

Nationalism and The Niger-Delta Minority Question In Nigeria: A Philosophical Re-examination

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Abstract

This essay is a follow-up to my earlier paper which x-rayed the attempts made to address the Niger-Delta problem through the exercise of state power and the institution/insertion of certain democratic principles and practices. That paper argues that those attempts have not been (and would never be) successful because the issues involved are rooted in ethnic nationalism. Consequently, the current paper seeks to provide a panacea for the failure of statism and democratism by arguing that, unless these attempts are tilted towards nationalism, the question surrounding the Niger-Delta would neither be correctly diagnosed nor be properly treated. Employing expository, historical and analytic methodologies, the paper calls for a reinterpretation of the concept of “minority” and wonders why a region that account for a super-majority in the economic respiration of Nigeria should still be classified as “minority”, just because of land mass and population. The paper concludes by arguing that the consideration of minority issues would involve metaphysical, political and moral dimensions. Central to any minority discourse is the question of their identity (metaphysical), their survival (political) and their right to justice (moral).

Keywords: Crude Oil, Ethnicity, Minority, Nationalism, Niger Delta, Nigerian State

Introduction

Every dispute has its own unique history and circumstance that need to be taken into account in devising a fair and workable solution... it is not surprising, therefore, that minority rights

have returned to prominence in international relation
-Will Kymlicka.¹

John Locke² in England and Jean Jacques Rousseau³ in France are usually eulogized in the history of political theory for providing the philosophical background for today's (liberal) democratic governance. But do we remember John Stuart Mill's *Magnum Opus*, titled, *On Liberty*?⁴ Well, if the first John (Locke) provided us the basis for today's Majoritarianism, another John (Mill), provided us a ground-breaking basis why we must take care of “everyone”, if the will of the majority would not become torpedoed by the sheer visceral outburst of an otherwise tiny and insignificant “minority”. Mill made us to provide a platform for everyone to come with ideas. He told us that “truth” is not synonymous with “large size”, that “irrationality” is not defined by or equated with “smallness”. The utilitarian demand that targets happiness for the greatest number as a moral goal should not be mutually at ambivalence with the need to create a space and a position for the minority.

All over the world, societies are grappling with the increasing demand to guarantee “minority rights”, realizing that the broader (and traditional) concepts or doctrines of “human rights” have become grossly inadequate in addressing these rights. And within this increasing appearance on the front burner of international interaction, the minorities have arisen to present an image of themselves as endangered species that must be protected from becoming extinct. And they have won the sympathy of the

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- ¹. Will Kymlicka, *Multi-Cultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1, 5.
 - ². John Locke, *Two Treaties of Government*, 2nd Edn. Peter Laslett (ed.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
 - ³. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* edited and translated by Roger D. Masters, and Judith R. Masters, (New York: St. Martin's Books, 1978).
 - ⁴. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1963)

world community and international organizations, especially the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007.⁵

The discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri in 1956 and the coming of the military to the body politics changed Nigeria. For one, the agricultural basis of Nigeria's economy was pushed to the distant rear. Two, with no charter of (co-existence), her military leaders simply shared the oil wells among themselves. The result is what we witness today, and the rest is history. The interest of the state and its managers are, therefore, everything but people- focused.

The crude oil in the Niger-Delta earth crust and the eventual exploitation produced a country of lazy leaders whose interest is to gather in Abuja monthly to share out the oil resources. With the environmental pollution and its economic and health implications, occurrences in the Niger-Delta assumed local, regional and international interest and attention. The emergence of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, a Niger-Deltan, as President of Nigeria, as well as the activities of the insurgent Islamic sect, *Boko Haram*, did bring some relative calm in the Niger-Delta. And when Mohammodu Buhari became president in 2015, some group of militants, going by the name, Niger-Delta Avengers, unleashed enough violence that nearly dwarfed the militancy of the decades before. However, a combination of force, negotiations, appeals, reinvigoration of the amnesty programme and usual underground concessions caused the Avengers to retreat. But the question is: how long will this suppressed violence last in the midst of obvious natural and political injustice? In Nigeria, there is no doubt that the Niger Delta constitute the majority among all the other minorities, and the fact that Nigeria's survival has

⁵. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Un-drip), September 13 2007.

depended largely on the crude oil therein, has ensured that agitations from there are at least, given verbal semantic attention by the different managers of the Nigerian state.

