

## CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PARADOX OF NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA

**Mbaeze, Netchy Christian**

Department of Political Science  
Enugu State University of Science & Technology (ESUT)

**Okoli, Chukwuma Rowland**

Department of Political Science & International Relations  
Godfrey Okoye University & University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu

**Okonkwo, Willy**

Department of Political Science & International Relations  
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu

### **Abstract**

*The much-vaunted nation-building for plural societies remains a mirage in Nigeria. Plagued by divisive features like primordialism, existence of 'dual citizenship' and prioritization of ethnic indigeneity over national citizenship, the country is torn between clashing centrifugal forces. This study examined how ethnic based civil society organizations (CSOs) act as centrifugal forces that thwart nation-building in Nigeria. Case-study research design was adopted to focus our analysis on three selected CSOs: Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo, Afenifere and Arewa Consultative Forum. Content analysis was employed to analyze data collected via documentary approach. We anchored our study on the Marxian theory of postcolonial state. The study found that the selected CSOs thwart nation-building by entrenching primordialism and 'dual citizenship' through integration of the people at the subnational level based on ethnic cleavages, primarily for the purpose of accessing power and oil-dominated economic resources concentrated at center of Nigeria's lopsided federal system. We recommended, among others, that CSOs should focus on mobilizing the people for economic production and contribution rather than distribution. There is also need to address the imbalance in the federal system to enhance autonomy of the federating units and avoid hegemony of any federating unit.*

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organizations (CSOs); Nation-building; Primordialism; Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo, Afenifere; Arewa Consultative Forum

### **Introduction/Problematique**

Nation building is a complex but centripetal process as well as a strategy of welding together groups of diverse ethnic, cultural, traditional, historical and religious identities, into a nation-state with a common identity and interest (Igwe, 2005). Like many other African states, nation building has remained a major challenge for Nigeria since her independence in 1960. Despite various mechanisms and institutions put in

place by successive governments to eke out a nation out of the diverse groups that make up the area known as Nigeria, the country remains a mosaic torn apart by constantly clashing ethnic groups. Thus, after over fifty years of independence, Nigeria still suffers from divisive factors like primordialism and prevalence of 'dual citizenship' in which Nigerians see themselves first as citizens of their ethnic groups and secondly as Nigerian citizens. Although federalism was adopted as the most viable form of government for Nigeria in view of her ethnic diversity, Nigeria's federal system deteriorated over the years to become an impediment to the unity it aimed to advance. Nigeria's federal system is characterized by a 'vicious circle of imbalance' in which the structural imbalance amongst the federating units, and between them and the central government exacerbates a horizontal and vertical fiscal imbalance in the system. This lop-sided federal structure enables the central government to retain so much fiscal and political power such that the federating units are entirely dependent on the center for development. In fact, emerging studies have argued that this lop-sided federal structure accounts for the die-hard contestation for federal power by regional elites (Ezirim, Nnamani & Nnaegbo, 2016). More so, beyond the problematic structure of Nigeria's federal system, Kendhammer, (2014) have demonstrated that power-sharing institutions like the Federal Character Commission created to enhance nation building through promotion of federal character principle have only succeeded in undermining nation building by entrenching the 'dual citizenship' syndrome.

The imbalance in the federal system and perceived marginalization of some ethnic groups has continued to stimulate agitation from various ethnic groups within the country. Hence, while some ethnic groups call for restructuring of the system to take care of their demands, others call for dismantling of the Nigerian state, yet others call for retention of the status quo from which they benefit. Such agitations have increased with return to democratic rule since 1999. This surge in agitations can be linked to the increase in activities of ethnic based civil society organizations.

Conceptually, civil society is the space outside the state, the market and the family which enables the citizens to pursue their common aspiration and participate in the overall development of the society (Clarke, 2016; Froissart, 2014). It is a society in which autonomous groups exist to aggregate the views and activities of individuals, promote and defend individual interests including against the state when necessary (Katusiimeh, 2004). Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are non-state structures which provide channels for through which the citizens relate to themselves and the state (Ikelegbe, 2013). Structurally, Falton (as cited in Ikelegbe, 2013) classified CSOs into three structural strata – predatory, quasi-bourgeoisie and popular CSOs. While, the predatory and the quasi-bourgeoisie CSOs are made of rent-seeking elites who seek to protect their interests, the popular CSOs are made up of the masses resisting reforms that undermine their welfare (Okoli, 2016).

