

## RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA: A DISCOURSE ON THE MINORITIES AND THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE

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### *Abstract*

*This paper examines the call for restructuring which has over the years been a recurring demand on Nigeria's political system. The proponents of restructuring have anchored it on issues, including resource control, state creation, secession, reversal to the regionalism structure under the 1963 constitution, constitutional amendments, and drafting of a new constitution, among others. Amidst this cacophony of voices, this paper focuses on the implications of the restructuring debate on minority groups in Nigeria in terms of justice, empowerment and development. Relying on the radical political economy framework, this paper situates the demand for restructuring in the character of the present-day Nigeria which is a product of colonial creation where the members of the dominant class who control the state and its apparatus government are focused on preserving the domination and exploitation of the country's human and material resources. In this context, restructuring is consid-*

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*ered as a project of this dominant class, and it is incapable of delivering justice and development to the minorities in a heterogenous society like Nigeria. The paper advances the need for a radical change and the birth of a Socialist Federal Republic of Nigeria as the panacea for addressing the demands of restructuring in the country.*

**Keywords: Nigeria, Federalism, Restructuring, Minorities, Neo-colonial state.**

## INTRODUCTION

The cacophonous political cymbal of restructuring that took root in Nigeria first following the massive rigging of the 1983 general elections by the northern dominated political party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), and second, on the heels of the annulment of the June 12 presidential election, especially under the General Sanni Abacha military junta, has now attained a national crescendo under the General Muhammadu Buhari presidency. This is in contrast to another agitation which was grounded about the same time on fiscal federalism by the Niger Delta people. It was for this agitation known as the resource control struggle that the renowned playwright and environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, was judicially murdered by the Nigerian state under General Sanni Abacha.

While there is a connection between the restructuring and resource control agitations, especially given that resource control is often linked and conflated with fiscal federalism (an aspect of the agitations for restructuring), the latter is broader and rooted in a different power dynamics, particularly in terms of the dominant social forces promoting them and their places in the national power equation. First, the social actors championing these two tendencies are not the same. Second, while restructuring is a battle cry of the temporarily 'disadvantaged' and 'shortchanged' majority political elites in the Nigerian primitive accumulative federal arrangement, resource control was by minority elites who capitalized on the painful and suffocating exploitation and oppression of resource-owning minorities of the Niger Delta region to demand participation (sharing) in the federal accumulative enterprise in the country. This clarification is key for proper

analysis and understanding of the ongoing restructuring problematic and its implications for the minorities.

The question to pose in this connection is why was restructuring not an issue under the General Olusegun Obasanjo, Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua and Dr Goodluck Jonathan's presidency? A perceptive answer to this query will reveal that restructuring rather than being oriented towards minority freedom, justice, empowerment and development is a counterfactual agenda of perpetuating minority domination by political elites of the majority groups. How and why is this so? Olorode (2021) called attention to the importance of 'facts and memory' in the resolution of the Nigerian crisis. In this regard, it could be recalled that though the Obasanjo presidency was initially not supported by the Yoruba political elites, it was unquestionably a project of the northern political elites. During the second term of Obasanjo, the Yoruba elites came on board while for the eight years the Igbo political elites enjoyed the number-three position. The Obasanjo administration could be described as years of political breeze and unhindered accumulation for the major ethnic groups. The minorities despite the usual tokenism were effectively locked out of power.

Beyond these facts and memory, we contend that the crux of understanding the Nigerian trajectory as a basis for resolving its contemporary problematic should be from an ideological perspective and interpretation of both historical memories and facts. This has been precluded in the debates on restructuring limited to the orthodox framework of federalism, regionalism, and the economic order of the state taken as given and immutable. Flowing from the above, the paper posits that the restructuring discourse is deliberately designed as a coup against an alternative liberating and empowering paradigm beyond the decadent capitalist order that breathes life and gives strength to the problems of the minorities in Nigeria. In other words, the core of the minorities' problem which is the nature and character of the Nigerian state and its ideological anchor of prebendal accumulation is being deliberately afforded. This problem flows from the use of state power as a ladder for economic power by those who control the machinery of the predatory Nigerian state. Second, the paper further argues that restructuring seeks to preserve the state and the prevailing system of domination. Consequently, the paper contends that the restric-

turing enterprise as presently constructed in Nigeria is superficial, enslaving and disempowering for the minorities in Nigeria, as it is a dangerous circumlocution in the exploitative cortex of the Nigerian decadent and primitive capitalist order.

Gladney (1998, p. 1, cited in Solway, 2004, p. 130) notes that ‘majorities are made, not born . . . numerically, ethnically, politically, and culturally, societies make and unmake their majorities and minorities under specific, political and social circumstances’. This underscores the position that the dichotomy between majority and minorities is a creation of human beings. Minorities are a broad category of oppressed, exploited, excluded and disadvantaged peoples ranging from political, economic, religious, ethnic, cultural, gender, disabled and youth minorities. With reference to Nigeria, minorities as a political taxonomy have their origin linked with the colonial imperialist organization of the Nigerian state and the exploitation of the Nigerian people. Prior to the creation of the colonial state in Nigeria, the different people that were forcefully brought together as Nigerians, irrespective of their demography, landmass, political organization, economic wealth and religions were minorities to nobody as they existed independently and autonomously of other political entities with which they related in different forms.

Failure to adequately appreciate movement and momentum as critical elements of history (Chiemeké, 2016) as regards the minorities’ issue in Nigeria will provide a defective understanding of the subject matter. This is germane, given that the restructuring discourse falls squarely within the rubric of what Nnoli (2010, p. 59) perceptively tags the ‘tyranny of petty bourgeoisie discourse’. This reactionary and disempowering discourse as Nnoli (2010, p. 59) further argues, ‘. . . has grown in strength to such an extent that it has sucked all political discussions, reactionary and progressive, into its vortex’, almost attaining the status of a ‘national theology’ (Nnoli, 2010, p. 59).

