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The Interplay of Ethnicity and The Imperatives of Political Federalism in Nigeria

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Abstract: In 1914, colonial authorities declared Nigeria a sovereign entity through the "Letter of Patent" in the British Parliament. Over a century later, the country still struggles to evolve into a true nation-state, as evidenced by persistent political instability. Various ethnic leaders have called for a reassessment of Nigeria's unity and the foundational decisions of 1914. Despite two constitutional conferences since the 1999 return to civilian rule, ethnic, tribal, and religious tensions continue to fuel demands for disintegration. This research explores the philosophical basis of nation-building and argues that Political Federalism offers the most viable framework for unifying Nigeria's diverse groups. Unlike the vague and contested notion of "True Federalism," Political Federalism is defined here as a model tailored to Nigeria's unique cultural and social realities. It requires a federal structure moderated to reflect a shared commitment to the "Common Good" through consensus among all stakeholders. The paper contends that a reimagined, pragmatic approach to federalism—termed "Tinkered Federalism"—can mitigate conflicts and foster national cohesion. When properly understood and implemented, this system can address long-standing grievances rooted in ethnic and religious divisions, thereby promoting a just and inclusive society.

Keywords: Political Federalism, Nigeria, Nation Building, Ethnic Conflict, Political Instability, True Federalism, Constitutional Conference, Unity, Overlapping Consensus.

1. Introduction

Nwagwu emphatically asserts that tribalism, ethnic loyalty and the current political structure of Nigeria are the root causes of the social – political crises the country is going through. As arguable as this can be, cursory observation of events in Nigeria lend a lot of credence to this claim. Ethnic groups in Nigeria are engaged in so much agitation that looks like an ethnic war in the offing. From what is playing out at the political space, it is clear that the twin problems of tribalism and religion are becoming topical again. It is fast becoming normal for citizens to see their allegiance first to the tribes before their country. The matter has snowballed to a point where the media space is inundated daily with cries of marginalization, tribalism, nepotism, religion, self-determination campaigns. At the base of all these agitations is the quest for power and resources. In support of the position of Nwagwu, Achebe argued that no other issue in Nigeria's political history represents the problem of national integration clearly than the word "tribe": Tribe has been accepted as an enemy at one time as a friend, rejected as an enemy at another, and finally smuggled in through the back door as an accomplice". For Achebe the foundation of tribalism in Nigeria was laid in the 50s when Chief Obafemi Awolowo "stole" the leadership of Western Nigeria from Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in broad day light on the floor of the Western House of Assembly and sent the great Zik scampering back to the Niger [1]. Many may want to argue that, if it had been the other way round, it would have been the still birth of tribalism in Nigeria but it is what it is and it has become part of the history of Nigerian politics. We will not dwell too much on the morality of what Chief Awolowo did but we can say that the problem of tribalism has come to stay in the ugly lexicon of Nigeria. Ethnic groups in Nigeria like any other part of Africa represent a set of humans bound together

