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**FEDERALISM AND ETHNIC MINORITY QUESTION IN NIGERIAN'S  
FOURTH REPUBLIC**

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**Abstract**

The research work is focus on federalism and the minority Question in Nigeria. The introduction of regionalism under the Richard's constitution of 1946 which made some parts of the country majorities and others minorities coupled with the federal system adopted with imbalance structures precipitated the problems of injustice, marginalization, balkanization, oppression and brutalization of minorities by the majority ethnic nationalities. This act by the majority ethnic groups over the minorities especially the Niger Delta people continued and became worst after independence was attained in 1960. The minorities have agitated and articulated their grievances to the Nigerian State. This grievance has been responded to but empirical analysis shows that they have never been

genuinely carried out to address these fears which has further made the minority ethnic nationalities to continue in their grievances and agitations. This is because most of the Nigerian state response to these grievances were not done to address them but were meant to further make the minorities underdeveloped and marginalized. Therefore, the objectives of this study, was to ascertain whether the nature of the grievances of the minority ethnic nationalities and also, to ascertain whether the Nigeria state has succeeded genuinely in addressing these fears and grievances of the ethnic minorities in the federation. In order to archive the above objectives, a viable proposition was established that could be tested in other to produce a good and meaningful conclusion. This study also utilized the structural functionalism theory which gives a better explanation of what the study entails. In terms of data presentation and analysis, this study adopted the time series research design. The conclusions made in the process of this study, was that the genesis of minority grievances started from the introduction of regionalism by the British colonial imperialists and that the Nigeria state have not genuinely addressed these minority fears and issues of underdevelopment especially that of the Niger Delta. Finally, this study recommends that the solution to ethnic minority problem is not true federalism but good governances and restructuring.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The Nigerian state is basically a colonial creation. What we know as Nigeria before the British colonization was a collection of several small empires and kingdoms of different historical, cultural, political and ethnic backgrounds. Before colonialism various empires and kingdoms have their own government and authoritative institutions and were at various stages of social and economic development. Each ethnic nationalities or linguistic groups are what constitute today's Nigeria and its own state and kingdom with its own social, political and administrative institutions. But with the Lurgardian fiat of January 7, 1914, Nigeria become one political entity with the amalgamation of the northern and souther protectorate (Elaiwu 1994.)

The artificial creation of the Nigerian state brought together about five hundred ethnic nationalities and consequently, this unholy and unsolicited alliance often resulted in a rather regular pull and push for political and economic resources controlled by the majority ethnics groups of Hausa/Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the West and Igbo of the East (Olutay 1998.)

It is indeed true that Nigeria is a pluralistic state that adopted a federal system of government from the colonial era. According to Akindele (1995).

"A federal state is a union of state or groups of people in which member agrees to sub-ordinate its governmental power to a central authority in specified common affairs" But unlike the federal system of government

obtainable in the United State of America, Switzerland, Germany and Canada, the Nigerian federalism is obviously involuntary and a disaggregated method as the British imperialist forced the constituent units into one unacceptable political entity (Akindele 1995).

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

There is no point denying the fact that the stability of any federal system is often determined by the existence of political goods and services including the sharing of political power and revenue, but the federal system adopted by the Nigerian state have set a very dangerous and virulent precedent for the country. The reason for this is that not all the ethnic groups have access to political power at the centre. Political power at the central or federal level has been the exclusive reserve for the three dominant ethnic groups which are the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and the Igbos and this have resulted to a symmetrical relationship among the various component unit in the country (Nnoli 1978).

However, since federalism is a system of government that emphasizes the element of coordinate and independence, then the existence of any structural imbalance in terms of population, land mass, access to political power etc, may to a large extent negates the principles of federalism by bringing together the various ethnic groups that has diverse socio cultural entities in a co-operative manner (Suberu 1946).

Again, the nature of the evolution or formulation of federalism in any polity largely determines what level of government controls revenue generating resources of the federation. Where the central government is a product of the negotiation of the component units, the resources are normally controlled by the component units, while if the union was forced on the component units in a disaggregation method, the tendency is that the centre ends up controlling the generated resources as in the case of Nigeria (Awolowo 1997).

For example, the Ijaws of the Niger Delta ethnic minorities are richly blessed and highly endowed with natural resources particularly crude oil which has become the mainstay of the Nigeria economy but yet it is a dismay that the region still suffers from gross environmental problems due to oil exploration and exploitation activities as a result of the fact that the region lacks access to political power (Young 1993).

The minorities precisely the Ijaws have been dispossessed of their God given resources through the obnoxious policies and laws formulated and executed by the federal government. Because of this, the region has suffered so much environmental degradation and despoliation. They have been denied of fair share of the oil wealth that is derived from their own region. They have been suppressed and brutally marginalized as minorities in the Nigeria supposed federalism (Azaike 2003).

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

The problem of Nigeria federalism is traceable to the 1914 amalgamation of the North and South by the British colonial masters which brought together the different ethnic and national groups which had hitherto been independent of one another either as empires and kingdoms.

Thereafter the attainment of independence in 1960 as a federation with an unusual composition that is a weak foundation of legitimacy among the various ethnic minorities, the problem of federalism in Nigeria become worst. This flawed federal structure is a major source of the ethnic or minorities conflicts and crisis inherent in the Nigerian state (Azaike 2003).