In line with the foregoing, this study interrogates the challenge of Nigeria's nation-building project within the context of the activities of ethno-regional Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) following return to civil rule in 1999. With specific focus on three CSOs - Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and Oha-na-eze

Ndi-Igbo - the paper described most of the ethno-regional CSOs in Nigeria as being predatory in character because of their attempt to eclipse other ethnic groups (especially the minorities), monopolize regional power; and serve mainly as channels for appropriating power and resources concentrated at the center of Nigeria's lopsided federal system. Accordingly, two research questions were provoked for interrogation in the study, viz: Did the imbalance in Nigeria's federal structure engender emergence of predatory ethno-regional civil society organizations? Does the predatory character of ethno-regional civil society organizations undermine their capacity to enhance nation-building in Nigeria?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on Marxian theory of Post-colonial state. Initially developed by Alavi (1972), other major proponents of the theory include Ake, (1985); Ekekwe (1985). The theory of post-colonial state emerged mainly from political and ideological resistance and intellectual critique of post-nineteenth century imperialism and colonialism, including the legacies of Western exploits in the global South and the contemporary power relations between the global South and the global North (Omeje, 2015). The theory has been shaped by the works of leftist historical materialism (notably Marxist political economy and dependency theories of history and political science) such as Ake (1985) which emerged as a critique of imperialist and nationalist historiographies on the *raison d'être* and consequence of colonialism. Ekekwe (1985) rightly captured the character of the post-colonial stated thus:

The post-colonial state rests on the foundation of the colonial state which, in turn had incorporated some important elements of the pre-colonial rudimentary state structures. The colonial state was an instrument of imperialism. However, much as it was an imposition, it had to have a modicum of support and acquiescence from some of the aristocratic and feudal elements who wielded economic and political authority in pre-colonial times. Gaining such support was imperative in order to minimize social dislocations (Ekekwe, 1985, p.56).

Accordingly, the theory assumes the following:

1. That post-colonial state serves as an instrument of capital accumulation,
2. That post-colonial state is authoritarian, divisive, predatory, exclusive and an instrument in the service of the dominant capitalist class;
3. That post-colonial state is interventionist and involves in class struggle and, or politics;

### **Methodology**

This study employed case study design which enables us to carry out in-depth study of a small number of cases in their real-life context and understanding how the cases influence and are influenced by the contexts in which they exist (Yin, 2009).

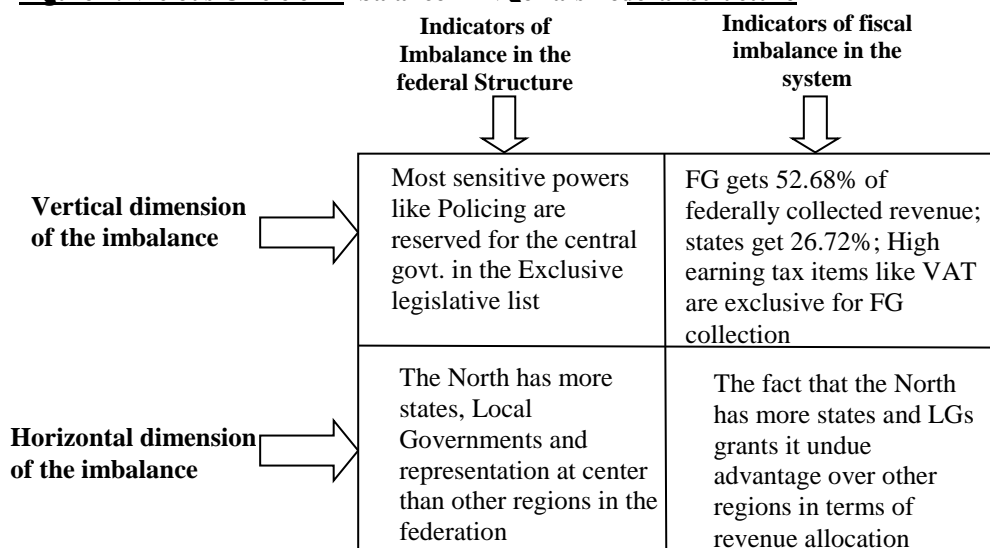
Thus, we isolated and focused our analysis on three major CSOs (Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and Oha-na-eze Ndi-Igbo) representing the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, Igbo), spread across the three major regions in the country.

Documentary method was adopted for data collection. The advantage of documentary method for a study such as this is that it provides access to past events from which inferences can be made and causal relationships drawn (Mogalakwe, 2006). In line with this, the study relied on secondary data drawn largely from published articles contained in journals and textbooks, newspaper publications and other unpublished documents that give insight into the activities of the various CSOs with regards to nation building in Nigeria. Content analysis was adopted for the analysis of data collected.

