Chapter Twenty-One
Federalism and Indigenous Peoples' Inclusion for Sustainable Peace

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Introduction

Though federalism is a contested political theory and form of government, it is used in the constitution of several countries to define the division of powers between national or central governments and subnational or constituent units. The federalism debate in Nigeria has historically been about the authenticity of its practice, as indicated in the popular use of the terms 'true federalism' and 'restructuring'. These terms can be broadly interpreted as calls for significant adjustments to Nigeria's existing somewhat centralizing model of federalism. For example, the terms are used in security and fiscal policy debates on decentralizing Nigeria's security architecture to deliver state police and allowing states to control the revenues proceeding from the extraction of oil from their ancestral lands. Others emphasize making the best use of the existing centralizing model, which leans towards an asymmetric type of federalism such as derivation or the fiscal regime which limits the autonomy of producing states and the number of legislators in the House of Representatives based on state population. This design of federalism is as asymmetric as it is centralizing (Nwawube, 2023).

One of the hallmarks of the practice of federalism in Nigeria is the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as the nation's capital city and a social project of national unity. The question is, how does national unity affect indigenous peoples' inclusion and sustainable peace? The paper examines the current state of non-violent conflict or agitations of indigenous ethnic groups in the FCT by focusing on the Gbagyi. The Gbagyi are among indigenous or native ethnic groups known as the original inhabitants of the designated region where the FCT and the Federal Capital City (FCC) Abuja are located. The designated region is defined in the 1976 Military government's decree announcing the creation of the FCT as an 8000 square-kilometre area south of present-day Suleja Local Government in Niger State.

The other natives of the FCT are the Amwamwa, the Bassa, the Egbura-Koto, the Gade, and the Gbari (the Gbari are categorized with the Gbagyi because they speak a dialect of the Gbagyi language and identify themselves as related to the Gbagyi), the Ganagana, the Gwandara, and the Koro. Different ethnic groups had as many as 845 settlements with small populations, scattered all over the Territory and living together peacefully by the 1970s (Unumen & Emordi, 2020). It is notable, that

when the Territory was discovered in 1976, there were no settlements exclusively occupied by any of the ethnic groups. Rather, the different ethnic groups lived in mixed settlements even if a particular group was in the majority. This indicates that the natives were for long, accustomed to the peaceful coexistence of diverse groups.

The natives can also be considered as ethnic minorities in the national context based on their smaller population sizes and socio-economic and political strengths relative to ethnic majorities such as the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Therefore, in this paper, the status of the Gbagyi as indigenous people of the FCT is conflated with their status as ethnic minorities in Nigeria. The reason for focusing on the Gbagyi among others is that the Gbagyi have had a more visible history of resistance to real or perceived injustice and activism within the FCT. This is partly because of greater media coverage compared to the other groups. Barnabas (2018) also highlighted that "the Gbagyi constituted the largest of these ethnic groups" in the FCT (Barnabas 2018, p.434). Gbagyi were approximately 70% of the total indigenous population in 1976 when the FCT was created. The 2004 population policy in the FCT placed the Gbagyi as the predominant group with 34.3% of the indigenous population and Bassa as the least at 8.5% (Dogo, Mundi & Dakyes, 2019). The paper, therefore, explores how the imperative of national unity and how indigenous peoples' interests can as a model for sustainable peace and shared prosperity in the FCT and the country at large.

Literature Review

Elazar (1987 cited in Bulmer, 2017, p. 3) defines federalism as a constitutional instrument for sharing power between different tiers of government so that federating units can enjoy substantial and constitutionally guaranteed autonomy over certain policy areas whilst sharing power with central governments over other areas. Therefore, federalism is typically a combination of partial self-government with partial shared government and is often associated with culturally diverse or territorially large countries like Nigeria and the United States of America (USA) among others. Throughout the twentieth century, federalism spread all over the world, especially in the developing world. Federalism is now practised in countries with presidential or parliamentary systems of government, in common law and civil-law countries and countries with different colonial histories ranging from Brazil and South Africa to Nigeria and Malaysia and on every continent (Bulmer, 2017). Malami (2017) suggested that federalism was adopted in Nigeria with the particular aim of combining unity and diversity to preserve and promote distinct ethnicities within the larger political union. This notion highlights the dual role of federalism which involves engineering national unity whilst protecting the interests of marginalised ethnic groups.