These conflict and unresolved disputes often reach dimensions which call to question the basis of Nigerian federalism. Minorities especially the Niger Deltans in particular have found themselves struggling to resist various attempts by the central government to rob them of their very resources which their region are endowed with (2009).

Nigeria as we can see is operating a defective and fallible federal system that has consistently undermined one of the most cardinal and philosophical principles of federalism by K.C. Wheare. This principle posits that. "Beyond size, territoriality and constitutionality, the plurality and heterogeneity of the federal constituents must be recognized". By implication, the relative autonomy, independence and self-determination

of those units must be appreciated and guaranteed in clear terms. The fact that the 1914 amalgamation was necessitated by the need to satisfy the interest of the British colonial authorities and material needs cannot be over emphasized which later formed the basis for a federal structure, as such, it's adaptation could not be questioned despite its resultant defects and imbalance structure (Kenneth 1979)

On this ground, the research question for this work will be:

1. Has the Nigerian federal system address the question and concerns of the minority ethnic nationalities?
2. What are the challenges that the minority ethnic nationalities face in the Nigerian federation?

This study is set out to address these questions in the Nigerian federalism of which the minorities are of major focus.

### **1.3 Clarification of Terms**

The research is also set out to understand some key concept which will give the readers better focus on the essence of this project work.

According to Kari Fredrick (1968) he contends that federalism is a situation whereby the federal and regional (States) government are limited to their spheres and within those spheres should be autonomous. According to William Riker, federalism entails a governmental arrangement in a

country whereby authorities of some sort are set up by the constitution (usually for regions of a state as in the states, of the United States) and these authorities are given certain political decision over which they have a legal monopoly of the control.

Finally, where (1943) cited that federalism is the method of dividing powers so that the central and regional governments are each within a sphere co-ordinate and independent. ii. Minority According to Writh in Ambily Etekpe (2007) a minority is a group of people who because of physical or cultural characteristics are singled out from others in the society for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.

Oxford Dictionary defined Minority as the smaller part of a group less than half of the people or things in a large group.

Lastly Encyclopaedia Britannica describes minorities as culturally, ethnically or racially distinct groups living within the society.

#### **1.4 Literature Review**

In other to understand the relationship between federalism and the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, this work is set out to reveal the following literature. The first work that will be reviewed is the work of Omololu Toluwanimi (2012) titled "The politics of minority question in Nigerian federalism". The work examined some of the issues that the minorities in



Nigeria are experiencing. He stated that, the issues of minority question in Nigeria is a direct consequence of the nature of the evolution and development of

the federal system. According to him, the federalism adopted in Nigeria has been detrimental to the minorities in Nigeria and that it has never catered for the interest of all the minorities in the state. He further argued that, the Nigerian federal system at its inception failed to stimulate a sense of National consciousness. Regrettably, political actors at independence politicised the issue of minorities at the expense of National unity. According to him, the consequence was that the minorities started demanding for self-determination, resource control and the creation of new States. Also, the work suggested that for minority issue to be addressed, the right of the minority should be safeguarded in the constitution and that the government should give them equal opportunity as their majority counterpart. Similarly, another prominent work in the field is that of Ambily Etekpe (2007), titled "Minority politics in Nigeria: The case of the south-south and middle belt Regions". The work examined the issues of minority ethnics groups in Nigeria especially that of Ijaw people. It gave an analyses of the beginning of minority troubles and also went further to posit that the genesis of minority problems can be traced to the 1946 Richard constitution which created regionalism. The work discovered and exposed how the act of regionalism gave more power and influence to the

majority ethnic groups in Nigeria without any for the minorities.

According to Etekpe, the British first had contact with the minorities of Ijo in 1840 and had interactions with them but later forgot them at the time of political arrangement in Nigeria. The work also looks at how the resources of the minorities became a curse to them because the majority ethnic group who were advantaged during the British political arrangement cannot remove their eyes from Ijo people's resources. The work also looks at how the minorities have been used by the majority ethnic groups to accomplish their aims. It also examined the attitude of the majority towards the minority whenever there is an agitation for the creation state and resources control. For instance, agitation and resource control by the minority ethnic groups is always seen as treason to the then Eastern region headed by Lt. Col. Ojokwu. This was the reason why suspicion, intimidation and mistrust were high and very pronounced in the then Eastern Nigeria. Also, another work that needs to be reviewed is that of Ayama Samuel (2003), titled "Federalism and ethnic minority groups in Nigeria". The work explores into the situation of minority ethnics groups in Nigeria and how they have been oppressed by their majority counterparts. According to Ayama, in the period of 1950 - 1966, Nigeria minority ethnics groups were increasingly subjected to harsh majoritarian oppression and intimidation.

According to the work, the cause of this is as a result of the structural imbalance of the Nigerian federal structure which gave more privilege to

the majority ethnic groups and kept the minorities in a terrible condition where they see themselves as second class citizens.