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by primordial ties of cultural homogeneity with identity and commonality in customs and traditions and history. Among them is a strong degree of affinity and subservience to basic institutions such as family configurations, religion, and language. Ethnic groups have unique and distinct folkways, moral codes, dress sense, art and craft, value system and other forms of living. Members of these groups have a natural consciousness of kind and a feeling of association. Some of these groups even regard themselves as a race, tribe, and a people with a common ancestry. This is what the politicians in Nigeria use to gain political capital most times and use to create tension when they are out of the power equation[2]. Tribalism and ethnicity have thus become some kind of asset and liability as it suits the politicians who most times use the same people they are supposed to unite to foment their ethnic and tribal agenda. So on one hand, blame goes to the politicians who set their tribes against opponents and on the other hand, the people who allow themselves to be used cannot escape blame. Ethnic groups which were to become the basis of the formation of the country have been at the core of scramble for power and resources in pre and post-colonial Nigeria. The pluralities existing among the ethnic groups unlike in professional or social interactions can only be galvanized for national cohesion through the instrumentality of national identities and national commonalities that can be founded on justice and welfare. There are three main ethnic groups in Nigeria Viz: Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo in addition to hundreds of small groups that are struggling for space to express themselves and be counted, all with distinct identities and structure. A major point in this analysis is the idea that there exists among these groups some kind of object and subject to which all their members express and manifest allegiance to. These include a monarch, a religion, a language and a territory [3]. In the Nigeria that emerged from these groups in 1914, people tend to be more committed to them than the country and the ethnic groups provide some form of social and political security. This is the backdrop of tribalism in Nigeria. People are able to identify tribal symbols and authorities but can find same for the political leadership at different levels. This is a major fault line in the country. The argument is that the ethnic groups in Nigeria are different in terms of culture, religion and philosophy and there is every reason for this to be accepted because it is the natural outcome of plural societies and the proper thing to do in keeping them as one is to agree on terms of relations and cooperation. Since the inception of the Nigerian state, prominent Nigerians in their submissions have all called for a restructuring of the country to correct the inconsistencies in the system due to current incompatible but reasonable differences among the ethnic groups. Advocates of restructuring have therefore called for the creation of an equitable social-political environment for all individuals in the society [4]. This and other evidence of religious and inter-ethnic crisis, indigene and settler crisis and political tribalism all point to the fact that after sixty years of independence, the people of Nigeria are still divided on almost every aspect of life, from religion to education, women's rights to children's rights, and from politics to culture etc. It is worthy of note that ethnic identity is an outcome of the desire by individuals to organise themselves in such a way that will underscore their ability to compete in situations where there is a social system that creates the urgency in them to compete with one another for state resources and political position. This is indicative of the reality that if not for the issues of state resources and political largesse in Nigeria, the ethnicity problem would not have assumed the dimension it has now. It was for this same reason that the 1999 constitution of the country encourages the principle of federal character in the appointment of officials into public institutions to forestall any feeling of marginalisation of any ethnic group [5]. Enahoro : "the failure of Nigeria so far may be attributed in great part to the perennial tensions and conflicts among its nationalities, resulting from mutual insecurity, jealousy and fears. Alapiki describing the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria as situational, argues that the issue emerges in situations where conditions under which: "competing actors as individuals, groups, or classes find the ethnic resource expedient. And in this process, ethnicity constitutes a serious obstacle to political integration, because it leads to the substitution of ethnic interests for the national interest". Thus, the question of contextualising the Nigerian society within the established pluralism falls into three broad categories. And they are: "how should the constituent units of the federation be demarcated and how many of them should there be? What should be the relationship between the government of the

federation and the governments of its constituent parts? And what should be the relationship between the Nigerian governments and the citizens?" It was well postulated that the cynosure of the Yoruba race is the town called Lagos. As early as 1861 the town had been annexed and made a colony of Britain [6]. But before 1900 Lagos, named after a Portuguese town in the Algarve region, had established a stable administration with professionals and other categories of personnel fully functioning under a traditional system of government by kings and Obas before the advent of British administration. The rest of the western part of what is today known as Nigeria had Kingdoms such as Benin, Itsekiri, Aboh, the non-centralised communities of Ukwani, Urhobo, Isoko, and western Ijaw. These people had their machinery for politics in place through prevailing socio-political organisations such as monarchies and gerontocracies. The machineries were distinctly different from the Northern, Eastern and Coastal societies in every respect [7]. The monarchical political system in Yoruba land was such that political power and governance was in the hands of one man known as the Oba, who was chosen by the 'gods' of the land from a family with an indefeasible hereditary right and who's right to rule was divinely ordained. The king had absolute power in theory but in practice was assisted by an institutionalised council of chiefs who could dethrone him at the will of the people. This social-political institution encouraged the king or Oba to rule in the interest of the people as monitored through the chiefs. The common interest of the people which is a cardinal condition of democracy in contemporary society was deeply entrenched and was at play in the Yoruba Kingdom for as long as the 19th century before the advent of colonialism. The Yoruba nation had a distinct culture, festivals and beliefs and they had established philosophical and religious doctrines that were very different from those of the Igbos and Hausa/Fulani. They had a distinct language, music and were very republican in nature. Women were encouraged to take part in politics and prompted to form social and economic groups that protected and projected their interests. They took interest in trade and farming and were active in the organisation of their societies[8]. Over the years, traditional political institutions in the western region were attacked and courted at the same time by the colonial regimes. Yet in their regimes they ran organized systems of government which encouraged western education and modern social ethics and civics.