**Nigeria’s Federal System, National Question & Emergence of Predatory Ethno-regional Civil Society Organizations  
Problematizing Nigeria’s Federal System**

The problem with Nigeria’s federal system is analyzed against the backdrop of the fiscal and structural imbalance in the system. Thus, the imbalance in the federal system is multi-dimensional, reinforcing and tend to favour a particular section of the federation since independence. We refer to this imbalance as the ‘vicious circle of imbalance’ in arising from the postcolonial character of the Nigerian state. This ‘vicious circle of imbalance’ in federal system as depicted in figure 1 is discussed below.

**Figure 1: Vicious Circle of Imbalance in Nigeria’s Federal Structure**



Source: Ugwu and Okoli (2016, p.139)

Historically, Nigeria's federalism is traced to 1954 Lyttleton Constitution which transformed the country from a unitary state it had practiced since 1914 to a federal system with three regions (Northern, Eastern and Western regions) and a central government based in Lagos. In addition to the fact that the country is ethnically diverse, some other immediate factors that led to the choice of federalism for the country include some constitutional and political crisis like the 1953 motion for 'self government now' by Enahoro; the 1953 Kano Riot; the 1953 Eastern regional crisis resulting from NCNC intra party crisis which eventually led to the dissolution of the Eastern House of Assembly; the collapse of 1951 Macpherson Constitution to mention a few.

Although, from 1954 to the end of the First Republic, the regions were administered by the respective regional governments, the fundamental structural challenge with the federal system was that the regions were unequal in size because the Northern region was larger than the other two regions (West and East) put together. Specifically, the Northern region dominated the rest of the regions both in geographical size (75 percent of Nigeria's landmass) and population (60 percent of total population) (Ngemutu, as cited in Arowosegbe, 2006). This situation worsened with the creation of the Mid-Western region in 1963.

As a post-colonial state, the intense struggle by political elites for state power as expressed in various post independence political crisis such as the 1962/63 Census crisis; 1962 Action Group crisis; 1964 Federal election crisis etc provided opportunity for military intervention in Nigeria's politics. The abortion of the first Republic by the military in 1966 eventually led to the practice of unitary system in the name of federalism with the emergence of a 12-state structure. At the eve of the civil war in 1967, the Northern region was balkanized into 6 states, the Eastern region into 3 states, the Western region into 2 and the Mid-Western region remained. The implication is that the number of states in the Northern region alone was equal to the number of states in the three other regions (i.e. West, Mid-Western and Eastern region) put together. Successive military regimes continued to weaken the federating units by creating more and more states without much consideration to the viability of these states. For instance, in 1976 additional seven states were created and the number subsequently increased 21, 30 and 36 in 1978, 1991 and 1996 respectively (Eboh, 2009). This balkanization of the regions into states vitiated the powers of the regions relative to the government at the center. Meanwhile, horizontal and vertical imbalance deepened in favour of the North which has more states and more representation at the center – the National Assembly, Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies. To illustrate, the 19 Northern states including the FCT currently produce 57 (52.3%) out of the 109 Senators in the National Assembly while the South put together has just 51 Senators. Similarly, in the Federal House of Representatives, the North also has 189 (52.5%) of the 360 members (see table 1).

**Table 1: Representation in National Assembly According Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria**

<b>Geopolitical Zone</b>	<b>No. of Senators</b>	<b>No. of House of Rep. Members</b>	<b>No. of States including FCT</b>	<b>Total Representation in National Assembly</b>
South East	15	43	5	58
South West	18	71	6	89
South South	18	55	6	73
North West	21	92	7	113
North East	18	48	6	66
North Central	18	49	6	67
FCT	1	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>469</b>

**Source:** Authors' Calculation

Military incursion in Nigeria's politics from 1966 coalesced with increased revenue from oil in the Niger Delta which propelled fiscal hegemony of the federal government over the states. Successive military regimes centralized the mobilization of critical revenue sources of the federation such that despite the provision of the Taxes and Levies (Approved List for Collection) Act 21 of 1998, the states and local governments are statutorily responsible for collection of revenue with insignificant financial value while the federal government retain collection of high-earning tax items like the import and excise duties, mining rents and royalties, petroleum profit tax, company income tax, value added tax (Eboh, 2009). For instance, Khemani (as cited Eboh 2009) noted that between 1990 and 1999 average revenue of the states and local governments was just about 5 percent of the country's GDP.

Because the regions were unequal in terms of the number of states in each region, they also experience inequality in terms of share of revenue accruing to them. To illustrate, at independence, following the creation of 12 states in 1967, Decree No. 15 of 1967 was promulgated to share the revenue in the Distributable Pools Account (DPA) in an arbitrary manner such that the six Northern states got 7 percent each (making a total of 42% for the North alone); Lagos, 2 percent; Mid-West, 8 percent; South East, 7.5 percent; Rivers, 5 percent; West, 18 percent. This reflects horizontal fiscal imbalance among the federating units. This centralization of revenue mobilization and its distribution in arbitrary manner is indicative of the post-colonial character of the Nigerian in state characterized by authoritarianism and centralization of power in the hands of few political leaders who use state power to accumulate wealth and favour their cronies. Again, being a post-colonial state, the centralization of power and the intense struggle by political leaders to capture and retain state power has led to adoption of all forms strategies including use of ethnic based CSOs by political elites as channels for contesting state power through dividing the masses

along ethnic lines.

