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Contending Perspectives on Restructuring in Nigeria: A Case for Ethno-Linguistic Homogeneity

Onuh Paul Ani

Lecturer, Department of political science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Nnaji Daniel Ikechi

Student, Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Abstract:

The happenings within the country in recent years, has once again put Nigeria on the map of artificial states. One hundred years into its journey towards nationhood, the state is characterized by weak/fledging institutions, insecurity, inequality, poverty, and gross inefficiency. This has been blamed on the character and structure of the Republic, especially in the current post military era. As a respite to these challenges, many stakeholders across the country have placed restructuring on the table, as a viable option. Hence, reinventing the argument on organization of state. In gathering data, the research employed the documentary, and focused grouped discussion methods. Also, qualitative descriptive analysis was employed in data analysis. This research articulates the contending perspectives of restructuring in Nigeria, implications of each perspective, as well as making a case for reorganization of the Republic based on ethno-linguistic homogeneity.

Keywords: Perspectives, federation, organization of state, ethno-linguistic homogeneity, restructuring

1. Introduction

The debate for restructuring of the Nigerian state has been ongoing for decades. However, in recent times, the ferocity of the restructuring discourse has pervaded the Nigerian political space. From every quarter, what seem like the in-thing now is restructuring (Adesoji, 2017:1). Over the years, political analysts, specialists in model of state organization and comparative government, as well as politicians and Diaspora Nigerians have observed the inadequacy of the Nigerian government structure and its operational mechanism in a nations-state. This fault line, many hinge on the legitimacy of the 1999 constitution (as a military executive fiat); the political content of the said constitution (in terms of centralization powers); the extent of its rigidity (regarding its ability to respond to socio-political dynamics); and ambiguity (regarding the intent of the framers of the constitution).

These reasons, and clamor for political restructuring forced president Olusegun Obasanjo to organize a political reform conference in 2005, National conference in 2014 by President Goodluck Jonathan, and the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) to set up a committee on restructuring in 2017. However, despite these actions the voices of restructuring remain divergent. Therefore, this paper X-rays these views on restructuring, making a case for the re-organization of the Nigerian state based on Ethno-linguistic homogeneity.

2. Historical Antecedents in Organization of the Nigerian State

2.1. The Colonial Period

Nigeria was declared into existence by a British colonial fiat under the lordship of Frederick Lugard in 1914. Having amalgamated the Southern and Northern protectorates, a new socio-formation was formed. This action brought together, people of disparate nationalities who hitherto existed independently, with divergent governance system. Many of these nationalities existed in enemy capacities but suddenly found themselves to be citizens of same Country-Nigeria.

Having created a new socio-formation, although without organic evolution from within, the task of governance became imperative. The colonialists created the Nigerian council, then introduced the 1922 constitution, the 1946 constitution and the 1951 constitution. These constitutions centralized government authority and basically dispossessed people of their fundamental human rights-in all manner, realities and pretenses, the colonial government was seen by itself to be superior to the people of Nigeria.

The unification and centralization of government power made governance difficult. This became clear as even the 1951 constitution which to an extent decentralized power proved ineffective and inefficient. "It proved unbearably restrictive and obstructive in operation" (Awolowo, 1966:11). This led to a new constitution which structured the country into a federation. Few modifications of this constitution became the independence and Republican constitutions of 1960 and 1963 respectively. Realistically, the colonial government was authoritarian, repressive and discriminatory. It was characterized with injustice, human rights abuse, racial discrimination, non-participation and inclusion of Africans in

government of their own country and siphoning of nations resources to Britain (Adesoji, 2017:2). Other activities of the colonial government are buried in the annals of history.

2.2. Post-Independence Period

Independent Nigeria was introduced with a constitution that maintained the federal structure and a parliamentary system modeled after the British west minister. The structure of the political system as at this time allowed regional governments to handle most issues except defense, aviation, currency, custom and immigration, rail ways etc. such other issues which did not appear in the exclusive list was left to the jurisdiction of regional governments as obtainable in many federations around the globe.