Conversely, Amah (2017) suggested that federalism was introduced in Nigeria to forcibly unite ethnic nationalities that were earlier haphazardly amalgamated into a unitary colony of protectorates of the British Empire. Therefore, Nigeria embraced federalism as a mechanism for ethnic conflict management and to serve as the indispensable basis for the country's unity and viability as a multi-ethnic democracy. Before the Nigerian Civil War (between July 1967 and January 1970) and afterwards, in 1976, successive military regimes of Generals Yakubu Gowon and Murtala Mohammed used federal principles of 'decentralising powers' and 'accommodating minority demands' to create new states, which marked the beginning of multistate federalism (a federal system with states and local governments as constituent units) in Nigeria (Suberu, 2005, p.139). Alongside the newly created states was the creation of the FCT.

Scholars have highlighted the decentralisation and inclusion principles of a federal system. Decentralisation could involve the creation of states as constituent units, transferring administrative and fiscal powers to constituent units or even having separate territories for more equitable distribution of resources, recognition of minority cultures and for government to be closer to its citizens. Bulmer (2017) explained that many federations establish a separate capital territory for example Canberra in Australia, New Delhi in India, Abuja in Nigeria and Washington DC in the USA, where the capital is located and this has some advantages for entrenching federal principles. One of the advantages is that the separate capital territory could be used to assert the neutrality of the federal capital concerning the constituent units (Bulmer, 2017, p.22). When General Murtala Mohammed (Military Head of State from 1975-1976) announced moving Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja, he described the newfound territory as an 'area…not within the control of any of the major ethnic groups…the new capital created on such virgin lands…will be for all Nigerians a symbol of their oneness and unity…' (General Murtala Mohammed quoted in Brooke & Quinn, 2017).

The General asserted the 'neutrality' of Abuja, an area not dominated by any majority ethnic groups and therefore fit for promoting national unity. However, the Head of State's emphasis on the absence of ethnic majorities concealed the presence and significance of the natives and set precedence for a notion of the FCT that relegated the question of indigenous peoples up to the present day. Okeke and Allen (2002) argued that Nigerian federalism has been characterised by the under-representation of ethnic minorities and fiscal imbalances between majority and minority groups, especially in southern Nigeria. Minority groups are also under-represented in terms of opportunities at the federal government level while ethnic majority groups are over-represented at the federal level. Consequently, minorities

are continuously dissatisfied with the distribution of power and resources. They further argue that these minority agitations on representation and resources pose a grievous challenge to the practice of federalism in Nigeria (Okeke and Allen in Warisu, 2005,pp.163-165).

Though Okeke and Allen's arguments refer to various minority groups in southern Nigeria, the same arguments apply to the experiences of the FCT's indigenous people in the North Central region such as the Gbagyi among others. Karmis and Norman (2005) highlighted a consensus among political theorists which recommends federalism as one of the best options available to reconcile such paradoxical trends as globalisation, the increase of 'identity-based demands' and other demands in modern multicultural democracies. The demands of the Gbagyi are identity-based, i.e., demand for inclusion, compensation and social justice based on ethnic identity and claims to ancestral land. In a culturally plural democracy, Young suggested that the goal of social justice is not limited to the distribution of social goods even though notions of social equality often imply economic distribution. Young believed social justice refers primarily to the full participation and inclusion of everyone in the major institutions of society. This includes opportunities for all to build up their capacities and realize their potential (Young, 1990). Fraser (2007) argued to the contrary, that this new idea of social justice which shifts emphasis from redistribution to recognition was alarming because questions of recognition serve less to enrich redistribution struggles. They rather marginalize and displace struggles of redistribution.

