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## **The Politics of Restructuring and the Nigerian Unity: The Role of the Leadership**

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### **Abstract**

The Nigerian political system, to a very large extent, since independence in 1960, has continued to be marked by divisions along ethnic, religious and class lines. The primordial identity symbols appear to have been capitalized on and manipulated by the political class and the elite to gain undue advantage in electoral contests, which have almost become a recovering decimal of the Nigerian politics. The result of this phenomenon has been a lack of patriotic leadership with nationalistic tendencies and equity-induced service delivery in the political affairs of our country. Our attempt at this Conference therefore, is to give a critical analysis of the politics surrounding the concept of restructuring and Nigeria unity vise-vise the role of the leadership.

### **Introduction**

For quite some time now, calls and agitations for political restructuring have rented the political landscape of Nigeria. Such agitations have come from individuals, geo-political associations, as well as geo- cultural groups. A call for restructuring should be seen within the context of reinforcing national unity and integration. The type of restructuring should be such that will provide and safeguard a sense of belonging to various segments of a plural society like ours in Nigeria. This is with a view to ensuring advancing social and economic interests of members of the society, and removing practices and counter-productive forces that are inimical to the interests of the federating units.

Calls for restructuring in Nigeria do not seem to have so far appealed to successive governments in Nigeria that would give the calls serious considerations. The nearest they have done within the context of the recent agitations, were the organization of the 2005 National Political Reform

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Conference (NPRC) (Tenuche, 2015) by President Obasanjo and the 2014 National Conference, convened by President Goodluck Jonathan. The outcome of these have not yet led to the expected restructuring exercise in Nigeria. Adedayo Bello (2017) advanced three reasons for the seemingly non-challant attitude to the recent calls for restructuring in Nigeria thus:-

- i. Some people believe that there is no guarantee that such an exercise will succeed in moving the nation forward, and that it may even be counter-productive or lead to unexpected consequences;
- ii. Prior to 2015, the people who were calling for restructuring never gave a clear definition of what they meant by re-structuring, neither were they specific about the scope, modalities or, even the timing of such an exercise;
- iii. Up till 2015, most of the calls for restructuring had been from individuals and groups from the southern part of Nigeria, especially, South-south geo-political zone. Others from the north, probably think that the agitation is because the south controls the major mineral resources that constitute the bulk of Nigeria's wealth.

However, the clamour for restructuring in the Nigerian polity has continued to enjoy support even in the north to some little extent since 2016. Few prominent people in the North have begun to show support for restructuring Nigeria. Among them, are the former Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar; Balarabe Musa; Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara and Paul Unongo. Even President Muhammad Buhari at various fora appears disposed to restructuring, but suggests due process being followed by way of referendum and constitutional amendment. (Bello 2017) Tohim, political restructuring is a constitutional matter.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For a better conceptualization of this paper, key terms in the topic need brief clarification. They include Concept of Restructuring; Federalism, Unity and Leadership.

**Restructuring:** attracts different definitions from different perspectives, cutting across individuals, associations and geo-political zones of Nigeria. Former Military President Babangida as reported by (Adeogu 2017) to have defined "Restructure" as a devolution of powers to the extent that more responsibilities be given to states, while Federal Government is vested with the responsibility to oversee our foreign policy, defence and economy. In the same vein, Atiku Abubakar perceived restructuring as devolution of more powers from the Federal Government and de-emphasizing federal allocations as source of sustenance of states.

Others define restructuring as a call for restoration of federalism as entrenched in the 1963 Republican Constitution, or as a federalism with independent self-sustaining federating units able to "develop infrastructure, critical amenities, undertake other developmental projects, education and health without a central body interfering" (Adeogu 2017) Yet, restructuring is perceived by (Bello 2017) simply as the process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts that make up a system and re-defining the inter-relationship between them in such a way that the entire system performs more efficiently.