Although, since the return to democracy in 1999, couple of events have led to increase in share of revenue going to the states as shown in table 2, the central government still enjoys lion share of the revenue while the North put together still get more revenue than other regions owing to the existing structural horizontal imbalance in the federal system where the north has more states and more local governments than other regions.

**Table 2: Vertical Allocation of Federally Collected Revenue in Nigeria Since 1981**

Period	% Share going to			
	Federal Govt.	State Govt.	Local Govt.	Special Funds
1981*	55	35	10	-
1989	50	30	15	5
1993	48.5	24	20	7.5
1994	48.5	24	20	7.5
1992-1999	48.5	24	20	7.5
May 2002	56	24	20	-
March 2004 till date	**52.68	26.72	20.60	-

\*Revenue Act of 1981

\*\* Sequel to Supreme Court verdict in April 2002 on the Resource Control suit, the provision of Special Funds was nullified in any given Revenue Allocation Formula. In addition, the nine oil producing states (Abia, Imo, Delta, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Edo and Ondo) get 13% of total oil proceeds based on the applied derivation formula.

**Source:** Eboh, E.C. (2009). Fiscal federalism, subnational governance and MDGs in Nigeria. *AIAE Research Paper 4*. Enugu: African Institute for Applied Economics.

### **The National Question**

This vicious circle of multi-dimensional and self re-enforcing imbalance in the federal system since independence with the associated marginalization and structural violence have generated series of grievances, questions and animosities among members of the federating units encapsulated in what is today referred to as the national question in Nigeria. The national question is essentially about the basis of unity of the diverse ethnic groups or nations in the country, and whether relations among the diverse groups should be geared towards integrating the groups into a single nation or granting self-determination to them. National question in most cases focus on resolving the contradictions arising from inter-ethnic and inter-class relations which manifests in form of fear of marginalization, injustice, inequality, domination etc (Okeke, 2015). It is implicit in most political orders in the

contemporary state system, often leading to competitions between ethnic groups and classes usually over scarce resources (Igwe, 2005). As regards the history of national question in Nigeria, Osaghae (as cited in Arowosegbe, 2006, p.8) aptly noted that:

The origins of the national question lie, ... in the forced lumping together of the diverse groups by the British colonialists and the subsequent attempts, after independence, to force so-called national unity while keeping intact or in fact accentuating the, extant inequalities and contradictions that have historically militated against peaceful co-existence.

Although, the issue of national question in Nigeria tend to be analyzed in most cases within the context of the agitation of the three major ethnic groups – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba – and recently the Niger Delta people. The national question becomes more problematic in Nigeria when we take into cognizance the issue of minorities struggling to avoid being eclipsed by the three major ethnic groups. Thus, right from the eve of independence, the national question has continued to stare Nigeria in the face. The fears of the minorities led to the appointment of the Royal Commission in September 1957 (headed by Sir Henry Willink) to look into the fears of the minorities. Accordingly, the commission noted that:

The fears of the minorities arose from two circumstances. First, the division of the whole territory into three powerful regions, in each of which one group is numerically preponderant and secondly, the approach of independence and, the removal of the restraints which have operated so far. (Federal Government of Nigeria as cited in Arowosegbe, 2006, p.10).

Hence, the national question cuts across (but not limited to) the demands and fears of the three major ethnic groups but also the agitations and grievances of the minorities in the three regions dominated by the three major ethnic groups. At independence, the fears and grievances of elites of the three major ethnic groups were expressed in the various proposals they put forward concerning the future of the Nigerian state. For instance, Nnamdi Azikwe (Premier of Eastern Region and Nigerian President between 1963 and 1966), proposed that Nigeria should practice federalism which should function as an administrative convenience and not as a means of recognizing ethnic diversity. Obafemi Awolowo (leader of the Action Group) argued that Nigeria was a mere geographical expression and that the ethnic diversity together with the varying economic levels of economic achievement should be recognized and accommodated in a near-confederal system built around the homogenous ethnic groups. The Yoruba leader specifically stated that:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are English, Welsh, or



French. The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (West African Pilot as cited in Olayode, 2012, p.9).