2. Materials and Methods

There is a general consensus and rightly so that there were hardly any parts and hardly any people in pre-colonial Nigeria that lacked a conception of state, society and pattern of authority extending beyond the family unit and all these are different and distinct from place to place and from people to people. The legacy and peculiarity of the northern part, today populated by the above group and other minorities such as the Igalas, Tivs, Nupes, and kanuris etc. was such that the mission by Shehu Usman Dan Fodio to establish an Islamic theocracy in the region had profound and far reaching consequences on the political culture of the era. Native traditional rulers in the provinces were overthrown and replaced by Fulani flag bearers under an emirate and caliphate system with emirs paying allegiance to the Sultan of Sokoto as the head of the caliphate. The jihad led by Shehu though religious in movement involved a socio-economic and political revolution with Islam providing the ideology. Crowder notes that this Islamic legacy of the northern part of the country before the coming of the colonial administrators shows a different legacy compared to other parts of the countries that practiced Christianity. The distinction in the northern part of Nigeria is thus borne partly from the fact that the Fulanis, kanuris, and Hausas were related in very close connection culturally, religiously and economically to North Africa, particularly with the conquest of the Berbers by the Arabs in the 17th century. The peculiarities of the Islamic religion and transportation sources such as camels were introduced by these Arabs in addition to writing and mathematics skills. These efforts formed the basis of the domination of Islam and Arabic education in the North and Christianity and Western education in the south. So the north had in place major states such as the Kanem-Bornu in the far northeast near Lake Chad and Kano, all flourishing under the Sokoto caliphate. And around this great caliphate were smaller pagan ethnic groups scattered around the area doing farming and iron

works [9]. The least centralized area in the country was the Eastern part populated mainly by the Igbos. Historians who have done so much research on this part of the country explain that these people were predominantly traders and had been trading with Europeans from the 19th century and after a long period of trading in slaves, trading shifted to palm oil and palm kernel. The political culture of the Igbos has been labelled variously by archaeologists as acephalous, stateless and republican. Communities there until very recent times, unlike the other areas of Nigeria did not have heads or institutions of government with persons serving as chiefs or ruling political authority. Another difference associated with the Igbos is that their communities did not possess formal structures of government with a hierarchical organization based on persons charged with functions of rule; and government was by the community at large. The Igbos did not reside power in one man with absolute authority unlike the Obas and Emirs in the West and North respectively. The Igbos were republican in nature as leadership is not prescriptive and permanent but changeable and flexibly assigned to persons of proven leadership capability. They are known today as the traders and industrialists with distinct culture, philosophy and religion. Their women are free to aspire to any height as their male counterparts and enjoy equal rights with the men except for traditional demands of marriage which makes the woman the junior partner. They were a stateless society because of their free and republican nature and outlook. They hardly have powerful traditional rulers with wide powers and kingdoms apart from the warrant chiefs created by the British to carry out the orders of the colonial government. This represents the minority ethnic groups in the southern part of the South of the Country [10]. They comprise the Ibibios, Ikwerres, Efiks, and the Ijaws; all being connected to the sea. The Niger Delta has an area of 70,000 Kilometres and accounts for only 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass and is third in wetlands in the world. It is easily recognised by the three way land area traversed by the point of bifurcation of the River Niger into the Nun and Forcados Rivers in addition to the many other distributaries into the Atlantic Ocean. Karl Maier and History records that when the Portuguese explorers first came to the Delta, the Ijaws lived in small fishing villages scattered around. They traded among themselves and with their neighbours in fish and salt extracted from the creeks in exchange for vegetables and iron implements. Modest settlements in Ijaw land were later transmuted into major slave ports in cities such as Bonny, new Calabar, Okrika and Brass when the Slave trade with Europeans commenced. When the slave trade ended in the 19th century the trade in palm oil picked up and a British merchant George Dash-wood Goldie Tubman who later turned out to be the British mercenary that commenced the colonization process banded the various palm oil companies in 1879 into the Royal Niger Company. And the company's main port at Akassa became the beach head of British colonial occupation of the Niger Delta and ultimately of Nigeria itself. From the foregoing accounts, the plurality of the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria is not just in their doctrines, philosophy, morality, religion and politics but also in the colonial heritage because while the Yoruba nation was conquered by the British and direct rule imposed, the Hausa/Fulani had British indirect rule even when Goldie and Laggard had conquered them. In the East and Nigeria Delta, it was more of trading and ceding of control through treaties with illiterate rulers. "The chiefs who signed treaties with Goldie and the British consul of the day Major Edward Hewett often did not understand that they were effectively ceding their sovereignty to the British crown and sometimes their signatures or marks were forged or obtained under duress. Other times the British simply lied to them". Also, unlike other parts of the country, the emirates of the North were such that society as noted by Anikpo was structured into social strata according to nobility, occupation, religion, ethnic group and slavery. This structure polarised the society into the ruling class- Masu Sarauta and the Commoners-Talakawas. Nzimiro explains that the ruling class is composed of all those in public office while the commoners are the peasants, serfs, and slaves who cultivated the land and paid rents to the land owners. Anikpo affirms that the Yorubas also had a system of governance where the traditional leaders sustained their subjugation of the commoners in the guise of divine kingship. On the other hand, the Benin, Ibo, Ibibio, and Tiv groups' social stratification was different where wealth, age and success formed the basis of traditional leadership. These differences formed the basis of relations among the groups