Due to disturbances in the political sphere, the military intervened on 15th January 1966; it was a history of coups, counter coups and other intrigues within the political system. The second republic (1979-1983) could be said to be a period of leave of absence for the military, and on January 1, 1984 they returned. In 1999, the military as a matter of expediency relinquished power and subordinated itself to civilian rule. However, it succeeded in bastardizing the practically federal political system and introduced instead a unitary constitution with a federal nomenclature. That constitution is the guiding principle of the Nigerian state today. Despite the return to civil rule, and a supposed liberal democracy, questions regarding the contradictions of the Nigerian state continue to pervade the political space. Threats of secession, marginalization, mutual distrust and mis-governance, with virtual citizen powerlessness, characterize political happenstances in the fourth republic.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the "functional pluralism paradigm" in analysis. According to Davies (1974:54) functional institutional sectors, each with a high degree of autonomy or institutional isolation. "This is imperative arising from the characterization of every society as complex, highly differentiated in character and role which is often devoid of human activity but operates mainly on intellectualized and bureaucratized mechanisms" (Odubajo, 2011:3). For Eikstein (1966:22) a plural society exists where political divisions follow very closely, and especially concern lines of objective social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in the society. This is represented in the guild of cultural, religious, ideological, linguistic and other bias that propels differentiation. In fact, Morris and Stephenson (1972:83) noted that "cultural pluralism increases the likelihood of conflict between members of communal groups in Black African Nations and increases the probability of communal and elite instability in these Nations".

The above assertion captures the rationale behind the challenges of the Nigerian State. Elite instability, threats of secession, mutual distrust in varying degrees between and amongst groups. Continuous quest for the decentralization of state power arises out of an understanding obviously empirical that plural societies like Nigeria, for optimal performance in all indices of human evolution and development must necessarily develop an internal mechanism wherein governmental power lies with the people, and is expressly manifested by them through the formation of government along Natural Ethno-linguistic concerns.

4. Diverse Models of Restructuring in Nigeria

The debate about restructuring the country has generated a frenzy of reactions on the subject-matter. This has allowed divergent opinion on what constitutes an ideal model of state organization for Nigeria. These debates recognize the reality of the diversity of Nigerian cultures, and the multiplicity of systems within the larger political system. These opinions are classified as follows:

- The Academic Class
- The Political Class

4.1. The Academic Class

The academic class in every society heavily influences public opinion on ideals and aspirations of that society. Its strength arises from its ability to conduct extensive research on any issue, its platform for knowledge impartation, and its ability to set the agenda for public discourse. The academic class in Nigeria is largely drawn from teachers within the spectrum of Nigeria's higher institutions. Scholars on federalism, organization of state, comparative government, and related sub-disciplines have at one time or the other, argued against Nigeria's current arrangement, urging for what some term "refederalization" "regional autonomy", "true federalism" and so on. Scholars classified hereunder include Odubajo (2011); Obidimma and Obidimma (2015); Abah and Nwokwu (2017) among others.

For Odubajo (2011) "the strength of federalism as a nation building tool and an integrative mechanism has not been properly applied ever since its adoption in the 1954 Nigerian Constitution." He opines that the structures have been eroded, broken, and its character has become empty. He further submits that Nigeria needs to start afresh with an "initiation and eventual adoption of a people oriented federal constitution geared towards restructuring and reforming the political process" (Odubajo, 2011:29). The problem with this submission is that while it acknowledges the need to restructure, it has no definitive pattern on how such restructuring should go. It carries such character of ambiguity, and leaves one in a dilemma of the direction of its proposition.

Also, Obidimma and Obidimma (2015) align with the argument that the Nigerian federalism, beyond semantics and intellectual masturbation, falls short of the basic features of a federal state. The reasons for this according to them are as follows: the manner in which the Nigerian federation was formed which differs from the manner of formation of other

notable federal states like the United States of America, Canada and Australia, and; the constant military incursion into the government of Nigeria since the formation of the Nigerian federation. The summary of their submission goes thus: "For a proper functioning of the Nigerian federalism, there is need for a proper restructuring of the federal structure in Nigeria starting from a constitutional amendment that will inculcate the basic requirements of federalism. There should be a proper balance in the sharing of governmental powers, functions and allocation of resources between the federal government and the governments of the federating units to ensure that each of the government of the 36 states of Nigeria is equipped with every paraphernalia of government to be able to stand as an independent autonomous entity as is required for the practice of federalism."

The problem with this position is that it fails to define what the basic requirements of a federation are. Moreover, it reinforces the argument for the maintenance of this 36 states structure wherein some states are unviable, derelict, and the whole system, very expensive to operate.

