

## THE QUEST AND BASIS FOR RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM IGBO COMMUNALISM

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### Abstract

This paper is motivated by the call from various segments of Nigeria for the restructuring of the country with regards to her system of government. Agitation for restructuring has persisted due to perceived continuous marginalization along ethno-religious line. Factors which have led to agitation for restructuring revolve around resource control, sharing formula, devolution of power and return to regional government. This paper appreciates the efforts made by successive governments in finding solution to the cry for marginalization but obviously the efforts did not yield the desired result. The study employed the descriptive phenomenological methodology in analyzing the data. The researchers therefore make a case for the involvement of traditional religious Igbo values as a solution to the agitation for restructuring the Nigerian federation. Data for this work were generated from secondary sources. The work advocates that traditional religious Igbo values are essential in restructuring Nigeria.

**Key words:** Value, Agitation, Restructuring, Marginalization and Nigeria.

### Introduction

The emergence of what is known today as Nigeria is the product of the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates by Lord Fredrick Lugard in 1914. Prior to the amalgamation, various ethnic groups lived as an entity without any strong affinity where it existed. Various groups and religions have the cause for political affiliation since 1914 due to the amalgamation.

Although different ethno-religious groups in Nigeria have lived together and at the same time shared a common political leadership, it has not been without agitation for one thing or the other along ethnic and or religious line. Agitations by different ethno-religious groups in Nigeria have made the political leaders to seek ways to curtail or end them. One of the ways was creation of regions and states. Adetoye (2016) observes that the creation of Midwestern region out of Western region by Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was to pacify the Midwestern region. He argues that it has not solved any problem as it has polarized Nigeria along ethnic and religious line. Nigeria has experienced civil war along ethno-religious line. Ethno-religious conflicts have continued unabated. The recent are the activities of Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen attack perceived to be ethnic cleansing by the Fulani tribe.

Further more, in a bid to have indivisible country, the Nigerian government introduced measures to ensure peaceful co-existence and end to agitation. Some of these measures are introduction of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Unity Schools, Federal Character, Quota System, National Orientation Agency and zoning formula based on the current six geo-political zones among others.

It is pertinent to observe that various policies made over the years have widened the relationship among the different ethnic and religious groups which have led to increase in the cry for injustice and marginalization, thus the clamour for restructuring. Nigerian political leaders having failed in making Nigeria united; there is the need to restructure the political system in Nigeria. It therefore becomes imperative to involve new measures in restructuring Nigeria. The researchers however argue that Igbo traditional religious values are essential in



restructuring Nigeria. Secondary source of data collection was used in gathering data. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive phenomenological method.

### **Conceptual Clarification of Restructuring**

Restructuring in the recent time is widely used and has become a household name in Nigeria. This is because it has presently dominated national. Restructuring has been used variously by many people, different groups and the academia. Its meaning differs depending on the people, group, political inclination, discipline and what one wants to achieve with it. In fact, the meaning of restructuring is shrouded in difficulty.

However, according to Amadi, Echem, Nwoko and Inyikalum (2017) restructuring; Has come to represent, in reality an omnibus word for all forms of adjustments, alterations and cosmetic manipulations aimed at changing the formula on the basis of which economic resources and political power are shared or distributed among the Nigerian elite (p. 04).

If the definition above is anything to go by, it then presupposes that clamour for restructuring is with selfish intent. Group of people or ethnic groups agitate for restructuring when government policies do not favour them. Abah and Nwokwu (2017) also argue that restructuring has been used variously in many occasions in Nigeria to mean; "divesting the central government of certain powers it wields and limiting its influence in such areas as fiscal policies, military defence, foreign policy, immigration and national elections" (p. 1518). This definition shows lacuna in the system of governance in Nigeria which needs urgent attention for redress.

However, both Procter (1981) and Hornby (2001) infer that restructuring means to organize or arrange a system, organization or company in a new or different way. Restructuring therefore is an agitation by many Nigerians to arrange the current political structure in a different way to fairly accommodate every section of the country despite the political and ethno-religious affiliation in economic resources and political power distribution.