Another work that need to be briefly reviewed is the work of Agbiboa Daniel (2006), titled federalism and Groups-Based inequalities in Nigeria. In this work, the author attributed the decision of 1914 which involves the merging of Northern and southern Nigeria to form a single political federation as been responsible for the issues of the minority ethnic groups. According to the work, the amalgamation created the problems Nigerian are facing today especially the ethnic minorities. There was no adequate consultation of the people of Nigeria. This action and others later on especially 1946 regionalism worsen the issues of Nigeria and created minority ethnic problems. Furthermore, he argued that the willincks commission of 1957 would have been the key to unlock the situation and liberate the minorities from their current plight but rather the commission did not take the agitation of the minorities very serious but rather, the commission only provided the protection of the rights of the minorities in the country. The work conclude that the freedom of the minorities can be attain if there are some constitutional provisions outlining the needs of minorities and the protection of their rights which will be followed without bias. From the above analysis concerning the relationship between the Nigerian federalism and the minorities, it is the clear that the quandary that the minority ethnic groups are facing today was as a result of the imbalance

structure in the Nigeria federal system. According to Ken Saro -Wiwa the Igbos, Yorubas and Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups as constituted themselves into and therefore, have constituted themselves into the subject and therefore, have assumed the position of the majorities in Nigeria. The idea that Nigeria consist three ethnic groups instead of three hundred ethnic groups is at the centre of the national malaise.

From Ken Saro-Wiwa's argument, it is obvious that the three hundred are so ethnic groups in Nigeria who are excluded from getting access to power and control of resources constitute the minorities. Since the wealth of the nation comes from these minorities a number of constitutional proposal have been put in place and Nigeria gradually moved towards a federal system dedicated on three regions. This three groups now struggle for power in order to have control over the nations and its resources. This has resulted indigenous colonialism by the majority ethnic groups while the minorities are being regarded as second class citizen in their own country but on the other sides, the entire wealth of the nation comes directly from the minorities. All these caused by the unorganized, imbalance and failed federal structure in Nigeria.

### **1.5 Objective of the Study**

This proposed research aims to achieve the following objectives;

1. To ascertain the nature of the grievances of the ethnic minority groups.

2. To ascertain whether the Nigerian state has succeeded in addressing the question and fears of ethnic nationalities in the federation.

### **1.6 Significance of Study**

The significance of this study appears to hinge on the fact that it will attempt to reveal the relevance and issues of the minorities in politics as a factor in Nigerian federalism.

Appreciating this fact, would in our thinking assist the administration of Nigeria greatly in solving most of the problems that threaten the existence of this country as a nation, ethnic politics as it relates to stability. Acknowledging this fact, will guide us on how to share the National wealth without looking at some areas as second class citizens because of numerical strength or ethnic background. However, this study hopes to reveal the problems and issues of the minority ethnic groups and try to encourage a proper understanding of their contribution into the wealth of the nation. Merit rather than ethnicity should be paramount in our development effort as who get what. This will help to reduce the antagonism and that whatever conclusion we reach would help in some meaningful way to understand the dynamics of politics. The findings of study will be a valve in the illumination and formulation of policies for managing the minority conflicts in Nigeria and for creating a more equitable, viable and stable system of federal Democratic Governance in the country.

It is also expected that the study will make up an important empirical and analytical contribution on the problems and prospect of democratic governance and plural societies such as Nigeria.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

This research work adopts structural functional theoretical framework as logic of analysis in explaining the research questions in this study. According to Gabriel Almond and

J.S Coleman in their book "the politics of the Developing Areas; 1960 as cited by Gauba (2003:95 - 98) in his book "An introduction to political theory", postulates that every that every political system is made up of a political structures and different political structures perform different political functions in the society. The resultant effect of the performance of the different functions by the different structures determines the behavior of the political system.

The functions in the political system are divided into input functions and output functions. The input functions are performed by Non-governmental agencies while the output functions are performed by governmental agencies. The logic in this is that if a particular function is not performed effectively, the implication is that there is a dysfunctional structure hence; one can trace the ills of society to the inefficient and ineffective structures in the society which have led to a poor performance of their functions in

the political system.

In applying this theory to this study, it could be said that the federal government is the structure responsible for the enforcement of the federal principle in favour of all federating units in order to integrate all parts of the federation which will in turn allay the fears and challenges of the ethnic minorities. Following this logic of analysis, one can say that the challenge of the minorities is a reflection of the poor performance of the structure responsible for entrenching the principles of federalism to the benefit of all federating units. It is trite to know that the structure responsible for the enforcement of the federal principle is the federal government and its various arms which embody the executives, the legislature and the judiciary. Drawing from this theory, this work hypothesizes that agitation by minority ethnic nationalities in Nigeria is due to the poor performance of its functions by the federal government which is evidence in the faulty nature of Nigerian federalism.

### **1.8 Research Proposition**

The central research proposition is that; The Nigerian federal system has not adequately addressed the concerns and fears of ethnic minority nationalities in the federation.

## **2 Research method**

The focus here is on presenting the research methods which according to

Avwokini (2006:41) "describes the knowledge acquisition process". This work is essentially a qualitative research as it involves detailed examination and description of minority grievances as a result of the ill structure of Nigeria federalism hence, the steps taken in the conduct of the research is presented here as follows;

### **Research Design**

A research design according to Nwana (1981:54) is a term used to describe a number of decision which need to be taken regarding the collection of data before ever the data are collected. Nwogu (1991:59) on his part defined research design as a plan or blue print which specifies how data relatively to a giving problem is collected and analyzed. In this sense, data is not just mere information, it is information gathered by investigation with the aid of instruments, techniques and other means. They are clearly identifiable information collected under conditions that are precisely specified and they have meaning only in relation to the particular problem being investigated (Cohen and Mansion 1980:27).

