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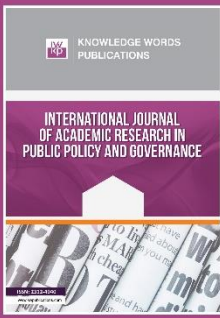
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Deconstructing Restructuring Debates on Corrosive Structures in Nigeria: A Rebirth of Political Quandary in A Nation's History

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Abstract

In Nigeria, there has been raging debates on the need to change its lopsided federal structure, which appears as harbinger to injustice, alienation, marginalization, exploitation, bad governance, underdevelopment and general feelings of frustration and aggression. The debates on restructuring culminate in highly contrasted schools of thought, with distinctive ideological chasm, and oftentimes, irreconcilable viewpoints. There is disagreement that Nigeria lag in a democratically orchestrated restructuring to correct many defects in the unitary form of federal system, which the colonial government and the post-colonial military administrations imposed on the country. There is also disagreement that federal structure in Nigeria is outlandish and comatose, lacking in vitality to drive the collective aspirations of diverse country like Nigeria. However, in spite of the assumption that the structure is a cornerstone to the nation's socio-economic and political downturn, there is feeling that it engenders mutual distrust, agitation, conflicts and general state of anomie in the system. Thus, the generic trepidation in Nigeria's tottering structure calls for concrete action, apart from the muddled debates on the reform of the system. This study, therefore, interrogates the various debates on restructuring Nigeria and synthesizes the arguments. It relies on documentary method for data collection, content analysis for discussions, and adopts dialectics as theoretical framework, to explain the contradiction of ideas that serve as the determining factor in their interaction, or any formal system of reasoning that arrives at a truth by the exchange of logical arguments. Based on the thesis-antithesis nature of restructuring debates, the study recommends a synthesis, encapsulated in "Equalitocracy" System of Government for Nigeria.

Keywords: Deconstructing Restructuring, Debates, Rebirth, Political Quandary, History

Introduction

Every nation encounters challenges that attract attention to its mode of governance and provide the pedestal for dissecting its socio-economic and political wellbeing. In almost the emergent colonial states in the world, more so in Africa, many countries therein contend with problems relating to

incontrovertible identity slogan, eternal connection to ethnicity and fragile nationality. Although “every nation has her peculiarities, it is such peculiarities that determine the way the nation is governed”, (Bright, 2018). The peculiarity of Nigeria consists in its heterogeneity and the deep-seated disintegrating forces that contradict the idea of transforming it into an egalitarian society.

The evasive political contour emanates from inability to adopt a generally accepted system of government and constitution, or balanced political structure that provides for equal number of administrative centers and federating units. It denies equity in representation, equal benefits from government and breeds mystifying problems, which show that most autonomous pre-colonial communities, forcibly fused by alien powers to form an incompatible political union without rigorous efforts to glue the distinct groups together, scarcely nurtures itself into a viable nation. There is such shared belief that most colonial states lack the quintessence of nation status, hence,

Nigeria is not yet a nation. It is a country created by our erstwhile colonial master, the United Kingdom; made up of many ethnic nationalities, but a nation waiting to be born, (Moghalu, 2018).

Since 1960 when Nigeria attained political independence, there have been persistent agitations for restructuring its federal system, to accommodate and cater for the peculiarities of its diversity but none has gone beyond lip service. It became more worrisome after the balkanization of Nigeria into uneven numbers of states and local governments by the military administration and defacing of its federal system by concentrating much power at the center and reducing the states to mere political appendage. Nigeria at present has 36 states and 774 local governments (Okibe, 2000) unevenly distributed among the six geopolitical zones. Most absurdly, the uneven numbers of states and local governments in the country also replicate in the disproportionate distributions of political offices, development projects and financial allocations made thereto.

For the foregoing reason, the incongruous structure bolsters the penchant for a geopolitical section favoured with more administrative structures to play domineering roles in political leadership, as well as in collection of lion share from the nation’s resources. It laid the foundation for virulent ethnic insignia in electoral contest for possible control of national institutions, resulting in cases of marginalization, conflicts and quest for restructuring. As a result, the system becomes susceptible to all forms of agitation, including the recurring calls for reform to correct the anomaly and entrench equity. Besides the prevalence of conflicting claims on the system, it is evident that,

The negative elements of ethnicity, religion, military government, repression, corruption and the thwarting of democracy, among other things, have raised a more fundamental crisis in political culture, namely the continuing existence of the Nigerian federation itself, (Wright, 2001:12).