From the above definitions and perceptions of restructuring, one observes certain common features amongst them, in terms of power devolution, independence, to a very large extent, of the component units of the super-system, which entails decentralization of powers of the super-system (Central authority) while strengthening those of the federating units. This, it is believed would ensure greater and faster development, achievement of common goals, higher

responsibilities and a sense of belonging. The proponents of restructuring therefore, argue that the exercise brings more stable polity, progress through hard work and healthy competition among the federating units.

An analysis of the ongoing clamour and agitations for restructuring, seems to be essentially centred on political-devolution of power and economy in terms of resource control. This appears to a narrow-minded perception of what restructuring should be. Restructuring should be seen in a more dimensional perspective, rather than what apparently seems to be the case-limiting it to political and economic dimensions at the expense of other areas of human endeavour. Bello (2017) suggested other dimensions of restructuring, for a more comprehensive and enduring exercise. They include human capital development, social, educational, administrative, security and restructuring of the mindset. We may have the best and most laudable restructuring on ground, but if the right orientation, value system and mindset of the citizenry are lacking, such restructuring can hardly solve Nigeria's problems. We should try to avoid a situation in which our attempts to restructure end up creating more problems as is the case so far in Nigeria. This may have informed Dan Agbeses (2018) claim that "A Problem + a Solution = Problems". Therefore, restructuring of our mindset and attitude considered to the mother of all restructuring, should be the starting point. In the same vein, Governor Nasiru Ahmed El- Rufai of Kaduna State does not believe that restructuring can be a "Panacea to the nation's current socio-economic woes, but rather, restructuring of the national mindset aimed at returning Nigeria to the path of progress.

**Federalism** In its broadest conception, is defined by Ramphel (1979) as "a process of unifying power within the cluster of states and decentralizing power within the unified State. In a true federal system, internal sovereignty is preserved, while external sovereignty is limited. It emphasises the plurality of the component parts that make the confederation. The key concepts in a true fashionable federal structure, therefore, are decentralization and devolution of powers. Federalism ensures that "sovereignty and political power are combined within a single nation of several territorial units, which are distributed between national and unit governments, in such a way that each, within its own sphere, is substantially independent of the others. It emphasises governments have broad local responsibilities that constitute and sufficiently autonomous to carry out their duties on behalf of their own people, in concert with the whole people of the federation.

According to Kincaid (2000) cited in Henry Alapiki (2005), "a democratic federation is in effect, a republic of republics, which emphasizes partnership and co-operation for the common good, while also allowing diversity and competition to foster liberty and efficiency".

Federalism in Nigeria formally came into being through the 1954 Lytleton Constitution, ostensibly to accommodate its diverse nationalities of more than 250, maintain the integrity of the country and grant the regions self-government. At independence, Nigeria became a federation of three regions. The questions here now, Mr. chairman, are, why did the federation fail within the first six years of its experimentation, leading to the beginning of military intervention into the nation's politics? Could the failure be attributable to the faulty nature of the federal constitution, or the operators of the constitution?

**Unity:** is a state of being in agreement and working together in peace, ensuring unity of interest and purpose. Unity cuts across local, state, national, regional /sub regional, continental and global. In whichever case, the central aim is for political stability, economic progress and social cohesion, and harmony. Emphasizing the importance of unity, the Senate President, Dr Bukola

Saraki (2017) recently said "As a nation, unity is a prerequisite for development, stability and greatness. Unity is the first focus. Without unity, we can achieve nothing." There is no doubt that the current challenges facing Nigeria as a nation, especially, as they concern unity, integration and restructuring must have informed such a declaration by the Senate President.