According to Eneanya (2012), as a logic, research designs are like the blue prints that tell us to reach plausible answers to research problems. This study being a qualitative research utilizes the time series research design. According to Campbell and Stanley (1963), the essence of the time series design is the presence of a periodic measurement process on some group



or individual and the introduction of an experimental change into this time series of measurement, the results of which are indicated by a discontinuity in the measurement recorded in the time series.

The justification of using this research design is basically because this study is centered on the historical approach where data will be presented on the faulty nature of Nigerian federalism and how it has contributed to ethnic minority agitations. Therefore, it logically means that data on minority crisis and grievances in different epochs in the Nigerian political history will be presented in order to determine the nexus between the faulty nature of Nigeria federalism and minority issues.

## **2.2 Sources of Data**

This study would rely on secondary sources for its data. A secondary source involves using information that others have gathered through primary research (Nwana:1981). Common sources of secondary data for social science include information collected by government departments, organizational records and data that was originally collected for other research purposes. A secondary source of data collection includes textbooks, seminar papers, magazine, the internet, newspaper and works in the libraries.

## **2.3 Method of Data Collection**

This provides an explanation of the research's logical model proof and how

the researcher hopes to establish a relationship between the variables under study (Soyombo:2003). The method of data collection that shall be employed in this research will be qualitative paradigm which is a documentary observational method that uses relevant textbooks material, magazines, historical documents which brings insights into the history, development of federalism and minority grievances and fears in Nigeria.

#### **2.4 Tools for Data Collection**

This refers to the mechanism that was used in collecting our data or information. This study make uses of data on federalism and other related database on minority grievances and fears in Nigeria. This research work shall make use of secondary sources where data or information will be collected from textbooks such as "minority politics in Nigeria" written by Ambily Etekpe (2007), "federalism and the challenges of nation building in Nigeria" by Olusegun Adeyeri (2010) "federalism and group based inequalities in Nigeria" by Agbiboa Daniel (2006) and others. Also, journals, newspapers and articles online will be used as tools for data collection.

#### **2.5 Method of Data Presentation and Analysis**

Data analysis refers to the way in which the collected data will be presented and interpreted in a meaningful way and in which explanations are given for observations (Soyombo: 2003). The approach or method that is

employed is the historical method where data will be presented in the different epochs of Nigeria political history concerning the faulty nature of Nigerian federalism and how it has contributed to the ethnic minority groups agitations. Content analysis involves reading meaning into forms of information that is either written or verbal in order to make sense out of it (ogban2018). Thematization of key issues has to do with focusing on the order of information in a sentence, it is a different way of analyzing a written text

## References

### **3 Federalism and the minority question in Nigeria**

This chapter basically involve an historical overview of minority grievances and fears in the Nigerian federation. In undertaken this task, this work being a qualitative research, explores scholarly views on the origin of minority grievances, marginalization and their fears in the Nigeria federation. Similarly, this chapter will also explore explicitly in details the Nigerian state response to the fears of minority ethnic nationality.

#### **3.1 Minority Grievances and Fears in the Nigerian Federation**

During the pre-colonial era in Nigeria, it was a true fact that different ethnic nationalities lived separately and independently. These groups sometimes were not even aware of the existence of other groups let alone to express ethnic sentiments against any. There was no such thing as majority or

minority. The various small empires, kingdoms and ethnic nationalities with their different religious, historical, cultural, traditional and political backgrounds lived peacefully and had their own autonomy (Elaigwu: 1994). But this period of bliss was hampered and endangered by the intervention of the British colonial masters.

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, two different phases that are characterized by minority grievance and fears will be analyzed which are the colonial phase and the post colonial phase.

According to Agbibo (2006), minority grievances in Nigeria first started during the period of British colonialism. But before minority agitations and fears started, the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria by Lord Lugard was the first action that prepared the ground for future imbalance in the Nigerian federal political system. As was said earlier, before western imperialism in Nigeria the ethnic nationalities that make up what we have in Nigeria today were living on their own without interference but with colonial amalgamation, they became one political entity. It is believed that the essence of the amalgamation was to facilitate the process of British colonialism thereby, paving the way for agitation of their own states and autonomy. For instance, the minorities under the defunct eastern region of Nigeria articulated their demands for autonomous states that were to be separated from the domination of the Igbo tribe.

The minorities, according to Nicholas Ofiaja (1979), opined that the eastern region numbered about five million out of a population of thirteen million. The eastern minorities are divided into five groups, namely; The Annang, Efik and Ibibio who constituted a group and inhabit the present Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom states. The Ijaws, Andoni, Benny, Brass, Kalabari, Okrika, Opobo, constitutes the second group of salt water inhabitants of the Rivers and Bayelsa states. The third group is the fresh water Ijaws of Yenagoa division and parts of western Ijaw.