However, there is room for reconciling Young and Fraser's arguments because the circumstances of the Gbagyi are such that requires both cultural recognition and economic re-distribution to achieve social justice. Keil's (2019) assessment of the usefulness of federalism as a tool for conflict resolution argued that while there is a growing body of literature on the use of federalism in conflict cases, the empirical evidence on its effectiveness in transforming conflicts remains mixed. Therefore, federalism is not necessarily a successful tool for conflict resolution and peacebuilding everywhere. However, in places where there is evident or relative success of the use of federalism in conflict resolution and crafting peace, Kymlica suggested that it is because federalism is a notoriously flexible system which can accommodate the peculiar needs or demands of diverse groups (Kymlica, 2005). These views imply that federal systems are elastic by design and should therefore be responsive to all necessary policy revisions of existing structures to accommodate the wishes of marginalised groups for justice and sustainable peace. The theoretical framework provided by federalism, particularly as it relates to decentralization and inclusion, will guide the analysis in subsequent chapters.

Methodology

The paper used multiple qualitative methods, combining case studies with focus group discussions (FGDs) to answer the research question. Case studies provide context and depth to the study and FGDs provide breadth or a wider range of views on the subject matter. The method involved the use of both secondary and primary sources of data. The secondary sources analysed were literature on federalism in Nigeria and universally, literature on indigenous peoples and newspaper archives covering more than a decade of Gbagyi activism. The primary sources were the views of young Gbagyi adults in an online FGD, moderated by the researcher. The online FGD was conducted in a WhatsApp group which means the study adapted a traditional qualitative method into its online equivalent. The discussions were conducted intermittently between June 2022 and September 2023, involving 15 participants (plus 1 note taker) who were young Gbagyi men and women activists and opinion leaders among their peers and in their communities. The participants were also residents of various towns in the various Area Councils of the FCT.

Media Representation and a Brief History of Marginalisation

In the last decade and more, there has been evidence of conflict between the Gbagyi and the Nigerian federal state. The non-violent conflict and activism are in newspaper reports including online audio-visual formats. The consistent media reports of Gbagyi activism made them the most recognised indigenous group in the FCT even as other groups were largely unknown to the public until recent years. However, other natives have their voices and often combine forces with the Gbagyi in the struggle for their socio-economic and political rights within the FCT. Wole-Abu (2018) emphasised that the basic functions of the media are to inform, educate and entertain and because these functions have a collective impact on the public, it is necessary to take a critical look at them. Since the 2000s, the archive of newspapers and other media reports on the Gbagyi fulfilled the traditional roles, especially informing and educating the public on native matters. Beyond their traditional roles, the news archives also validate Stuart Hall's idea of 'the repertoires of representation' i.e., the media's ability to create popular representations of cultural identity. Editorials have tendencies to emphasise certain narratives and images which shape public perception of the cultural identity of a people.

Concerning the Gbagyi, media reporting tended to evoke a set of binary opposites i.e., 'civilisation' versus the 'primitive' which in turn creates stereotypes in the public imagination and shapes discourse (Hall, 1997, pp.239-245). For example, in newspaper illustrations, there is the popular image of the 'woman who carries her pot on her shoulder instead of her head' or 'men scantily clad'. In an attempt to enlighten the public on the natives' culture, the images and reporting also

portrayed the culture as primitive and created stereotypes of a people that are averse to progress or unable to sufficiently adapt to the realities of modernisation and globalisation. The stereotypes are then reflected in common conversations on the Gbagyi, such as: 'people who retreat further into the hinterlands each time development comes to them because they prefer to continue their farming and inherited traditions without the interference of civilisation'. These stereotypes continue to influence how the Gbagyi are discussed.

Thus, the media's representation of the Gbagyi is consistent with Bayar's (2009) concept of the primordial view of ethnic identity which is an essentialist view that sees ethnic identity as 'fixed' once it is created. Bayar contrasts the primordial view with the constructivist view which emphasises change within an ethnic group's identity through their member's social construction and reconstruction (Bayar, 2009, pp.1639-1657). When applied to the coverage of the Gbagyi, the constructivist view requires equal emphasis on for example, how the younger generation of the Gbagyi are more educated than their forebears and increasingly found in different fields of endeavour. This includes a range of fields from medicine and engineering, to banking and business, sports and entertainment to politics and diplomatic service, law and real estate to educators and journalists among others. The younger generation is also involved in the social construction and reconstruction of their cultural heritage to adapt to contemporary trends, especially through entertainment. Online Gbagyi movies known as Gbagyiwood and the annual Miss Gbagyi Beauty Pageant are examples of emerging entertainment trends produced by the younger generation of the Gbagyi.