**Leadership:** is a state of being a leader. This can cut across all levels and categories, ranging from family, local, state, national, to institutional, political, religious, traditional and organizational- public or private, formal or informal, among others. In the context of this discourse, leadership refers to those at formal government establishments- Political, economic, social, security, ministries, departments and agencies (MDA's), tiers and organs of government. It is common knowledge however, that the greatest problem plaguing Nigeria, since independence is that of leadership, and as some would argue that of followership as well. Leaders from all walks of life be it private or public determine the path of its followers. If majority of the populace elect a wrong leader, then "it is inevitable that the country or profession will turn to wrong path" (Blusson, 2018) With effective leadership and good governance which meet the basic needs of the citizenry, the clamour for restructuring or agitation for dismemberment may disappear, or reduce to the barest minimum.

The type of leadership needed in Nigeria of today, particularly, at the centre is a visionary, incorruptible, inclusive, selfless, foresighted, intelligent, competent, caring for all, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or tribe. A leader who is courageous, having a sincerity of purpose to wage a decisive war against corruption, insecurity, poverty, unemployment, violation against the rule of law and mono-economy syndrome, among other societal vices.

### **Restructuring and Federalism in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective**

Political restructuring can be said to have started by the colonial rulers long before Nigeria's independence in 1960. This was in the form of declaration of Nigerian area into a number of Protectorates- Northern, Southern Protectorates and Lagos Colony. Reorganization and restructuring of the initial Protectorates continued up to 1914, when the then two protectorates of the North and South were amalgamated by Lord Lugard to become a single polity called Nigeria. The amalgamation was to unite the administration of the entire colonial territory and strengthen the policies on railways and sharing of customs proceeds. The exercise was basically for the British administrative convenience, rather than integrating the discreetly indigenous nationalities. As stated earlier, the Lytleton Constitution of 1954 formally introduced a Federal system of government in Nigeria, dividing it into three regions, East, West and North, with political autonomous status.

The 1954 constitution, in which the nationalists participated through their three major political parties, the NCNC, NPC and AG, was the first to transform the structure of Nigerian government from unitary foundations to those of federalism. It is fully institutionalized regionalism in the country. It marked the beginning of regional and ethnic feelings and what Nnoli (1978) described as "emotive ethnic symbols. This situation agrees with what Vice President Yemi, Osinbajo (2018) calls "identity politics, which promotes such questions like, "where do you come from, or to which religion do you belong". This is counter-productive to national unity and integration. The constitution granted the regions self-government which was maintained up to Nigeria's independence in 1960. By 1963, however Mild-Western region was carved out of the western region to satisfy agitations of the concerned peoples. Unfortunately, the Nigeria federation under a parliamentary constitution failed within five years of its existence. Accusations of corruption, election malpractices, insecurity of lives and property,

manipulation of census figures, among others, became the order of the day. Under such atmosphere, the military found justification for their incursion into the nation's political arena in January, 1966.

The federal constitution was replaced by the unitary system, through the promulgation of decree no 34 of 1966 by the new military Head of State- Major General J.T.U Aguyi-Ironsi. The decree truncated the first Republic with the Federal Republic Constitution of 1963. This is regarded to be the "murder" of federalism in Nigeria.

The unitary system led to disintegration, disharmony, and was a prelude to the death of regionalism. Perhaps, due to the popular outcries and agitations that greeted the promulgation of decree no 34, the new military regime under Lt. Col (later General) Yakubu Gowon after the demise of Ironsi's regime, abrogated the decree and reversed to the first republican federal constitution in July 1966. Military officers were appointed as Governors in each of the four regions, until 1967, when Gowon divided Nigeria into a 12-state-structure-6 each, in the North and South to replace the four regions. This political restructuring was to give a sense of belonging to every part of Nigeria, bring government closer to the grassroots and reduce the often-expressed fear of the supposed domination of the South by the North in the political affairs of the nation.

It has, however, been argued that Gowon's major aim of this restructuring was to forestall the secessionist move by the Eastern region and to protect the territorial integrity of Nigeria. It is said to be "a strategic calculation to cause a split in the eastern region and thereby weaken, if not entirely eliminate the support of the southeast minority groups for the majority Igbo ethnic group in the region. Whatever the case might have been, the creation of 12 states enjoyed the support of many people in almost all parts of Nigeria. It reduced the political might of the former regions and enthroned a perceived geo-political balance between the north and south. However, it marked the beginning of fresh agitations for more state creation.