The fourth group is the Ekoi group, which include Ogoja and Ikom divisions. The Ahoada and Ogoni divisions that constitute the fifth group are distinct groups by themselves. On the other hand, the agitations and fears of the minorities under the then western region in Nigeria were not different from that of the minorities in the defunct Eastern region. Due to the manner of treatment meted on the minorities by the majorities of the Yorubas, the minorities agitated for the creation of their own separate states. The minorities in the defunct western region include, the Edo speaking people of Benin, Urhobo, Itseriki, the western Ijaw and western Igbo of Asaba and Aboh divisions. Other minorities that need to be mentioned are the ones under the defunct Northern region. The region is comprised of Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Gwari and other Muslims. They are normally grouped with the Hausa/Fulani. They are sustainably united by Islam. This tie was strengthened by a deliberate colonial policy that promoted the slogan of

one North one Destiny. In the 1963 population census, out of the North was about thirty million. The minority was numbered six million. They are mainly the people of the middle belt i.e Angas, Jukun, Nupe, Okpoto and Tiv. Like the agitations and demands of the minorities under the Eastern and Western region, the minorities in the North were against order and changes in the legal system similar to those expressed in the Western and Northern regions in Nigeria. In particular, the ethnic groups that made up Rivers province of which the Ogoni division was part of, nursed long standing grievances to the effect that the geography of their deltaic and landscape and its associated difficulties for development were not understood.

They were therefore, united by fear of neglect at the heads of government who in any case put the needs of the interior first (Etekpe 2007).

The minority issues that were expressed during the colonial era by the nationalities as a result of their marginalization and oppression by the major ethnic groups further strengthened after the quest for independence.

Under the post-colonial phase, the relationship between the minorities and majorities are generally characterized by suspicion, intimidation and mistrust. In the Eastern region, this act was very pronounced and the Igbos often regarded the minorities under them as slaves. They see minorities agitating for their liberation and freedom as an act of treason. This attitude was expressed by the formal military governor of the region Lt. Col.

Ojukwu. In addition to intimidation, balkanization has been another weapon of subjugation of the minorities into poverty, especially the Ijaws. The division of the southern protectorate into East and West using River Niger as line of demarcation in 1885 gave birth to Western and Eastern Ijaws (Etekpe:2007). The subsequent introduction of colonial administrative configurations, such as the province in 1923, Region in 1946 and the various State creation exercises that began on May 27th 1967, further divided the Ijaws into different administrative units. The Western Ijaws, occupying a contiguous mass land crisis- crossed rivers, rivulets and creeks along the Benue and mouths of the Escravos Rivers are split as appendages in Delta, Edo and Ondo states. Thus, in Delta state, the Ijaws of the defunct Warri local movement (Egema, gbaramatu, Ogbe-Ijaw and Isaba clans) are split into Warri South-West and Warri North Local Government area. It was alleged that balkanization is a deliberate state policy to ensure that the Ijaw ethnic group; which is presumed to be the fourth largest ethnic group in the country continue to remain minorities in every local government area and or state along the Niger Delta region so that they would not wield power to challenge policies formulated by the domineering majority ethnic groups. It is also alleged that the policy of balkanization is to fragment the Ijaws so that they shall not be united to pursue common agenda just as the British did during the colonial rule (Etekpe: 2007).

The British administration equated the needs of the three dominant ethnic groups to that of the three hundred ethnic nationalities making up the nation. Nigeria was simply governed as if it was made up of the three ethnic groups of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani. Thus, problems of governance and their solution were seen from this tripodal angle. They regarded the minorities merely as means to an end. The three regional governments were all but a law unto themselves.

The creation of mid-west region in 1963 cannot be attributed to a concerted agitation by the minorities, but rather fallout of the plot by the NCNC/NPC coalition government to whittle down the spread and influence of the action group (AG). The concerted call for self-determination by the minority people of the defunct Eastern region through the vehicles of Niger Delta congress, COR (CalabarOgoja-Rivers) movement; and the middle-belt through the United Middle Congress (UMBC), was effectively scuttled by the NCNC/NPC coalition.

Thus, the Nigerian federation of the three dominant tribe stumbled and wobbled along until the military struck in January 15th 1966. From independence in 1960 till the first republic of 1963 the minority ethnic nationalities have been oppressed and were subjected to harsh maltreatment by their ethnic majority (Ayama: 2003).

The first Republic Politicians were not ready to listen to the cries and fears



of the oppressed and marginalized ethnic minorities. As was said earlier, even the Mid-West region that was created in 1963 was not created because of minority agitations but rather for political reasons.

As for the case of the minorities in the Ijaw and Niger Delta in general, it is believed that they are the most marginalized. The resource of this region has become the mainstay of the economy of the nation to a greater extent. But the irony is that the inhabitants of the Niger Delta have been unsatisfied with this. The complain of the region is that they are always neglected in terms of development but when the federal government want to explore and exploit the resources of the region, they do it without any appreciation of the people in the region. According to Tekena (1998), the action of the government and its multinational oil companies has further caused environmental degradation, air pollution and underdevelopment which have given rise to different frustrated and aggravated youths and groups in the Niger Delta region. He further asserted that these activists and marginalized youths express how they have been subjected to brutality and harsh poverty.

