv rebellions between 1960 and 64. Although the term south is used to refer to the area south of the old Northern Region, it is not meant to convey a

solidary region. It is only a short hand term for the old Western and Eastern Regions. Because of the rivalry between the elites of the two large ethnic groups that respectively occupy these two regions - Yoruba and Igbo - the south has never been united. This has facilitated the situation in which the Hausa/Fulani has been able to monopolize power.

#### **Hausa/Fulani Domination of National Politics**

The Hausa/Fulani have continued to monopolize power in Nigeria despite the creation of more states. Of the eight executive heads of state that Nigeria has had since independence, six of them have come from the north and two from the south. Of the six from the north, four are Hausa/Fulani, one is a Muslim from Minna (NigerState). The sixth, Gowon, an Angas man and a Christian, was chosen by the Hausa/Fulani coup plotters in 1966 to succeed the Igbo military leader whom they assassinated. The only Yoruba, Obasanjo; is believed to have held power due ‘to the magnanimity of the majority of northern military officer corps’.<sup>16</sup> In present Fourth Republic two more southerners have been added to the list. They are Goodluck Jonathan and Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu. The later was been adopted because of his Islamic inclination.

**Table 4: Ethnic Origins of Nigeria’s Heads of State**

<b>President</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Yrs. in Office</b>
Balewa	Fulani	North	6 years
Aguiyi-Ironsi	Igbo	East	6 months
Gowon	Angas	North	9 years
Murtala	Fulani	North	13 months
Obasanjo	Yoruba	West	4 years
Shagari	Fulani	North	4 years
Buhari	Fulani	North	19 months
Babangida	Minna (Muslim)	North	7 years
Abacha	Kano (Muslim)	North	8 years
Abdulsalami	Niger (Muslim)	North	1 year
Obasanjo	Yoruba	West	8 years
Yar’Adua	Katsina (Muslim)	North	2 years
Goodluck	Bayelsa	South	6 years
Tinubu	Osun.(Muslim)	West	Present

The Hausa/Fulani control of power in the First Republic derived from the group’s control of the NPC, the governing party in the Northern Region. Together with the Hausa/Fulani were several other groups such as the Kanuri, Tiv, Idoma, Angas, Jukun, Nupe and Igala that occupied the region. Thus, Hausa/Fulani control of the centre could not have been without the support of some of these groups despite its majority status in the region. However, the electoral system and the federal structure in the First Republic facilitated the repression and coercion of minority groups within the region. In contrast, the new federal structure facilitates the expression of northern heterogeneity more accurately than the previous regional structure had permitted. The minority groups in the north have separate states of their own now. As Table 6 shows, the Hausa/Fulani dominate in four of the 19 states: Sokoto, Kano, Bauchi and Katsina. They control traditional power in the new Kaduna State although they are numerically in the minority. In the new 30-state structure, Kebbi State carved out of Sokoto State gives them control of five states. The degree to which the Hausa/Fulani can control Nigeria through a democratically elected government still depends on cooperation from other areas. In the Second Republic their attempt to maintain power by rallying the old north failed. Northern minority states exercised their new influence by voting against the Hausa/Fulani-dominated NPN. The group however captured power at the centre with others across Nigeria, particularly the eastern minority states, as junior partners. Thus, the creation of states has not solved the problem of Hausa/Fulani domination of the central government. It has, however, reduced the overall power of the Hausa/Fulani, so that it is no longer plausible for them to think of dominating the whole country.<sup>17</sup>

The new system acted as a kind of electoral reform. It replaced the former winner-take-all formula, which gave unlimited power to the largest regional party and the largest ethnic group supporting the party, with a kind of proportional representation (Horowitz, 1985). Thus, although the ruling party had a core support in the Hausa/Fulani areas in the Second Republic, it could not use the resources of the federal state to the exclusive benefit of those areas as it did in the First Republic. The support it enjoyed outside the Hausa/Fulani areas would have eroded. That extra-regional support was more important than it was for the predecessor NPC in the First Republic. Although there are still threats from the Muslim north to dominate Nigeria as a whole, this could be contained by the fear that if that leads to secession on the part of other regions the north would be left in a rather poor state. Furthermore, the Hausa/Fulani threat to dominate Nigeria is mitigated by the liberation of the numerous ethnic minority groups in the middle belt of the old Northern Region from their former Hausa/Fulani rulers. These ethnic groups whose identities were subsumed under the dominant Muslim Hausa/Fulani identity have now adopted an overarching Christian identity in their revolt against their former rulers. This competition between previous rulers and subjects is redrawing cultural boundaries in Nigeria. The final outcome of the contest no doubt has far reaching implications for the future of Nigeria as a nation.