Moreover, Abah and Nwokwu (2017) observe that the Nigerian federalism is riddled with imperfections, and largely characterized by over centralization of state power at the detriment of component units. He recommends a restructured Nigeria based on the following:

- Devolution of more powers to the federating units
- Constituent Units should have control of resources found in their various localities
- Equalization in Number of states by geo-political zones
- Strict adherence to federal character principle for all political office of state.

Also, the argument for more states under the guise of equality will recreate the problems of viability and expense. Secondly, it does not demonstrate how its model will curb such issues like inter-ethnic hostility as regards the quest for governmental power. It fails to provide a benchmark on the power devolution process.

4.2. *The Political Class*

The issue surrounding a restructuring of the Nigerian State to reflect a character consistent with the federal Principle as obtainable in most advanced federations is not lost on the lips of some of Nigeria's politicians. Many, including Nigeria's former vice presidents (Alex Ekwueme, Atiku Abubakar), Deputy President of the Senate (Ike Ekweremmadu), Governor of Kaduna State and a former Minister of the Republic (Nasir Ahmad El Rufai), Former Governor of Lagos State and National leader of the All Progressives Congress (Bola Ahmed Tinubu) have in one time or the other, argued in favour of restructuring the country with a view to decentralizing power.

Amongst these people, Atiku Abubakar argues for devolution of power and resources to States, matching grants from the federal government and States to help them grow their internally generated revenue, privatization of unviable federal government owned assets, and replacing the State of origin with the state of residence. For him, restructuring means "making changes to our current federal structure, so it comes closer to what our founding fathers established" (Abubakar, 2017). This argument follows a conviction that inasmuch as it is necessary to devolve power, it must be gradual, and that this idea will eliminate policies that feed the mindset that drives sharing mentality with regard to current revenue allocation regime. Furthermore, he believes his model shall contract the contradiction of "centralized federalism", and also reduce over dependence on the federal government. However, challenges with this model arise from the ambiguity of its postulations. "Atiku's restructuring is vague" (Osinbajo, 2018). Critics ask, when you match state grants with federal grants, how does that help them grow their internally generated revenue position, and from where will the money come? To what extent will power be devolved? This model basically wants to keep the current 36 states structure up and running, which were arbitrarily created, and have been identified to be expensive, and many states unviable.

Another prominent figure within the political class in favour of restructuring is Alex Ekwueme (though late). The central tenets of his propositions revolve around dividing the country into six geo-political zones, and these geo-political zones being the federating units. This implies that state institutions will be modeled after this structure. However, the power of the central government is to be slightly adjusted or remain basically the same. The argument here is that this structure takes cognizance of the current skewed arrangement which appears to marginalize some parts of the country, as well as understands the content and character of the polity. Also, Ekwueme (1995) argues that a six-unit federating structure saves the country a lot of money in terms of elections, maintaining different state governors and houses of assembly etc. Furthermore, every section is included in governance, thereby addressing the problem of marginalization. However, this proposition fails to address basic issues on the principles of the federal system. Nigeria, a country whose diversity rings in its socio cultural, political and economic sub-systems is too large to tilt towards a "centralized federation" as proposed by Ekwueme. This system of "centralized federation" creates contradictions which threaten the stability of the Republic. Also, this model of state organization sees the six federating units as appendages of the central government without proximate powers to develop internal institutional mechanism and policies that inspires development.

Also, Ike Ekweremmadu, Nigeria's Deputy Senate president backs the idea of restructuring the country. His views revolve around devolution of federal power to states on such issues like policing, mining, and collapsing of the thirty-six states structure into a six state structure. He stated that "federating units will have more control over their resources in a restructured Nigeria and that there would be equalization fund to ensure that every region thrives above a reasonable threshold" (Vanguard, November 17, 2017). He further argues that Nigeria has come to a point where restructuring is inevitable, considering the quest to promote unity and integration between and amongst the peoples of Nigeria. However, the challenge with Ekweremmadu's position on this issue is the lack of depth. He fails to give in clear and unambiguous terms a model he means for a restructured Nigeria. When the thirty-six states structure is collapsed into a six states

structure, how does he factor in the issue of same nationalities existing in different tentative geopolitical zones? For example, there are Igala and Idoma speaking people in Enugu State (South East), and Igbo speaking people in Benue State (North Central), as well as Igbo speaking people in Rivers and Delta States (South South). If he will sue for a redrawing of boundaries, he didn't specify on that.