before the advent of colonialism such that integration of the groups was not attempted. This situation has re-enforced and re-emphasised the problem of tribal and ethnic loyalty in the country as all groups jostle for public office for ethnic preservation and ethnic enhancement. Udoidem in assessing the issue argued that before the advent of colonialism, there was no national value system as there was no Nigeria in a geo-political sense. During this pre-Nigeria period, he notes that the social structure of the different independent communities, clans, and tribes based their value system on some form of transcendental divine order and on some kind of humanistic communalism. The structure emphasised a brother's keeper mentality as against the post colonialism system of every-man-for-himself philosophy. The structure of the country in terms of the relationship between the component states and the central government has generated much scholarship and commentary such as those by Nwagwu ; Sagay ; Afigbo ; and Arikpo. The general argument by critics is that while the 1999 constitution in operation at present expressly declares the country to be a federal state, the contrary is the case as in practical terms the country is operating a unitary political system, and all component state authorities depend on the central government while the central government dictates to them thereby negating the spirit of federalism as envisaged by the constitution. Legal minds in the country such as Nwabueze and Sagay have argued that the constitution envisages that under the federal structure a level of autonomy and some form of devolution of power is given to the component states to take care of the pluralities and diversities in the country. The problem, however, is that the operators of the document are not implementing the constitution properly but manipulate it to the extent that rather than a federal structure, the real system being operated is the unitary system where power and resources are concentrated at the centre. Mazrui puts it succinctly that: "in Nigeria, federalism has been substantially negated by almost four decades of military rule since independence while state rights and human rights have been trivialised by military arbitrariness". Rotimi Amaechi, a former governor in one of the component states that produces oil (Rivers state) in the Niger Delta and now a Minister, describes the structure as a "confused federalism" Newspapers quoted him to have said: "...the nation is a dependent confused federal structure. Nigeria is not practising federalism [11]. In Nigeria, power has been personalised instead of the structure being institutionalised. The political space should belong to the people. Nigeria is not practicing federalism. The rich is a non-productive rich depending on oil, and once you grab oil you have made it. We are a dependent confused federal structure, a marriage of convenience". Despite the lapses noticed in the practice of the structure however, and apart from the advocates and campaigners for the splitting of the country into smaller units along ethnic lines , the consensus seems to be that the most desired structure for the country in view of the pluralities of the people is the federal structure . The advocates of this structure (modified as true federalism) base their preference on the assumption that it affords the people to grow at their pace since in the first place their differences have not augured well for national integration and cohesion. Awolowo did extensive work on this in his people's republic when he outlined and argued categorically that: "If a country is uni-lingual or multi-lingual, and also consists of communities which, though belonging to the same nation, have, over a period of years, developed some important culture divergences as well as autonomous geographical separateness, the constitution must be federal, and the constituent states must be organized on the dual basis of language and geographical separateness" For Nicolson the reason that the federal system did not achieve its objectives as far back as the 1950s was that Nigeria had not properly developed and the necessary social and political conditions in which such institutions could flourish were not in place. His argument is the same as Awolowo's assertion that Nigeria was not yet a nation and would not be unless certain reforms and restructurings were carried out [12]. The requirement of common sympathies and the will to cooperate with a particular set of people more than others in addition to the desire to want to be under the same government, which are all necessary to make the structure work, they believed, are absent. In spite of this though, some accounts such as Maier still believe that the military coup of 1966 which in a decree abrogated the regions and the federal structure, replacing it with the unitary system, set into motion a perennial and chronic constitutional crisis affecting

the governance model for the country, a situation that continues to this day, resulting in the implementation of a unitary system in a supposed federal structure.