They condemned the activities of the government and its multinationals as inhuman and evil therefore, they call on the government to bring in the needed development. For instance, due to the nonchalant and recalcitrant attitude of the Nigeria government towards curbing the issue of underdevelopment in the region, the late activist Isaac Adaka Boro

confronted the Nigerian government with his group with violence. His group the Niger Delta volunteer service (NDVS) was made up of 147 youths who were trained by him confronted the government in 1966 on a 12 days war. Their aim was for the Niger Delta region to have its independence and freedom. They were later defeated, tried, convicted and sentenced to death for treason. Based on the early intervention of the Ijaw leaders,

The capital punishment was changed to life imprisonment. While serving the jail term, states including Rivers state were created by Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon the then military head of states and commander in chief of armed forces. Lt. Col. Gowon later pardoned and released Boro who immediately was enlisted in the Nigerian army to fight against the Biafrans led by Lt. col. Ojukwu in order to liberate his dream state (Etekpe: 2007). Another important figure that needs to be looked into was Ken Saro Wiwa. Ken was a well-known environmental activist who fought consciously against the western multinational oil corporation that have been causing great suffering, environmental degradation and despoliation and air in the Ogoni land. The minorities of the Ogoin clamored severally and demonstrated over how the Nigerian government and its oil companies have been causing great pains to them.

Their agitations was made under the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people (MOSOP) led by Ken Saro Wiwa. The execution of Ken by

the government of Nigeria made the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region to see their God given resources as a curse rather than a blessing. Subsequent freedom fighters of the region emerge who claim to be fighting for the liberation of the region. This new sets of generation activists with their violent actions carried out different illegal activities such as kidnapping, vandalization of public properties and destroying oil pipelines just to get the attention of the federal government. This activities reached an apogee when the government decided to listen to the demands of the youths by giving them amnesty which later made most of them became rich overnight thereby forgetting lingering problems in the region (Imkwo: 2010).

### **3.2 State Response to the Fear of Minority Ethnic Nationalities**

The ethnic minority agitations, grievances and fears have been responded in different ways by the Nigerian state. Different policies, development boards and bodies have been set up to look into all the agitations and articulations made by the minority ethnic nationalities in the country.

Therefore, this work will look at the Nigerian State response to the minority grievances and fears during the colonial era and the post-colonial era.

As was said earlier, minority marginalization started officially from 1946 when the country was divided into regions which are termed as the major ethnic groups. The minorities under these regions suffered great level of

oppression, suppression, intimidation and balkanization.

The fears of the minorities under the colonial period made them to agitate and demand for the creation of their own states. Anytime they agitate, it is seen as treason to their ethnic majority.

According to Adeyeri (2005), as a result of their grievances and articulations, the colonial government had to set up a commission of inquiry to look into these fears and grievances. The commission which was the Willink commission established in 1957 was the first response of the federal government towards the minority insecurity and fears.

The Willink Commission of Inquiry in 1957 (According to Olutayo 1998), the minorities expressed fears that the majority ethnic nationalities would seize their lands through the instrumentality of the state, and unduly victimization of traditional rulers and elites who did not follow the line of majority ethnic group government. They also expressed that they are being suppressed, oppressed and dominated by the majority. These fears and spate of grievance compelled the British government to set up the Willink commission of inquiry to look into those fears. The commission was set up by the secretary of state for the colonies, Mr. Allen Lennox Boyd. The commission was named after its chairman Sir Henry Willink. The minority groups claim that the government services and amenities should be distributed equally rather than on population. According to Etekpe

(20070), the fears expressed by the minorities before the commission were different. Whereas, the East and West bordered about ethnic discrimination and domination. In the North, the fears borders on religious and ethnic discrimination. Due to this marginalization of the minorities, they all agitated for the creation of their own regions and States as the only remedy to their fears and grievances. In the 1958 constitutional conferences, the Willink commission agreed that some of the fears expressed by the minorities were genuine but that they don't think creating new regions or States was the most effective means of allaying the fears of the minorities but rather, it will protect their rights in the constitution.

The 1958 constitutional conference which ushered in Nigeria national independence in 1960 was not able to implement most of the recommendations made by the Willink omission concerning minority fears. The first response to the minority fears and agitations during the post-colonial period was the creation of the mid-west region in 1963. The creation of the region satisfied some of the demands and agitations of the minorities under that region. Most scholars and politicians viewed the creation of mid-west as political game to smash own the action group for challenging the political strength of the NPC and its allies.

Consequently, the four regional structure of the federation (North, East, West and mid-west) remained until 1967 (Akindele: 1995). The Creation of States in Nigeria. The major demand of the ethnic minority nationalities

since the colonial days was the creation of their own separate independent and autonomous states. The coming of the military on January 15th 1966 was a new dawn in the political history of Nigeria. The ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the first republic politicians prepared the ground for military takeover of government (Alabi:2006).

During the regime of General Yakubu Gowon the then Head of State in Nigeria, the leading minority nationalities eventually convinced him to create twelve States out of the four regions on May 27th 1967. The creation of States angered Lt. Col. Ojukwu to declare the Republic of Biafra which immediately started the civil war that ended in 1970. The minorities received some number of states out of the twelve States created therefore, according to Akindele (1995), the minorities decided to join alliance with the federal Government to fight against the Biafrans since they have gotten what they have been agitating for and will do everything and anything possible to protect it. The states that were created for the minorities out of the twelve State became the second response of the federal government to the fears and plights of minorities since independence. Although, it was argued that in an attempt to forestall the then Eastern region headed by Lt.Col Odumegwu Ojukwu from seceding and in an attempt to weaken Ojukwu after the aburi accord in Ghana, Gowon had to create twelve States. Therefore, it was seen that if not for the crisis between the Nigeria government and the Easterners no States would have been created.