Similarly, Sir Ahmadu Bello (leader of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) together with other Northern elites demanded for a loose Confederal system that would preserve the large regional system which ensured the North's advantage in terms of population and land mass (Kendhammer, 2014). Meanwhile, it has to be noted that the dominance of these three major ethnic groups in the three regions was a result of British administrative decisions. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, the British administrators empowered the Hausa-Fulani elites from the influx of other colonial subjects so as to ensure efficient collection of taxes was not threatened. The same was the case in Western Region where the Yoruba political elites were empowered by the colonial lords for ease of administration (Kendhammer, 2014).

The consequence of this British administrative decision of creating three regions each dominated by a particular ethnic group, was increased fear and agitation by ethnic and religious minorities. In the Western region dominated by Yoruba ethnic group which also controlled the Action Group (AG) party dominating the region politically, there were fears by ethnic minorities from the Mid-west and religious minority Muslim communities. The same was the case in the Northern region where the minorities feared the tendency of the Hausa-fulani Emirs to rule on the basis of Islamic laws and principles which contradicted the religion and belief system of other ethnic and religious minorities. Similarly, in the Eastern region, the minorities expressed fear of economic and political domination by the dominant and socially mobile Igbo ethnic group which controlled the NCNC (Arowosegbe, 2006).

### **Emergence of Ethno-regional Civil Society Groups (CSGs)**

Apparently, the national question which emerged at the eve of independence in Nigeria has not been resolved till date. The intervention of the military worsened the situation by stifling the space needed to resolve the national question and the factors that ignited the national question. It is against the backdrop of the unresolved national question that civil society organizations (CSOs) emerged along ethnic lines as channels of ethnic mobilization and pursuit of the interest of the various ethnic elites. The three CSGs of interest in this study are: Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and Oha-na-eze Ndi-Igbo. We provide brief history of each CSG below while demonstrating how each exhibit predatory character.

#### **Afenifere**

Afenifere is a socio-cultural organization of the Yoruba ethnic group formed in January 1993 mainly in response to long years of military rule in Nigeria, the political cum economic dominance of Northern elites in the country, the perceived marginalization of the Yoruba ethnic group in the country. Afenifere is an offshoot of 'Egbe Omo Oduduwa' which is itself a Yoruba socio-cultural organization formed in

London in 1945 under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo with the central objective of uniting the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria during the colonial rule to pursue a federal system that allows for regional autonomy in such a manner that would preserve the Yoruba ethnic hegemony in the Western region (Olayode, 2012).

Hence, it was essentially the political and economic interest of the leading Yoruba elites that led to the emergence of Afenifere in the 1990s with Pa Abraham Adesanya as its pioneer leader. Other prominent members of the organization included Chief Bola Ige, Pa Onasanya, Ganiyu Dawodu, Chief Reuben Fasoranti to mention a few. Just like the 'Egbe Omo Oduduwa', the political agenda of Afenifere include: true federalism with strong regions, resource control by states and convocation of a sovereign national conference to debate the national question. The agenda of the group eventually became the manifesto of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), a political party formed by members of the group to actualize their political agenda.

The fact that Afenifere was able to give birth to a political party which in turn adopted the agenda of the group as its party manifesto is indicative of the fundamental aim of the Yoruba elites to eclipse minority ethnic groups in the West, mobilize the Yoruba 'citizens', and entrench Yoruba hegemony in West and also use the group as a springboard for appropriating power and resources at the center. Discussion on the use of Afenifere to capture political power is presented in the section before the conclusion.

#### **Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF)**

Following the return to civilian rule in 1999, the Arewa Consultative Forum was formed in 2000 as a successor of the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The ACF is a political and socio-cultural association of Northern elites which aims essentially to promote the unity of the North, protect their interest in Nigeria and at the same to ensure the political hegemony of the Northern elites in the country through the use powers of elected political office holders of the North.

The group emerged following a meeting convened at the Arewa House in Kaduna by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Maccido in March 2000 and has elites like Alhaji Muhammadu Dikko Yusufu as the Chairman and Gen. Yakubu Gowon as its chairman Board of Patrons. Structurally, the Forum is divided into five (5) organs which include: Patrons, General Assembly, Board of Trustees, National Executive Council and Working Committee.

In line with its objective of uniting the North and maintaining its hegemony and pursuing its cause through the use of powers of incumbent political office holders of the north, upon its formation, the group requested the Sultan of Sokoto to send delegation to traditional rulers in the North (irrespective of ethnic affiliation) and to the 19 Governors of the Northern States as well as the Speaker of the House of Reps., the Deputy President of the Senate and other legislators in order to get their support.