In an earlier essay titled “the poverty of the forces of statism and Democratism in Addressing the Naija-Delta question in Nigeria”,⁶ I had discussed the challenge posed by the decades of the attempts to address the problem by employing the ever-coercive state power (statism) and the employment of certain liberal democratic principles and institutions as though they are ends in themselves (democratism). The purpose of the current reflection is to expand the discussion and to argue that considerations of nationalism are critical in resolving the Naija-Delta question.

The relationship between nationalism and minority is explored, especially as it relates to the crises in the Naija delta. At the end of the day the complementary nature of 'majority' and 'minority' is explained, reinterpreted and reconceptualized in line with the concerns of political philosophy. Let us proceed.

Concept Clarifications

It is important, for the purpose of intelligibility, that we clarify our usage of certain terms/concepts which are employed in the title of this essay. These terms include nationalism, minority, etc. The term “nationalism” is from the word “nation”. The Greek word *ethnos*, from where the concept of “nation” is taken, actually means (open-endedly) “people”, “race”, or “tribe”, those sharing some cultural affinities. By “nationalism” in this essay, we shall have in mind a particular kind of

⁶. Joseph N Agbo, “the poverty of the forces of statism and democratism in addressing the Naija-delta question in Nigeria”, in *Sofia: an African journal of philosophy and public affairs*, vol, 19 no.2(2020),229-241

feeling that makes one to believe and recognize that one belongs to an ethnic root from where one draws strength and hope for survival, even in very daunting situations. German sociologist and philosopher, Max Weber (1864-1920), in his work, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, conceives “nation” in terms of those with common descent, essential homogeneity, cultural assertiveness and consciousness and a commitment to their prestige.⁷

The term “minority”, which is the crux of this essay, is a political term thrown up by the desire and demand for the equitable sharing of society's (state's) resources. The word “minor” ordinarily means “not important or serious”. The *Oxford Mini Dictionary* gives a definition of minority that is important for our context: “a small group differing from the majority, in race, religion, etc”. The minority is, therefore, within the Nigerian context, those ethnic groups with different languages and cultures, with small population and perhaps, landmass, and who are outside the big three: Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo.

What we have called “the Niger-Delta Minority Question” arises, in our opinion, on the basis of the fact that Nigeria's economic survival since independence has almost entirely depended on the crude oil explored, exploited and exported from the Niger-Delta earth crust. Yet the region has remained largely and grossly underdeveloped. The question, therefore, is: how can and why should a people (or peoples) that provide the majority of what Nigeria need for survival continue to wallow in such subjugation, environmental degradation and physical underdevelopment, just because of numerical and geographical “minor-ness”? A second part of this minority question, for us, relates to the

⁷. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* vol.1 (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

justification for the struggle within the Niger-Delta and its possible implication for the survival of Nigeria.

The Niger-Delta Conflict

Those with poor historical memory or who have a poor knack to peer backwards from the textbooks of history usually think that the Niger-Delta crisis/conflict is a phenomenon of the 1990s. Some of those who want to be a bit historical, date it back to Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro and his Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) “troops”, of 159 rag-tag men, who wanted to bring about an independent Niger- Delta State on February 23,1966, just 39 days after Nigeria's first military coup. However, in the opinion of Tekena N. Tamuno these minority concerns and agitations have been there as early as the 1920s.⁸ In order words it began right at the dawn of Nigeria's amalgamation. Indeed the minority crisis in Nigeria has an ethnic foundation since Nigeria is constituted by hundreds of ethnic groups. Tamuno argues that the dominant ethnic groups were so interested in pushing away the British and seizing the machinery of the central (later federal) government that “they encouraged rivalries which had the effect of playing off one ethnic group against another”.⁹

The Niger-Delta Region in Nigeria is mostly composed of the area called the “South-South” in the current 6 geopolitical arrangements in Nigeria. It is mostly made up of Rivers, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Bayelsa and Akwa-Ibom states. And although some parts of Ondo, Abia and Imo States have oil wells, they are not regarded as part of *core* Niger-Delta.

The politics of crude oil exploitation has ensured that international and

^{8.} Tamuno, Tekena N. “Separatist Agitations in Nigeria since 1914”, in, *The Town of Modern African studies*, vol.8, no.4 (1970)

^{9.} Ibid, 572.