The point of departure for this paper is that restructuring is a class project and is underpinned by class interest. Hence, the restructuring discourse is ideologically loaded and provides ideological rationalization for covert class positions and power. Political discourses, like the restructuring dis-

course, are never value-free, neither are they ideologically neutral. In identifying a plausible restructuring model, the focus must be on it serving the interests of the minorities and the Nigerian masses. It is in this context that the paper repudiates the ongoing restructuring conundrum whose propositions include a return to the 1963 Republican Constitution as well as the creation of more states, amendment of the constitution, adoption of a new constitution and special Commissions on the Niger Delta. These strategies that were applied before, rather than serve as a panacea for minorities' empowerment, were mechanisms for opportunistic incorporation of minorities' elites into the parasitic club of the Nigerian exploiting system. This paper argues that the restructuring orchestra has no new lyrics that envision a new socioeconomic order to empower all Nigerians and make Nigeria serve the interest of Nigerians as against imperialism and its domestic beneficiaries. To that extent, it is posited that restructuring is a grand illusion and delusion designed to perpetuate the domination and exploitation of the minorities in Nigeria, as well as consolidate their impotence. The rest of the paper deals with minorities' conundrum in Nigeria, the restructuring problematic, what is to be done and the conclusion.

### **The Minorities' Conundrum in Nigeria**

There is a sense in which the minority is not divine but a political creation. Neither is it fixed. It could be transformed by political power, a different political circumstance and configuration from the one that creates it in the first instance. For instance, as Falola (2004) argues, the Yoruba nation was a political creation of the nineteenth century. Hitherto, there were several political kingdoms or empires among the Yoruba. In Falola's (2004, p. 151) words, 'Yorubaland was never a single socio-political unit'. As an idea and consciousness, Falola (2004) opines that Yoruba was manufactured like other ethnic groups, including Igbo and Hausa-Fulani.

It has been argued that the contemporary major ethnic groups in Nigeria, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, were nothing but political creations in the context of the power structure of colonialism and the struggle for decolonization wherein they positioned themselves to inherit the colonial state power at independence (Nnoli, 1978; Ake, 1993). Though the power and control over the Nigerian economy remained with the departing Brit-

ish colonial power, these major ethnic groups inherited Nigeria at independence as a neocolonial package which included the dominated ethnic minorities. As Nnoli (2010, p. 62) opines, 'Colonial occupation in Nigeria was characterized by domination, oppression, repression, exploitation, injustice and illegitimacy. The most significant of these features was domination. It had political, economic and cultural dimensions. Of these, the economic aspect was the most important'.

Two important historically correct observations in relation to colonialism and the ethnic configuration of Nigeria often ignored which Olorode (2021) advances is that 'No ethnic group or nationality, as they are conceived today, was conquered by the colonialists as such; the European conquests were achieved piecemeal and city state-by-city state occasioning various degrees of collaboration between African city-states and the marauding European conquerors!' While it is correct that there existed pre-colonial sociocultural and economic links as well as conflicts between the people who constituted Nigeria, these different social formations were not and never related as minorities. In this respect, Oyovbaire (1983) posits that 'colonial rule was hardly more than a scaffolding, a superstructure over numerous pre-colonial social orders having varying degrees of independence from, interdependence upon, each other. ... All colonial rule did was to amalgamate and divide for its own purpose of domination and exploitation'.

Arguing the same position Akinyemi (2007, p. 38) posits that 'in the case of Nigeria, these major structures are the nationalities which were all independent before the advent of colonialism in the 1800s. They are not by any stretch of the imagination a motley collection of individuals without structure, without government, without authority and without any formal system. These nationalities were negotiated with, warred against and finally were subject of treaties with Britain'. Akinyemi (2007, p. 39) further emphasizes that 'the important thing, however, was that they were not in a subjugative relationship among themselves'.

Being a political creation of the state process in Nigeria, minorities have been severally created and recreated in Nigeria as a consequence of contestations of social forces as well as the pleasure of the dominant political

coalitions in the Nigerian state. For Olorode (2021), ‘these identities are inventions of the ruling classes any way; they are constructed and deconstructed as political exigencies require or as group and individual aspirations of alleged leaders command.’

It need to be said that the whole concept of minorities that impregnates the restructuring agitation is myopic and exclusionist. Reducing minority’s questions to political minorities is fundamentally flawed. One minority is as problematic and requires liberation and empowerment like another. Often, in the minorities’ discourses, political minorities have been overemphasized to the exclusion of others minorities that equally deserves attention. This underscores the fact that much of the hullabaloo on minorities in Nigeria has nothing to do with the issue of social justice. This calls for a proper conceptualization of the minorities.

While demographic inferiority in a political community is an attribute of minorities as Barten (2015) argues, it is the non-dominant position of minorities, that is, minorities’ powerlessness that should be the focus. There are political communities no matter how exceptional these may be where minorities dominate and are powerful. Osaghae (1991) accords secondary importance to population in understanding the minorities. Rather, Osaghae (1991, p. 238) argues that it is not ‘...the objective existence of a major or minor groups, but of the dynamic interactions which follow the objective differentiation’. Thus, minorities must be historically and empirically constructed. Historicizing the minority issue in Nigeria, Osaghae (1991) argues that colonial creation of regions and regionalism provided the background for the minority problems in Nigeria.

Suffice to say that the question of minorities cannot be understood outside the question of power and resources. In other words, the majorities-cum-minorities question is one of political economy. That is, who gets who, when and how in the resources that are available in the political community? Hence, the subservient position of political minorities is the issue in the prevailing political economy dynamic evident in marginalization in the areas of regional development, access to power or privilege, social, economic and political spheres (Stavenhagen, 1983, p. 122). Osaghae (1991, p. 239) similarly asserts thus:

The regions not only contained groups of unequal sizes, more importantly, also afforded the elites of the majority groups the opportunities for transforming their groups from groups-in-themselves to groups-for-themselves. They did this because it was clear to them that only groups which were preponderant could hope to control power in the regions and at the centre. It was the ethnic nationalism instigated by the elites of the majority groups, more than the mere fact of lumping together unequal groups that brought about the problem of minorities.