According to Obi (2000), in order to meet the demands of the ethnic minority nationalities, General Murtala Muhammed set up a panel in 1975 headed by Justice Ayo Irikefe to look into the issue of creation of more state in the country. As a result of the panel's recommendation, seven more states were created on February 3a 1976 thereby bringing the number of state to 19. Few out of the seven states created, were owned by the minority for their agitations. This was the response of the Nigerian government to minority fears and marginalization. From 23rd September 1987 to 1991, 11 more States were created by General Ibrahim Babangida's administration which some were owned by the ethnic minorities thereby making the number of states in the country to 30. On October 1st 1996, General Sanni Abacha's administration created additional 6 states. Out of it, the minorities still had their own which brought the total number of states in the Nigerian federation to 36 (Obi: 2000). Development Boards for Ethnic Minorities

As was said earlier, the most marginalized ethnic minority nationalities are the People of the Niger Delta. The minorities of this region are seen as the most pronounced in terms of backwardness, underdevelopment and oppression. Although the region is an important sub region in the Nigerian federation. This is so because the resource of the region is what is embellishing the country's economy. But yet the region is deeply characterized by primitive backwardness. Since the colonial days, the region has always presented one problem or the other. The Henry Willink

Commission which was set up in 1957 to look into the fears of minorities identified and pinpointed that the region is too poor, undeveloped and neglected.

The recommendation of the commission to the region was that special attention should be devoted to developing the region and one of such attention was the establishment of different developmental board to curb the issues of underdevelopment and also to ameliorate the violence of the region as a result of the frustrations of the youths. The first board established was the Niger Delta development board in 1961.

According to Etekpe (2007), the essence of the board was to handle the development needs and challenges of the region. The failure and short comings of the NDDB led to the establishment of the Oil Mineral producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. And lastly, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was also established in 2002 for the same purpose of ushering the needed development in the Niger Delta region. The establishment of these boards by the Federal Government was also a major response to the agitation and lingering problems of development in the Niger Delta region and the minorities in general. Irrespective of the efforts of the federal Government to curb the lingering issues of underdevelopment in the region by establishing various development boards, there have been several criticisms of the usefulness of these boards to the minorities of the Niger



Delta. Therefore, according to Etekpe (2007), he argued that each of the boards has failed to redress the problems of the region. This is because the majority ethnic nationalities usually manipulate these various boards or institutions from the stages of their conception to their implementation of functions in order to favour them (the majorities). He argued further that this has become worrisome with the discovery of oil and gas where those (the Niger Delta) who produce them are deliberately excluded from the process of decision making; and it has made a large number of people in the region to think that the institutions were from inception programmed not to succeed. This may look believable because Lagos and Abuja (FCT) were built without any commission. Therefore, Etekpe concluded that the development of the Niger Delta region should not equally require commission (s). What it rather requires is the political will to develop the regions.

According to Olutayo (1998), it is a popular belief, especially among the minorities in Nigeria that Nigeria is able to keep herself together as one country today because of oil and gas wealth that sustains the machinery of government. If oil and gas resources were located in the lands owned and controlled by the three major groups Nigeria would have torn to shreds a long time ago because none of these groups would give them out as the case of the region without stringent conditions. Consequently, it is an irony of basic expectation that the living standards of the communities in the

Niger Delta region do not in any way reflect the stupendous wealth found in the region. This state of affairs is unfair, predatory and runs counters to the tenets of civilized and democratic governance, therefore, the people are not satisfied with the different development boards established (Etekpe:2007).

### Analysis

The findings of this study show that before the forces of British colonial imperialists, the various ethnic nationalities were living separately and independently. According to Elaigwu

(1994), there was no such things as minority or majority. The various ethnic nationalities are what formed the entity called Nigeria. The work also finds out that the introduction of regionalism in 1946 under the Richard's constitution was the immediate cause of minority grievances in Nigeria. According to Imkwo (2009), the regionalization policy which divided the country into three regions of north, east and west of over 300 ethnic nationalities resulted in the politics of marginalization, oppression and suppression of the minority ethnic nationalities by the majority group. This act of the three major ethnic groups towards their minorities makes it to seem as if they are ignored thereby making them to demand for the creation of their own states and regions. The findings of this study also show that even after the end of the colonial imperialism in Nigeria, the minorities

were still subjected to brutal form of oppression and balkanization. According to Etekpe (2007), in the independence era, minorities' relationship with their majorities was characterized by suspicious, intimidation and mistrust. He argued that in the eastern region this act was very pronounced and the Igbos regained the minorities under them as slaves. The same level of marginalization melted on the minorities of the East was also seen in the west and North.

As for the aspect of the Nigeria state response to minority ethnic group fears and agitation, the findings of this work shows that the Willink Commission was the first response to minority fears especially in the colonial period. According to Nnoli (1978), the response of the omission did not really address the plights of the ethnic minorities rather it recommended that the rights of the minorities. Should be enshrined and protected in the constitution. The finding of this work also shows that the second response of the Nigerian state to the fears of ethnic minorities was the creation of mid-west region out of the western region in 1963. Although, from our findings, some scholars like Ayama (2003) argued that the creation of the mid-west region out of the western region was done not to favour the marginalized minorities of the west but to reduce the political force of the ruling AG party in the western region.

The study also find out that even after the mid-west region was created there was still high level of agitations and demands by other minorities.

