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Nigerian Federalism and the Clamour for Restructuring: Is It the Structures or the Leadership

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Abstract

Restructuring is a topical issue that is making news headlines in Nigeria. The restructuring debate has divided the Nigerian political elites into two groups. First, the proponents of State and Local Government creation. The second are those advocating for devolution of powers to the component units. Dialectically opposed to the above two groups, is the separatist agitation by the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) with divergent strategies for actualizing their intention of seceding from the Nigerian federation. They wanted an independent country for the Igbo ethnic nation. However, they are diametrically opposed to each other in their modus operandi. The MASSOB are favorably disposed to peaceful and consensual separation, while IPOB chooses to be armed with an aggressive confrontation with the Nigerian state. The fundamental question raised in this paper and attempt made to provide answers to is, what is wrong with the federal structures of Nigeria. Is it the structures or the governance process. The paper concluded that corrupt and inept leadership cutting across regime type in Nigeria is responsible for the dysfunctional federal system of Nigeria. The paper suggested among others that more Local Governments be created with the condition that Nigerians of proven integrity should contest election at the local council, while they still retain their jobs in the public and private sectors, only to resign when they emerge victorious in the poll.

Introduction

On the 12th of November, 2017, an erudite scholar, Dr. Kasim Waziri (katukan Borgu), Associate Professor of property law, University of Abuja, stated that "You would not appreciate the value of divorce until you have a cantankerous husband." Since then, I began to search for the attributes of a cantankerous husband, only to realize that, a cantankerous husband is bad-tempered, but has enormous wealth with farms and fruit orchards where rivers flow. His resources can be diversified at will to numerous profitable economic ventures, but he always battered his wife. He deprived her of her legal matrimonial entitlements of better shelter, food, and clothing. She is always faced with starvation in her wealthy husband's house, yet she remains patient and calm in the face of all denials of right.

The cantankerous husband would come at night to sleep with her, and if she used that conjugal relationship to ask for her basic needs, he would react negatively. In this scenario, instead of the battered wife, it is the cantankerous husband that is asking for a divorce (satire emphasis is mine).

This scenario is the replica of the Nigerian situation where the vultures (Selfish Politicians) that devour the commonwealth of the nation and impoverished her citizens are the people asking for the restructuring of the Nigerian Federation. Let us reawaken our consciousness by first defining the concept of federalism and the reasons for adopting federal system anywhere in the world so that we can contextually see, if Nigeria satisfied the necessary conditions for federalism and asked the fundamental question of why are the federal structures not functioning the way they should?

Federalism: A Conceptualization

Federalism is a governmental arrangement that allows the federating units to develop along their cultural identities giving room for even development to the component units. It is a system that divides power among the three arms of the federal government (Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary) and also divides power between the Federal Government, the States and Local Governments. In this arrangement, power is reserved for the state government which makes both state and federal governments co-ordinates to each other and independent in certain aspects and exercise power as prescribed by the constitution

The 2003 version of the *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia* defines federalism as a national or international political system in which two levels of government control the same territory and citizens. Dicey, (1939), conceived federation as a political contrivance aimed at reconciling national unity and power while maintaining state rights. Dicey, emphasized further that, federalism means the distribution of the force of the state among a number of coordinate bodies each originating in and controlled by the constitution.

In a different perspective, Jega in Elaigwu and Akindele, (1996), said in a plural society like Nigeria, federalism is theoretically about equality and equity, justice and fair play among both the constituent units and the communal groups that comprises it. Nigerian federalism, even though a colonial creation, has satisfied some of the basic pre-requisite for a federal system of government, such as Geographical proximity of the constituent units, Fear of domination, i.e., stronger nations dominating the smaller ones, Economic advantage, Cultural diversities, etc.

Background Information on Re-Structuring

Restructuring is a political game that has metamorphosed over time from colonial period to date. Each time the elites lost the grip of power at all levels of governance, they frame new political lexicon to gain political relevance. Such deceitful framework changes nomenclature from Minority Question, Indigene/Settlers, Ethno-Religious crisis, Niger Delta Avengers to the recurrent re-structuring clamor. Re-structuring is an endgame played by the selfish Nigerian political elites particularly those from the Southern and Middle belt extraction.

These class of politicians sees the North dominating the political scene, without making a concerted effort to traverse the length and breadth of the Northern part of the country to see poverty, deprivation, and denial of constitutional rights, even among the families of the Northern political oligarchy that dominated the political scene since independence. If not the recent voice of Atiku Abubakar in support of re-structuring resulting from his political diminishing return, the Northern political elites have been silent over the issue of restructuring. Their silence is occasioned by the oil wells they primitively acquired in the Southern part of the country.