(unfortunately) even national concern over the Niger Delta has revolved mainly around “stability” and a fugitive kind of “peace”, just to create enough ennobling conditions for a continuation of oil exploitation. Whatever happens to the environment and the people would be of little significance. In 1995, environmental activists, Ken Saro-Wiwa, along with other Ogonis were executed by the maximum ruler, General Sani Abacha. But in 2011, the United Nations agreed that the level of pollution in Ogoniland is so permeating that it would require an excess of 1 billion U.S Dollars to clean it!

The conflict in the Niger Delta region moved from Boro's desire for an independent Niger Delta State to the demand for “resource-control”, if Nigeria's claim to “federalism” would be taken seriously. It was this demand to; at least, control the oil-resource and the frustration of the citizens of the Niger-Delta that snowballed into the militancy that began in the early-1990s. According to a 2004 report of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC),¹⁰ the Niger Delta region has an estimated growing population of over 30 million people, which is about 23% of Nigeria's population. From the formation of MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People) in 1990 and the IYC (Ijaw Youth Council) in December 1998, the demand for the control of the petroleum resource intensified.

The Stabilizing Force of Nationalism

The word “nationalism”, especially for us in Africa, would certainly invoke an air of nostalgia, particularly when we have recourse to the struggle for decolonisation. It is necessary here for us to get into discussing real issues. Whenever the word “nation” is mentioned, it is a request to answer the “who are we?” question. In Nigeria, we can easily

^{10.} Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Report, 2004

wonder: what sort of nationalism emerged from the clutches of colonial domination – Nigerian or regional? It would not be untrue to argue that perhaps before the eventual departure of the British, there may have been a relatively strong desire to put away the foreigners for Nigerians. But it would also not be too far away from the truth to say that the moment the colonial masters were gone, regional nationalism took off its masquerading Nigerian robes and manifested brazenly.

Ghia Nodia,¹¹ has critically discussed the importance of a sense of “nation” in developing the modern democratic values. He observes that making people just “equal citizens” *simpliciter* destroys their identity, deprives them of the unities under which they live and speak out, and (more importantly) submerge them to the tyranny of the majority. For him, when this happens, you don't expect much from such people in terms of participation in a democratic initiative. Nodia argues that the traditional ambivalence between democracy (rational) and nationalism (irrational) does not help our current search for a suitable polity. The obvious irrationality in choice making for candidates and the sentiments employed during electioneering in liberal democratic processes give credence to Nodia's position. For Nodia “neither democratic nor liberal principles are based on a rational foundation”.¹²

The circumstances of the emergence of the Nigeria state as well as the modes of its sustenance did not take into cognisance the ethnic nationalities that exist therein. Nearly all the managers of the Nigerian project have assumed that it is business as usual. They refused to

^{11.} Ghia Nodia, “Rethinking Nationalism and Democracy in the Light of Post-Communist Experience”, in, N.Y. Chavchavadze, P. Peachy and M Foley(eds.) *National Identity As An Issue of Knowledge and Morality* (Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 39-66

^{12.} Ibid, 48.

acknowledge that the identity, sentiments, beliefs, and feelings of these nationalities would be crucial to getting them to be committed (instead of just “tagging along”) to building a nation-state. Again, as Nodia observes “the nation is personality, because like a modern individual it is willing to observe only those laws which itself endorses, denouncing any rules imposed by an external force”.¹³ That is why all attempts to address the rumble in the Niger Delta without being responsibly committed to the sentiments being expressed by the Ijaw, Urhobo, Itshekiri, (as well as the ibibio, the anang, the efik, the isoco and even the igbo,) have been exercise in futility. Yes, nationalism can become a dangerous force, but it even becomes more dangerously devastating when it is “shut-up” without even as much as granted a mere audience. In her “is Nationalism Inherently Violent?”, Veronika Prochko writes:

Nationalism itself is not inherently violent. Rather, nationalism has a capacity for violence precisely due to various contextual factors, specifically structural, political, socio-economic, ethnic and perceptual issues as they provide the basis from which violent behaviours expends... Nationalism can be defined in 3 ways: as a political principle, as an ideological movement and as a sentiment.¹⁴

According to Clacs G. Ryn, in his paper, “Democracy and Nationhood”: Another questionable assumption among the democrats is that certain abstract ideas-the ideas of democracy and human right –can take the place of old national cultural and religious identities as sources of social cohesion and inspiration. Democratism typically treats historically evolved allegiances as anachronisms and as obstacles to the progress and liberation of mankind. Nationalism is often seen as posing a particularly serious threat to enlightened rule. That nationalism can be a very dangerous force hardly needs proving, but it too can

^{13.} Ibid, 49.

