

Restructuring and Ethnocentrism in Nigeria's Federalism: A Sociological Insight

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Abstract

Restructuring and Ethnocentrism in Nigeria Federalism, and the call for restructuring by ethnic groups has intensified in recent times. It appears all the ethnic groups sees structuring as a necessity, and that a restructured Nigeria is good for the North and the South, but the problem in their nature, perspective and method differs. The main objective of this paper is to identify the various perspectives and misconception about restructuring of the Nigerian Federation. The paper derives its data basically from secondary material basically from text books, journals, articles, newspapers, through a systemic qualitative content analysis, using a theoretical framework of Nepotism as a tool for analysis. One major finding is that, ethnocentrism and restructuring call has become the front burner in Nigeria political discourse, due to the perceived lopsided federal system, that is deepening ethnic division. The study, therefore recommend among others that, ownership of resources be encouraged among components units and the implement of 2014 national conference report.

Keywords: *Ethnocentrism, Federalism, Restructuring and Sociological insight*

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Background to the Study

Restructuring debate has dominated political discourse in Nigeria. Civil Society organizations, religious leaders, socio-cultural organizations, etc. are not left out in the debate. The debate is occasioned by the imbalance and inequality exhibited by governance from one part of Nigeria, against the other. The situation is made worse by the visible level of ethnocentrism, exhibited by the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria against the minority ethnic group, who have the resources that sustain and keep the entity called Nigeria running. It is common in most ethnically heterogeneous societies to see cleavages formed along ethnic lines. Quite often, the person in such societies stresses so much their identity in an attempt to make an impact on the socio-economic and political system. Similar unreported squabbles in other parts of the country have also been ongoing. The Civil war in Nigeria is also still very fresh in our memories. The people of the Niger Delta are currently threatening succession for many years of marginalization.

The Yoruba's threatened to secede from Nigeria after the annulment of the June 12 presidential elections of 1993. In all of these, the major source of solidarity for each group is ethnic identity. Besides, how can an individual be sure of what restructuring means to the Yoruba nation, is that what it means to the South-East people? Who says that restructuring in the understanding of the South-South is what it depicts to the North-West and North-East? (Olaniyi and Muhammed, 2017). Thus, like the saying goes, different strokes for different folks and that is exactly the concept of restructuring appears differently in contemporary Nigeria. Federalism enjoys some consensus among political architects as a solution to the problem of unity in diversity in a multi-ethnic state. To this extent, can it be said that this has been achieved in Nigeria? Since federalism itself may not be a design with some air of finality, we shall see in this paper how ethnic ethnocentrism has affected the structures in Nigeria. Nigeria provides an example of a society in need of national integration considering its multi-ethnic nature. It provides a far-reaching test as a structural technique to ethnicity in a country like Nigeria. It has been argued that the Nigerian evidence shows that federalism can either exacerbate or mitigate ethnic conflict that depends on the number of component states in the federal composition. Particularly of importance is the relationship among ethnic groups distribution of states. The sociological force of ethnicity has been a decisive factor in the politics of Nigeria federalism. It is for this reason that the system has suffered strains in the past and experienced an evolutionary fragmentation from regions to state fractured federal system.

Methodology and Scope of the Study

The data for the study were fairly derived from secondary materials, such as textbooks, internet materials, newspapers and magazines, journal articles, etc. through a systemic qualitative content analysis. The scope of the study is on restructuring and ethnocentrism in Nigeria Federalism: A Sociological Insight:

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this paper is one of the theories of ethnicity, "The Nepotism theory" by (Bangura, 1994) when he said, why do people attach importance to their ethnic identities? Why should they not be comfortable with state-imposed identities of other