The effort of the ACF to create a monolithic North and unity among the 'Northern citizens' who would be subservient to the dictates of the ACF which itself would be influenced by the Emirs indicates the predatory tendency of the ACF which

tries to ensure that minority ethnic groups are subjugated by the elites controlling the Hausa-Fulani Caliphate. Further, the strategy of utilizing the powers of elected political office holders of Northern extract to pursue Northern interest is indicative of the group's intention to accumulate resources at the center to the detriment of other ethnic groups in the country. Discussion on the use of ACF to undermine nation building is presented in the section before the conclusion.

### **Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo**

Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo is the apex socio-cultural organization of the Igbo ethnic group in South Eastern Nigeria representing all Igbo communities in Nigeria and in diaspora. The group aims to unite members of the Igbo community and ensure fair representation and treatment of the Igbos in Nigeria. Although some literature attempt to trace the origin of Ohanaeze to the post civil war era, it is important to state that the group has a long history that can be traced to the colonial era. Thus, the origin of the group can be traced to 1934 when few Igbo elites formed the Igbo State Union in Lagos to advance and promote the collective interests of the Igbo people (Ojukwu & Nwaorgu, 2013). The Igbo State Union (ISU) later metamorphosed to Igbo National Assembly (INA), which was later banned by the Federal Military Government due to suspicion and antagonism to the group. After the civil war, the Federal Government of Nigeria was accused of genocide in which it attempted ethnic cleansing of the Igbo nation, the Igbo elites saw the need to create an apex organization that will unite and provide centralized leadership for the remaining Igbo people. This led to the metamorphosis of INA to Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo in 1976 following the meeting of Igbo elites including Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam, Prof. Ben Nwabueze, Dr. Pius Okigbo, Kingsley Mbadiwe, Chief Jerome Udorji, Dr. M. I. Okpara to mention a few. Structurally, the group is organized at four levels: (a) Town Unions and affiliate organizations (b) Local Government area Ohanaeze (c) State Ohanaeze and (d) National Ohanaeze. It also has Ohanaeze Wings which include Women, Youth, Transporters and Traders. The Standing Committees provided in Article 24 of the Constitution includes Planning and Strategy Committee, Outreach Committee, Welfare Committee, Research, Documentation and Publication Committee, Finance Committee and Disciplinary and Conflict Resolution Committee.

Evidently, the injustice meted to the Igbo people after the civil war by the Federal Government and their continued marginalization was a major reason for the formation of the group. This is aptly captured by Nwabueze who averred that the organization was formed to:

...lift ourselves [Igbos] from our present marginalized position and realize our group interest in the fierce competition and struggle among the antagonistic ethnic nationalities comprised in Nigeria...in such an organization, lies our only hope of salvaging ourselves from the abyss into which we have sunk. Our defeat in the civil war and the consequent loss of much of our

possessions certainly has something to do with it. But with an organization of this nature, the defeat and loss can be made good (Nwabueze as cited in Ojukwu & Nwaorgu, 2013, p.109).

Since its formation in 1976, Ohanaeze has continued to serve as a tool for mobilization of the Igbo people not just for political purposes but for creating awareness and pursuit of economic and cultural interest of the people. For instance, the group brought a petition before the Oputa Panel of inquiry on human rights violations in which they elaborated how the government of Nigeria attempted to exterminate the Igbo nation during the civil war, the continued marginalization of the Igbo people even after the war and also requested for compensation from the government for the pogrom orchestrated by the government of Nigeria. Even though, no compensation was obtained after presenting the petition to the Panel, the group was able to create awareness and further heightened since nationalism among the Igbo people.

Despite the republican nature of the Igbo society as demonstrated by the organization and activities of the Ohanaeze, it is also important to note that prominent among the agitations and contention by the group are: (a) the call for return to regionalism where all the South East and South South states would return to the old Eastern region; (b) the contention by some Igbo elites that most ethnic minorities in the South-East and South-South (especially Rivers and Delta States) which today attempt to claim different identity were originally Igbo and should regard themselves as such. These agitations and contentions are all indicative of intention of the Ohanaeze to create a monolithic Igbo nation where everyone is seen as 'Igbo citizen', appropriate the old Eastern region including most of the oil rich states in the Niger Delta where the hegemony of Igbo citizens over other minority ethnic groups would be maintained as was in the pre-independence era. Discussion on how some activities of Ohanaeze undermine nation building is presented in the next section.