3. Results.

The reason and philosophy behind federalism was seen by many as good, judging from the fact that political leaders including late Awolowo advocated this strongly as a panacea against future crisis. When it was first introduced in the 1946 and 1956 constitutions, Nigeria had only three regions. From the time of independence in 1960 and up to today Nigeria now has 36 component states. The agitation for true federalism cutting across all segments of the country is that component states should have a level of autonomy and be unchained from the incessant control and manipulation of the central government. Sagay, Awolowo and Nwagwu all propound that this will allow states to grow at their own pace and utilise their resources fully [13]. Their position eliminates the central control of the petro dollars by the ruling class and revert the centre of development to the component state. Sagay's argument is that federalism makes governance at the centre unattractive by de-emphasizing the pecuniary consideration for national service by shifting the attention of governance and economic production to the federating units. This makes these units stronger because, political and economic powers would be exercised by locals in their daily living, interactions and activities as obtained in developed democracies: "The constitution of a country is or should be a reflection of its historical and socio-political experience. In this regard Nigeria cannot be different. The deliberate choice of federalism as the only viable and acceptable form of government for Nigeria was a product of the diversity of its people, politically, historically, culturally, and linguistically, and of the experience gained from the attempts to create a viable polity out of the forced amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria beginning in 1912". Former military President of Nigeria General Ibrahim Babangida, the former governors of Rivers and Delta states Rotimi Amaechi and Chief Emmanuel Uduaghan all condemned the current federal structure in place and called for a better practice of Federalism. Babangida argued that the country has not progressed and does not enjoy social justice and political stability because of the lack of true federalism: "Until Nigeria enthrones a true federalism, we cannot enjoy justice and stability and the country must have real federalism as the only solution to our problem". Uduaghan argued that "if you want this country to grow, there must be proper federation-a true federalism" [14]. To free the country from the straight jacket of the self-serving unitary arrangement currently in place, Osundare asserts that Nigeria is urgently and seriously in need of a true federalism aimed at generating cooperation, harmony and interdependence among the constituent parts and at the same time ensure that no part of the country is so powerful and so big as to be able to dominate either directly or indirectly the other parts and no part is weak enough that it cannot function adequately without being seriously and desperately dependent on other parts. All the component states it is argued will enjoy the kind of equality that will ensure social justice and ensure political stability as the absence of these are caused by feelings of cheating and lack of adequate resources from the centre. Federalism as advocated by many groups guarantees decentralisation and the granting of legal rights to federating units to have ownership of their affairs, resources and culture. Being a popular and universal system, federalism recognises the unevenness in the society and seeks to address this by throwing a challenge to federating units to develop at their pace and assist weak ones through fiscal tools such as tax and revenue rather than an outright assumption that all federating units must be at par. The inequalities recognised in federalism is not to leave the weak ones helpless but to give them a sense of belonging as the central authority is empowered to cater for the least advantaged which would be in line with Rawls' difference principle [15]. The sheer territorial size of Nigeria warrants the adoption of a federal system of constitution with the division of the country along ethnic lines Awolowo argued. An example of this imperative for advocates of federalism is the institution of Obaship and Emirship which are established in the western and northern parts but totally irrelevant in the east. Also among the various ethnic groups, there are different standards of civilisation and unequal levels in the adoption of western education and the adoption of western civilisation. A system of ethnic delineation would make each linguistic group

to not only develop its own peculiar culture and institution but to progress at its own pace without being pushed or slowed down by others [16]. Federalism campaigners contend that it is a misconception to believe that Nigerians would easily and readily accept common standards and common leadership. The philosophy of true federalism in Nigeria means among other things the complete reconstitution and discarding of the present constitution, which is more unitary in practice but masquerades as federal. In very specific terms, it would involve the institution of a non-centralised scheme of fiscal federalism whereby each part of the federating unit will explore, exploit and produce its resources, keep the money and make the necessary contribution in form of tax to the central purse. The philosophy would also necessitate the restructuring of the current over centralised unitary police structure, and the recognition of state rights over the local government system etc. For Mazrui Clearly federalism is at best only a necessary condition for pluralistic liberal order and not a sufficient condition [17]. What has been remarkable since independence has been, loosely, Africa's reluctance to seriously consider it as a solution to its tumultuous ethnic upheavals and secondly, the United States' reluctance to sell federalism as part of the American liberal legacy". The proponents of federalism also believe that it affords the country the best opportunity for the issue of mass participation of the people in the affairs of the state, government and politics. The emphasis in this regard is that the sovereignty of the will of the people shall be uncompromised while human rights shall be respected[18]. The system that is being proposed also embraces and encourages equal political, social and economic opportunities i.e. political and economic empowerment for every Nigerian citizen while at the same time equity, justice and fair-play are to be the ethical basis of politics and national unity, and transparency and accountability are to be the basis for governance. Saro-Wiwa equally believes "It is only a loose federation based on the ethnic groups that can offer a measure of cohesion and offer the Nigerian nation-state a slim chance of survival" Mazrui asserts that federalism remains a necessity in African societies, noting that it was the only missing item on the list of exports of the American system: "The missing American agenda is federalism. For the first half-century of postcolonial experience in Africa, the word federalism has been anathema almost everywhere in Africa, other than Nigeria" . The reference to the American system is quite instructive because it is the quintessential example of a working federalism as the fifty states operate successfully under a federal constitution while the reference to Nigeria is because it is the biggest federation in Africa and the fifth largest federation in the world after India, US, Brazil and Russia. Nwagwu in this context believes it is important to adopt a structure that will make Nigeria a sovereign nation of one people as against the sovereign state it is at the moment.