groups? One of the oldest and popular explanations is that people have been the way they are from time immemorial, i.e., defined by language, custom, religion, race, and territory. Ethnic consciousness, it is argued is an expression of deeply rooted human sentiments. In different words, ethnicity is paramount: people would favour individuals of their group in the event to pick out among strangers and their fellow group organization, dispute is unavoidable when a country is lived in by more than one ethnic group. Bangura contends and explained identities as a major stand in human behaviour, which can activate nepotism, when groups are already conscious of their identity and feel a need to protect it. Perhaps the major weakness of this explanation lies in the fact that the concept of nepotism cannot account for the complexities of ethnic consciousness as it does not explain how such consciousness is created, however, it changes over time. Why it varies in intensity among folks of constant cluster, and why folks build, defend relationship that cut across ethnic boundaries. However, the nepotism theory of ethnicity is suitable for the paper, a sociological insight. Restructuring debate in Nigeria and ethnocentrism, since heterogeneous societies see cleavages formed along ethnic identity, and attempt to impact on the socio-economic and political system.

Conceptual Clarification

Sociological Insight

An assessment of the society reveals a lot is happening in our individual lives, private and personal. It could be due to the influence of other people, events and societal features that surround us. Societal processes can shape events, and individual action in turn affects those processes. Sociology provides distinctive insight into the taking for granted without any consideration for personal events, macro, and small and therefore, the large-scale cultural and world processes that form up our everyday existence. Other disciplines study human life too, biologists study how the body works, Hooghe, Ann and Bart, (2008) points that neurologist examines what goes on inside the brain, while Kendra (2020) psychologists' study what goes on within the mind to form human behaviour. Such disciplines concentrate exclusively on the systems and processes residing within the person. In comparison, sociologist studies what happens, between people as individuals or groups, or as societies. How do such social forces influence or affect the people interacting with each other? How do people make sense of their private lives and the social world they occupy? How does every day social interaction create Society?

Issues like poverty, sexuality, aging, prejudice, restructuring debate currently in Nigeria, etc. are better understood within an appropriate social context, through the lens of sociological insight. In this paper, the sociological insight is focused on restructuring debate, and ethnocentrism used to reinforce resistance to clamour on restructuring in Nigeria. Unlike other disciplines, Sociological experience requires one to look beyond the tight limits, of human anatomy and personality to understand the phenomenon that shapes one. The restructuring debate and ethnocentrism in Nigeria and the importance of the social world in this context cannot be downplayed or ignored. Sociology helps us evaluate our lives as much the inquiry into non-public behaviour, yet societal, in accordance with providing a capacity to assess our lives and social environment. Restructuring and ethnocentrism are social issues; hence the need for sociological insight has become inevitable in Nigeria. Sociological insight

will enable us X-ray both sides of the restructuring debate and ethnocentrism expressed in the entity called Nigeria.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnic consciousness is not the bane to Nigeria's national integration, ethnic diversities in Nigeria if positively harnessed would make Nigeria's ethnic interaction a case for study and emulation by the international community (Mezieobi 2014). Ethnocentrism is that belief and tenaciously held inclination of an individual or an ethnic group to the effect that is own life ways are superior, all others are inferior (Nein, 2018).

Federalism

Scholars have examined federalism from different perspectives (Salifu, 2015). Fundamentally, Wheare's (1964) view of federalism laid the foundation for the discourse on modern federalism, as the method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each within a sphere, coordinate and independent and argues that the general government should be able to finance itself, as well as the regional government but the case of Nigeria appears different.

Arowolo (2011, 4) defines federalism as the constitutional structure under which at least two tiers of government exist. This is what obtains in Nigeria, a central government; otherwise called the federal government, and other component units. Wheare (1964), say that federalism is a way of separating powers such that, the general and regional governments are each coordinated and autonomous within a domain. This was the intention of the initiators of federalism in Nigeria; the application of the term is questionable in Nigeria, with regard's "independence" of the units.

The necessary goal of federalism in the accommodation of diversities, cultures or life styles, is a proof of similar men/ diversity in team spirit (Awolowo, 1966: in Lenshie and Henry, 2015). The inability of the government to adhere to this principle have occasioned the call for restructuring, perceived to better accommodate the diversity in Nigeria, which Nigeria federalism is unable to address.

Restructuring

To restructure implies, the current structure of an entity is defective and imbalance. Nigeria is a superstructure comprising the main states, the 36 federal states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) making up the structure. What has happened to this structure over the years is that something is defective about the superstructure called Nigeria (Dayo, 2020). He further contends restructuring as a means of devolving power from the centre to the states; making the centre less attractive. Restructuring implies that everything about Nigeria is not right, that is why there is this agitation here and there (Olukayode 2017).