### **Basis for Restructuring in Nigeria**

Agitation for one thing or the other is not new in Nigeria. It has been part of our political system. What is new in the current agitation is it's none sectional nature; every section of the country: north and south are agitating for one thing or the other. Although, what every section may be agitating for differs.

It should be recalled that the British conquered different parts of what is today known as Nigeria and establish authority over them in 19<sup>th</sup> century. The different groups for their administrative convenience were grouped into Southern and Northern protectorates. These protectorates were later in 1914 amalgamated and called Nigeria. Fusing many ethnic groups into one entity as Nigeria was not without some motives by the British colonial government.

However, this did not deter different peoples of Nigeria as persons like Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro among others were able to come together to agitate for Nigerian's independence when they noticed non-inclusion of Nigerians in government and continued subjugation of the indigenes of Nigeria. Abbas and Wakili (2018) intone that agitation for self-government by the Nigerian nationalists gave rise to the series of constitutions in pre-independent Nigeria; Clifford constitution of 1922, Richard constitution of 1946, Macpherson constitution of 1951 and Lyttleton's constitution of 1954 to assuage their feeling of being alienated and subjugated. The agitation and struggle by the Nigerian nationalists gave rise to independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960 and her subsequent republican status on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1963.

However, initial restructuring of Nigeria began when Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa created Midwestern region out of western region. Since then restructuring in terms of state



Western, Eastern and Midwestern regions) into twelve states to break the backbone of former Eastern region agitation for Republic of Biafra mainly populated by the Igbo. In response to further agitation for state creation, General Murtala Mohammed created additional seven states. General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida on two different years; 1987 and 1991 created two and nine states respectively bringing the number to thirty states. The current thirty six states structure was by General Sani Abacha when in 1996, he created six more states. Nigeria has moved from two protectorates in 1914 of the colonial era to the current thirty six states structure. Yet some sections of the country are agitating for more state creation due to lopsidedness in the present structure.

Abah and Nwoku (2017) argue that the intrusion of military into the Nigerian political landscape eroded good governance in the country. They argue that state creation which has taken place only during military administration made centre to be much stronger while the states become weak. The scholars infer that the current clamour for restructuring is because of perceived marginalization and neglect of some sections of the country by the Buhari administration that is using this central might at the disadvantage of some parts of the country. The administrative style of Alhaji Muhammed Buhari has awakened the consciousness of Nigerians on the need to restructure the political system of our country.

Obaze (nd) sees the need for restructuring in Nigeria. He argues that;

The crux of the problem is that citizen alienation is rife nationwide; to the extent that every ethnic jigsaw component of Nigeria feels sufficiently aggrieved, marginalized and therefore seeks equity via restructuring. Paradoxically, before now, the call for restructuring was one-sided (p.2).

Indeed, there is no doubt that every region is agitating for one thing or another. The clamour for marginalization is definitely no longer sectional. This indicates the failure of political leaders to address adequately and satisfactorily the agitation of various sections. What this portends is that Nigeria is ripe more than ever for restructuring.

More so, Abbas and Wakili (2018) intone that the clamour for restructuring is as a result of contentious issues in Nigeria which have remained unresolved over the years. The scholars enumerate such contentious issues as; call for devolution of power, review of sharing formula, creation of more states, return to regional federalism and parliamentary system of government, reorganization of the Nigerian police, removal of immunity clause, appropriate role of the traditional rulers and constitutional basis for restructuring Nigerian's federation. According to Adedeji and Ezeabasili (2018), "clearly the issue of fiscal relationship among the tiers of government has remained controversial and often the basis for the clamour for a restructuring of the federal structure" (p. 166). In as much as the reasons for restructuring are germane, bad leadership and corruption which has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria call for the restructuring of Nigeria so as to find a new way to deal with bad leadership and corruption.