4. Discussion

Any argument on the best structure for any society can easily make the people look like puppets and non- participants in the interplay of structural institutions. The reality is that it is actually impossible to separate social structure from personal agency. While the structural-functionalists see society as a unit working together to maintain equilibrium, the position of conflict theorists that society is a competition of the classes in society resonates well and more with the reality of the Nigerian experience where there is an invisible conflict among the different interests for the control of the political system for their own satisfaction and for vested interest [19]. The relevance of this is that because of the immoral motive of the people, the social structure of federalism is weakened and as such, people think more of themselves, rather than the whole and this has led to the scramble for power for the development of self-interest which also means ethnic interest rather than the development of institutions and processes. The situation in Nigeria as it relates to structure and agency therefore is that instead of having a situation where the former gives direction to the later, it is the other way round thereby creating the high incidence of social injustice and social-political crisis. The most consistent attempt at reconceptualising social structure in recent social theory is the work of Anthony Giddens. From the mid-seventies, he has been arguing that the concept is dual. This means that structure connotes "both the medium and outcome of the practices which constitute social

systems". Sewell thus believes that: "In this view of things, human agency and structure, far from being opposed, in fact presuppose each other. Structures are enacted by what Giddens calls knowledgeable human agents (i.e. people who know what they are doing and how to do it), and agents act by putting into practice their necessarily structured knowledge". The sense of justice in Nigeria makes it conventional for the agency in the practice of federalism deliberately withdraw the right knowledge in furtherance of ethnic preference [20]. This dual understanding of structure which ties it to agency explains the fate of the social structure of the Nigerian society as both a creation of the Nigerian people but also their 'Achilles' heel'. The structure put in place and sustained through the means of political leadership by the elites is now the cause of the draconian system of organising the society that has created so much social injustice and political instability. Proponents of structural theories claim that individuals are born into societies that are already constituted and they are merely individuals in a system of associations involving many others. This system of thought undermines the way societies emerge because the natural emergence of society is a function of existing individuals in different communities pulling together based on some agreements for the common good of all of them. Individuals are the main initiators of society and should remain the fulcrum irrespective of when they are born into society [21]. Primarily, individualist sociologists as opposed to Structuralists believe that society is nothing but a body of individuals bound by interdependence with characteristics such as national, local or cultural identities, social solidarity, language or hierarchical organisations. It is individuals that create society and not the other way round. Theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu sought to find some kind of balance and equilibrium between the different arguments on the debate by arguing that structure and agency are complimentary phenomena. While structure influences human behaviour, humans have the ability and capacity to influence and change the social structure they live in. This idea of being able to change social structure would underscore the views of advocates of the conflict theory in a way as they believe that the structure of a society can be to the disadvantage of the individuals in that society, hence the teaching of violent overthrow or revolution. Fuchs is one theorist who has been able to put the contrasting pairs of structure and agency under the universal umbrella of formal pragmatics. This he did by dividing modern society into life-worlds which he termed micro and macro [22]. This view seems to be a synthesis of the two views on the discussion and they both give a practical and pragmatic explanation of how society functions. The idea is that of a combination of the two spheres of characteristics. Here the argument Fuchs makes is that people can create their micro world but not their macro world. They act but under circumstances not of their own choice. They define and redefine situations but are limited by structures in the society. It is in his sense that the structures in the Nigerian society affect the actions of the people. They can by choice and free will choose a given situation but are limited by the structures that predate them. The question then is what happens when a structure is unjust. What options do individuals in general have in this situation? The two phenomena must therefore be seen as part and parcel of a complete interplay of persons and systems. The Nigerian society like many others is composed of people from different ethnic groups, who relate to each other through constant and persistent relations including social status, roles and social-political networks [23]. It carries the reality of the people of a particular region or country. Giddens in this direction sees society as: 'generalised connotation of social association or interaction and unity, having boundaries which mark it off from other surrounding societies... societies have no "reason" or "needs" whatsoever: only the actors whose activities constantly constitute and reconstitute those societies do so'. In a related vein therefore, Giddens' argument can be placed side by side the idea of structure and agency translating to the fact that society is akin to structure seen as macro, while agency is micro as per the individuals in society. The relationship and significance of the Nigerian people with the structure of the society will not be too different from the debate about structure and agency. We shall thus address this issue within this context. Common understanding is that agency has to do with the ability of persons in any given society to act and take actions independently while making their own free choices from free will. This shows that people act freely and are not robots in the society. Harrington in a similar argument notes that in spite of the fact that structure