Restructuring Debate in Nigeria

Restructuring has become an issue for discourse in Nigeria, whenever there is a forum/platform for discussing Nigeria, and it has been heatedly discussed. Opinion as to what

the concept means differs amongst Nigerian across the various regions, political parties, civil societies, socio-culturing organizations to mention a few.

This opinion is personal but objective, looking at the rate of agitation across the regions reveal the imbalance in the entity called Nigeria, restructuring means so many things are not right in Nigeria and must be put right, but a section of the country is opposed to the clamour for restructuring, they seems to be beneficiary of the imbalance in the political structure of Nigeria as currently constituted, the North heads the Arms Forces, the Police, Directory of Security Service (DSS) and service chiefs to mention a few. Bala (2017) stated that restructuring can be viewed as, a mechanism that requires us to move Nigeria forward, reorganized or realign the current system internally, so that Nigeria state can advance positively. The assertion implies Nigeria as an entity is stock and immobile; hence, the structure needs reorganization and realignment, just like a vehicle is realigned to keep the tires stable, which guarantees stable movement of the vehicle. Same realignment and reorganization will help this entity called Nigeria. This is the essence of restructuring debate for Nigeria to start moving positively.

Yinka (2017), Afenifere spokesperson gave ten reasons why Nigeria should be restructured. Summarily a few will be highlighted:

1. Nigeria earnestly restructured, is a Nigeria positively restored: a united state restored on the paths of development, progress, rapid educational advancement etc.
2. Nigeria restructured is Nigeria with enhancing leadership building culture, where a truly federal system allows each region, effort and efficient use of local resources.
3. Nigeria where the central government will be strong, together with its lower-levels, the Federating Units, each strong with the right responsibility, the Federal government; defence, immigration, and global diplomacy.
4. Nigeria should be restructured, to enhance the removal of the current perverse-incentive system, where people seek to serve, and not seeking elected and appointive positions with the intent to fraud and misappropriating funds meant for the development of infrastructure.
5. Nigeria where there will be no practice of the current system of forced equalization of downwards educational opportunity, in the name of federal character.
6. Nigeria where the negative effects of lowing academic and examination standards will become untenable.

Notable Nigerian is currently dissatisfied with the structure/entity called Nigeria. Representatives of Afenifere, Ohaneze, both socio/cultural organization converged in Lagos, with a call for restructuring Nigeria before 2019 general election. They contend that, "The youths in the South East, Niger Delta, and South-west are useful to us, as well as the North. Based on this, the clamour for restructuring is growing louder. The dissatisfaction with the Nigerian state is expressed by all well-meaning Nigerian, irrespective of regions. Ayo (2020) advocated a restructuring of different constitutions to reflect regional autonomy, different from what we currently have, one constitution for the whole country, and the constitution of the regions will reflect the peculiarities of the various regions. Advocates of this opinion have

emphasized that, it will lead to competition and in the long-run, enhance rapid development. Ann-Kio (2018) opined Nigeria is a fast-moving train without brake, only restructuring would allow for controlled development of the country. Her opinion hinges on the fact that, some states produce no revenue, but relies only on Federation Account, which is shared monthly in the name of allocation. Those states therefore hinder development that would have come to the region that has the resources, which sustain Nigeria. Ann-Kio argues that, North has 419 Local Government, the South has 365 Local Government, the Niger Delta produces more, but gets less allocation from the federation account, Therefore, Resource control is the core of our opinion of restructuring, as a standard of all advanced federal states.

Ogbu represented Ohaneze, President-General, Dr. Nwodo, stresses restructuring as a change of the Unitary System of Government, the military handed to us. In this direction, Nigeria has of late clamoured for the establishment of state police, due to the security challenges facing the country. Pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group, Afenifere have severally opined for the restructuring of Nigeria. Due to its dysfunction and slide towards the edge of precipice crime rise by the day, the economy in a parlous state, the forces of disintegration have been let loosed. The prices of food today in Nigeria are increasing every day (Afenifere,2017). There are many dimensions to restructuring, political, economic, educational, social, accounting restructuring, etc. (Stephen, 2017).

