

RESTRUCTURING (IN) NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR BETTER SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper aims at a critical evaluation of the recent clamor for political restructuring in Nigeria and its capacity for better Nigerian society. The paper applies historical and hermeneutical methods to understand the extent to which federalism has failed Nigeria and to determine how restructuring can redeem the situation of Nigeria polity. Keeping track of the stated aim, the paper studies the concept of restructuring as the adjustment of the Nigerian political system for a better society. Also, it studies the advantages of restructuring over the present federalism. The paper argues that the federal system in Nigeria has concentration of powers at the federal level than the federating states. This situation promotes ethnic and religious bigotry, hence leading to persistent agitations for restructuring, separations, e.t.c. The study shows that the present political structure can only lead Nigeria to nowhere but doom and instability symptomized by increasing insecurity, marginalization, corruption, e.t.c. Hence the implication of the study shows that the current doom and instability has become so widened and obvious enough that the corresponding agitations for restructuring becomes legitimate and a necessity for national development. Therefore, the paper makes the case for the government to dispassionately quicken actions towards adequate and thorough political and structural realignment as a veritable tool for national development.

Key words: Restructuring, federalism, national development, marginalization, security,

Introduction

Nigeria is a multiethnic nationality. This multiethnicity should be a source of strength and beauty to the nation but the country is bedeviled with ethnic and religious bigotry.¹ These ethnic and

religious lines are widened by the practice of federalism in Nigeria, hence raising questions of national cohesion among the diverse ethnicities of Nigeria. Like cause-and-effect principle, ethnic and religious bigotry has given rise to various forms of

¹. Anacletus Ogbunkwu (2021) "Government Partnership with Traditional Institutions as Desideratum for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria". in *Thinkers Journal*, A Publication of the Faculty of Arts, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu. 2021: 1

marginalization, agitations, militancy, hate speech with different divisive rhetorics, economic stress, political uncertainty, e.t.c.

No doubt, federalism in Nigeria has not been able to keep Nigeria together in harmony over the years. Minding the concentration of power at the centre, particular regions and ethnic nationalities have controlled the affairs of the whole nation thereby widening the lines of ethnic and religious differences.² Hence other regions and ethnic nationalities have been living in grudges due to gravely perceived social injustice, marginalization, insecurity, to mention but a few. This ugly situation has led to irresistible demand for a break-up of the country by separatist groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND),³ Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), e.t.c. This paper proposes that the best possible method of liberating Nigeria from this menace is political restructuring.

The present state of Nigeria calls for urgent attention in order to restore her politically, economically, religiously and

socially. Minding the degree of ethnic-religious and socioeconomic ravage, there is need to restructure the political structure in such a manner that all ethnic groups and religious lines will be well accommodated. Others argue for total division / secession and abandonment of the existing political structure such as the agitation for Biafra and Oodua nation. Others who benefit from the existing structure are adamant to the quests for restructuring and as such desire to shut down every discussion on restructuring.⁴ El-Rufai referred to the quest for restructuring as mere opportunism of certain leaders for the purposes of political career-enhancement and media attention.⁵

Worst still for Nigeria is that the same fractious politics and competing interests which have given enough reason for restructuring also risk muddying the waters of the current agitation for restructuring. Hence this paper is interested in arguing for the realignment that will encourage a fairer and meritocratic system that puts social justice and fairness above everything else. This will go a long way in helping to manage marginalization, sectionalism, insecurity / militancy, ethnic politics, economic stress, hate speech with different divisive

² Osakwe, C., & Habib, E. P. (2014). "The sovereign National Conference; Appraising the Contending Issues". In V. Ekwemi, J. Wuam and C. Orngu (Eds.), *Federalism, Politics and Minorities in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Professor G.N Hembe* (Lagos: Bahiti and Delila Publications, 2014), pp. 563-578.