usually dictates the shape of social institutions and systems, individuals still have the capacity to choose what to do even though the choices at their disposal are restricted and shaped in different forms and ways by the structural realities in the society [24]. The implication of this is that while the structure of a society may not be too favourable to individuals, they still have alternative possibilities of action. This line of thought by Harrington falls in line with the argument of violent changes and the realities of crime and anti-social behaviour in society where structures tend to be against the welfare and interest of the people. Scholars such as Ake in this regard have argued that once people in a particular system perceive the system as unjust, they would automatically develop their idea of justice in terms of injustice and embark on actions that can be categorised as anti-social but can be justified by them as their own way of working with the system. Part of the effects of such an unjust system in Nigeria is the fact that in 1960, the British 'arranged' and 'installed' a parliamentary Westminster type of democracy, but because the system was weak and cosmetic, it could not function effectively in the 'highly combative political environment' and in 1966 it collapsed. Under the same weak state and societal structure, the country has been divided into thirty six states in a bid to stem ethnic, tribal and religions contradictions. These failed efforts indicate the challenges of building a democracy in what Wright refers to as 'a severely fractured state'. The only reason why Federalism has not worked effectively in spite its inherent virtues as attested to in earlier sections of this article is because Nigerians have not allowed it and the evidence is that from the parliamentary system in the early sixties to the presidential system of the seventies, through to the military dictatorships and back to the presidential system in a federal structure has not produced the justice and development envisaged. It is almost argued that no matter how good a system is, it a good people that can run it and sustain it for their own preservation [25]. Like Plato advocates: "If a Polis is just, it is such only in so far as its people are generally just person and what makes the Polis just is the disposition of these same persons to do their own". You can never divorce a people from a system as they are intertwined in a relationship that is mutually life giving such that the agency needs a good system to grow and a good system is built by a good agency. It therefore means that Federalism has the potentials to pull Nigerians together in a relationship that is independent within dependence as people of one country. At the same time, it is the responsibility of Nigerians to make federalism work. Sadly within their sense of justice, once a Nigerian agency leaves his ethnic sphere, he cares less about his responsibility and sees it as just to be unjust to it. Any form of activity by the people is seen as morally justified and in the best interest of the people if reasons can be given for it which connect it with the will of the agent concerned and with the well-being of the society of which the agent is himself a member. It is therefore important that a moral culture ought to be established which is acceptable to all members of a society as norms and values, as a precursor to the establishment of a political culture. It is often argued that there is no morality in politics, a thinking that gives rise to all kind of chaos in society. A society that practises politics without morality will only breed criminals and enemies of the common interest and the ultimate is a slide to the state of nature. The doctrine of the state of nature itself is a pointer to the idea that in the state of nature, there was no law and no morality and therefore no right or wrong; no good or bad and every man became his own morality. The resultant effect is what life in the state of nature became as outlined by Hobbes. Federalism has not worked in Nigeria because Nigerians in their different situations have worked against it through immoral and incompetent behaviour.