Akinyele (1996, pp. 71-72) maps a variety of actions by dominant majority ethnic groups and by extension the state in confronting the marginalization of political minority groups. These include ethnocide, genocide, constitutional provisions, reversal of status and territorial solutions. For instance, Guyana and Lebanon introduced proportional representation as constitutional measures to ensure the integration of minority ethnic groups. Extreme solutions include ethnocide and genocide were witnessed for instance during the Holocaust in Germany.

In response to their continued marginalization, minority groups have responded in a number of ways. Broad actions by minority ethnic groups include integration with the political majority groups, struggle for self-government or maintaining the status quo of marginalization (Kymlicka, 2004, p. 56). The first two have emerged as popular options for minority groups across the world. The integration with majority ethnic groups is manifested in nation-building efforts by states which as Kymlicka (2004) argued are aimed at eroding the identities of minority groups and undermining their capacity to push for self-government (p. 57).

Within the cultural landscape of Nigeria, minority ethnic groups include Birom, Idoma, Tiv, Kanuri, the Yorubas in Kwara and Kogi States, Esan, Angas, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Efik, Ijaw, Ibibio, Ekoi, Ikwerre, Kalabari, Bini, among others. The creation of regions in 1939 which cemented the territorial basis of federalism in Nigeria engendered the marginalization of these political minority groups (Suberu and Agbaje, 1998, p. 337; Osaghae, 1991, p. 239). This is because the ethnic groups were subjected to the



domination of the majority ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa who controlled the Western, Eastern and Northern regions, respectively.

As argued previously, the importance of economic domination in the creation of these minorities starting from colonial times cannot be over-emphasized. The colonial economy that was based on the exploitation of peasant agriculture was basically trading and externally oriented. The colonial state was a primary means of accumulation. Nigerians were largely alienated except for the emerging petty bourgeoisie of the major ethnic groups who profited from the colonial economic order of accumulation using state machinery. The political elites of the major ethnic groups learned the deployment of state power for access to accumulation and minority domination under colonial rule.

Realizing their disadvantage in the unfolding power equation, during the struggle for self-government and independence, these minority ethnic groups in the three regions, formed political parties as platforms to agitate, challenge and contest for political power solely and in alliance with oppositional majority parties. Some of these minority parties were the United Middle Belt Congress, United Nigeria Independence Party, Borno Youth Movement, and Calabar Improvement League, among others. The failure of the colonial state to address the concerns of the minority ethnic groups led to the heightening of these demands in the face of impending political independence. This resulted in the constitution of a Commission to enquire into the concerns of the minority groups and provide recommendations on how to allay the fears. Individuals saddled with this responsibility included Willink H. (Chairman), Mason P., Hadow G., Shearer J., and Hilton K. (Secretary).

The Commission, which was established in 1957 was required to study the demands of the minority groups in Nigeria and make necessary recommendations to the colonial government. The colonial government in setting the terms of reference for the Commission prioritized constitutional panacea over the creation of new states as solutions for addressing the fears of the minorities. The Commission was inundated with complaints of marginalization of the minority ethnic groups in different spheres such as political, socioeconomic, sociocultural, and developmental, among others

(Akinyele, 1996, p. 77). Consequently, the consensus among the representatives of these minority groups was the creation of new states with proposals including the Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers state out of the Eastern region, the Mid-West state in the Western region and the Middle Belt state for minorities in the Northern region.

The Willink Commission acknowledged the evidence of marginalization of the minority groups by the dominant groups in the three regions. It however failed to support the demand for the creation of states by the minority ethnic groups on the basis that the creation of new states will lead to the proliferation of minority groups and their agitations (Colonial Office, 1958). Experience with the creation of states in the country after independence has validated this position. The Commission's recommendations focused on the use of constitutional guarantees and other institutional means to address the fears of minority ethnic groups. The continued agitations by the ethnic minorities in Nigeria are a pointer to the fact that state creation and constitutional guarantees recipe against minorities domination and exploitation in Nigeria merely scratches the surface of the problem.

The recommendations by the Willink Commission included liberal democratic practices and the parliamentary system of government, placing policing functions in the concurrent list, a special government agency to examine the problem of the Niger Delta with the support of both tiers of government, as well as the constitutional guarantee of fundamental human rights (Colonial Office, 1958). At the root of the non-workability of the liberal democratic and parliamentary solutions recommended by the Commission is the failure and lack of concern to pose the question 'whose democracy' and the nature of democracy? That is, is it a democracy that empowers the ordinary Nigerian people and promotes social justice or a democracy that disempowered the Nigerian people and promoted ethnic justice?

Furthermore, equating minority rights with human rights (Barten, 2015, p. 148) is antithetical to solving the challenges of ethnic minorities. This is because guaranteeing the rights of minority ethnic groups goes beyond individual rights. Barten (2015) in differentiating between these two cat-

egories of rights notes that minority rights focus on the collective, while human rights are applicable to individuals (p. 148). Examples of collective rights include the right to representation, the right to be treated equally as other ethnic groups, the right to self-determination, the right to identity, the right to infrastructural and developmental projects, among others. The lack of concern and inability of the Nigerian state in terms of protecting these collective rights, as well as the non-justiciability of these rights, further underscore its limits in addressing the fears of minorities.