Since re-structuring is an end game, the first act of the colonial lords when they came on their exploitative mission was to restructure the existing traditional political structures of what later became known as Nigeria. The centralized and total submissive political system of Northern Nigeria was modified by the British colonial lords to accommodate the indirect rule system which further enhanced their exploitative mission. In the same vein, the semi-centralized traditional political system of South Western Nigeria and the fragmented republican system of the Igbo speaking people of South East were re-structured although with some fierce resistance from some quarters.

At independence in 1960, the country adopted the West Minster's Parliamentary democracy with three (3) regional structures (North, East, and West). By 1963, the Mid Western region was created increasing the federal structure to four. Three years after the creation of the Midwestern region, the five Majors of Igbo extraction struck and terminated the first republic. This then brought to the fore some salient issues of Nigerian federalism such as suspicion, fear of domination, fear of social distance, etc

Amidst the fear of one region dominating the other, the military government under the leadership of General Gowon called for an ad-hoc Constitutional Conference in 1966. The conference was bedeviled by divergent interest as it is usual of Nigerian Constitutional Conferences, as such consensus was not reached by the delegates of the four regions. The North wanted a confederation with four regions but later settled for a federal system with more states to be created. The Eastern Region also advocated for a confederation with more states in the regions. While the Western Region came with two proposals to the conference. One, to restructure Nigeria into Eighteen (18) the Federal States. Two, they also advocated for a confederation. The newly created Midwestern Region made a case for a federal system of government with Twelve (12) States. Consequently, General Gowon took into cognizance, the submissions of the regions and therefore created twelve (12) states in 1967. The states were Benue-Plateau, East - Central, Kano, Kwara, Lagos, Mid Western, North-Central, North-Eastern, North- Western, Rivers, South- Eastern and Western- States.

In February 1976, General Murtala Muhammad created a Nineteen (19) State Federal structure with Abuja as the new federal capital. Anambra, Bauchi, Bendel, Benue, Borno, Cross River, Gongola, Imo, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara, Lagos, Niger, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Plateau, Rivers, and Sokoto. Alhaji Aliyu Shehu Usman Shagari retained the 19 state-federal structure created by General Murtala.

Apparently, relying on the strength military decree, on 23rd September 1987, General Babangida created Akwa Ibom and Katsina states and on 27th August 1991, created Abia, Enugu, Delta, Jigawa, Kebbi, Osun, Kogi, Taraba, and Yobe making a total of 30 state-federal structure. General Abacha increased the states to 36 in 1996 by creating Ebonyi, Bayelsa, Nasarawa, Zamfara, Gombe, and Ekiti.

As it is the case with a federal system, powers were constitutionally shared between the federal government and the constituent units created by successive military governments. However, it is instructive to note that, federal system does not operate in a vacuum. It is operated by human beings with divergent interest particularly in the case of Nigeria where primordial sentiments override the sense of reasoning. The operators of the system are therefore expected to be fair in the distribution of the Commonwealth of the nation. In this instance, without a collective mental transformation of leaders and the led in Nigeria, any structural changes in all spheres of the Nigerian federation will be subverted by the negative mindset of the selfish individuals cutting across the divides of the masses and the leaders.

Is it the Structures or the Governing Process?

This is where the leadership question comes in because there is nothing wrong with the federal structures of Nigeria. The problem lies with individuals saddled with the responsibility of operating the structures. Achebe (1985) submitted that the trouble with Nigeria is that of leadership. He said there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of her leaders to rise to the responsibilities and challenges of personal examples, which are the hallmark of true leadership .

Nigeria is a lucky nation endowed with abundant natural resources, both human and material. In terms of land mass apart from Mali and Niger republics, no nation in West African sub-region has the land mass of Nigeria. Nigeria occupies a total land area of 923, 768 square kilometers (356, 669 square miles). The upland covers 910, 768 square kilometers, while 13 square kilometers is covered by water. The longest distance from East to West is about 767 kilometers, while from North to South is 1, 605. Kilometers, Nigeria shares a boundary with the Benin Republic on the west, the Cameroon Republic on the East, Niger and Chad Republics on the Northern axis and on the southern axis, it is a vast coastline of the Atlantic Ocean measuring about 800 kilometers into the gulf of guinea. Nigeria is the number eight oil producer in the world accounting for about 21.9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 56.4% of the foreign exchange receipts and 88.6% of government revenues (Charles, Englama and Adebusuyi, 2010). Solid mineral deposits also abound all over the 774 local government areas of the federation(News Watch Magazine, 1993)

However, these natural gifts did not translate into better lives for the larger proportion of Nigerians. An enormous amount of public money running into trillions of naira have been allocated to States and Local Governments from the federation account since the oil boom to the Buhari bailout. The intention is to provide basic welfare services and infrastructure such as Roads, Schools, Health Facilities, Water Supply, etc. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth of

the nation did not have a trickle-down effect on the rural and urban poor in Nigeria. The reason is, the ruling elites whom Buhari described as "Spoilt Children" including his own governors and ministers determine how the resources are shared to their own parochial advantage with the resultant effect of pervasive corruption and poverty in the land.