Despite the lack of constructivism in its reporting, the media's traditional role of informing and educating the public on Gbagyi agitations has kept the issues of marginalisation, justice and inclusion in the public domain. The following headlines are among several agitations reported in newspapers and other media since 2009:

- 'Nigeria: The Making of Nigerian Aborigines?' *ThisDay*, 31st March 2009; 'Nigeria: Pains of the FCT Gbagyi', *Daily Trust*, 24th December 2009;
- 'Gbagyi Fight for Compensation Over Abuja Land', Aljazeera Media online, 19th November 2012;
- Relinquish your powers in the governance of FCT', Abuja Indigenes tell Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ), Reps', *Daily Post,* (dailypost.ng), 7th January 2013;
- 'The Battle for Abuja', *Vanguard* online, 29th June 2014;
- 'Centenary City: Abuja indigenes reveal how Jonathan ignored their cry of marginalisation', The *Daily Post* (dailypost.ng), 2nd September 2015;

- 'Not a No Man's Land': Abuja natives get ready to fight', Aljazeera Media online, 9th August 2016;
- 'Abuja Natives and the Tale of Marginalisation': for the natives of Abuja, it has been over 40 years of marginalisation, *The Pulse News* online, 14th July 2017;
- 'When Gbagyi, FCT Indigenes, Protested Marginalisation', *Tribune* online, 9th, August 2017;
- 'Gbagyi Indigenes take the fight to FCT authorities', *The Sun* Online, 2nd May 2018;
- 'Protesters block Yemi Osinbajo's convoy, accuse Army of land grab', *The Guardian* online, 8th May 2019;
- Abuja indigenous people and the ticking time bomb', *The Guardian* online, 19th August 2022;
- Don't Demolish Durumi Village, FCT Indigenes Beg Minister', *Leadership* (leadership.ng), 13th September 2022; and 'Abuja Not No Man's Land-Indigenes', *Leadership* (leadership.ng), June 21st, 2023.

According to the foregoing media accounts, one of the ways conflict transpires between the Gbagyi and the FCT authorities is when communities resist what they perceive to be indiscriminate seizure of their ancestral lands. This happens when FCT authorities demolish their settlements to make way for real estate and other developments. It is important to note that from a government perspective, demolitions in the FCT are typically to do with structures and settlements that transgress planning laws within the FCT and are not simply targeted at the Gbagyi or other native communities. In some cases, authorities try to ensure that residences identified as belonging to the natives are not part of demolitions. However, securing natives' residencies is not necessarily standard practice in the handling of all demolitions. Another way the conflict has been evident over the years is in intermittent street protests by the Gbagyi. They accuse the federal state of political exclusion in the FCT and lack of adequate compensation for their ancestral lands.

Certain factors historically placed the Gbagyi in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the emergence of the FCT. The first is their status as ethnic minorities in the country: This made it easy for policymakers to be dismissive of their existence from the beginning and perpetuated a narrative of Abuja as a no man's land' or 'ethnically neutral' i.e., not claimed by any of the ethnic majorities. This situation would have been unlikely to happen if the FCT natives were any of the majority ethnic groups in 1976.Secondly, there were low levels of education among the Gbagyi up until the government's FCT plan began to take off in the late 1980s and early 1990s: This

means the Gbagyi lacked an educated middle class in the formative years of the FCT. Ruth (2005) held that social change movements have been historically led by the middle class in different parts of the world (Ruth, 2005, p. 51). The absence of a middle class meant there was no 'critical mass' of natives who could use their intellectual and other resources to lead the fight for ample concessions from the federal state and effectively defend and promote the rights of their marginalised kin.Thirdly, there was the 'military regime factor' which made it less likely for any rights, let alone the rights of ethnic minorities to be protected given the authoritarian thrust of military regimes.