In post-independence Nigeria, the demands for state creation as a solution to the challenge of marginalization of minority ethnic groups have persisted. In the context of Nigeria's federal structure, the creation of states provides the political elites of the minority groups ready access to national politics and its accompanying accumulation benefits in line with Nkrumah's (1957) maxim about the primacy of the political kingdom in neo-colonial societies. The creation of states benefits the political elites of the minority groups in terms of representation in the central government, statutory and preferential appointments, recruitments into the armed forces and other government parastatals, among others (Osaghae, 1986, p. 158). The fall-out of state creations has been the creation of new majorities and minorities as Otite (2010, p. 42) argues '... in an endless crisis of marginalization and uneven development'.

Beyond these factors, the demand for states must be situated within the political economy of a neo-colonial contraption like Nigeria. Considering that the state has remained an important means of accumulation and the consolidation of the interests of the political elites, Ekekwe (1986) argues that political elites of minority ethnic groups propose the creation of states as a means of gaining access to the accumulative machinery of the state. State creation enables political minorities' elites' opportunistic exploitation of minorities through accommodation with majority elements within the federal exploitative order.

Ekekwe's (1986) thesis on the instrumental perspective to state creation is important for understanding the present disdain of the present governing class in Nigeria to reducing the number of states in the country as it impinges on the accumulative interest of the class. In this respect, those

advocating the return to old regional arrangements as parts of their restructuring agenda will have minorities' political elite who are the beneficiaries of state creation to contend with. This is because this will be an end to the ladder they are using for primitive capital accumulation. The absence of minorities' political parties like in the First Republic shows that the political elites of the different ethnic minorities have found comfort and accommodation in the political cocoons of the majority parties and the created states to achieve their accumulation agenda. It is for this reason that the resource control agitations were never predicated on the separatist agenda but on accommodation and ethnic justice within the Nigerian federation unlike most of the restructuring agitations that are outrightly secessionist.

A discourse on the challenges of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria would be incomplete without considering the Niger Delta conundrum. The Niger Delta region comprises minority ethnic groups, such as Urhobo, Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik, Itsekiri, Bini, Ogoni, Isoko, Ikwerre, Kalabari, among others. Since the discovery of crude oil in the region in 1956, the region has assumed economic importance in Nigeria. Onuoha (2016) notes that the Niger Delta has an '... estimated 37.2 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and 188 trillion standard cubic feet of natural gas... the largest hydrocarbon deposits in Africa' (p. 2).

The Nigerian state has however failed to accede to the developmental needs of the Niger Delta region as the area remains a signpost of lack of development and its indicators such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and insecurity, among others. The creation of a special government agency to address the needs of the Niger Delta as recommended by the Willink Commission and managed mostly by political elites of Niger Delta extraction has failed to significantly impact the region's condition for over fifty-one years. The foregoing analysis and failure of applied strategies to deal with the minorities' problematic demonstrate a failed understanding of the minorities' question which is rooted in the nature and character of the state, as well as the condition of accumulation engendered by the state. A perspective understanding of this must also be linked with the crises of citizenship the state form brings forth.

## **The State, Citizenship Crisis and Restructuring**

Flowing from the social contract, the state exists only in the context of citizens for which it is mandated to provide security and welfare in order to secure its own continued legitimacy. Stewart (1995) distinguishes two forms of citizenship, namely, state and democratic citizenships. Stewart (1995, p. 63) argues that ‘state citizenship involves the identification of citizenship with the elaboration of a formal legal status... democratic citizenship, . . ., involved the elaboration of citizenship around shared membership of a political community, in which conception citizens are political actors constituting political spaces’.

It is within this legal status of citizens, and citizens being political actors with their inviolable political space, that they are imbued with equal rights. Hence, Shachar and Hirschl (2007) describe citizenship as inherited property. As argued by Birkinshaw (1993 p. 31), ‘citizenship connotes bundle of rights and duties, obligations and privileges. The source of these rights and duties is the state, that institution representing the official and public side of human affairs’. Birkinshaw (1993 p. 31) further notes that ‘Citizenship involves a sense of community and one’s membership of the community – community bounded by space, territorial extent and cultural and traditional heritage’. Flowing from the above, the existence of a majority and majority dichotomy is a breach of citizenship rights and a mark of a dysfunctional state. It is therefore curious and a gross theoretical oversight that the ongoing restructuring discourse has thus far dealt with the minorities issue out of the citizenship and state problematic. This is because as Birkinshaw (1993, p. 31) further argues, ‘the body that provides these rights may also invade these rights. If citizenship is to mean anything, then there should be adequate protection against such invasion unless it is clearly justified.’ Were the state not invading the rights and space of citizens, the restructuring problem would not have arisen.

The state for strategic reasons hides its true nature as an instrument of class rule and pretends to be an altruistic defender and promoter of the common good. Ake (1985, p. 105) exposes this charade thus, ‘the state is a specific modality of class domination, one in which class domination is mediated by commodity exchange so that the system of institutional mecha-

nisms of domination is differentiated and disassociated from the ruling class and even the society and appears as an objective force standing alongside society'. This seeming autonomy, with which the state is clothed, Ake (1985) opines, is limited. In consequence, therefore, the African state, for Ake (1985), is involved in the class struggle. In fact, the state is a site of struggle and a means of production. It is germane that an ontological analysis of the Nigerian state is indispensable in order to understand the minority problematic.

The starting point is to state that the Nigerian state was created originally as a colonial state. This Nigerian colonial state was not a welfare nor development-oriented state. Rather, it was an instrument of domination, oppression, exploitation and accumulation in the interest of foreign capital which clothed its uncivilized predisposition in the rhetoric of 'civilizing mission'. Keeping the nationalities divided, confused, antagonistic and suspicious of each other by whatever means possible were dominant strategies of colonial rule in Nigeria.

To achieve its imperialist accumulation agenda, the colonial power allied primarily with the major ethnic groups which were politically created and given the prominence as well as the relevance they never had prior to colonial rule. The colonial creation and constitutional base of the ethnic minority problems thus became rooted in the creation of regions in 1939 as alluded to earlier and concretized in the Richard Constitution of 1945, as well as the adoption of federalism in 1954.