Upon a critical examination of the position of most of these politicians on the restructuring debate, the evidence of their incoherence comes to light. However, it is important to note that they as mentioned, and many others have identified that the current federal arrangement is faulty, hence the need to restructure. But again, the issue regarding their intentions and the sincerity of their quest comes to the fore. It appears as if politicians making these arguments are either in the opposition or not part of the federal executive as at the time of their propositions.

5. A Case for Ethno-Linguistic Homogeneity

Having articulated the restructuring propositions put forward by different stakeholders within the Nigerian political space, together with a basic understanding of how collective heterogeneous states function, and in consultation with history, we arrive at the argument for restructuring of the Nigerian state based on ethno-linguistic homogeneity. The term ethno-linguistic arises out of a combination of ethnic and lingual preferences in the course to produce and align a concept aimed at the advancement of identity on the basis of unification of the dynamics of culture and language of indigenous people with very similar historical antecedents. In this case, ethno-linguistic homogeneity means advancing of social atomization and optimization of a people in such a way that the underlying characteristics of micro units of any socio-formation is the similarity in culture and language, and unity in both, with a view to advancing the political interests of its people. Furthermore, ethno-linguistic homogeneity implies that the language of law and politics is in tandem with the indigenous language of a people.

Based on historical antecedents, Western Europe is stable and progressive because among other things, its contemporary society was founded on the principle of ethno-linguistic homogeneity. An examination of mode of state organization in the United Kingdom - a significantly heterogeneous country with different nations - English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish, which are themselves major power blocs, without a significantly dominant group in terms of population and civilization, shows that the United Kingdom follows this principle, given that the four micro political units - England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, are politically autonomous regions with nearly every characteristics of a modern state operating within the framework of the United Kingdom, expressed by the Westminster parliament, based on dialogue, and projection of "soft power" rather than Military force. These micro political units have real governmental power, for the purpose of state administration. Its decisions have wide ranging implications on economic, political, and cultural aspects of existence. More importantly, these nations within the United Kingdom, in their respects have ethno-linguistic homogeneity. Though they all speak English, a closer observation shows the dialectical difference in the speech pattern which they cherish, within their respective political spaces.

Also, taking a look at the structure of the United States, one understands that the core of American statehood is expressed as a federal Union based among many other things, ethno-linguistic homogeneity. In Canada, regions and provinces are delineated considering ethno-linguistic homogeneity. A pointer to this is the accession to semi independence status of Quebec arising mainly from the reality of its history, culture and lingua franca.

Most progressive nations of the World are predominated by people from the same ethno-linguistic groups. The Germans have Germany, the French have France, the Dutch have the Netherlands, the Finns have Finland, and the Spaniards have Spain, the Portuguese have Portugal, the English have England, the Irish have Ireland etc. Also, by contrast, most retrogressive societies are heterogeneous socio-formations with unitary constitutions and governance structures which fundamentally suffocate the idea of advancement of indigenous people in their own political space, and by their means. These countries are often superimpositions by erstwhile imperial bosses, maintained and sustained by tacit approval of the emergent bourgeoisie who derive satisfaction from their comprador status. Such societies include virtually all states in sub-Saharan Africa and Minor touches elsewhere.

The argument that Nigeria remains as presently structured and constituted has no convincing *raison d'être*. On one hand, such illusions of an exaggerated center and maintenance based on its centenary marriage of convenience, and inter-ethnic hybridization is emotion laden and antithetic to sound logic. It is only rational to figure out that something that has not worked for over a century should be dismantled, and alternatives put in place.

Coming home to Africa, Botswana and Ethiopia remains some of the most stable and progressive socio-formations in the Continent. The question that follows is why are these states stable and progressive, whereas states like Nigeria, Central African Republic, and Congo are unstable and retrogressive? The answer is not farfetched- the ethno-linguistic Configuration of Botswana and ethno-linguistic configuration of Micro political units - federating structure in Ethiopia. Botswana is an Ethno-linguistic Homogenous nation with nearly 80 percent of its population made up of Tswana or Setswana people, and 75% of its people speak the Setswana language. In Ethiopia, a similar pattern of ethno-linguistic delineation is followed. It is a federation of states, based on language identity and consent of the people. Each of these states - Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somalia, Benshagul/Gumuz, Harari, Gambela, and Southern Nations have autonomous governments, directing development at individual state pace. This reinforces their identity, and reduces inter-ethnic struggle for governmental power. Here, the state functions as a guarantor of the realm, leaving the people to be primarily interested in socioeconomic development.