The Governor of Bayelsa State, Henry Seriake Dickson, in a lecture delivered, in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Ogun State, with the theme: Restructuring and the search for a productive Nigeria, fault Buhari, for saying those clamouring for restructuring has a parochial interest. He said, those clamouring for restructuring are the real patriot in Nigeria, and meant well for the country, not those against the clamour. Restructuring, he stressed, will guarantee stability, prosperity, and peace of Nigeria. He contends that, the present state of Nigeria federal system cannot stand the test of time. The majority opinion of Nigerians, irrespective of geo-political zones, from the North, South, East, West and Middle belt and all patriots of Nigeria, are in support. A Nigeria we should be proud to call home any day can only be guaranteed by restructuring, Dickson emphasized. We cannot have a productive Nigeria the way it is structured; with a presidential system that is very expensive and wasteful.

A committee of northern governors was set up and headed by Sokoto State governor which includes; Traditional rulers, groups and other stakeholders, including, the Arewa Research and Development Project (ARDP), they viewed restructuring differently. Dr. Usman Bugaje, in their meeting, contends in his opinion of restructuring, and disagree on return to four regions as part of restructuring as advocated by Southerners. That, no state should be called oil-producing states, because all mineral resources belong to the Nigeria State. The quest for restructuring is due to dissatisfaction with governance in Nigeria, which is manifest in the inability to deliver on development (Andrew, Hasfat and Yusha'u ,2018). Tanko Yakasai, the north cannot take a stand because it does not know what other regions meant by restructuring, he prefers a return to the 1963 constitution.

Soludo opinion and perspective of restructuring is a far departure from the opinion of Tanko Yakasai and other Northerners on restructuring. Soludo (2018), opinion of restructuring is categorized into three sections; soft restructuring, hybrid restructuring, and hard restructuring. The amendment of the constitution to allow state police, scrapping of the local council and resource control is within the ambit of soft restructuring and negotiation of a new constitution with regional autonomy within the federation, represent hybrid restructuring, confederation or outright independence for any desiring part of the country, is within the purvey of hard restructuring. The restructuring will have short to medium term loser, he stressed further. The good side of all of these is that, everyone could potentially win in the long run. This opinion is objective and just, he is a patriot who meant well for Nigeria, following the assertion of Seriake Dickson, in his assertion contained in the lecture he delivered on restructuring at O.A.U. in Osun State.

Sadiq from Gombe challenged the northern elite over their stance that there is no cause for any restructuring. Sadiq cited by Kabiru (2018) according to him Buhari got 80% of all his votes in 2015 from the North, the North according to statistics is 80% of Nigeria, appointment currently the North is short-changed, the North will benefit from restructuring which will reflect votes got from the North and 80% of North is Nigeria. He reminded Buhari that Nigeria has consistently undergone restructuring from its initial three regions to four by Tafawa Belewa civilian administration, to the current six regions. There were parliamentary systems and structure in Nigeria which suited true federation but was truncated by the military which brought in the very expensive presidential system with the top-down centralized command structure of the military (Kabiru, citing Sadiq 2018). Again, he states the “Aims and Objectives” of the APC constitution, the first two fully support the calls for restructuring.

- i. To promote and foster the unity, political stability and national consciousness of the people of Nigeria, this aligns with the opinion of Seriake Dickson.
- ii. To promote true federation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, true Federalism is what every section says it wants to see entrenched (Kabiru, 2018).

He finally urged Buhari to implement what APC promised Nigerian, as started earlier. An x-ray of perception of what restructuring means reveal the fragile nature of the entity called Nigeria. Some of the expressions were ethnic, regional, politically driven and unbecoming. Socially speaking people should have the right to decide, the condition under which they can live together as a nation. In advance and civilized societies, even though we claim to be the Giant of Africa. The sure part for all to get justice is a true referendum, the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) have consistently asked for a referendum to decide to remain as Nigeria or get their republic, this also is another perspective of restructuring. They were silenced using state apparatus and tagged terrorist organization, charged to court with trumped-up charges. The Fulani Herdsmen have turned killer sect, the highest from 1999 to 2022, but the same government that tagged IPOB terrorist organizations have refused, to tag the same.