Suffice to say that independence in Nigeria brought about neo-colonialism with the domestic inheritors of state power from the majority ethnic groups who had been well-schooled in the use of state power for accumulation in the interest of imperialism. The indigenous members of the dominant class, especially the petty and comprador bourgeoisie that were subservient to the imperialist prior to independence, utilized the state in accumulating resources for personal benefits and dominating the masses. In this respect, Williams (1980, p. 47) notes that 'the ethics of business penetrated politics, the ethics of politics penetrated business, the ethics of the gangster penetrated both'. Thus, as Williams and Turner (1980, p. 67)

argue, 'politics thus became a means for gaining control of public resources for the pursuit of private ends'.

Even the state itself made a foray into business and became an exploiter of its citizens through profiteering and payment of miserable wages. Ake raised concern about the reversed capitalist process in Africa where rather than individuals the state acts as an entrepreneur, major employer and exploiter of surplus values from the citizens. In Claude Ake's words, 'many of those who exploit the proletariat do not themselves own the means of production, but they control the power of the state which is used to control the means of production and to carry out exploitation' (Ake, 1976, p. 3).

In this regard, Graf (1983, p. 199) notes that 'active state involvement in the economy then further enhances the process of elite consolidation'. For Southall and Comminos (2009, p. 358), '... the emergent post-colonial national bourgeoisie [national by geographical location only] developed largely through public employment and state economic activity via parastatals rather than through economic entrepreneurship within the private sector. The emergent bourgeoisie, managerial rather than capitalist, was therefore from this perspective pursuing rent rather than profit'.

This struggle over the control of state power by the political elites of the majority elite groups engendered a normless intra-class struggle for power for which the instrumentalisation of ethnicity became a major strategy. The fallout is group contestations and struggles for dominance which unknown to many were struggles among political elites rather than the ethnic groups. In this group interface and contestation, the minorities are highly disadvantaged. Even when states were created in the course of these struggles, new minorities were created. The marked outcome of the struggles for power by these political elites of the major ethnic groups in the pursuit of accumulation is the creation of new citizenship rooted in ethnic citizenship. Citizens were recruited and constituted into political clients who give unalloyed loyalties to these political elites in exchange for crumbs stolen from the collective patrimony of the people in the name of the people. This produced discriminative citizenship where attainment is not by merit but by one's ethnicity.

Given that the political elites of the major ethnic groups have captured state power leveraging on the advantage they acquire during colonial rule as well as the orientation towards patrimonial politics they recruit more and more clients from their ethnic groups. In the same way, development projects are not allocated based on economic rationality but on ethnic justifications even in cases where the resources deployed for these developmental projects were obtained from the minorities. It is this promotion of ethnic, unequal and discriminative citizenship which fails to do justice and equality to all Nigerians by the political elites of the majority ethnic groups in order to privilege themselves and their ethnic groups that are at the root of minority marginalization, oppression and injustice in Nigeria.

The minority issue cannot therefore be understood outside the context of the state and its use and misuse as a means of production and accumulation. It is for this reason that the issue of federalism, through its bastardization is unnecessarily exaggerated in the interrogation of the minority problem in Nigeria. A focus exclusively on federalism in finding solutions to the minorities' quagmire is flawed in a fundamental way. As Onyeoziri (2005, p. 20) correctly posits, 'giving that federal solution is rooted within the state system, a theory of the state should be both necessary and prior to a theory of federalism'. We contend that the state should be accorded primarily to federalism. Onyeozeri (2005) further notes that first, the state precedes federalism. Second, federal solutions are the only means of serving the end of the state. Third, the efficacy of the federal solution is tied to the nature and character of the state.

What kind of state is the Nigerian state? Put differently, what is the nature and character of the state in Nigeria that allows for this sort of ethnic and discriminative citizenship which engenders the minority problems? We shall proceed to briefly sketch the fine contours of the character and nature of the Nigerian state.

First, the Nigerian state is non-organic as a consequence of both its creation and the failure to consciously move it to become a nation-state. This is due to the failure of the petty and comprador bourgeoisie class's preference for ethnic citizenship and primitive accumulation as against capital accumulation in order to entrench their hegemony. Second, the state is



alienated from the citizens. The state confronts the citizens mostly as an extractive machine, always asking but not giving or offering the minimum requirement on which state legitimacy is based: security and welfare. This condition has worsened since the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986.

Third, the state lacks relative autonomy and acts unabashedly as the instrument of capital, exploitation and oppression. Fourth, the Nigerian state is a decadent, peripheral, predatory and parasitic capitalist state which is highly unproductive. In fact, it often acts as if it is against production in the way it sought to extract revenue from the insignificant productive activities taking place in the forms of multiple and double taxation. Productivity is punished, while unproductive wealth is allowed to flourish. Both the private sector and the public sector are in alliance in the looting of the state.

Furthermore, the Nigerian state is lawless to the extent that it does not obey its own laws and dishonours its own constitutions. Consequently, like its colonial progenitor, the Nigerian state is arbitrary and undemocratic in spite of the fact that it claims to be under democratic governance. The Nigerian state is subservient to foreign capital and imperialist dictates. Finally, the Nigerian state is run by an unproductive, predatory and parasitic domestic class on behalf of transnational capital. It was as a result of the nature and character of the Nigerian state that the pre-independence federal consensus broke down immediately after independence, and the several political patchwork since then has been unsustainable.

All of these characteristics get codified in the state-capital mode of accumulation through which the state and the class that manage it dominate everything to the exclusion of all other classes and groups. The rationale for this is evident in Graf's (1983, p. 199) assertion that 'active state involvement in the economy then further enhances the process of elite consolidation'. It cannot be overemphasized that the state plays an instrumentalist role in this accumulation process. This is because the Nigerian state is largely an instrument of the ruling class deployed as a means of production. In this wise, it lacks relative autonomy and is unable to play a mediating role as well as provoke challenges to the legitimacy and hegemony of the dominant class given the direct involvement of the state in

accumulation on behalf of the class. The restructuring issue among other divisive issues facing Nigeria is a reflection of the legitimacy crisis of the state and its dominant class.