The dominant role and place of the Hausa/Fulani in Nigerian politics is a crucial issue for Nigerian nationalism. It is seen as the fundamental cause of instability in the country. The Yoruba-based newspaper, *Nigerian Tribune*, observed that it 'has resulted in unjust government policies about the share of the nation's resources, unequal opportunity, injustices and inequities'. Headships of certain key ministries are reserved for members of the group and polls are rigged to ensure that the group maintains its monopoly on power.<sup>18</sup> In the Second Republic, many company owners in the south felt that unless they brought in northerners to their Boards, they would have insurmountable difficulties in obtaining needed import licenses. Some southerners, particularly Igbos, have adopted Hausa names or Islam in order to 'get on'. 'In any ministry, or anywhere if you call yourself "Alhaji" you're accepted, you're welcome, the doors open'.<sup>19</sup> Such perceptions have provoked calls for a rotation of power 'to re-assure Nigerians that they belong to Nigeria'.<sup>20</sup> The clamour for confederation by some groups should not be construed as a lack of love for Nigeria. Hausa came to be widely spoken even in the non-Hausa areas of the northern region. It thus makes sense to refer to them as Hausa-Fulani but such reference does not imply a merger of both groups. They are each distinguishable. Those who control power are the Fulani.

### **State Creation and Minorities Politics**

The creation of states has mitigated minority fear of domination by the three major ethnic groups. It has given prominence to the uncommon ethnicity of the minority groups and granted their elites access to power. This has added to the legitimacy of the federal centre. The break-up of Nigeria would not be in the interests of the many minorities who have been able to negotiate political alliances to assert and pursue their interests. During the war, it was the minorities who contributed most to the win-the-war efforts.

The new federal structure has not, however, affected the possibility of the three groups being influential in the affairs of the country. Given the criteria for the sharing of federation resources, viz. equality and population, they will still predominate. The three major ethnic groups form the majority in more than half of the total number of states. The total population of the three groups - Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo - by the 1963 census was 36,904,008, which is 66 percent of the total for the country.

The proliferation of states has, however, reduced the overall power of the majority groups. It is no longer plausible for them to think they can challenge the power of central government. In this fundamental sense the new federal structure has been beneficial to Nigerian unity. It has restored the authority and influence of the state which was weakened by the former formula in which the federal units controlled by the three major groups were more powerful than the centre. This means that secession is an unlikely option for ethnic pluralism in Nigeria. No group is now in a position to relegate the federal government to the background. Because the states are now dependent on the central government for their maintenance, they are more likely to combine in order to put more pressure on the federal government to allocate funds to them rather than to challenge its authority. Thus, the 'Nigerian state has come to stay' because of the new federal formula. Its authority and legitimacy are no longer



in question. This is auspicious for nationalism. The current political trends in the fourth Republic manifest the political emancipation of the minority groups. The present federal structure that is shaped by multiplicity of states created room for flexible alliance between majority and minority ethnic groups to come together in national politics. This idea produced President Goodluck Jonathan.

Rivalry between the three major groups is still intense despite the creation of states. This rivalry is, however, mitigated by two factors. One, some of the inter-ethnic conflict between the groups has been dispersed into more parochial forums by their division into smaller political units. The other factor is that the minorities hold the balance of power between the majority groups. The space created by majority rivalry has allowed the minorities to prosper. They have been able to exploit this space to negotiate political alliances to assert their economic and political interests. Their support is essential for any of the major groups to gain power at the centre. They exploited this factor to bargain for a share in the country's top political offices during the Second and present fourth Republics. For instance, they used the fact that they were the deciding factor in the NPN's success in the 1979 elections to get the presidency of the senate. In return for their continued support, the NPN minority caucus of politicians wanted the development of minority areas, more Federal patronage for minority contractors, more distributorships, more investments in the minority areas and more commission agents. In short, they wanted economic power to rival, or even better, that of the majorities. Despite their enhanced position, the minorities still accuse the majorities of domination.<sup>21</sup> Minority politics is thus not dissimilar to majority politics.