These and several other unequal treatments have heightened the call for restructuring of Nigeria. A country should consist of people who voluntarily submit, to be part of the nation, not the opposite, as currently exist. Nigerian are united only during the football tournament,

after which the reality stares all and sundry in the face. The restructuring debate is regionally driven. The restructuring debate in Nigeria could be summarized as follows: The resident of the south and eastern region of Nigeria, their view of restructuring is practically ceding (breaking away) this view is championed by an organization called indigenous people of Biafra, IPOB. South Western Nigeria, have a different view, they are demanding for granting more powers to the states against the federal government, what they describe as “Federating States”. Atiku (2017) contends that position as the best; to reduce the power and roles of the federal government and to return some items on the concurrent list to the states. The Niger Delta region, where oil is explored and extracted, their view on the debate is that each state of the federation should control its territorial natural resources and only remit taxes to the federal government (Hon 2017). Majority Muslim Northern Nigerian, do not seem to support the restructuring debate.

Ethnocentrism and Restructuring call in Nigeria

Ethnocentrism and restructuring call have become front burner in political discourse in Nigeria. Ethnocentrism is a widespread tendency for people to favour their own group over another group on the belief that one's own ethnic group or culture is superior to other ethnic groups and culture. Ethnocentrism has many commonalities with prejudice, stereotype, racism, discrimination, xenophobia. Prejudice refers to negative attitude towards an out-group and results in a harmful, detrimental or unfavourable view of an out-group; stereotype is a rigid image of typical characteristics of group members; discrimination refers to behaviour that disadvantages individuals (Taylor, 1997). Racism is an act of general belief that one's race, ethnic group, culture or biologically determined group is supreme and all others are innately inferior and therefore has the right to control, exclude or even exterminate others.

Hooghe, Ann and Bart (2008) see racism as a form of prejudice. Prejudice can result from ethnocentrism and often accompanied by ethnocentrism, as factors highlighted above, manifest often in the governance of Nigeria, which have left the disadvantage groups/ethnic group with no option, but the call of restructuring, where the perceived injustice associated with current Nigeria, will not exist. Ethnocentrism prevents understanding amongst groups, ethnicity/tribes that constitute a country, in turn; it incites conflicts when actions and words are seen as threats rather than different ways of experiencing life (Margaret and Gabriel, 2014). The call for restructuring is perceived by the majority ethnic group an attempt to secede from Nigeria, when it should be seen as their way of experiencing life and an expression that reflects the social imbalance associated with Nigeria as currently constituted, the perception of the majority ethnic group is driven by ethnocentrism. Overcoming ethnic insincerity, occasion by ethnocentrism, is necessary to secure the perceived unity of Nigeria.

The concept of ethnocentrism was first used in the summer of 1906, to explain a cultural narrow-mindedness, in which, the ethnically based person embraced rigidly, those who were culturally similar while refusing those who were culturally different (Ogretir and Ozcelik, 2008). Ethnocentrism is problematic; sometimes the perpetrators are not aware that they are judging others negatively, based on their religion, culture, race, etc. with adverse effects. Barger (2008), states ethnocentrism is the tendency of making a false assumption about others' way of

life-based on own limited experience. This false assumption has continued to plague the Igbo's of Eastern Nigeria, traceable to the Biafra-Nigeria war in the 1960s. This act is socially unjustifiable, this has however been used against them, they have not been given the chance of producing a democratically elected president, they are also the only zone in Nigeria that consists of five states, whereas all; the rest have six states in the respective zones.