Setting a pace for state creation in Nigeria by Gowon, successive military regimes seemed to have succumbed to continuous and apparently persistent pressures for more states. From 12 states in 1967 to 19 in 1976, to 21 in 1987 to 30 in 1991 and to the present 36 structure in 1996.

However, the present structure is still far from being satisfactory, as pressures and agitations for additional states have continued to mount on governments since the fourth republic came into being in 1999. The Local Councils were not spared in the restructuring exercise in Nigeria. The Councils have enjoyed tremendous increase in number. They rose from 301 in 1976 to 450 in 1988, to 589 in 1991 and to the present 774 in 1996. In the same manner, calls and agitations for additional local government councils have continued up to date. Even the present 6 geo-political zones, North-west, North-east and North-central in the Northern, and South – West, South – South and South – East in Southern parts of the country respectively, is part of political restructuring aimed at achieving sense of belonging and political balancing, among others.

### **General Comments/ Analysis**

The importance of restructuring and true federalism cannot be underrated in any society that desires for political stability, economic progress, social harmony and national unity. It should be thought of as aiming to genuinely benefit the entire populace of the nation, rather than a lopsided, undemocratic body or bodies with pre-determined selfish set objectives. The fundamental and cardinal short-time objective or long-time goal of restructuring Nigeria, therefore, is to provide a political, and socio-economic framework, which is streamlined and

made more inclusive to accommodate patriotic views dedicated to patriotic Nigeria project. Whatever structure adopted, however, must be periodically perfected upon in line with changing circumstances and the country's socio-economic developments.

In the same vein, federalism as a system of government has come to stay in many parts of the world. It, however, should not be seen as non-amendable or unchangeable. Prevailing circumstances determine its continuous workability or otherwise, hence no one federal system as it differs in operation from one country to another.

Be that as it may, the success of any federalism lies more on the consensus opinion, patriotic nationalistic feelings and sufficient presence of political ideological commitment to the primary concept or value of federation itself. Where these and other counter-productive forces, (such poor leadership, corruption, ethnic and religious sentiments, financial constraints and violation of constitutional provisions, among others, prevail, as is the case in Nigeria of today, good governance can hardly be achieved on a sustainable manner. The absence of good governance therefore, defeats whatever structures put in place to achieving, national unity and true federalism. Supporting this, one-time Prime Minister of Canada quoted in Akingemi et al (1979) that:

It is, of course, obvious that a notional consensus will be developed in this way only if the nationalism is emotionally acceptable to all important groups within the nation. Only blind men could expect a consensus to be lasting if the national flag or the national image is merely the reflection of one part of the nation, if the sum of values to be protected is not defined so as to include the language or the cultural heritage of some very large tightly knit minority, if the identity to be arrived at is shattered by a colour-bar

In summary, success of any federalism depends on true dialogue, willingness and consensus building. The question now is, to what extent can it be said that Nigeria is largely prepared to fulfill the criteria that would make restructuring aimed at achieving sustainable political, fiscal, administrative, and crisis-free federalism that will enjoy the consensus and acceptability of the citizenry?

There have been arguments in certain quarters that the military interventions in Nigeria's politics have been largely accountable for the failure of true federalism. This is predicated on the fact that most post-independence Constitutional Drafts or Reviews had been at the time of military regimes. While one would not contest the illegality of the military incursion into the nation's body polity, it can be pointed out that the composition of membership of the Constitutional Drafting or Review Panels/ Committees, were majorly not the military, but, that of the elite, intellectuals, politicians, bureaucrats, religious groups, Civil Society Organizations, Labour and Trade Union Congress, Students Unions, business Women Organizations, among others. If the military- both serving and retired, were there at all, the number could be negligible, which could not have overwhelmed other members' decisions and recommendations. Or, do we have evidence of removal and expunge of vital recommendations by the Military Leadership that would have promoted federalism and national unity in the draft constitutions before adopting and signing them into law? It is the view of this paper that it is high time we shifted blame on the constitutions made and signed into law during the military regimes, to those that took part in drafting and / or, on the operators of such constitutions. Like we cannot continue to blame the colonial rulers on the present political, economic and social predicaments in Nigeria after nearly 60 years of our independence.