Thus, there was the need for the creation of states. This came into reality in 1967 when General Yakubu Gowon created twelve states from the four regions. This work finds out that the creation was done out of necessity. In the views of Obi (2000), it was in an attempt to forestall and weaken the then Eastern region headed by Lt. Col Ojukwu from seceding that the Gowon's administration created twelve state.

Furthermore, the work discovered that even after these states were created the demands of the minorities were still on. Thus, from 1976 to 1996 more states were created which the minority ethnic nationalities had some numbers but yet there still were still lots of agitations and demands made by the ethnic minorities. According to Etekpe (2007), the reasons for the continuous minority agitation was because the Nigeria State responses to minority issues were never genuine. He argued that in an attempt to ensure that the minorities especially the Ijaws and their regions remain backward and underdeveloped, the Federal Government had to introduce several institutional arrangements without having the political will to develop the minority ethnic nationalities. These institutions or development boards or bodies were; the Niger Delta Development Board established in 1961, presidential committee on Revenue for oil producing Area in 1981, the oil mineral Producing Area development Commission 1992 and the Niger Delta Development Commission established in 2002. In our findings, Imkwo (2010), argued that in reality, these boards have further

undeveloped the minorities especially that of the Niger Delta region. As Etekpe opined, each of these institutions have failed completely in addressing the issues of minorities. This is because from the time of their formation to the period of the execution of their functions, the majority ethnic nationalities have always manipulated them. Therefore, Etekpe concluded that the development of Abuja and Lagos did not require any commission why would the minorities and their regions or states require any development boards even when their resource is what sustains the country's economy. From our discussion of findings, this work was able to discover that the response of the Nigerian state to the fears of ethnic minorities has never been genuine. This is because the majority ethnic nationalities since the introduction of regionalism have made it a culture to continue their marginalization, oppression and suppression of the minority ethnic nationalities. This shows why no matter all the responses to their agitation and plights they still glamour for development. From the above analysis, we have been able to discover that the Nigerian state have not been able to genuinely address the fears, agitations and grievances of the minority ethnic nationalities in the federation. These fears and concerns are still sources of minority agitations and challenge of the authority and legitimacy of the Nigerian.

#### **4 Conclusion**

This chapter is devoted to summarizing the entire research work, draw

conclusion from the research findings and making recommendations towards providing meaningful and practical solutions to the fears, grievances and backwardness of the minority ethnic nationalities.

#### **4.1 Summary of the Study**

The research is concerned with an introductory chapter that dealt with foundational issues such as how the federal system of government adopted by the former colonial masters have been responsible for the problems of the country. It also look at how the Nigerian state that is a British creation brought together more than 300 ethnic nationalities who were living separately and inadequately and who were forced to form the entity called Nigeria for the selfish interest of the colonial master. It also look at issues such as the research problem and question, the objectives of the research, adopted theory, review of related literature and research propositions. This was followed by the second chapter that presented the research design, sources of data collection, methods of data collection, tools for data collection as well as the method of data presentation and analysis. The third chapter did an analysis and interpretation of the data generated from various scholars. And finally, the fourth chapter presented the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

#### **4.2 Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn.

One, from the findings of data analysis, we were able to establish that the genesis of minority grievances was as a result of the British introduction of regionalism in 1946 which brought into existence the politics of majority and minorities. Secondly, we are also able to establish that based on the Nigerian state response to minority grievances, there are still numerous complaints and fears from the minority ethnic nationalities.

And lastly, we are also able to establish that all response of the Nigerian state to ethnic minorities have never been genuine. This is because the majority ethnic groups have always decided to make sure the minority ethnic nationalities remain underdeveloped and backward.

Thus, Etekpe (2007) argued that in order to continue the underdevelopment of the minority ethnic nationalities, development boards and policy were made without having the political will to develop the minorities especially the Niger Delta.

### **4.3 Recommendations**

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made to reduce the fears and grievances of the minority ethnic nationalities.

One of the solutions to the ethnic minorities of Nigeria is not true federalism but true leadership and good governance. Where good governance exist, there will not be much agitations or grievances by the

minorities. The existence of good leadership and governance will be able to genuinely y look into most of the fears of the minorities and provide them with most of their demands. The existence of good leadership will be able to know that since the major resources of the minorities especially the Niger Delta is what sustains and make economy of the nation prosper, the minorities are supposed to receive the highest allocation of revenue in terms of revenue sharing of resources which will facilitate development. Also, there should be good leadership and governance in the minority states for the governors to be able to manage the allocated resources prudently which will also quicken development of their people rather than misappropriating and siphoning the revenue and creating more grievances. Secondly, the principle of federal character should be sincerely applied in other for every aspect of the Nigerian society to be adequately represented effectively. When this happens, the minorities will have meaningful development and have no reason to agitate as long as their representatives exhibit the character of a good, honest and transparent leadership. Thirdly, this work recommends that minority rights should be highly guaranteed, protected and enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. When this happens the minorities especially the Niger Deltans will have a sense of belonging rather than neglect. Fourthly, the work also recommends that the minorities in the Nigerian



Federation should always have control of reasonable percentage of political power at the centre and their representatives should be sincere in their dealings and also make practical efforts and have the political will to develop their people without being manipulated and influenced by the majority ethnic nationalities. And finally, there should be restructuring of the Nigerian political system and also devolution of powers. When this happens, the minority ethnic nationalities will be able to control their resources and will also be able to take their destiny into their hands.

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