The Niger Delta in Nigeria which is the oil-producing area is at the mercy of the majority ethnic groups which has often boasted and contends that, “the small size and population of the oil producing area is not lyrical pleased”. Also noting that, the oil-producing regions remain unhappy, but they cannot jeopardize the country's stability, or sustain its continued economic growth” (Saro-Wiwa in Okoko and Nna, 1997:1). The quotation above is a reflection of the arrogance and ethnocentrism of the dominant ethnic groups and their contempt for the minority oil-producing areas. Nigeria's ethnic groups are unequal in two major respects: population size and access to the incumbency of political positions, and the social networks of the member of the groups. The first is converted to an important resource in the dominance of all facet of life of the minority ethnic groups. The voting behaviour of Nigerians is generally still influenced by the sentiment of kingship and ethnicity as assets, exploited by high-status seekers when soliciting for votes. Only candidates or contestants with very outstanding leadership qualities may overcome the strong traditional tendency to vote for only kinsmen and “sons of the soil” (Otite, 2000).

This consists of the opportunities which members of an ethnic group have in their contact and connections with party politicians: old classmates, club members, in-law, professional colleagues, clients and patrons who are in positions or corridors of powers, with majority ethnic group with significant socio-political networks excels. In fact, leaders or traditional rulers in an ethnic group with one or both of the above features have, in many cases used their positions to attempt to overrule or “Lord” it over the opposing groups residents and territories considered to be inferior.

The displays of ethnocentrism in the context of Nigeria, the minority ethnic groups are relegated in the development or urbanization of locations they geographically occupy. The lopsided appointment and development, all the military heads in Nigeria arm forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Nigerian Police Force, and directorate of State Security Service (DSS) in Nigeria currently is occupied by people from the majority ethnic groups in Nigeria to the disadvantage of the minority ethnic groups, such as the Niger Delta and other ethnic minorities from where Nigeria's oil wealth is exploited. The emergency of militant's Spear-heading minority ethnic violence to draw attention to their deprivation was occasioned by ethnocentrism by the majority ethnic group on the minorities, development- wise. Niger Delta's movement for the emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) quickly comes to mind in this regard. Such militant groups are however, formed in some minority areas in six geo-political zones of Nigeria (Mezieobi, 2014). The injustice, exclusion, exploitation, neglect, discriminatory actions, etc. are the product of ethnocentrism Suffered by the minority as a result of minority status, have resulted in the recent call for restructuring debate.

The role of ethnocentrism exhibited in governance in Nigeria, have tended leaders to disregard the tenet of true federalism which ought to accommodate our diversities, making Nigerian's more divided daily, hence the call for restructuring by the minority. Restructuring is a reaction to the system of government in Nigeria that does not allow the parts to operate freely, without interference as the majority holds the minority under the tutelage of ethnocentrism of the majority groups. The clamour and debate for restructuring are due to the impunity of the ethnic majority and principle of majoritarianism and ethnocentrism, coupled with bad governance, which is manifested in deficit infrastructural development in the country, occasioned by the alienation of the minorities, especially the core southern ethnic minorities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria and her peoples, in their multi-ethnic heterogeneity, that has defied what ought to be Federalism and is paying lip service to unity in diversity; this is deepening ethnic cohesion which is antithetical to the principles of Federalism.

There is nothing socially wrong per say with each ethnic group becoming intra-conscious of its social group in order to give the given group self-identity as an identification index, when compared with other ethnic groups. But when a privileged ethnic group become too dominant, repressive and oppressive of the minority ethnic group, subject them to humiliation, cross subordination, deprivation, segregation, it would be magical in human relational history, if the oppressed do not rise in agitation, protest, challenges, in intense inter-ethnic disagreement that may degenerate into tense ethnic conflict, that not only prematurely consume, destroy properties and human lives, but also threatens the corporate existence of Nigeria.

1. True federalism should be encouraged to allow the parts to have a sense of ownership of their resources.
2. The government should do something by discussing with various groups to avoid escalation of the situation.
3. Nigeria leaders should De-ethnicise, to encourage harmonious co-existence.
4. The government must stop lip service to restructuring.
5. Ethnic relation drive, coupled with heightened mutual ethnic motored suspicion between majority groups and minorities should be reduced by way of national unity, been encouraged.
6. Full implementation of the 2014 national conference report, under Dr. Goodluck Jonathan administration, can stem the call for restructuring.

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