It is pertinent to observe that there are varied schools of thought as to the basis for restructuring. It is clear however that Nigeria needs restructuring now more than ever. With the ethnic and religious diverse nature of our country, one cannot deny the fact that a section may feel marginalized. The call for restructuring which hitherto was seen as a sectional demand has become a national discourse. It is then necessary that Nigerian government should seize this opportunity to restructure our country before it is late. It is based on this that the researchers make a case for the involvement of Igbo traditional religious values.

### **Igbo Communalism: A Veritable Instrument for Restructuring**

Communalism is a cultural practice valued in Africa. This is to say that every tribe in Africa values and practices communalism. It is then among the universality of culture. The practice of communality in Igbo society is used as a case study to describe how it can be instrument for restructuring Nigeria.



Communalism according to Gyekye (1996) is "the doctrine or theory that the community (or, group) is the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society" (p. 36). Communalism is life in the community which is concerned with the welfare of the people living in the society. Hornby (2005) posits that communalism is "the fact of people living together and sharing possession and responsibility" (p. 291). It is in view of this that Mbiti (1969) in his *Ahiagoku* lecture describes it as 'Igbo Republicanism'. Mbiti (1969) understands it to be "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p.108). The belief that the success of the society depends on the individual members of the society and vice versa promotes communal living. Communalism therefore is mutual assistance for one another, every member of the society devoid of partiality for peaceful co-existence. It bridges the gap of sectionalism and injustice but promotes justice fair play and nepotism.

Communal value in Igbo society is as old as man. Onwu (2002) notes that "tradition has given the Igbo people a deep sense of communality" (p.1). Communalism cuts across every aspect of the life of the Igbo people. Man is not only a culture bearing being, but also a social being. In traditional Igbo society, meaningful life cannot be lived in isolation with other individuals. This is so because *otu osisi adighi eme ohia* (a tree cannot make a forest). Man is not an island hence he cannot exist alone. There is the need for members of the society to interact, commune, share ideas and values to achieve common interests. It is vital for Nigerians to understand that we cannot become one entity known as Nigeria and chart a common cause for the good, peaceful co-existence and survival of their society. It is vital for Nigerians to understand that we do not value and respect our ethno-religious diversity. An ethnic group alone can not occupy the geographical enclave called Nigeria and become the giant of Africa. *Igwe bu ike* (there is strength in number) is aphorism of the Igbo which describes the importance of strength in number. Nigeria is known as the most populous Black Country in the world because of the coming together of diverse people. For the continued existence of Nigeria, therefore, every section of the country despite tribal, religious and political affiliation should be considered as very much vital for the continued growth and existence of Nigeria.

More so, Mbiti (1969) argues that deep sense of kinship in traditional African societies fosters communalism. To corroborate this, Ilogu (1985) intones that "...the traditional lineage structure commonly called *umunna* ...indicated that group life with its web of social life is very strong, and the pattern of life is communalistic" (p. 24). It is in view of this foregoing that Egbeke (2000) opines that "kinship system is the theoretical basis of African communalism which expresses itself on the social level in terms of institutions such as clan, underlying the initial equality of all and the responsibility of many for one" (p. 18). What can be deduced from the thoughts of Mbiti, Ilogu and Egbeke is that communalism made possible due to close tie among the communities based on brotherhood known as *nwanne*. *Nwanne* (relation) describes relationship one has with another whether as a brother, sister, uncle, aunt, cousin etc because there are no other Igbo words to describe relationship one has with another person.

It is based on this that Nwala (2010) contends that;

In Igbo traditional thought, a community is the same as 'people of one blood', irrespective of their geographical location...the community itself has its being, identity or existence defined by this common blood. The life of a member of the community is interwoven with the others through blood which they share and through the web of economic and social interdependence which practically exists in the community (p. 93).

Common blood as a link which fosters communalism cannot be denied. Various tribes in Nigeria are directly or indirectly link to one another. People of different tribal origin have been linked to common blood through marriage. Undoubtedly, intertribal marriage among the tribes in Nigeria has become rampant in recent time, such that what concerns or affects one tribe indirectly affects the other(s).