^{14.} VeronikaProchko, “Is Nationalism Inherently Violent” <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/09/23/nationalism-inherently-violent/>. Accessed July 13 2022.

appear in very different forms. Like democracy, it has opposed potentialities.¹⁵

The historical particularity of the Niger Delta conflict and the several attempts to muzzle these agitations have led to a kind of progressive extremism. I do not think that it was an original demand that the Niger Delta should have political self-determination, except, of course, it is placed within the larger Biafran Declaration. The people first of all, requested to be treated well, fairly and justifiably; not just for providing the economic basis of the Nigerian state, but equally for the environment health implications of the oil exploitation.

When their plea fell on deaf ears, they requested for resource control, at least following the principle of federalism gazetted in the constitution. From there, the demand for self-government was made. Oti/Igbuuzor captures that history thus

The publicity and tempo of the struggle increased with the formation of the Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP) in August 1990. In October 1990, the Ogoni Bill of Rights was presented to the Nigerian government and people. The Ogoni Bill of Rights among other things demanded for the right to use a fair Proportion of economic resources in Ogoni land for its development and the right to control their environment. In October 1999, movement for the survival of the Izon Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND) was formed. They presented the Izon people charter, which among other things demanded for the right of the Ijaw to control their natural resources. On December 11, 1998, the Ijaw Youth council was established and the famous Kaiama declaration was made. The declaration among other things asserted the right of the Ijaw

¹⁵. Clacs G Ryn, "Democracy and Nationhood", in, N.Y. Chavahavadze, P. Peachy and M. Foley(eds.) *National Identity As An Issue of Knowledge and Morality* (Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 98

people to the ownership and control of their lands and resources.¹⁶

The Kaiama declaration affirmed that: All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival. We cease to recognize all undemocratic decrees that rob our people/communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent. These include the Land Use Decree and the Petroleum Decree, etc.

I need to affirm that the declaration states: “we agreed to remain within Nigeria but to demand and work for self-government and resource control for the Ijaw people”.¹⁷ Today, all Niger Deltans including the political leaders have embraced the struggle for resource control.

Those who keep reiterating and repeating that the demand for a sovereign National Conference (SNC) is a demand to dismember Nigeria use that as a blackmail weapon. The Kaiama Declaration did not seek to take the Ijaws away from Nigeria. Even the declaration of the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 was more rightly a response, reaction, not an action. It was a response, to the pogrom and genocide meted out to the Easterners in the North, which led to the attempt by the then Eastern Region to assert its identity. A line in the declaration of 1967, as captured in the book, *Biafra: Selected Speeches of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu*, reads;

¹⁶ OtiveIbguzor, “Constitution Making and the Struggle for Resource Control in Nigeria”, <https://www.dawodu.com/index.php?option=com-content&view=article&id=381:constitution-making-and-the-struggle-for-resource-control-in-Nigeria>. Accessed July 4, 2012

¹⁷ Kaiama Declaration, 1998, www.unitedijaw.com accessed July 4 2012

“Following the pogrom of 1966, some 2,000,000 Eastern Nigerians have returned from other regions, refugees in their own country. Money was needed to care for them-not to give them relief but to rehabilitate them and, in time, restore their outraged feelings”.¹⁸

When Ojukwu died in November 2011 and during his burial in February 2012, many people from North to South, East and West who spoke on the ex-Biafran leader said he had to do what he did because the circumstance demanded that it be done. That is exactly the situation in the Niger Delta. No one would see the level of environmental assault on the region and the amount of petrol-dollars that are extracted there from, and not agitate, even with one's blood. For what does one live on and for when one's identity is swallowed up by being force-marched into a Universalist, rationalist democratism?

Identity is the single-most important question in discussing nation or nationalism. For once this is lost, the flesh that animates the community is lost and we are left only with the dry bones of differentiated individuality that manifests in multi-dimensional conflicts. The same situation has been playing out in the middle belt region of Nigeria, Especially in Benue State, Where mindless terrorists (with all manner of names- herdsmen, Boko Haram, Bandits, etc) have unleashed blood-letting on the people. The very identity (philosophical) and survival (physical) of the people have been at stake. The enthronement of the liberal view that sees the individual as a single unit, whose desires must always be met, systematically destroyed the sense of community or nation and the social cohesion that makes groups to function. For the Nigerian state have overtime, constantly giving appointments to