### **The Problem of Restructuring in Nigeria**

There are several interpretations of restructuring as there are restructuring agitators. From resource control, true federalism, secession, state creation, return to the 1963 regional arrangement, regionalism, constitutional amendments, new constitution and the like. Interestingly, the restructuring agitators are a babel of voices such that even they themselves lack mutual understanding. While they have sufficiently confused themselves, they have also succeeded in confusing others such that the restructuring discourse has become constrained to the limited parameter they have defined; that is, within the context of a rigid ultra-conservative framework of the decadent, parasitic capitalist state and its disempowering ideology. It is in this sense that we argue that the restructuring discourse as a tyranny of received discourse is a counterfactual agenda for minority domination.

According to Amuwo and Haurault (1998, p. 6), 'restructuring is indicative of the fact that existing state institutions, particularly at the centre, are inadequate to apprehend, comprehend and resolve immediate and new challenges'. This is the outcome of the quasi-federal arrangement with excessive centralization of power following the military intervention in 1966, state creation and particularly the rise of the oil political economy of the 1970s.

It is obvious that Nigerians see federalism as a magical wax that solves all the problems of a segregated society. It is also true that Nigerians take restructuring as a cure for the ills of federalism. This is perverted thinking. First, federalism has the propensity for both integration and disintegration depending on the felicity of the federal ideology and ideas. Second, as Akinyemi (1979, cited in Amuwo and Haurault, 1998, p. 3), argues, 'review of a federal system is not new and does not warrant any apology. Thus, restructuring as a model of review of federalism is normal and desirable if the issues are understood as a basis of the review'. Restructuring ultimately deals with the reordering of power in the state. This is with

particular focus on the use of power either for collective accumulation, equity in the distribution of state resources and public benefits in a way that is ethnically blind. The issue, therefore, is not about the rightness or otherwise of restructuring but within what political economy framework and whose interest is accorded primacy in the process.

In this context, an issue that has been totally ignored in the restructuring discourse in Nigeria is the democratic foundation of federalism. As Wheare, cited in Amuwo and Herault (1998, p. 3), argues, 'federalism demands forms of government which have the characteristics usually associated with democratic or free government'. Duchacek, (1977) similarly stresses the importance of democracy for the success of federalism. This is important for entrenching popular participation, rule of law, constitutionalism, decentralization of powers, citizenship rights, regional autonomy and the right to self-determination (Odukoya and Ashiru, 2007, p. 81). It is in the context of democracy that federalism represents a viable option for safeguarding minority groups from marginalization. Can we say from 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999, when we started this civil rule journey, Nigeria has a democracy we can be proud of? Whose democracy? Has our democracy empowered or disempowered the Nigerian people?

It must however be emphasized that federalism is not a perfect panacea for managing diversity in plural societies. Its utilitarian essence is reflected in Linz's (1997, p. 21) position that 'federalism can only assure that nobody could be fully unhappy but certainly not that everybody will be happy with the solution'. Similarly, Tamuno (1998, p. 13) asserts that peace in federalism '... is not necessarily that of the grave'. Consequently, managers of federal structures around the world must pay attention to addressing challenges from the constituent groups in order to engender unity in diversity.

Paradoxically, federalism is not adopted in Nigeria because it was deemed to be a perfect solution to the crisis of state-building. Rather, it was adopted because it was the preference of the British colonial power that saw it as the best way to preserve the ethnically diverse nation for its continued exploitation (Alli, 2003). Acceptance of federalism was also the easiest choice to fast-track the realization of the goal of the desperate political

elites of the majority ethnic groups to inherit political power and its economic benefits from the colonialist.

According to Gana (2003, p. 19), the British preferred federalism because they believed it will serve the interest of their domestic collaborators after independence not because it could aid national integration. In his words, 'federalism was adopted merely as an expedient strategy for terminating colonial rule by the nationalists. Thus, the adoption of federalism was a recalibration of the struggle for power among the political elites of the three dominant ethnic majorities'. Ekekwe (1986, p. 73) correctly notes that '... , the federal nature of the state, which to some extent at least was a British creation, also helped to determine the pattern of the struggles for access and political control'.

The federalist compromise of the British colonialists and the political elites of the three major ethnic groups on the eve of Nigeria's independence broke down like a pack of cards no sooner after independence. Akinyemi (2007) argues that the federal consensus succeeded until the Tiv revolt and Western region crisis starting in 1962, and the coup of 1966 eventually put it asunder. For many, especially the northern political elites, the imposition of the unification decree by the military under Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi marked the termination of the nation's federal arrangement.

This sad development of the unification decree though reversed subsequently under General Yakubu Gowon's military administration, coupled with the oil political economy which shifted the focus of accumulation to the minorities of the Niger Delta region, fueled the greed of the political elites of the majority ethnic groups in control of the levers of power of the Nigerian state. Aided by the centralizing and command ethos of the military, Nigerian federalism was recentralized and became a quasi-federalism with states becoming beggarly in the federation. The various state creation exercises also weakened the states relative to the central. This was not helped by the north-dominated military who authored the constitution on which civil rule is based. The military constitutionalized the over-centralization of state power in favour of the north in particular and the majorities in general.

Akinyemi (2007, p. 41) captures the development as follows:

The intervention of the military has had two consequences for the national question. The first was the destruction of the federal system and adoption of a pseudo-federal system with a powerful centre. Even the constitutions which the military bequeathed to succeeding civilian regimes reflected its belief that it is only an over-centralized system that can contain the competing nationalities of Nigeria, whereas the competing nationalities of Nigeria have reached the opposite conclusion that only within a proper federal system that their interests can be safeguarded. The second consequence which derives from the first... The other nationalities in Nigeria regard the post-military constitution not only as unfederal but, more importantly, as having been designed to serve the interest of the Hausa-Fulani. In essence, to the other nationalities in Nigeria, the system negotiated at independence which provided sufficient autonomy to them has been replaced with one imposed by one nationality for the interests of that nationality to the detriment of other nationalities.