³ Ibid.,

⁴ HE Mallam Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai (Kaduna State Governor), "Next Generation Nigeria: What is Restructuring and does Nigeria need it?" presented at the Chatham House; The Royal Institute of International Affairs, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-09-21-What-is-restructuring-and-does-Nigeria-need](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-09-21-What-is-restructuring-and-does-Nigeria-need%20it.pdf) it.pdf

⁵ Ibid.,

rhetoric, e.t.c. It is only when this form of restructuring is properly done that Nigeria is set for national development.

Federalism in Nigeria and its Challenges

Etymologically, federalism has a Latin derivative as “foedus” which means “treaty”, ‘alliances’ or ‘leagues’.⁶ By its etymology, federalism refers to the formation of treaty or alliances or leagues by different states, unites or regions in a country in order to have a formidable centre while bearing the character of their individualism. Hence for Watts, federalism is a philosophy or doctrine of governance that favours the combination of centralization of some political powers and the decentralization of others.⁷ In the words of O’Leary and McGarry, it can be referred as territorial pluralism.⁸ Also, it can be referred as the treaty between different independent sovereign bodies in a country.⁹

Following the understanding of Federalism as adapted from some authors above, we make a synthesis of Federalism as a political organizational structure or system that emphasizes power sharing across different levels of government such as regions, states, ethnic groups e.t.c.

Also, this system of governance seeks a full integration and active participation in governance by different socio-cultural and ethnic units.¹⁰ Hence it can be said to be a mixed or compound system of government which combines a general, central or federal government with regional, provincial, or state governments in a single political system. In this case, these sub-regional governments are referred as the federating units of the federal government.

It should be noted that in this system of government, both the federal and federating governments have their own legislative, executive, and judicial arms of government. Both have power to pass, enforce and interpret laws as long as they do not violate the national constitution. However, the federal government is reserved with the right to determine foreign policies, control import and export duties, print national currency. Matters of taxation, business regulation, environmental protection, civil rights e.t.c. are shared between the federal government and the federating governments.

Similarly, according to Apparodai, federalism is a system built on the

⁶ Watts, Ronald L. "Federalism, Federal Political Systems, and Federations." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (1998): 117-37.

⁷ Ibid.,

⁸ O’Leary, Brendan, and John McGarry. "The Politics of Accommodation and Integration in Democratic States." In Adrian Guelke and Jean Tournon, *The Study of Politics and Ethnicity: Recent Analytical Developments*, (Leverkusen, Opladen: Barbara Budrich Books, 2012), 79-116.

⁹ Anirudh Prasad and Justice D.A.Desai, *Centre and State Powers under Indian Federalism*, (Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1981), 20

¹⁰ Wheare, K. *Federal Government*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 47.

principle that the government must be structured on the basis of the existence of multiple levels of governments each of which exercises some governmental legislative powers allotted to them by a constitution, which is supreme, and the source of life of all governments in the country.¹¹

This formal division is aimed at controlling the government and prevents a single group defined in racial, class or linguistic terms, from dominating the others and monopolizing the consumption of public goods.

The foregoing makes Wheare's definition of federalism most apt. Hence federalism is seen by Wheare as following:

a political arrangement wherein powers within a multi-ethnic country are shared between the central government and sub-component governments in such a way that each unit including the central government exists as a government separately and independently from the others.

Furthermore, Wheare claimed that the fundamental and distinguishing characteristic of a federal system is that neither the central nor the regional governments is subordinate to each other rather they are both coordinate and independent as autonomous entity and not appendage.

Nigeria was founded by British fiat in 1914 thereby bringing together diverse peoples with different cultures under one polity. It is no news to state that the British colonial government institutionalized federalism in Nigeria on October 1, 1954 by the Lyttleton constitution. It functioned with the emergence of three regions notably; Northern, Eastern and Western regions with their elected leaders for self rule. Each of them had their constitution and authorized to raise their own revenues while contributing to the central government.

No doubt, the practice of federalism in Nigeria today is surrounded with lots of fears and tears such that this practice can be at best described to be a fake shadow of its true nature. The federal system in Nigeria is one which vests enormous powers in the centre with little or nothing for the states and local governments, hence the centre takes control of the federating states. Therefore, it becomes logical to assert that the practice of federalism in Nigeria can be said to be antithetical to holistic national development and a shadow of its true nature.