^{18.} Chukwuemeka O Ojukwu, *Biafra: Selected Speeches of C. OdumegwuOjukwu*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1969),184

individuals within the region then assume that the real problems of justice, resource control, environmental pollution have been addressed. This is why Chris Newson in his, “Conflict in the Niger Delta: More Than a Local Affair” says “using cash and contracts to placate the violence becomes a self-defeating trap. Any deviation in patronage risks punitive actions, and appetites only grow overtime”.¹⁹ This, I think, is the logic behind the Amnesty programme: “call these troublesome boys, let us give them money, send them abroad to learn some handcraft, and we will have peace, since we can't really defeat them militarily in the Creeks”! And with a sense of *de jevu*, our leaders, with their exploiting international collaborators, go and relax and relapse in their corruptive tendencies. Again Newson opines that “the amnesty as a program also suffers from short-sighted planning and patronage contracting”, but the evolving investment of over \$400 million in the amnesty shows the extent to which the government desires peace for the purpose of effecting continuous oil production.²⁰ But this is peanut when you compare it with the estimated 24.6 billion dollars (about 3.7, trillion naira) worth of oil that is stolen or bunkered yearly in the Niger Delta. This figure is released by Onyema Nwachukwu, in his, “Shielding the Nigerian Oil Industry”.²¹ But that was when the Naira was still relatively strong against the dollar. Now that it is over 600 naira to a dollar,(and rising) one can only imagine what this amounts to.

Before we end our reflection on what nationalism can bring to the resolution of the crisis in the Niger Delta, we have to state that related to (and arising from) the issue of identity, is the desire to be “recognized” or

^{19.} Chris Newson, “Conflict in the Niger Delta: More Than a Local Affair”, Special Report 271, *United States Institute of peace (USIP)*, June 2011.

^{20.} Ibid

^{21.} Onyema Nwachukwu, “Shielding the Nigerian Oil Industry”, a Commentary read on Radio Nigeria Network News, 7.55 am, May 24, 2012.

“dignified”. No matter how much is doled out to the Niger Deltans and yet the Nigerian State does not give them the “recognition” that softens their ego and calms frailed nerves, the solution would continue to be elusive. In Isaiah Berlin's book, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, he writes that the “hunger for recognition...more than any other cause, seems to lead to nationalist excesses; nationalism...expresses the inflamed desire of the insufficiently regarded to count for something among the cultures of the world”.²² This desire to be recognized, to be accorded some respect, to be regarded as a dignified part and major contributor to the stuttering Nigerian Project appears to be missing from the Nigerian State, and the manner in which the Decree of 1969 changed the original principle of derivation to resource allocation, left much to be desired. In the words of Muzan, allswell “the diminution of the derivation principle of revenue allocation which came to its perigee by the late 1970s was virtually co-eval with the ascendancy of petroleum as the primary source of revenue for the nation”.²³ In the “June 30, MNN²⁴ Declaration: Why We Reject the Nigeria Defined By the 1999 Constitution”, one of the major reason given for that rejection is “Resource Hijack: the 1969 Petroleum Decree by which the oil and gas assets of Eastern Nigeria (so-called South-East and South-South) got hijacked by the Federal Government was issued by willing-tool, Yakubu Gowon in the name of the war with break-away Biafra”.

The facts are incontrovertible. Addressing the Niger Delta question without a tilt towards and acceptance that it has a nationalistic root

²² Cited in Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2004), 62

²³ Allswell Osini Muzan, “The Nigerian Constitution and Minority Rights Guarantees”, in, C.S. Momoh, U Jack-Osimiri and I.A. Umezulike (eds.) *Law, Democracy and Its Dividends* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2004), 356

²⁴ Movement for New Nigeria (MNN), June 30 MNN Declaration: Why We Reject the Nigeria Defined By the '1999 Constitution', Text of A World Press Conference in Lagos, September 5, 2011.

simply amounts to banning the Pope from Praying the Rosary!