Can emotion defy logic? Does love for one's country not presuppose that person's laying such claims advance rational and empirical solutions to the cesspit Nigeria has found itself? Cameroun that effectively abrogated its federal structure previously based on ethno-linguistic identity, how has it fared? Is it not the same Nigerian story of internal strife,

rebellion and most recently insurrection? On the other hand, Ghana, South Africa and Tanzania who understand the importance of delineation of socio-formations based on ethno-linguistic identity with less human and material resources are ahead of Nigeria in almost all indices of human and socioeconomic development.

The argument for restructuring of Nigeria based on ethno-linguistic homogeneity arises from a time tested recurrence of stability and prosperity of ethno-linguistically homogenous socio-formations. On the social front, there is cultural revolution in line with contemporary realities. The concept of "detrribalized National" becomes vague and obsolete. In fact, one would hardly read anything like "detrribalized Frenchman" or "detrribalized Norwegian". Here in Nigeria, the concept of "detrribalized Nigerian" has been smuggled into the political lexicon. In clear terms, what does that mean?

As a corollary to the above, Nigeria is not a nation. Its development crises continue due to the persistent inability of major actors of state to come to terms concerning the political direction of the state, and contradictions arising from its mode of organization. Though the country is in motion, it is motion without movement, and whenever it makes any moves, it appears to be heading to oblivion. Contrary to the Marxian postulations of the primacy of economy in all human activities, it is important to understand that colonially created socio-formations with high level of heterogeneity would assume political determinism of its economy rather than economic determinism of its politics. This means that despite the economic policies in place, Nigeria would continue to grind under the burden of political contradictions and contradistinctions largely bordering on model of state organization.

Ethno-linguistic models of state organization remain the most optimal model for nation-states like Nigeria, arising from the fact that ethno-linguistic homogeneity creates positive externalities, and nurtures positive internal matrices. The socio-political, economic, technological and military advancement of Western Europe are natural corollaries of Western Europe's adoption of Ethno-linguistic homogenous model of state organization. Same can be said of the United States, Canada, and even the great powers of Asia, China and India, considering the progress they have made in the past five decades. Ethno-linguistic homogeneity and diversity are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are collectively exhaustive. This means that societies structured on this principle could be diverse in composition. However, the defining factor here is the presence of a dominant group within such socio-formations. Take a look at Germany for instance; Germans are over 80 percent of the total population of the German Republic. There are more Mandarin speaking people of Han origin in People's Republic of China. In fact, they are said to be over 90 percent. In France, French people dominate, in Wales, the Welsh dominate. This dominance does not mean zero diversity. It means that there are minority groups whose aspirations are better expressed on the platter of rational and historical aspirations of the majority. The Nigerian Republic is better restructured on the basis of ethno-linguistic identity. Of course, the consent of the governed confers legitimacy on the exercise. Each of these micro political units shall evolve unique governance systems, identical and peculiar to its culture and history.

6. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the restructuring position by different class of Nigerians hamstrung on the debate – Academic, Activist and Political. The fact of matter remains that the argument of these classes of people, though divergent in intent, and their presentations on the modus operandi of the Nigerian state, it converges on the reality that the present structure is wholesomely faulty, maintaining, sustaining, and extending the frontiers of epileptic development structures, convulsing grain of statehood, and a multiplication in geometric terms, contradictions between the state and its citizens. Hence, the argument for a reorganization of state.

The crux of this study, is its case for Ethno-linguistic homogeneity. It observes and advances the reality that while not all stable, rich and progressive socio-formations are ethno-linguistically organized, all socio-formations organized on the basis of ethno-linguistic homogeneity, are stable and progressive. It therefore, posits that Nigeria's federalism should tow same line, wherein federating units are organized on the basis of ethno-linguistic homogeneity, each unit having a sufficiently dominant group among other minorities. Crucially, these groups (dominant and minorities) must share similar historical antecedents.

7. Recommendations

Upon the examination of all arguments as stated supra, and the case for ethno-linguistic homogeneity, the following recommendations are imperative.

- A restructuring of the Nigerian State based on ethno-linguistic homogeneity
- Such grouping of indigenous people must consider historical antecedents
- Nigeria becomes a federation of Fifteen component units known as regions, whose names and symbols shall be determined and voted for by its people.
- Composition of these regions shall be explicated in further publications.

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