In view of this, Mbiti (1969) infers that marriage promotes communal living. In marriage the couple is bridge linking families. When two tribes are involved, they become linked through the bride and the groom; thus common blood is established. Intertribal marriage which has taken place in Nigeria among the north and south, Christian and muslim should enhance peaceful co-existence having been brought into relationship. Through intertribal marriage couples and their families share things in common. It is necessary that anything that may affect the marriage should be discouraged. Equity and concern for all should be the watchword bearing in mind that whatever that affects any of the couples affects all; including their ethnic affiliation.

However, the essence of communalism is for equity and fair play. Madukwe and Madukwe (2010) contend that in communalism;

There is the bearing of one another's burden and everyone is his brother's keeper.

There is a mutual assistance for one another. The haves help those who do not have so that no one perishes because of want while his next door neighbour lives in affluence.

There is sharing of virtually everything p. (279).

It is pertinent to observe that communalism abhors individualism; rather individual life is made meaningful by the community. Hence Nwala (2010) asserts that "the being of the community is larger than and prior to that of any of its individual members..." (p. 93). This is not to say that individual life of the members of the society is condemned, but that the community is not allowed to suffer on the account of an individual. Emphasis is placed on the community above the individual. Individual view and actions are carried out within the ambit of the community's values. Individuals account for their actions to the society. Actions which portray his image in bad light is avoided, hence one does not aspire to acquire wealth at all cost and at the detriment of his fellows. Even when wealth is genuinely acquired, it is not withheld for personal use. This agrees with the assertion of Madukwe and Madukwe (2010) that, "the haves help those who do not have so that no one perishes of want while his next door neighbor lives in affluence" (p. 279).

The motive behind communalism is vital in restructuring Nigeria. It negates corruption which is widespread in our country. The rich are becoming richer at the expense of the poor and less privileged without any concern for them. Corruption is holding sway due to individualism which has been entrenched as an acceptable norm in Nigeria. There is the need for equitable distribution of our national resources to fairly accommodate every ethno-religious group. Those who are rich should realize that it is given to them on trust for the benefit of all, because according to Ekwunife (2003) "excessive individualism...negates African communal existence. ...African communal life stirs the middle point between two extremes- exclusivity and domineering attitude" (pp. 20-21). Communalism control people's quest to have it all so that the resource meant for the society is not grabbed by an individual or few privileged persons as it is being done by few privileged Nigerians currently. The leaders and the subjects should understand that without the entity called Nigeria, there will be no Nigerians. Therefore all should be considered as very important in the political and economic policies of our country.

### Recommendations

This work having looked at how restructuring can be achieved using the Igbo values, recommends that;

1. Nigeria is long overdue for restructuring with the prevailing circumstance in the country. Nigerian leaders should as a matter of necessity restructure to avoid crisis situation.
2. The different diverse people being of the same culture background should apply their culture means which easily bind them together. Nigeria should be restructured



3. Every Nigerian should bear in mind that what makes us great is the diverse inhabiting the geographical enclave called Nigeria. It is then necessary that for continued corporate existence and survival, every group must be considered important.
4. The privileged Nigerians should consider others as among those that should share the resources of the country. Our resource should be equitably shared despite political, ethnic and religious affiliation.

### Conclusion

Nigeria is a country with diverse people of different ethnic background. It is this diversity that makes Nigeria great. Yet this diversity is the problem which has caused nepotism. Some sections feel aggrieved and marginalized. Nigerian government has at some of her policies tried to assuage the grievances which has led to the clamour for restructuring. It is a fact that with the current situation of things in our country, restructuring is inevitable. Nigerians though of different background but of the same cultural affinity should to restructure using the instrument of Igbo communalism as case study. It is expected that if this is done, nepotism, injustice and corruption in Nigeria will be reduced to the minimum level.

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