The Majority-Minority Complementarity

Sometimes, when one reflects deeply and philosophically on the struggle between majority and minority, one finds out that there is no need for this struggle since none can be conceptualised or defined without (simultaneously) possessing an idea of the other. The majority puts on that toga because there is a minority that defines it and gives it meaning. Chris O. Ijiomah, while reflecting on Fred Kerlinger's thoughts on the knowledge of relation among phenomena, writes “we know that something is what it is only because we have related it to something else”.²⁵

Within the Nigerian philosophical circles, however, one man, Innocent I. Asouzu, is prominent in the complementary philosophical discourse. For him, everything that exists serves as a “missing link” to something else, or other things that exist in reality. His monumental work, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology* is written to espouse this understanding of being. He writes about theorists “who are never tired seeing substance and accidents as if they belong to diverse regions of being. Hence perceiving all missing links in their fragmentation and relativity, but in full consciousness of the comprehensive, whole, future reference dimension of their determination, the mind seeks joyous balance in the tension between extreme tendencies to absoluteness and relativity”.²⁶

The zeal and zest of the minority tends towards destructiveness when that minority is subjected to intimidation, suppression or subjugation.

²⁵ Chris O Ijiomah, “Humanistic Epistemology”, in, *FilosofiaTheoretica*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (December 2011).⁶⁷

²⁶ Innocent I Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology* (Zurich: LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2007), 330

When the minority contributes very little to the political and economic pool of a particular state, it is still not a reasonable and advisable thing not to listen to both what they are saying and what they are trying to say, but which the drowning noise of the majority would not allow to be heard. The idea of state creation sort to solve the majority-minority imbroglio in Nigeria, but each minority that “settled”, as a state, still contains another minority within it, who, if settled, would also contain another minority...and so on, perhaps, *ad infinitum*. Will Kymlicka, has called for the development of “truly international mechanisms for protecting national minorities...”²⁷ However, one doubts how and what form such mechanisms can be developed at international level. Realizing that majority-minority complement is an ontological reality itself as well as a socio-political fact, we can do well to reduce those things that frail nerves and make others feel unrecognised.

Perhaps we may not be able to restore hope between the majority and minority until we bring back the trust that has been destroyed by greed on the part of leader after leader in Nigeria. And it does look like there is a relationship between trusts, the struggle for recognition and conflicts as captured by Cletus Onyema Obasi. For him:

The breakdown of trust between two persons or group is a history of trauma and humiliation. And any society that experiences this break down of trust between groups is at the threshold of anarchy and bloody battle. Fukuyama believes that liberal democracy solves the problem of 'bloody battle' 'nationalism', a rational form of recognition, has become a tool for the struggle for recognition for decades; it is Africa's most intense vehicle of conflict. The struggle for recognition in Nigeria bears a different mark from most African states. It is rooted in the question of ownership, indigene / settler-ship and

²⁷. Kymlicka, *multicultural citizenship*, 58

patriotism. It lies beneath the struggles in the Niger Delta.²⁸

Towards Redefining the Concept of Minority

Why should the idea of “minority” be only a function of population and landmass? Can't a people be intellectual minority? With the number of Professors from Ondo state, for example, that have won the National Merit Award, is there not a sense in which the rest of Nigeria is an intellectual minority to her? Is it not time for us to release ourselves from what David Walsh, calls “conventional perspectives”.²⁹ For him, we should make “effort to break free of the tyranny of conventional perspectives. Without such detachment we run the danger of misreading or misinterpreting the import of the prolific historical studies available to us”.³⁰

Against that backdrop, is there anything wrong in perceiving the Niger Delta region as the region with the majority stakes in the Nigerian state? As far as the economic respiration of Nigeria is concerned, the Niger Delta does not belong to the minority. The region is in fact a super-majority. What we call minority here is relative to a forced relation. By being forced into a Union she did not partake in shaping its character, the Niger Delta has become a minority to the bigger ethnic groups. Before colonialism and later in 1914 amalgamation, whose minority was she?

The violence in the North that graced the victory of the Bayelsa-born Goodluck Jonathan in April 2011 Presidential election in Nigeria may be

^{28.} Cletus O Obasi, “Conceptual Problems About Ethnicity and Identity in Nigeria's Conflict: A paradigm Shift”, in *Mary Land Studies*, vol.3 (June, 2006).

^{29.} David Walsh, “Reflections on the of Nature of Modernity”, ”, in *National Identity As An Issue of Knowledge and Morality*, (eds.) N.Y. Chavchavadze, P. Peachy and M Foley (*Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy*, 1994), 107-164

^{30.} Ibid 107

traced to the inability of some elements in the North to absorb the shock that political power has gone to the most unlikely and unexpected of regions. But it is not difficult to see that Jonathan's emergence came by default. When the Niger Delta got the Vice President's slot in 2007, it was an attempt by the majority to placate and calm the frailed nerves in the violent-prone region. However, Providence was to play a major role in his emergence with the death of the then President, Musa Yar'adua in May 2010. Unfortunately for Jonathan, the level and extent to which he exercised his seemingly political majority, which his being President appeared to have conferred on him, was limited by the fact that the population majority had set the structure and institutions under which he operated. For example, he had to give 71 local government slots to Kano (44) and Jigawa (27), 20 to Lagos with almost the same population and 8 to Bayelsa that produces the oil. This is anchored on manipulated population figures.