A typical example of this anomaly in power is our land revenue sharing formula. The 1978 Land Use Act vests ownership and control of all lands in the urban to the state governments and in the rural places to the local governments.¹²

^{11.} Apparodai, A. *A Substance of Politics*. (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1975), 59.

^{12.} Land Use Act 1978, Sec. 1

Thus the right of occupancy was allowed to be granted and signed by state governments.¹³ Nevertheless, the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act of 2007 allows only the federal government to claim ownership of all lands endowed with mineral resources wherever it is located in Nigeria.¹⁴ The implication of this ACT is that all revenues accruing from the exploration of these resources are the exclusive preserve of the federal government. This is similar to earlier decree on oil minerals which officially handed over the revenue from such minerals to the federal government.¹⁵ Hence Epelle bemoaned this situation claiming that the aim of this Act and Decree is:

to ensure that regions/states which lay the golden egg hands over the chicks when hatched, while conversely states which produce no resource get more revenue than the resource-bearing states from the monthly federal allocation...This bizarre federalism is bolstered by the fact that, in Nigeria, what is used in distributing revenue is not what is

derived from your region/state, but such nebulous variables as “equality of states” (40%), “population” (30%), “social development sector” (10%), “land mass/terrain” (10%) with “internal revenue effort” getting a paltry 10%.¹⁶

No doubt, before the discovery and shift of attention to petroleum as the driving force of Nigerian economy, the derivation principle of regional resources was 100% until 1964 when it was reduced to 50%. This was a time when almost all regions have a fair share of tradable agricultural produce such as groundnut in the North, cocoa in the West and palm oil in the East.¹⁷ It is disheartening too that of about 450 ethnic groups in Nigeria, only three; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are seen as the majorities while giving little or no attention to the minorities.¹⁸ McGarry claims that federalism in Nigeria is characterized by unitary tendencies so much so that powers are concentrated at the centre whereas the federating states and local governments are reduced to mere appendages.¹⁹

¹³. Land Use Act 1978, Sec. 5(1)

¹⁴. Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act of 2007, Sec 1 (2)

¹⁵. Oil Mineral Rights Decree No. 51 of 1969

¹⁶. Epelle, A. (2004). “Legitimizing Corporate Irresponsibility: the Rentier State and Nigeria's Oil Multinationals” in *African Journal of Political and Administrative Studies*, 1, 11-21

¹⁷. Epelle A; and Isike, C. “Government Opposition to Resource Control Agitation: Matters Arising. In E. Orobator, F. Ifowodo, & E. Edosa (Eds.), *Federal State and resource control in Nigeria*, (Benin City: F. Parker, 2005). 120-131.

¹⁸. Egwu, S. (2014). “Federalism and the Dilemma of Ethnic Minorities in Nigeria”. In V. Egwemi, J. Wuam & C. Orngu (Eds.) *Federalism, Politics and Minorities in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Professor G.N Hembe* (Lagos: Bahiti and Delila., 2014), 3-12

¹⁹. McGarry, J. (2005). “Can Federalism help in Manage Ethnic and National Diversity”? *Forum of Federations*, 5(A-1):15-17.

This power imbalance is one of the major factors responsible for corruption in Nigeria, hence it fans corruption into flame and gives it a quantum leap of notoriety.²⁰ Noteworthy is that the concentration of power at the federal level attracts much attention to the center making the center to be over flooded leading to election rigging, politics of ethnic favoritism,²¹ e.t.c. An example of such ethnic favouritism gained by concentration of power at the centre is the attempt to smuggle Nigeria into Organization for Islamic Conference (OIC) and the official license to operate Islamic banking in a secular country like Nigeria during the regime of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida²². These factors show to a great extent that Nigerian has really lost the way in the practice of federalism.²³

These anomalies have given room for different forms of marginalization against the minority tribes. Even the Federal character principle as enshrined in Section