### **Predatory CSGs and the Paradox of Nation Building in Nigeria**

Nation building in Nigeria has continued to suffer setbacks due to factors like the predatory character of these CSOs which reflects the long standing attempts by the three major ethnic groups in the country to maintain ethnic hegemony in each of the three major regions in Nigeria by creating a form of 'dual citizenship' that sees Nigerian citizens first as 'Hausa-Fulani citizen' (in the Northern region), 'Igbo citizen' (in the East region) and 'Yoruba citizen' (in the West region) irrespective of the existence and idiosyncrasies of the minority groups existing within this region. This attempt to maintain ethnic hegemony in the regions by these three groups could be traced to 1914 following the amalgamation of the Colony and Southern Protectorate with the Northern Protectorate by British colonial administration. Kendhammer (2014) demonstrated how in pursuit of their predatory tendency, Azikiwe and Awolowo jettisoned their agitation for smaller federal units during the 1953-1954 London Constitutional Convention because they discovered that a federal system that

allows existence of three regions with strong regional premier at the top “would ensure the continued electoral dominance of Igbo and Yoruba interests” (Kendhammer, 2014, p. 404).

Apparently, the dream of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria was to dominate the three major regions of the country which were the centers of economic and political powers in the pre-independence and early independence era. Unfortunately, this dream was thwarted following military incursion into Nigerian politics and the centralization of the federal structure by the military. This vitiated the economic and political strengths of the regions vis-à-vis the federal government. Attempt by the Igbos to secede by severing the old Eastern region from the Federal Republic of Nigeria plunged the country into civil war which ended in 1970 with Nigeria as a united entity.

The return to democracy in 1999 was accompanied by a surge in ethno-nationalism as political elites exploited the ethnic divide to pursue political interests. It is within this context that existing ethnic based CSOs were re-energised while new ones were formed where there were none. Thus, following the return to civil rule in 1999, ethnic based CSOs not only remained portent channels for political mobilization and ethno-nationalism, they also stood out as gladiators with clashing interests and identities. For instance, while the North which benefits from the current lopsided federal system formed the ACF as a channel for protecting the Northern advantaged position in the current federal structure, by calling for a centralized (not united) Nigeria, the South-East (Igbos) and the South-West (Yorubas) who feel short-changed continued to group under the Ohanaeze and Afenifere respectively to clamour for ‘true federal’ in which the regions would enjoy high level of autonomy under the hegemony of the dominant ethnic groups. What is common among the three CSOs is that they continue to entrench ‘dual citizenship’ by ensuring that Nigerians are first identified by their ethnic cleavage before being identified as Nigerians.

The use of ethnic based CSOs to entrench ethnic divide in Nigeria was glaring during the 1999 presidential elections. The political activities of the Yorubas in West can be cited as a good example. During the elections, the Afenifere quickly formed a political party -the Alliance for Democracy (AD) – as a political platform for electing a Yoruba president. During the 1999 elections, AD presented Chief Olu Falae as its presidential candidate. The Afenifere elites were able to win all the governorship seats in the West since the Yorubas voted mainly for candidates endorsed by the group. Hence, AD governorship candidates, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Chief Olusegun Osoba, Niyi Adebayo, Chief Bisi Akande and Alhaji Lamidi Adesina and Adefarati, won and ruled over Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Osun, Oyo and Ondo States respectively. Olusegun Obasanjo who contested under the umbrella of PDP did not get the support of the Yoruba people because he did not get the endorsement of Afenifere. However, following his victory, he was able to get his ethnic group through the elites in Afenifere to rally around him. To crown it all, Bola Ige a prominent member of the Afenifere and member of the AD was appointed as the Minister of Justice/Attorney General of the federation. With this, the Afenifere and Yoruba people began recognizing the President first as a ‘Yoruba citizen’ that should

supported in government. They gave him all the support including campaigning and voting massively for him in 2003 presidential elections during which the AD governors of the West and Afenifere members used their positions to campaign and mobilize votes for Olusegun Obasanjo. The use of Afenifere as a channel by Yoruba elites to influence the Yorubas into voting for Obasanjo was aptly captured by Bola Tinubu, the then governor of Lagos who stated that: "We campaigned wholeheartedly to vote for Obasanjo in 2003. I supported him only for the people's democracy because Yoruba elders [Afenifere] throughout the country said we should give him a second chance ..." (Tinubu as cited in Tytler, 2007, p.1).

The activities of the ethnic based CSOs during the 2014 National Conference further indicates how they serve as instruments for entrenching 'dual citizenship' and for undermining nation building. The CSOs ensured that through their demands and postures during the National Conference, Nigerian are made to continue to see each other as different, incompatible people who have no reason being together under one entity. For example, while the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups through Afenifere and Ohanaeze respectively were making demands for 'true federalism' or restructuring Nigeria back to regional governments with control over resources, the North through the ACF vehemently opposed 'true federalism' or restructuring but called for retention of the existing centralized structure because it tends to favour the Northern elites. For instance, as soon as the 2014 National Conference was scheduled, Afenifere made its position known and tried to mobilize delegates of Yoruba extracts to make such demands at the Confab. According to the National Publicity Secretary, Mr. Yinka Odumakin:

...all delegates to the conference must first answer the question: Do we still want to live together as a people? If the answer is yes, then on what terms? "For us in Afenifere, ours should be on the basis of federalism and once we agree that Nigeria should be a true Federal Republic of Nigeria, then the next thing to do is to draft a constitution that will spell out whether we want to continue to live together in harmony. As we speak now, all universities in Nigeria are under lock and key. If we have the six existing structures as regions and they manage the universities in their regions, there is no way ASUU will go on strike in the six regions at the same time... Let everybody develop at their own pace and within their areas, let the federal be lean and the regions be strong. We also believe in Afenifere that this federal structure is too costly... (Mamah, Ndujihe, Akinrefon, & Oyadongha, 2013, p.1).

Similarly, a group of Igbo elites most of whom are also members of the Ohanaeze organized under "Igbo Leaders of Thought" and came up a 56-paged document titled "The Position of the Igbo Nation at the National Conference for a Renegotiated Constitution for Nigeria," in which it articulated the demands of the Igbo nation. Essentially, the group stressed that Nigeria is simply a conglomeration of different ethnic nationalities which must be recognized by the National Conference

and a new Nigerian Constitution. Specifically, the document read:

Nigeria has no territory other than, or different from, the traditional territories inhabited by its constituent ethnic nationalities from time immemorial...it is the ethnic nationalities that ceded or granted the sovereignty or the sovereign powers of government over their territories to Britain, and on which British jurisdiction in Nigeria rested, which therefore makes them the original and primary stakeholders in the Nigerian state...the Nigerian state is a union of these ethnic nationalities...it follows that as political entities pre-dating the creation of the Nigerian state as an act of British colonization, the ethnic nationalities have an inherent right to self-determination, including the right of secession...(The Position of the Igbo Nation at the National Conference for a Renegotiated Constitution for Nigeria, 2014, p.7-8)

The document further added that: “Ndigbo would like to be guaranteed a relative level of independence to develop their territory in all ramifications of the concept. They should be allowed to control their resources while assisting the rest of the country in appropriate ways” (The Position of the Igbo Nation at the National Conference for a Renegotiated Constitution for Nigeria, 2014:3). Obviously, the implication of the above statement is that there is no such thing as ‘Nigerian citizen’, even if there is, then ethnic citizenship comes first and supersedes.

However, the North also made known their position that the status quo must remain. The National Publicity Secretary of the ACF, Mr. Anthony Sani presented the position of the North which it said was not averse to national dialogue that can help strengthen the Nigeria state provided such dialogue is not in the form of Sovereign National Conference that translates to vote of no confidence on nascent democracy and its institutions.

Obviously, after over fifty years of independences, Nigerians are still unable to primarily identify themselves as Nigerians and nation building remains far from being attained. The ethnic diversity continues to be pronounced over the unity of the nation. Everyone tends to first identify with his/her ethnic group because ethnic citizenship appears to be a prerequisite for identification as a Nigerian. The CSOs are not really working out how to build a stronger and sustainable Nigeria, but they always think of a system that favours the ethnic group they represent to the detriment of other ethnic groups especially the minorities. Apparently, some of these agitations are genuine, for instance, the call for creation of additional state in the South East by Ohanaeze is genuine to the extent that all other geopolitical zones have 6 states but the South East has only 5 states. However, the call for secession by some in the South East, the issuance of quit notice to Igbos in the North by some members of the ACF in 2017 are examples divisive acts that continue to weaken nation building.

### **Conclusion/Prognosis**

The study examined the role of ethno-regional CSOs in Nigeria's nation building project which has remained a mirage. The paper focused on the activities of the three CSOs representing the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria and argued that these CSOs express predatory character and therefore act as centrifugal forces which thwart the centripetal process of nation building in Nigeria. Again, the predatory character of these CSOs is linked to the vicious circle of imbalance in Nigeria's federal system and the failure of successive government to address the imbalance. Thus, it is the position of this paper that the CSOs fossilize the long-standing division and suspicion among the ethnic groups, entrench the 'dual citizenship' syndrome and raise self-serving agitations which are antithetical to building a sustainable nation-state.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are articulated:

- There is need for vertical restructuring of the federal system to reduce the powers of the federal government especially with regards to revenue mobilization so that major sources of revenue like VAT, Company Income Tax, mining rents and royalties, excise duties, petroleum profit tax etc can be appropriated by the states. This will reduce dependence of states and make the ethnic groups to look inwards towards developing their states' capacity to earn.
- The existing CSOs should eschew sectional interest but collectively dialogue on how to unite the various ethnic groups in the country, allay the fears of each other especially the minority by collectively canvassing for equitable representation of each group.

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