The Gbagyi have not fared any better in the current democratic dispensation, as successive governments are yet to seriously engage with the question of FCT natives. In contrast with the Gbagyi, several other Nigerians who relocated to Abuja in the 1990s were more educated, connected, larger populations and therefore better placed to take advantage of opportunities in the FCT. These Nigerians included those from the dominant cultures of ethnic majorities. The coexistence of the dominant cultures and the Gbagyi culture in the FCT has given rise to a state of affairs best captured by Young's (1990) theory of cultural imperialism i.e., dominant groups can establish their own culture and experiences as the norm of expectations in society. Consequently, the minority groups' own experience and interpretation of social life find limited expression in the wider society because the dominant cultural expressions give 'little room' for the experience of minorities or discuss them in marginalized ways.

Federal Imperative of National Unity/National Identity and Social Justice

Nigerians continue to move to the FCT regularly. This is partly because of the proliferation of conflict in Nigeria over the last decade, leading to population shifts away from affected areas to safer zones (Oshita et al., 2016, p.9). Nigerians and foreign nationals are also coming to Abuja for opportunities in the federal civil and public service, real estate and other private enterprise, the voluntary sector and the diplomatic community. In addition to the security and economic pull factors, Abuja is considered a home for every Nigerian, not owned by any particular ethnic nationalities, a hub for stimulating national unity and an overarching national identity. The notions of national unity and national identity both constitute the independent variable in this study. National unity is a notion that calls for unity of purpose regardless of existing ethnic or other differences. A common example of this concept is when politicians offer a government of national unity aimed at including people of divergent political views.

Conversely, the overarching national identity means self-identifying firstly as a Nigerian before identifying with other ethnic or regional identities. The idea of being Nigerian takes pre-eminence over being for example an Igbo (ethnic identity)

or a northerner (regional identity). The dependent variable is the Gbagyi who are affected by any developments in the independent variable. In a cause-and-effect relationship, national unity and identity are both the cause and Gbagyi is the effect or dependent variable. The independent variable is considered to be almost sacrosanct because it is an indispensable nation-building tool for crafting a sustainable multicultural federal state.

The agitations and activism of the Gbagyi are based on ancestral ownership of the FCT lands. However, the lands were compulsorily acquired by the national government as enacted in the FCT Act of 1976 which vested all Abuja lands exclusively in the Federal Government of Nigeria. The FCT Act is reinforced by the 1999 Constitution which reiterates the federal government's ownership of all lands in the FCT. Thus, the Gbagyi claims to ancestral land may not be tenable under the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria but rather speak to the moral ideals of social justice. These ideals include fairness, respect for human dignity and rights, cultural preservation and the redress of socio-economic and political inequalities. Hilaire (2023) argued that the compulsory termination of the customary land rights of the Gbagyi and in the absence of any clear definition of 'indigenous people' in Nigeria, was a purely human rights violation and that one could make a case for colonialism. Hilaire further suggested the government's unilateral approach seemed to have usurped the consent of powerless natives, supposedly speaking on their behalf about the benefits of establishing the FCC on their ancestral land (Hilaire in Barnabas ed., 2023).

Exploration and the Findings

The online FGDs provided insights into Gbagyi's views on a range of FCT issues such as: (a) The progress of Gbagyi's youth. (b) Gbagyi-coping strategies in the face of marginalisation and youth aspiration (c) Gender and Gbagyi activism. (d) Security and Peace in the FCT. (e) Gbagyi's perceptions of the FCT as a project of national unity and Nigeria's capital city etc. Below are some of the questions presented by the researcher to the participants. The first question was asked because the researcher had observed non-indigenes residing in the FCT who were completely unaware of the agitations of the Gbagyi even though they lived in the FCT for 10 years or more.

***Question*:** *The first question was on whether the agitations or conflict between the Nigerian federal state and the Gbagyi is ongoing or a thing of the past?*

***Answer*:** The responses to the opening question were emphatic: that agitations are ongoing and not a thing of the past and that no Nigerian living in the FCT in the last decade could truly claim that they were unaware of the agitations of natives.