7 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria has become a tool for exploitation. This article in the constitution is supposed to be a tool towards harvesting talents across the country for different offices but the practice today has become a shadow of itself. Epelle and Omoruyi noted that the effect of the policy of quota system and Federal Character principle has been to pull down merit and encourage mediocrity and indolence.²⁴

Restructuring and Nation Building in Nigeria

In the context of the foregoing, restructuring means the adjustment of the existing federal system in such a way that powers of the federal government are drastically reduced, with a view to giving the component units or regions and by extension ethnic nationalities, the opportunities to participate and manage their own affairs.²⁵ According to Tamuna, restructuring will enable the component units of a political organization to share

²⁰. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, "Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends", [https://www.google.com/url?data-and analysis statistics Corruption_in_Nigeria_2019_standard](https://www.google.com/url?data-and+analysis+statistics+Corruption_in_Nigeria_2019_standard) accessed April 30, 2022

²¹. Badiora, A. I., (2017) "Civil Unrest, Insurgences and the Challenges of Community Displacement in Sub-Sahara Africa: A Silhouette of selected states in Nigeria" in *International Journal of criminal Justices Sciences*, 12(2), 302-318. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1034678> accessed on 23/01/2019.

²². Epelle, A. (2017). "The Nigerian Military and Peace of the Graveyard Victory over Boko Haram Insurgents: Pragmatic Strategies for Ensuring Enduring Peace in the North-East Region". *Port Harcourt Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies*, 4(2), 610.

²³. Tony Osborg, "Nigeria: Skewed Federalism", <https://allafrica.com/stories/201509100070.html> accessed on April 30, 2022.

²⁴. Epelle, A. & Omoruyi, O. "The National Policy on Education". In P.E Igbinovia, B.A Okonofua & O.O Osunde (Eds.). *Law and social policy legislation and administration in Nigeria* (Lagos: Ababa Pub, 2005), 195-211.

²⁵. Amuwo, K., & Herault, G. "On the Notion of Political Restructuring in Federal Systems". In K. Amuwo, A. Agbaje, R. Suberu & G. Herault (Eds.), *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria* (Kaduna: Spectrum Books, 2000), p. 3-10.

powers in a cooperative manner for equity and fairness.²⁶ Simply put, restructuring connotes a transition from the lopsided federal political structure to a system of political inclusiveness, people oriented constitutional amendment, resource control, electoral process, political representation, e.t.c in order to create a path for better society.

Restructuring is a necessary process in federalism when the system becomes burdensome and there are rising misgivings in the federal system of governance. More so experts have shown that ideal federalism may be a mirage without constant restructuring.²⁷ Hence there is need to consistently adapt to the realities of political, economic, social, racial, ideological, geographical, cultural, religious changes in time in order to address pitfalls and create enabling environment for societal/national development. It is a radical movement by ethnic nationalities and states to restore equilibrium to its best possible stand for peaceful coexistence.

Federalism in Nigeria can at best be described as a failed project. The study so far has shown how federalism in Nigeria has concentrated power at the centre than on the federating states or regions. The major reasons for the introduction of federalism in Nigeria were for her cultural diversity, fear of domination and bringing government nearer to the people. The unfortunate is that instead of bringing

these desired ends of peaceful coexistence, administrative convenience and national development; federalism in Nigeria has been accompanied with conflicts, political instability, ethnic and religious bigotry, economic collapse and severe insecurity. This failure calls for reactions from different regions of Nigeria towards restoration of sanity, peace and good governance in Nigeria. This reaction has been a harmonious melody of restructuring as echoed from all the regions of Nigeria except the regions that are highly favoured by creative federalism in Nigeria and who use federalism as a tool for political domination and marginalization. Hence their ill-disposition for restructuring is already a proof of the need for restructuring.