The level of re-alignment of the various social forces within Nigeria, therefore, calls for a redefinition of the concept of minority and majority. Now, it includes other things and not just population and landmass. When Fiscal Federalism, with the emphasis on the Derivation Principle is entrenched the question of political economic, intellectual, technological minority or majority would have been redefined.

While laying emphasis on ethnic minorities, Naira Marmaryan, in the essay "*Minority Concept and Related issues*",³¹ discusses the concept of minority and its various interpretations. According to Marmaryan, although many are aware of the question of minority, it has been "more

³¹. Naira, Marmaryan, "*Minority Concept and Related Issues*" www.books.google.com.ng. accessed oct 10 2019

talk, less action”.³² The author notes that the concept of minority is like that of a tree trunk with various branches. According to her “the minority constitutes the following groups”, ethnic national minority, 'religious minority', 'racial minority', 'gender minority', 'age minority', 'sexual minority', 'economic minority', 'disabled minority', etc.... minorities comprise a significant element or segment of any society and serve as material for building up society and for causing atmospheric changes within it”.³³ We see from the foregoing that the Niger-Delta area in Nigeria is not an “economic minority” but a majority. And although the area may be sociologically, geographically and numerically a minority, when consideration is focused on “economy”, it is a super-majority.

As a philosophical concept, “minority” is popular in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Their analysis, interpretation and understanding of the concepts of “minor” and “becoming-minor” is particularly interesting because they have bearing on what is happening in the Niger-Delta. Deleuze's book, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*³⁴ uses the metaphor of Kafka, who finds himself among the Prague's Jews and the Dominant Germans, Austrians or Hungarians. He is, therefore part of a “missing people” and Deleuze's work sets out to find the missing people. For both Deleuze's and Guattari, the idea of “becoming- minor” is usually expressed and identifiable within the concept of “Minority groups” because of the fact that it occurs within cramped social spaces.

In *Molecular Revolution*, Guattari³⁵ sees the concept of “becoming-

³² Ibid, 63.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, “Kafka: towards a minor literature”, *New literary history*. 16 NO .3 (1985) pp. 591-608. www.jstor.org accessed 4 August 2020

³⁵ Guattari, Felix, *molecular revolutions: psychiatry and politics* (New York: penguin books, 1984).

minoritarian” as essentially or primarily an ethical action, and for him, it occurs within the context of one trying to avoid “becoming-fascist”. Of course, drawing his analysis from Fascist Italy, Guattari looks at the circumstance where anyone who was not a Fascist in, say Mussolini’s Italy would inevitably be seen as a “Minor”. The implication is that “becoming-minor” converges at or is synonymous with “not- Becoming-fascist”, just like “becoming minor” is equal to “becoming-woman”, in a situation where (inspite of their numerical majority) woman are dominated by men, politically.

Deleuze and Guattari’s identification of “becoming-minor” with “becoming-molecular, imperceptible and revolutionary” is an attempt to make the concept “de-territorized”. Yet (paradoxically) it appears that this conception manifests territorially in the Niger-Delta. For having conceived the Niger Delta people in molecular, imperceptible fashion, the result was a “revolutionary” outburst that brought about militancy. The militancy let to a political “becoming-major” that proceeded from Vice-Presidency to Ministry of the Niger Delta and ultimately to the Presidency. One can, therefore, say that these were brought about by a realization that the Niger Delta is an “economic- majority”. At the end of the day, it does appear that a mere “redefinition” of the concept of “minority” may not suffice for a change in attitude towards the Niger Delta what is required is a proper “conceiving” or conception of the concept.