It is therefore unequivocally clear that the agitations for restructuring underscore the failure of and a vote of no confidence on the 1999 Constitution by majorities of Nigerians. Given the ethnic foundation of the 1999 Constitution in terms of how it favoured the major ethnic groups by the over-centralization of power, the restructuring brouhaha continues to engender the ethnification of the national question in Nigeria. This has led to conflating the minority crisis in Nigeria as ethnic crisis. We argue that the minority question is not an ethnic crisis but at the core of the national question.

Odukoya and Ashiru (2007, pp. 82-83) opine in this respect that:

While ethnic questions are embraced within the rubric of the national question, the national question cannot be contained or subsumed within the problematic of an ethnic

question. This is because the totality of the national question has to do with the issue of social justice. And social justice is non-exclusive; it is an umbrella concept that covers all, irrespective of ethnic, religious or cultural background. It is for this reason that the ethnic question is non-liberating and amenable to injustice and social inequalities. On the other hand, the national question, properly posed, is a question of generalized justice, equality, freedom, human rights and human dignity.

The issue of returning to the old regional arrangement as a basis for resolving minorities' problems would have been paradoxical had it been canvassed by the minorities. As Ekekwe (1986, p. 132) succinctly argues, 'the Commission [Willink Commission] made a clear point of the fact – and this is important – that the fears 'were all expressed in regard to the *Regional Governments*, who in each Region were thought of as a majority group. *No minority expressed fears of the Federal Government*' (*italics added*). The attraction to the regions and the call for a return to the regionalism of the First Republic is nothing but nostalgia for the era where the regions were for the domestic bourgeoisie political class the centre of accumulation, particularly with the control over the instrumentalities of the marketing boards among others. As Ekekwe (1986, p. 76) argues, 'the increasing economic accumulation powers of the regional government helps to explain why regions were the focuses of serious political struggles for access'.

The struggle for accumulation is thus central to the hegemonic centralization of power and the present counter-hegemonic call for restructuring which is oriented to decentralization and institutionalization of a new accumulation propensity. This however is not a repudiation of devolution of power. The question is within what context? Any decentralization within the prevailing socioeconomic order will produce the same, if not worst results. This flows from the fact that at the root of the restructuring crisis and minority issue is the need for re-ordering the pattern of accumulation in the state. What nature of accumulation is feasible in a decadent predatory capitalist social formation like Nigeria?

As alluded to earlier, state creation which is another strategy in the struggle for accumulation has failed as a mechanism for access to state and accumulation. Particularly the difficulties of state creation under civil rule have made it unattractive and restructuring attractive. However, there are still some demands for state creations being made. Similarly, the suggestions on constitutional amendment as well as having a new constitution are unhelpful. For constitutional amendment, the demographic dominance of the major ethnic groups particularly the north in the National Assembly is such that it would be impossible to achieve any fundamental redistribution of power from how it is presently constituted. In the same vein, Amuwo's (1998) position on restructuring through constitution-making is instructive and persuasive. As Amuwo (1998, p. 80) opines, '... constitution-making hardly democratizes inter-class political competition, it only addresses intra-elite political contestation and, not infrequently, rather unfairly and unsatisfactorily.'

### **What is to be Done**

A restatement of how we perceived the minority problem will be helpful and simplify our task. At the root of the minority debacle in Nigeria we have argued are the issues of justice, lack of democracy, majority domination, and ethnic citizenship all incubating under the over-arching debilitating impact of a decadent and parasitic capitalist state in the interest of transnational capital.

One is at loss to situate the issue of justice within the ongoing discourse on restructuring. This is understandable given that justice is a scarce commodity, particularly in the context of a decadent and parasitic capitalist system oriented to oppression, domination and exploitation of labour and minorities of different types. Justice in the relations among Nigerians is a categorical imperative in the resolution of the minority problems.

We talk of justice in the context of the relations between groups in Nigeria in the Rawlsian sense. As John Rawls (1976, p. 50) argues:

The conception of justice which I want to develop may be stated in the form of two principles as follows: first,

each person participating in a practice, or affected by it has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with the liberty for all; and second, inequalities are arbitrary unless it is reasonable to expect that they will work out for everyone's advantage, and provided the positions and offices to which they attach, or from which they may be gained, are open to all. These principles expressed justice as a complex of three ideas: liberty, equality, and reward for services contributing to the common good.

From the above, justice must entail the equality of liberty as well as equality of inequalities among the citizens of a state. This resonates in our conception of citizenship as equal citizenship. The denial of political, economic, social and cultural rights as well as non-generalized inequalities in a country is coterminous with injustice and promotes discriminative citizenship which is the root of the minority problems. To this end, the minority problem in Nigeria is also a question of justice as a basis for ensuring democratic citizenship which allows for a sense of community.

Can justice be obtained by the minorities in the context of the decadent parasitic capitalist social formation known as Nigeria? For Blowers and Thompson (1976, p. 160):

Inequalities are primarily an effect of the structure and forms of social organization, so that to change inequalities the social structure must itself be changed. This can be achieved both by individual effort and perhaps more importantly, by collective action. It is at this point that the issue of the political responses to inequalities is directly posed. Individuals and group or class ideological attitudes towards inequalities are given expression through different political strategies, for change or otherwise, and through the forms of organization built upon those strategies.