### **Emerging Agitations from State Creation**

The issue of state creation is no longer a palliative for ethnic minority fear of domination. But, fear of domination remains the major justification for agitations for new states. For instance, the demand for an Anioma State from Bendel State in 1987 was motivated by the 'desire to counter oppression, denigration, denial of opportunities to develop, peripheralization and burgeoning monarchism'. Burgeoning monarchism means political and cultural domination by the Bini (Edo) majority in the state. The movement for the creation of Delta State from Bendel State was marred by accusations of Urhobo domination by the Itsekiri group. A group speaking for the Itsekiris called for talks to agree on 'an accord on non-domination anchored upon the permanent protection of the permanent interest of all the minorities in Delta State in general and the Itsekiris in particular viz: the inviolability of the person and title of the Olu of Warri'<sup>22</sup>

The politics of state creation has added a new dimension to the categories of domination. In each state created there is now a new majority and minority groups which continue to agitate for the creation of even more states. Sometimes the concern is not a majority/minority one but ethnic incompatibility or environmental differences. In the Rivers State, which is itself a minority state, the division is between fresh water and salt water areas. In Anambra, an all-Igbo state, it is north/south dichotomy. In Bendel State, despite the fact that the colonial provinces have been dismantled a long time ago, there is a dichotomy based on the former colonial Benin and Delta provinces. In the Second Republic accusations of ethnic domination and incompatibility were frequently used by the more homogeneous Igbo and Yoruba groups in their demands for more states. For instance, proponents of Ijebu State complained of being isolated and rejected by the other Yorubas. Proponents of Aba and Onitsha States (both Igbo groups) claimed that they had no cultural affinity binding them. The new federal framework has thus provided arenas in which intra-ethnic conflict can occur. This is good for conflict reduction at the all-Nigeria level. However, in view of the recurring demands for more states, a cynic might well wonder how much state creation is a project for national unity, a general project of the ruling elite, or a series of particularistic, special interest ploys for access to political power and its benefits.

### **Conclusion**

As a strategy for unity, state creation has been based on the exploitation rather than amelioration of ethnic differences. The 1967 exercise was primarily intended to undermine the impending secession of the Eastern Region. Once the need for creating states in the east was established, states had to be created elsewhere. In spite of this limitation, the 1967 exercise effectively tackled the problem of the huge size

of the Northern Region. It had the added advantage of promoting political stability as it granted both the north and south equal number of states. But, the 1976 exercise recreated the old imbalance. Igbo apologists condemned it as a conspiracy between the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba against the Igbo.<sup>23</sup>The 1987 exercise created two new states, one in the north and the other in the east. It was the Hausa Fulani and the northern and eastern minorities that gained, Igbo apologists did not like it because it effectively made the Igbo a minority group in a Region where they were once dominant.<sup>22</sup>The Igbo campaign for more states led to the creation of nine new states in 1991. This exercise favoured the Igbo who gained two new states. In addition, the capital of Delta State, comprising the Igbo on the west bank of the Niger, the Urhobo, the Itsekiri and the Ijaw, was sited in an Igbo town.

The recurring demands for states are understandable. Under the present arrangement for the allocation to individual states of about 90 percent of their revenue from federal resources, ownership of a state is seen as the greatest amenity an ethnic group can achieve. Moreover, since state creation offered the development of state capitals outside the traditional centres of development, the idea is reinforced that the creation of states leads to the development of growth centres. The election of the president is also a major consideration by both majority and minority groups in making demands for more states. The more states an ethnic group has the more likely it is to produce the president and thereby control the federal government. The constitution stipulates that the president elect must have at least one quarter of the votes cast in two-thirds of the states. These ethnocentric justifications for states can only mean that ethnicity is still a vigorous concept.

However, the fact that the groups are demanding more states within Nigeria can be taken to demonstrate a desire for a Nigerian nation-state. What is therefore seen by the ethnic groups to be at stake is equal access to the 'national cake'. Ethnicity, as identity and as pragmatic pursuit of economic and political advantage, is therefore, in the context of state creation, the route to the political centre. In that way ethnicity largely contributes, albeit in an unintended manner, to the legitimacy of the federal political arena.

The proliferation of states has then, not undermined ethnicity. But it has provided Nigeria with a politics of conciliation. Although images of the old regional structure still remain firmly rooted in the minds of many Nigerians and accusation of majority domination are still rife, some of the ethnic conflict has been dispersed into more parochial forms. New arenas for intra-ethnic conflict to occur have been created by the division of the large ethnic states and the increase in the number of the constituent units of the federation. There are now incentives for political cooperation which were not there in the First Republic. Domination by one ethnic group is no longer plausible. Groups not well represented at the federal level have now more opportunities to participate in government through their state or local governments. This should enable disparities between the groups to reduce so that dissatisfaction can decline, thereby promoting nationalism. The more groups participate in the political centre, and it overrides their regional and ethnic interest, the stronger will be the perception of Nigeria as one indivisible entity commanding loyalty of her citizens. The Nigerian experience thus provides evidence that political engineering can alter ethnic balances and alignments so that ethnicity, nationalism and nation-building are made more compatible.

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