5. Conclusion

We have shown that the treatment of the relationship between the social structure of the society, i.e. Federalism and the role of agency i.e. the people has shown that the two entities go together and are in fact inseparable. The best of people cannot achieve much under a structure that is not built for the common good. Federalism cannot work if the operators do not make it work. On the other hand, an unjust structure cannot guarantee good citizenship contrary to what writers such as Achebe believe. Achebe posits the problem of Nigeria in the lack of good leadership rather than good social structure. The

structural-functionalists theorize on attaining order and equilibrium in society which ordinarily should be the desire of any right thinking society but the incidence and interplay of injustice in the structure distorts this ideal. For Nigeria, Federalism remains the most viable option for a stable polity but the unfulfilled desire for free and participatory political process in addition to a deep concern for fairness and equitable distribution of resources and public wealth continue to be a cause for concern for the citizens who abhorred the colonial imposition and earnestly fought for the end of colonialism. The struggle for self-rule and independence many thought would bring an end to all the social and political challenges confronting the country but African people are very disappointed in their systems as nothing seems to have changed. Federalism to many has been characterised by a monopolization of state power and some people in Nigeria are asking whether the country should remain as one or break up into its several pre-colonial parts. Different surveys done by both Nigerian agencies and foreign agencies such as the United Nations have reported that the current Federal structure encourages corruption and this problem is seen as one of the country's most severe problems. The three branches of government in Nigeria are today suffering from low public confidence even though it means nothing to the politicians. Human Rights Watch also summarized the endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria by estimating that 'about \$380 Billion has been lost to corruption from independence in 1960 to 1999'. However, attempts in the past to stem the tide failed because they lacked any theoretical fundamentals. They include Ethical revolution, War Against indiscipline (WAI) in 1984, National orientation movement Mass mobilization for social justice, Code of conduct bureau, Independent corrupt practices commission (ICPC) in 1999 and the Economic and Financial crimes commission (EFCC) in 2004. With the foregoing, were Phillipson and Adebo correct when they asserted that every situation has its roots in the past? Without doubt, it can be concluded that the current socio-political problems in the country are basically a result of an unjust social structure in Nigeria, which has its roots in the past as the past survives into the present; the present properly understood is nothing but the past in metamorphosis. Nigeria could not have turned out better than it has with the kind of past we just analysed. So unlike Achebe who wrote that the problem of Nigeria is strictly leadership, a consensus in literature suggests that the problem of Nigeria also has to do with the colonial legacy of weak and unjust social structure such as Federalism. While the monumental failures of the Nigerian state may be a subject of debate, some of its founding political leaders clearly admit that "the mistake of 1914 has come to light". While it may be superfluous to blame the ills of the Nigerian society purely on the incidence of colonialism, as it was an idea that was fashionable then and Nigeria was not the only country so colonized, analysis so far shows that its effects on the socio-political landscape of the Nigerian society is profound and significant. It is argued by Maier, Ake, Soyinka and many other scholars that colonialism remains the basis of the current institutional injustice and flawed social structure of the society because in Nigeria's case compared to nation states such as England, France or Germany, the country did not have an auspicious debut. Ostheimer notes that: "...there was no Bismarck to unify the diverse Nigerian tribes. No seventh century settlement, equivalent to those made between York and Lancaster or between catholic and protestant were made between Nigerian regions and the various tribes. No Louis xiv ever encouraged Nigeria's dozens of ethnic units to acknowledge one central authority, nor did common linguistic and cultural traditions exist to support such political events, had they occurred". The analogy that easily comes to mind concerning the bond of nationhood is in the estimation of Ostheimer, the emotional bond shared by the majority of Americans which is derived from their common historical experiences, their mythology of national heroes and villains, and perhaps most of all from the mobility of their people. More importantly is the enormous area of cultural mutuality such as their fascination with professional sports, propagated by the mass media. The United States is a political community which means that political attitudes are shaped by shared experiences and common personalities that command national attention. Ostheimer's argument is that while countries such as USA and Great Britain are less homogenous nation-states than the Scandinavian countries, they still keep their society together through strong social and political structures and institutions that resonate and are

accepted in most cases by the majority of the people, which does not mean that absolutely everybody agreed to the terms. It just means that a greater number of the society is satisfied with both the process and outcomes of these institutions. In these countries, citizens identify with public principles guiding and regulating society and are obedient to their stipulations and dictates. Under this kind of atmosphere law and order can be achieved because the people believe the rule of law is intended for their good rather than that of the ruling class. It is of note that since Nigerians in their different Ethnic groups and tribes or what Awolowo referred to as their 'nations' have never at any particular time in history entered into a social contract, they remain in the pre-society stage of civilization. Today the country is faced with all manner of crises caused by a warped structure inherited wholesale from the colonial past. But the colonial past is not the only reason for the woes of the country. In fact some apologists would argue that the colonial past recorded some mile-stones and that the new administrators failed to take advantage of its inheritance from colonial rule. They note further that it was Nigerians' inadequacies that necessitated colonialism in the first place.

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