Furthermore, the intermittent street protests could resume when needed. It was equally striking to note that these Gbagyi participants from the outset, insisted on a discussion that was inclusive of other natives of the FCT. They rejected the notion of a Gbagyi-centred discussion of natives and insisted that the discussion refer to other indigenous natives alongside the Gbagyi. This revealed a strong sense of solidarity among FCT natives with the Gbagyi majority no longer at ease with enjoying the limelight alone. Although Gbagyi remained the case study, the researcher ensured other natives of the FCT were mentioned alongside Gbagyi throughout discussions. Thus, the opening question and responses set the tone for several other questions and answers.

Question**:** *On current levels of progress among youths such as levels of education attainment and ownership of small businesses?*

Answer**:** there was recognition that although Gbagyi youth are now more educated than their forebears, they were likely to be either unemployed or in menial jobs for example, men as blue-collar workers or security guards in the bourgeoning real estate sector and women as housemaids on the same high-brow estates. However, some Gbagyi youth own micro and small businesses even though youth from majority ethnic groups naturally dominate ownership of small businesses in the FCT. Most participants believed indigenous youth in general were under-represented in the federal civil and public service i.e. the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

Question**:** *Regarding the coping strategies of the Gbagyi in the face of marginalisation and youth aspiration?*

Answer**:** one of the participants suggested that as a coping strategy, the Gbagyi and other indigenous youth ought to expand their social networks i.e. befriend or network with members of other 'tribes' or thnic groups who are considered to be more successful. These networks or social capi[e]tal could help instil a mindset of growth and progress in the indigenous youth and could increase their life chances. Some participants also alluded to partisan politics within the FCT as a coping strategy, but not explicitly. Participants seemed to shy away from explicitly discussing questions on FCT politics.

Question**:** *On the role of gender in activism and gender and marginalisation?*

Answer**:** The views on gender and activism varied as some participants argued that Gbagyi's activism was very masculine and relegated women and girls. Others believed women and girls were visible in activism and fully participated in street protests and other forms of activism. With regards to gender and marginalisation, a

female participant believed Gbagyi women were not as marginalised as the men because they were increasingly found in different fields of endeavour such as business, politics, administration and education. However, the challenge was transferring knowledge to the younger generation because many girls at the FCT grassroots were not interested in higher education and the few who were interested had no scholarships to support them. According to a male participant, marginalisation knows no gender as everyone is affected especially women. Another view was that Gbagyi women and girls enjoy interventions from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the FCT compared to boys presumably because of the gender equality objectives of NGOs.

***Question*:** *On the subject of the FCT as a project of national unity and the nation's capital city?*

***Answer*:** there was a mildly angry response that underscored the pain most Gbagyi still feel, 48 years after the government took over their ancestral lands to establish the nation's capital. One view blamed their forefathers and there was also mild resentment of the dominance of non-indigenes especially in the FCC. Other responses were more conciliatory, emphasizing accommodation of diversity, the importance of national unity and some pride in the FCC. The conciliatory comments believed the Gbagyi should identify and emphasise shared interests with non-indigenes to help build common ground and foster a sense of national unity. The conciliatory comments ultimately wanted respect for the rights and aspirations of both indigenes and non-indigenes in Abuja. Though the conciliatory comments were dominant in the discussions, a common thread running through the conversation was an enduring sense of loss of ancestral land, levels of poverty, suffering and marginalisation of too many Gbagyi and other natives of the FCT. However, aspiration was a notable quality of the upcoming generation of the Gbagyi.

***Question*:** *On the question of security and peace in the FCT?*

The researcher provided a background to the question in which the researcher reminded participants that though the Gbagyi are viewed nationwide as peaceful and peace-loving people, in recent years there has been a new development of violent clashes between Gbagyi and Hausa youths within the FCT. There was the December 2017 bloody clash between Gbagyi and Hausa youths in the Bwari Area Council of the FCT and another clash between the same groups in April 2023 in the Gwarimpa area. Therefore the question was 'Despite the image of a people who are peaceful to a fault, are the younger generation of Gbagyi more willing to deploy violence either in self-defence or in fighting real or perceived oppression?