There is therefore, a sense in which what is “minor” refers to “that which is dominated”, while the “major” relates to “the dominating” reality, opinion or entity. “Minority” is, consequently, not a Being but a Becoming. It is something, a condition, a state that someone, some people, something, somewhere comes into only in relation to or in comparism with another or others. It is as such not an absolute state of

being, but one that involves a becoming and becoming-not depending on the relative state of that which “Minoritized” it. Marmaryan's conception of minority as involving being “held in lower esteem”, debarred from certain opportunities” and “excluded from full participation in the national life”³⁶; appears to no longer apply to the Niger Delta. This is because being an economic- majority seemed to have, in one fell swoop, with the emergence of the Goodluck, Jonathan phenomenon, wiped-out the above characterization of ethnic- minority by Marmaryan. The rumble in the Northern part of Nigeria, exemplified in the Boko Haram phenomenon, could be interpreted as being a reflection of the fact that some people in Nigeria are not aware that the minority-majority imbroglio is not static.

Conclusion

The existence of states as nations has become a critical discourse in contemporary politics. However, it does look like there is a need to down-play the expectation of making a nation out of a state. It is more feasible to allow nations the opportunity to form a state of their choice, defining its nature, shaping its character, and establishing its scope. That Nigeria is not a nation is an obvious fact stated by many scholars. for Tam David- West, “...strictly speaking, Nigeria is not a nation (at least not yet) although some flatter us with the mendacious claim to nationhood”³⁷. However, we do not have to be a nation or expect to be one, like David-West alludes to above, to be part of the comity of international states.

³⁶. Marmaryann, 65

³⁷. Tam David West, “Nigeria: The state of the Nation”, being a lecture delivered at the 2002 Gany Annual Conference, at Arewa House, Kaduna, June 12, 2002, Published in *The Comet*, July 16, 2002.

If “who are we?” is an existential question dealing with identity, inclusion, intersubjectivity, and even responsibility; the other question, “What are we?” centers around the structure, method and processes to adopt in social interaction. The latter question has essentially become the task, mission and preoccupation of the modern state. I believe that the nations that form a modern state must be allowed to answer the “who are we?” question before they can structure themselves into the state, which then undertakes to answer the “what are we”? Question. The inability of the Niger areas to first of all answer the former question before attempting to answer the latter has led to the chequered attempt we have made to build a state called “Nigeria” for the various nations that have existed in that territory before contact with the Europeans.

Almost all the states in Europe today emerged on their own out of nationalistic agitations. We remember how Greece emerged from a fast-fading Ottoman Empire and how Belgium came out of the Netherlands. Of course, in recent times, we have Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union becoming history with the emergence of about 20 states out of the 3, all becoming members of the United Nations. Nigeria cannot afford to go this (violent) way, although in the case of the Soviet Union, it was not a violent break-up. The inability of the current managers of the Nigerian state to allow the ethnic nationalities within Nigeria to draw a proper constitution, to re-negotiate the basis of their existence may be counter-productive. If we agree with Ademola Popola that “the fundamental premise for a culture of tolerance and mutual respect, inter and intra-ethnic relationship in Nigeria is an acceptance of concept of nation as political community...bound by common citizenship and identity arising from shared habitation and territoriality”,³⁸ where does

³⁸. Ademola O Popola, “Ethnic Conflicts and National Security”, in Momoh, C.S. in, (eds.) C.S. Momoh, U Jack-Osimiri and I.A Umezulike *Law, Democracy and Its Dividends* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2004),

this take us to? For the issue is no longer that the ethnic-nationalities in Nigeria share the same territory or even the same houses. No! The issue is that though we share the same territory and co-habit, some nationalities are begging to survive *economically* within the cohabited territory, even though they account for and contribute majority of the resources. This conflict is economic. In a bid to “seek for notice” they are compelled to, as it were, introspect into their racial, ancestral or blood tiers and then remember what they had downplayed: that they have always been different!

The Nigerian state must use the universal democratic fervour of our age to give these nationalities (these nations) the opportunity to express themselves and decide the basis and fundamentals of their existence. In my paper, “The Crisis of identity and the Quest for Development in Africa: The Place of Leadership in Creating a New Culture”,³⁹ I called attention to the part that purposeful and visionary leaders can play in reshaping and restructuring a society. It is such Leadership that plants the “culture” that society should live by from the “top”, when the “bottom” is grounded in hopelessness and helplessness. A leader with purpose and vision can ride on the back of the state and tilt the balance towards nationalism if the Niger Delta (Nigerian) question would ever be positively answered.

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³⁹. Joseph N. Agbo, “The Crisis of Identity and the Quest for Development in Africa: The Place of Leadership in Creating a New Culture”, in, *UJAH: UNIZIK Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol.12, N0.2 (2011), 204-239

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