With the departure of the colonial lords from Nigeria over fifty years ago, the nation is still filled with discontentment. There is discontentment because the Nigerian Government cutting across regime time has been the government of Looters, Exploiters, Connivance, and Oppressors. While the Nigerian politics has been politics of Lies, Deceptions, Collaborators, Cabals and unfulfilled promises. This is what informed the submission of Jega (2007) that :

Nigeria has grappled and battled with a profound paradox. The country's enormous human and material resources have been wasted, squandered and vandalized. Except in few cases, credible, competent and patriotic leadership has eluded the nation. Very few inept, corrupt and selfish individuals in sensitive positions of responsibility, decides for over One Hundred and Eighty Million Nigerians.

Given this antecedents, the governing process became corrupt and subsumed by primitive capital accumulation. The military, whose constitutional role is to manage violence and safeguard the territorial integrity of the country, became deeply rooted in Nigerian government and politics with glaring cases of corruption. Since 1966, military regime accused its predecessor of corruption. It is instructive to note that the oil boom of the 70s did not only entrenched corruption in successive military governments but also influenced the thinking of military policymakers to embark on many capital intensive public projects that later became uncompleted and abandoned. Adeyemi (2001) is of the view that, the failed and abandoned projects littered the national landscape. The enormous amount of public fund wasted in such projects could have otherwise been put to productive use. While a huge amount of resources have been sunk into such failed projects, a lot of basic needs of the Nigerian masses such as education, health, and road infrastructure are still left to be desired.

Such failed, and underutilized projects in various subsectors of the economy include, the National Center for Agricultural Mechanization Ilorin, established in 1974. The Strategic Grains Silos Programme, commissioned in 1988. The National Fertilizer Company (NAFCO) at Onne and the Fertilizer and Superphosphate Plant in Kaduna. The River Basin Development Authority etc. In the manufacturing subsector, there is the Nigerian Machine Tools Industry, Oshogbo, the Jebba, Iwopin and Oku-Iboku Paper Mills, the multi-billion Dollars Ajaokuta Steel Plant, the Delta Steel Plant, the Oshogbo, Jos and Katsina Steel Rolling Mills. The Itakpe Iron Ore Mining Project. These projects failed to yield any positive result for Nigerians because of the inexperience of the military leaders and corruption incarnate.

Shagari's government could not exonerate itself from the endemic corruption in the history of the country. During his administration, Nigerian foreign reserve was depleted from Eight

Billion Dollars in 1979 to One Billion Dollars in 1983, while external debt increased from Twelve Billion Dollars to Fifteen Billion Dollars. His Ministers, Governors, Senators and other government officials became corrupt and deeply involved in money laundering.

Buhari overthrew Shagari's government over corruption, and he was in turn overthrown by Babangida and accused his government of corruption, inflation, and high handedness. Babangida's regime could not tame corruption. Professor Nuhu Yakuq described the regime as indiscipline, corrupt and grossly irresponsible. Mohammed Lawan Maina, Governor of Borno State under Babangida's regime corruptly spent Nine Million Naira to host Prince Charles of Britain and his wife, Lady Diana for just 24 hours

Babangida stepped aside paving the way for Abacha to overthrow Shonekan's interim government to assume a mantle of leadership. When Abacha came on board, he told Nigerians that his government is a child of necessity with strong determination to restore peace and stability to our country and on this foundation enthrone a lasting and true democracy. It was under this pretext that Abacha looted Nigeria's treasury. His family members, accomplices, and his ministers had fat private bank accounts abroad.

After the death of Abacha in June 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar succeeded him. He was smart in fast-tracking the transition programme and quickly handed over power to Obasanjo in 1999. His wisdom to relinquish power to civilians covered his monumental treasury loot. Al-Mustapha accused him of diverting Abacha's loot and corruptly spent Five (5) Billion dollars to give the Eagle Square an aesthetic look for the May 29, 1999 handing over ceremony (Anifowose and Erremuo, 1999).