***Answer*:** The responses suggested that even though Gbagyi remain largely peaceful and peace-loving, any community can experience shifts in attitudes and behaviours among the younger generation due to societal pressures and challenges such as continued land disputes, marginalisation and perceived oppression. These may lead to young people becoming more assertive including the potential use of violence. However, there was a consensus view that violence is never the ideal solution and efforts should always be made to address the root causes of conflicts and find peaceful resolutions to prevent further inter-ethnic clashes in the FCT.These findings are excerpts of discussions with participants over several months in a WhatsApp group (online FGD). In scoping the current state of Gbagyi activism, the FGDs sought to answer the research question i.e. 'How does national unity affect indigenous peoples' inclusion and sustainable peace?

The Discussion

While state creation in Nigeria has historically been in response to the agitations of various ethnic nationalities who wanted their states, the FCT was established at the instance of the national government and at the time, it was a fiat of the military regime. The arguments for relocating the capital from Lagos to Abuja were informed by practical and national security concerns as well as certain ideals. The practical reasons were multidimensional, including Lagos' chaotic traffic, congestion and overstretched city infrastructure. The national security view was that Lagos is coastal and therefore open to attacks and as is now evident, vulnerable to sea level rise due to climate change. Most importantly, Lagos was not viewed as representative of national unity because it was a regional hub for the South-West. Conversely, Abuja was going to be a planned city, designed with wide spaces for public engagement, art and leisure and based on model cities such as Paris, Washington, Islamabad and Brasilia. The proposed region had a favourable climate, an abundance of land and water and from a national security perspective, was located in the centre of the country, perhaps easier to defend (Oshita et al., 2016, Brooke & Quinn, 2017).

In addition to being a model city that signified Nigeria's ambitions, the FCT was also founded on certain ideals i.e., national unity and the overarching national identity. This explains why Abuja is nicknamed the Centre of Unity. While a utopian goal, every nation-state in the modern and global era aspires to national unity which is why unity is viewed as sacrosanct by states. However, nation-states in the developed and developing world similarly grapple with the herculean task of uniting their citizens. For example, even though the USA, the United Kingdom and other older states have achieved enviable levels of development, they find it challenging to unite their citizens, let alone developing countries.

Although unity is of existential importance to the nation-state, in this case, it is at the expense of the survival of indigenous cultures, their socio-economic well-being and political standing in the only spaces that they can call home. The FGDs showcased how the younger generation of the Gbagyi are on the socio-economic margins of the FCT despite being more educated than their forebears. And though participants of the FGDs were generally supportive of the big picture of national unity vis-à-vis the FCT, there was an underlying sense of being left behind in what has become a land of opportunity which happens to be their ancestral land. Thus in the spirit of positive peace, there is a need for preventative measures that seek to win the hearts and minds of groups left behind in Nigeria. Given that the FCT has a special status in the country's constitutional and political arrangements, it follows that its natives ought to be accorded special status in policy terms which are also enshrined in law.

The aim here would be to foster official recognition of indigenous peoples' cultures precisely because they cannot compete with the dominant ethnic majority cultures. Recognition would work hand-in-hand with the distribution of economic opportunities or redistribution. Therefore one of the keys to winning the hearts and minds of groups left behind is recognition and redistribution (Young, 1990, Fraser, 2000). If recognition and redistribution are the ends, then federalism is the means because it is what Kymlica (2005) has described as a notoriously flexible system, able to accommodate the peculiar demands of marginalised groups.

However, federalism is only as good as those operating the system. Federalism could not solve the country's systemic failures if its potentials are not fully and continuously explored. In Nigeria, there is generally a lack of political will and a failure of the imagination required to stretch the limits of federalism. Governance should involve the willingness to relentlessly apply the federalism principle of decentralisation with the attendant policy, legislative and administrative innovations necessary to build inclusive and peaceful systems. Concerning the Gbagyi and other Abuja natives, affirmative-action policies and legislation within the FCT are appropriate tools for achieving social justice. Therefore, the answer (s) to the question, 'How does national unity affect indigenous peoples' inclusion and sustainable peace hinges on historical marginalisation and contemporary political inertia on matters of social justice for Abuja's natives: from the very beginning in 1976, the Gbagyi were 'too small to be seen' by the state.