This calls for a critical engagement of the decadent capitalist system which is the structure that underpins and generates the minority question in Nigeria. Harman (2010, p. 11) correctly depicts the capitalist system when he



notes that 'capitalism transforms society in its entirety as it sucks people by the billions into labouring for it. It changes the whole pattern by which humanity lives, remoulding human nature itself. It gives a new character to old oppression and throws up completely new ones.' On his part, Toyo (2001, p. 152) sees a capitalist economy as a 'master-and-servant economy, one of such economies in history. It is, in fact, a modern variety of a slave economy.'

A decadent capitalist economy such as we have in Nigeria is worse than the normal capitalist system described in shivering details above, given that those who run the Nigerian economy are themselves subservient and do not own the means of production but survive on crumbs, commissions and stealing in the performance of their roles. Beyond the workers that are traditionally dominated and exploited in the capitalist economy, different minorities are dominated and exploited in the process of accumulation by the petty and comprador bourgeoisie managers of the Nigerian decadent and parasitic capitalist state.

Decadent capitalism in Nigeria engenders crisis, contradictions and antagonism which find expression in unemployment and underemployment, inflation, poverty, insecurity, insurgencies, kidnapping, banditry, Boko Haram, ethno-religious crisis, armed robbery and others. One of the ways the political elites have contained these crises from threatening their hold on power and becoming a revolutionary pressure for change is ethnification of the crisis. The result is that the poor and dominated who as a class should rise against their oppressors at the root of their problems end up confused, misinformed and fighting themselves. The restructuring discourse is another of these strategies of revolutionary containment by the oppressors.

Toyo (2001, p. 155) notes that 'capitalism is characterized by two forms of capital accumulation, namely, primitive accumulation and accumulation out of profits generated in already established capitalist enterprises'. Elsewhere, Toyo (2002) characterizes primitive capitalist accumulation as non-endogenous parasitism. For Toyo (2002, p. 11), 'non-endogenous parasitism in the capitalist sector takes the forms of unequal exchange, landlordism, state contracts, state subsidies to business, state-financed loans,

agency contracts, money lending, inflationary financing and speculation'. Control of state power plays a dominant role in this form of accumulation, and the majority use it to disadvantage and unjustly against the minorities.

The failure of the poor, dominated and exploited class to organize and institute a class action against the exploiting class has promoted minority oppression and exploitation in Nigeria. For too long, the Nigerian poor and exploited class across ethnic boundaries have accepted to be limited to the periphery of politics as against the core of the state which is the engine room of political actions. In this wise, the power of the workers, masses and the minorities remain sadly potential. The poor and dominated must transit from the fringe of political power to the core arena of state power for the minorities to get justice.

Lenin (1976, p. 31) argues that 'guaranteeing the rights of a national minority is inseparably linked with the principle of complete equality'. This is not possible under capitalism. The lesson Karl Marx bequeathed to the poor, oppressed and exploited is that the social order that has become antiquated does not just give way, except through a struggle. Williams (1980, p.17) similarly counsels thus: 'Class action of the poor and exploited classes requires that they organize themselves to act directly in their own interest'. Of what benefits is a system valorized for its ability to create wealth but in practice makes the workers who create the wealth consume less and inversely poorer in proportion to the wealth they have helped to produce for someone else who plays no role in the production of the wealth beyond providing the capital?

To expect the members of the Nigerian domestic bourgeoisie class either among the majority or minority ethnic groups who sometimes pose as nationalist or ethnic group champions to relinquish power or empower the poor, dominated and the minorities is a grand delusion of unimaginable proportion that is unhistorical. These political elites are mere opportunists interested only in advancing their chances of accumulation at the expense of the Nigerian people. This is why they masquerade as champions of the people's cause.

According to Williams (1980, p.40):

The ambiguous position of the bourgeoisie within the neo-colonial political economy is expressed in its ideological ambiguity. Its nationalism is the outcome of its wish to appropriate resources back from the foreigner; its commitment to foreign investment is the outcome of its concrete dependence on the neo-colonial political economy. National unity and reconciliation express its ambition to act as a hegemonic class, providing moral and political leadership at the national level and within the international political arena; its tribalism is the outcome of its lack of control of the productive resources of the economy and hence of the competition among the bourgeoisie for favoured access to scarce resources, and the need to manipulate particularistic interests and sentiments among the poor to maintain the bourgeoisie's political domination.

Similarly, Williams and Turner (1980, p.67) submit that 'the competition for access to resources in Nigeria has taken place predominantly between ethnically-defined constituencies. These constituencies were not simply given, but a redefined in the process of political competition'.

## **Conclusion**

Given the complicity of the state in the minority problem and the use of the state as a means of production and mechanism for primitive capitalist accumulation by the political elites of the major ethnic groups, a condition favoured and allowed by the prevailing decadent capitalist system, restructuring is an agenda to perpetuate the domination and exploitation of the minority within the Nigerian federation. We therefore affirm Olorode's (2008, p. 40) position on the imperative of the commitment to a new political movement that Nigerians must work assiduously to build which is captured as follows:

The first is commitment to a united Nigeria with a united people who are genuinely sovereign. The second is a commitment to an economic order in which the welfare of the people is the primary goal, in which the resources of our land and their exploitation and allocation are under the full control of the toiling people thus immediately enabling the minimum of a welfare state and incremental socialization of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The third commitment of the movement will be the pursuit of a social and cultural policy that promotes cultural freedom and solidarity among our people, and frees their minds from superstitions and from ethnic and confessional prejudices.

Without any equivocation, only a socialist federal republic of Nigeria can ensure justice, equity, equal and democratic citizenship, productive accumulation, welfare, employment and development for the minorities in particular and all Nigerians in general. The emergence of this socialist alternative in Nigeria is dependent on the level of consciousness, coherence and conspiracy of the working class. There is therefore an urgent need to incorporate the peasantry and workers in the informal sector into Nigeria's labour movement in the struggle for a more equitable society for the citizenry. Furthermore, this working-class alliance is needed to champion the struggle for power from the present rapacious and predatory ruling class through the support of a socialist party acting as the vanguard party necessary for a people's revolution.

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