Obasanjo took over on 29th May 1999 and in September 2000, he told British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that there is corruption in Nigerian Air Ways, Nigerian Ports Authority, Nigerian Petroleum Corporation. Given the endemic nature of corruption among the Nigerian elites, within the first three years, Obasanjo/Atiku misappropriated over Two Hundred Billion Naira. The Senate President under Obasanjo's government was indicted with bribery case to the tune of 22.95 million naira as Christmas welfare package. The Halliburton bribery saga was a typical corruption case under Obasanjo. Obsanjo himself fraudulently attempted to elongate his tenure using money (N100 million each) and plot of land in strategic locations of Abuja to bribe the National Assembly Members (Bugage in Mohammed, 2006). His governors were indicted for corruptly acquiring public wealth in billions of naira.

Corruption Cases of Obasanjo's Governors (1999 – 2007)

S/NO	NAME OF GOVERNOR	STATE	AMOUNT INVOLVED	YEARS OF COURT CASE
001	Gbenga Daniel	Ogun	₦58 billion	3
002	Orji Uzo Kalu	Abia	₦5 billion	7
003	Joshua Dariye	Plateau	₦700 million	7
004	Ayo Fayose	Ekiti	₦1.2 billion	7

005	Saminu Turaki	Jigawa	₦36 billion	7
006	Abdullahi Adamu	Nassarawa	₦15 billion	4
007	Chimaroke Nnamani	Enugu	₦5.3 billion	7
008	Jolly Nyame	Taraba	₦1.3 billion	7
009	Danjuma Goje	Gombe	₦24 billion	3
010	Attahiru Bafarawa	Sokoto	₦6 billion	5
011	Aliyu Akwe Doma	Nassarawa	₦15 billion	3
012	Timipre Sylva	Bayelsa	₦5 billion	2
013	Alao Akala	Oyo	₦11 billion	3
014	Rasheed Ladoja	Oyo	₦6 billion	6
015	Peter Odili	Rivers	₦100 billion	Perpetual injunction

Source: Daily Trust, September 29, 2014.

The Dasuki and Diezani gates under president Jonathan were the climax of primitive capital accumulation synonymous with the Nigerian political class. Dasuki was magnanimous in sharing 2.1 billion US dollars arms money to the same political class and their accomplices. With the unprecedented loot of Diezani Alison Madueke, I doubt if Nigerian women can agitate for the 35% affirmative action again.

Beneficiaries of Dasuki Arms Deal

S/N	Name	Nomenclature	Amount
001	Dr. Peter Odili	Former Governor, Rivers State	₦100 million
002	Attahiru Bafarawa	Former Governor, Sokoto State	₦4.5 billion
003	Aliyu Shinkafi		₦100 million
004	Jim Nwobodo	Former Information Minister	₦500 million
005	Tony Anenih	Former BOT Chairman	₦260 million
006	Ahmadu Ali	Former PDP Chairman	₦100 million
007	Bode George	Former Deputy Chairman	₦100 million and \$30,000.00
008	Olisa Metuh	PDP Publicity Secretary	#400 million
009	Gen. Bello Sarkin Yaki		₦200 million
010	Dr. Raymond Dokpesi	Chairman Daar Communication Plc	#2.1 billion
011	Iyorchia Ayu	Former Speaker House of Rep	#345 million
012	Dalhatu Investment Ltd		₦1.5 billion
013	Bello Haliru and Son	Former PDP Chairman	₦300 million
014	Bello Mutawalle		₦300 million
015	ACACIA Holding		₦600 million
016	Bashir Yuguda	Former Minister of State Finance	₦1.9 billion
017	Rashidi Ladoja	Former Governor Oyo State	₦100 million
018	Olu Falae	Former Secretary FGN	₦100 million
019	Tanko Yakasai	Former Presidential Adviser	₦63 million

Source, Daily Trust January, 17th 2016.

The Minister of information, Lai Mohammed said in the *Daily Trust Newspaper* of 19th January 2016, that fifty-five (55) people stole 1.3 trillion in seven (7) years. This period covered the end of Obasanjo's second tenure to late Umaru Musa Yar'adua and Good luck Jonathan's tenures. The minister stated further that using World Bank's rates and costs, one-third of the stolen fund would have provided 635.18 kilometers of roads, built 36 ultra modern hospitals in each state of the federation, built 183 schools, educates 3,974 children from primary to tertiary level at 25.24 million per child and built 20,062 units of 2 bedroom houses.