### Conclusion

If there is a common denominator for the recent and on-going calls for restructuring, it is the issue of marginalization expressed across Nigeria. The South-South complaints of neglect, deprivation of critical developmental infrastructure and inadequate derivation for being the hub of the nation's oil wealth have been loud and clear. The South-East still nurses the huge loss incurred after the 30 months civil war and its inability, to, so far produce Nigerian Executive President, fifty-eight years after independence. The South-West argue, that the present federal structure is far from meeting their desires and aspirations. The zone, therefore, is calling for a reversal to the First Republican Parliamentary system with regional structures. The North's complaints centre on the fact that most Nigeria's insolvent states are in their region. A higher rate of poverty, uneducated and unskilled youths are in the North. The fact that the zone is not an oil producing area, they lose out on preferential derivation from oil. The above scenario may have informed former Vice President Atiku Abubakar (Who is seen as one of those Nigerian Politicians suffering from ideological instability), to have lamented that our current structure and the practice have been a major impediment to the economic and political development of our country. In short, it has not served Nigeria well, and at the risk of reproach, it has not served my part of the country, the North well. (see Tenuche, 2005)

Restructuring Nigeria, if handled well with the correct mindset is capable of moving the country forward. We should do away with certain unproven sentiments and beliefs that have found a permanent residence in the heart of Nigerian adults. These according to Bello, (2017) include such assertions as corruption cannot be eradicated, "we can never have correct census", "if you don't bribe, you cannot get contract,"if you don't bribe voters you cannot win elections", "merit alone cannot get you job or promotion". These pessimistic feelings paint the picture that Nigeria is an impossible country and the worst place on earth to live in. The only panacea or anti-dote for the above fear and pessimism, as has been stated earlier, is the first of all restructuring of our mindsets and value re-orientation together with positive attitudinal change of our value system and development of our character.

All arguments, suggestions and proposals, such as going back to the regional system of government, reduction or addition of the number of states and Local Government Councils, fiscal federalism, resource control, and adopting the present six geo-political structure as a balanced federalism, can hardly be successful, if the correct mindset, unity of purpose, coupled with dynamic and purposeful leadership and right type of human capital development to engineer good governance are lacking.

We should, as a matter of urgency as averred by Fayemi (2012) do away with the impression that restructuring concerns only political affairs, being the only solution to end all Nigeria's problems. We should also de-emphasize reliance on oil, as the sole revenue earner. With the right type of human capital development, other more important economic resources that are in abundance in almost all parts of the country can be identified and maximally exploited for the betterment of the entire Nigerian citizenry, as recently advised by Bill Gate.

Finally, and most importantly, the key to successful and sustainable restructuring in the Nigerian federation lies in the emergence and institutionalization of dynamic and purposeful leadership. Such leaders at whatever tiers, or organs of government, must possess attributes, such as accountability, vision, non-sentimental in ethnic and religious affairs, ability for effective and efficient resource utilization, respect for the rule of law, ability to provide inclusive governance and exemplary leadership worthy of emulation by the citizens. It is the

leader that determines the path of his followers. Good leadership attracts positive change. Therefore, change and leadership in this concept are inseparable. Though they are different in definition, in applicability however, one cannot be achieved without the other. To ensure or attract followership, leaders should not see themselves stronger than, or above the institutions put in place for the purpose of enhancing and promoting good governance. Among such are ICPC, EFCC, INEC, FEDERAL Character Commission, Judicial Institutions and other Standing or Adhoc Commissions/Committees.

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