It is therefore obvious that several indices of over centralization of powers abounds thereby negating and heightening the call for restructuring. Also, it is obvious that the current federal system in Nigeria is challenged by injustice and lack of equity. This fact is collaborated minding the constitutional structure and concentration of power at the centre which favours particular sections of the country and adversely disenfranchises others. This system permits absolute political power in the hands of whichever section or groups that control power at the centre. In the same vein, the need for restructuring is most timely so as to enthrone a people oriented constitution since the present state of Nigerian constitution is a birth of

^{26.} Ibid.,

^{27.} McGarry, J. (2005). "Can Federalism help in Manage Ethnic and National Diversity"? *Forum of Federations*, 5(A-1):15-17.

military operation in democratic rule. Hence if the constitution is to govern a democratic government then there is need to restructure the constitution to truly reflect people oriented government of the people and by the people.

This adjustment is most timely in Nigeria as the situation is at its yielding point of total collapse. No doubt, federalism in Nigeria has proven to be a wanton rape of governance and tool for ethnic bigotry. Hence it is most apt that the federal system be restructured in order to restore justice and equity to reign supreme. It is hence a truism to claim that the call for restructuring is gaining momentum these days as unprecedented. Thus restructuring has become a popular demand of the masses. This is a necessary effect following the collapse of federalism in Nigeria precipitating the clamour and agitations for political restructuring. For Okpe, 'the more the delay in restructuring the country, the more there will be mutual suspicion among the ethnic groups in the country; the more minority elements will feel cheated by the system; and the more crises the federation experiences'.²⁸

Nigeria has practiced extreme creative federalism which is a situation where the federal/ national government interferes and controls state governments by grant regulations. By concentrating power at the centre, the federal government creates a form of "feeding bottle" method of

governance where the federal government is the mother source and all federating states are all suckers. It is over emphasizing the obvious stating that the federal system of government has failed Nigeria, hence the agitations for restructuring. It is upon restructuring that Nigeria would hit the ground running in matters of national development.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was stated earlier as a probe into the recent clamor for political restructuring in Nigeria so as to address its fears, determine the tears of federalism in Nigeria and project the triumph of restructuring for national building. The paper tried to understand the extent to which federalism has failed Nigeria and to determine how restructuring can redeem Nigeria as a country. A thorough conceptual study on federalism and restructuring was made to understand the scope of the study and put the research in better perspective minding the stated aim. The paper so far made a dogged effort towards proving why restructuring is an indispensable necessity in Nigeria as a leeway for national development.

Restructuring as here understood refers to adjustment of the federal system in order to fine-tune or smoothen the rough edges and create a leeway for national development. This adjustment is in a manner that powers of the federal government are drastically reduced with a

²⁸. Okpeh, O.O. "The Sovereign National Conference: A historical Appraisal of Contending Issues and their Implications for the Corporeality of the Nigerian Nation". In O.O Okpeh (Ed.), *The sovereign National Conference* (Makurdi: Aboki Pub., 2003), 1-34.

view to giving the component units regions and by extension ethnic nationalities, the opportunities to participate and manage their own affairs.²⁹

Furthermore, this research argued that federalism in Nigeria was already fractured on arrival making it unhealthy for national development. This claim tests positive minding the tears and fears emanating from excessive concentration of power at the centre (Abuja) leading to marginalization of minority groups, insecurity, irresponsible quest for political powers, breeding a turn-over of half baked politicians and spilling corruption to the superlative degree, election rigging, politics of ethnic favoritism, lopsided political appointment on ethnic lines, e.t.c.

The above tears show that federalism in Nigeria can be said to be a failed project. This failure calls for reactions from different regions of Nigeria towards restoration of sanity, peace and good governance in Nigeria. This reaction has been a harmonious melody of restructuring. No doubt, restructuring is most timely in Nigeria as the situation is at its yielding point of total collapse in order to truly restore the nation, Nigeria. This implies a restoration of real federalism aimed as decentralization of powers and responsibilities between the central and federating unites. This form of federalism empowers the federating unites to assume responsibility more effectively while reserving responsibilities such as the

armed forces and security matters, foreign affairs, central bank and currency matters, immigration issues, e.t.c.

Therefore, this paper makes a passionate call on the government and all relevant authorities to dispassionately quicken actions towards political restructuring as the better option for national growth and development in Nigeria.

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