This was the prevailing situation in Nigeria when Buhari came on board. He promised to fight corruption, insecurity and revamp the economy. But unfortunately under his watch, the Secretary to the Federal Government, Babachir David Lawal was indicted and sacked for stealing over 500 Million Naira meant for the sanitary improvement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in his own North Eastern zone. For over two years, the budgetary allocation to the Aso rock clinic has been siphoned by invisible hands in the presidential villa. Relief materials for the IDPs have been missing on transit. The situation is not different in the states, even with the bailout funds given to the state governors. For the first time, Nigerians came face to face with the realities of budget padding by the 8th National Assembly under Buhari's civil government.

The cumulative effect of this primitive accumulation by those entrusted with the management of the Commonwealth of the nation is endemic poverty in the land. While the leadership became consumed by the poverty of conscience, the followers became entangled by material poverty created by inept leadership over time. There are about 63.9% core poor households in Nigeria with the highest percentage in the rural areas. There are 67.0% poor in the rural areas and 57.9% in the urban centers. Across the geopolitical zones, North East has the largest proportion of the poor, about 77.5%, South East 76.8%, North Central 62.8%, South West 61.4%, North West 50.2% (NBS)

In spite of the impoverished situation in Nigeria orchestrated by the selfish political class, their ovation for structural changes of the country is glaring. Atiku Abubakar was reported at a launch of a book titled "We are all Biafrans" on May 31, 2016, saying:

When I was invited to chair this occasion, I immediately understood that the titled of the book is a metaphor for the legitimate feelings of marginalization by diverse segments of Nigerians that cut across the country. Agitations by much right thinking Nigerians call for restructuring and renewal of our federation to make it less centralized, less suffocating and less dictatorial as some of you may know, I have for a long time advocated the need to restructure our federation. (Leadership newspaper, 31 May 2016).

Femi Fanny Kayode, a former Minister of Federal Republic of Nigeria, said in the Igbo, Yoruba and Middle Belt conference in Abia State that;

In this country, there are slaves and masters. Those who see themselves as masters, see the rest of us as slaves. The suffering of the people of South East is something we all have to apologize. You and your children were slaughtered at your houses and in the North on 28 July 1966. One million Igbo children were starved to death and year after year, Igbos have been killed in the North and the people of the middle belt have also been killed. I am glad Jona Jang is here. Everything was taken away from them including their identity. What they did to IPOB is unacceptable. As a friend to Nnamdi Kanu, I cannot forget him... I call on Buhari to produce him, whether dead or alive. They did it to us in the South West, they kill our children, wives, men, elders. We have no fear again. If they did not restructure, we would do it by force. If there is no restructure, there will be no Nigeria.

Tanko Yakasai in a different opinion from Atiku and Kayode said;

Whoever is thinking about restructuring Nigeria should realize that he is talking about the fate of over 180 million Nigerians who are entitled to know what the details of this restructuring are ... I am a Nigerian and I will like to know what will be my fate in a restructured Nigeria. Other Nigerians will also like to know what a restructured Nigeria will look like because they are affected.

Conclusively, restructuring to the Nigerian rural and urban poor would mean sufficient, efficient and affordable medical care, qualitative and accessible education, quality and safe roads network, efficient and accessible credit facilities. In fact, restructuring to a 60 years old stone crusher in Karimajiji, a suburb of Abuja, means the provision of his basic needs that can take him off the energy-sapping means of survival. It is against this backdrop that these fundamental questions were raised in this paper . One. if the Federal Republic of Nigeria is to be restructured given the endemic corruption, who will be in charge of the new structures?. Two, If eventually, there is devolution of powers, which tier of government should be more empowered ?. Three, if the separatist is able to secede, what system of government would they adopt given their fragmented societies (Federal System or Unitary System) and how would they accommodate the Niger Delta agitating for the control of their resources?

The Way Forward

For us to get out of the quagmire we found ourselves in Nigeria, we must have a fear of God and expunge vested interest in all sectors of our political economy. Secondly, no state creation should take place again. Instead, more local governments should be created with autonomy, but with a proviso.

If the electoral laws would be amended to allow men of proven integrity to contest election while they retain their jobs in the public or private sectors. After winning the

election, they tender their resignation letter and if otherwise, they go back to their work.

Finally, I will like to advise the Nigerian political class the way Christian clergymen admonish the princes of Brazzaville.

You who are in good position, you and your wives, today you enjoy many comforts, perhaps a good education, a fine house, good contacts and many missions on which you are delegated which opens new horizons to you. But all your wealth forms a hard shell which prevents your seeing the poverty that surrounds you. Take care, if there is no room in your heart for consideration towards those who are beneath you, there will be no room for you in God's house.(cited in Frantz Fanon, 1963).

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