As they made themselves visible through activism, the state has done two things: (a) diminished their claims to ancestral land through unmitigated urbanisation although lawful, and (b) largely ignored the content of their agitation because they are perceived to be neither a threat to national security nor the interests of political power brokers. The Gbagyi and other natives are sacrificial lambs on the altar of national unity. Just as the Ogoni have had to suffer the pollution of their

environment because of the state's economic interest, the federal imperative of national unity and identity is construed as more important than protecting FCT natives.

Some may argue that there are numerous claims from diverse ethnic groups within Nigeria, calling for one thing or the other. And if Abuja natives are given special treatment, it sets precedence for several other groups around the country to 'stake their claim' and that would be unsustainable for the country. Whilst the foregoing argument may be valid, Nigeria has to learn the lessons from the age of violence in the Niger Delta caused by too many natives left behind. Thus perpetually ignoring the question of Gbagyi and other natives in the FCT may leave room for future violent conflicts as unintended consequences of today's political inertia.

It is noteworthy, that the focus group did not indicate any conscious drift towards violence in today's Gbagyi activism and since the 2000s, the Gbagyi struggle has increasingly pivoted towards partisan politics. The Gbagyi are somewhat, a voting bloc in FCT elections. They mostly vote for candidates that are Gbagyi and oppose non-Gbagyi candidates as they seek to utilise their votes to achieve inclusion and recognition. Furthermore, the natives have at different times, called for the President of the Federal Republic to appoint a native as Minister of the FCT. Furthermore, there have been calls for the creation of the office of a Mayor of the FCT and an increase in the number of legislators sent to the National Assembly. The expectation of the natives is for their members to use such positions as a means to draw huge concessions from the federal state. However, there is the added dynamic of non-indigene candidates running in FCT elections. Consequently, every election cycle, indigene and non-indigene interests collide. The politics of non-indigenes would argue that Abuja is for all Nigerians and Centre of Unity therefore any Nigerian from anywhere can run for office.

Here, FCT politics vividly demonstrates the variables set out in this paper i.e. the federal imperative for national unity and identity versus the inclusion of marginalised natives. Unity is important for the country but so is the preservation of the interests of indigenous people as an important part of achieving unity. This line of thought lends credence to the slogan 'unity in diversity', a slogan that serves as a guiding principle and mechanism for seamlessly combining the imperative of unity with the reality of diversity in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The chapter reveals significant challenges in balancing national unity with the indigenous peoples' interests. While federalism promises the management of ethnic diversity and achieving national unity and identity, the experience of Gbagyi

people highlights a gap between these ideals. The peaceful activism of the people and their quest for recognition, economic inclusion and political representation reflect broader issues faced by many indigenous groups within federal systems worldwide. Therefore, there is the need for the creation of an Abuja Natives Development Commission (ANDC) with special funds allocated for the empowerment of the native people. In a related development, the seat of the Minister of FCT who is the President's appointee should be reserved for the natives while the Minister of State for the FCT should be rotated among the six geo-political regions. This should be enshrined in the FCT Act.

There should be three Senators representing the FCT in the National Assembly instead of the one. Two of the senators should be natives while one should be rotated among the six geo-political regions. There should also be three members of the House of Representatives instead of two. The two should be natives and one rotated among the six geo-political regions. The indigenous culture of the people should be preserved by using natives' names and art in public institutions, landmarks and honouring the natives as it is done in New Zealand. In New Zealand, official dual names are used for its public institutions to recognize and honour its indigenous Māori culture. Following the New Zealand model, Abuja could be officially known as **Abuja/Azhi-da-lo** (the direct translation is 'the owners of the town are present' in Gbagyi) and Eagles Square/Olu-ta (the direct translation is 'birds haven' in Gbagyi).

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