Although Britain vertically divided Nigeria into north and south, with horizontal marginalization of minorities across the divides, injustice redefines the political spectrum and the import of the polarity in every ramification, including the damage it causes on the country’s political ligament. Axiomatically, Nigeria faces phenomenal increase in public discontent with the system and mutual distrusts among the various ethnic groups and the minorities within them. It has often loosened the inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic ties and constantly inflamed the polity with unending calls for

restructuring. El-Rufai, (2017) notes that, "The call is regardless of ethnicity, religion or socioeconomic status". It assumes many dimensions, thereby, throwing up conflicting opinions and differing schools of thoughts, consisting of the protagonists and the antagonists. Therefore, based on the divisive nature of the debates on restructuring, the palpable consequence is that:

Lack of agreement on what should qualify for inclusion in the restructuring agenda has been a weighty obstacle to launching the process, including the procedural issues that have to do with representation in the restructuring process, and in fact the structure of the restructuring process itself, (Abutudu, 2010).

Amidst the disagreement on the components and the process of restructuring, lay the obvious fact that the federal system in Nigeria does not function properly, and although the opinions of few beneficiaries may differ, the public acknowledges the structural defects. The acknowledgement is regardless of how each ethnic or interest group misguidedly perceives it. Thus, the restructuring that the public clamours for, is targeting the reversal of the crippling political contrivance hatched by the British colonial rule and the post-colonial military administrations in Nigeria. The debate appears intense for lack of clarity and consensus on three interrelated contextual issues, including:

- ❖ What specific areas needed restructuring in Nigeria to make the system function effectively?
- ❖ Why does each ethnic or interest group feel fixated on its slim goals on restructuring Nigeria and how does it affect inter and intra-ethnic communications and relations in the country?
- ❖ How does restructuring intend providing solution to the endemic problems that crisscross through the diverse ethnic and interest groups in Nigeria?

In view of the foregoing differing perspectives on restructuring debates in Nigeria, the paper firstly, examines the various dimensions of the pervasive debates, focusing on the subsisting underlying problems in the country and secondly, analyzed the issues that formed the discourse.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted dialectical theory for illustration of the concatenation among the contending variables. It surmises the contradiction, conflict and tensions underlying relationships among different groups that are engaged in pursuits of opposing goals and interests. Its origin lay in the works of Karl Marx and Hegel, including many contemporary scholars, who explore the layers of logics underlying the premises of politically oriented arguments to understand how it unravels the motivations of interests. According to Wood (1997: p. 203), who replicated the earliest prototype,

Marx and Hegel saw dialectics as involving a thesis (we are independent) and an antithesis (we are dependent) that are reconciled by a synthesis of the two opposing sides (we are interdependent)".

The whole essence of Marx dialects is to emphasize the fact that change derives from the conflict and contradictions in society: from the divisive interests generated through the capitalist division of labour, between the social aspects of production and its private control, between the requirements

of profit maximization and human social needs, (Swingewood, 1975). Thus, the thesis-antithesis implies "dialogues between opposing 'voices', each expressing a different and contradictory impulse", (Trenholm, 2000:29). In other words, the theory analogically explains the notion of the raging debates on restructuring in Nigeria that juxtaposes conflicting viewpoints from among scholars, political actors, and public officials across various divides and thus explicates how the inherent contradictions in the political debates shape the natures of relationship between and among the divides. In fact, Anderson & Ross (2002:350), in relating dialectical theory to such analysis, hypothesize the contextual linkage,

Dialectical theory examines how relationships develop from the interplay of perceived opposite forces or contradictions and how communicators negotiate these ever-changing processes.

The over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria interact to form perception about each other and share experiences as they compete for political space. Each group expresses differing views about where they situate in the current structure of the federating units, how the system appropriates resources to the component units and how government administration affects their daily lives. The essences of the consequent interlocutory dialogues among the ethnic groups are to resolve the national questions, but instead, they polarize them the more with tension. Wood (1997:21-22), explains the contradiction in the debates for restructuring from the prisms of dialectical theory and argues,

The dialectical theory is an assertion that there are inherent tensions between contradictory impulses or dialectics and that these tensions and how we respond to them are what we can use to understand how relationships work, and how they grow and change over time.

Perhaps, the consciousness of marginalization escalates the agitation for restructuring and intensely affects the relationships between and among the various units in Nigeria. It pitches ethnic, linguistic and religious groups against one another and engenders elites-mass dichotomy. It has had and still has adverse effects on Nigerians across the boundaries. Trenholm (2000: p.28), generalized the premise that underpins the push and pull communications in restructuring debates and the effect on relationships. Thus, relationships in a similar context operate in four dimensions:

1. **As a constellation of behaviors**, - meaning that the relationship is constructed of interdependent actions of two people,
2. **As cognitive constructs**, - meaning that a relationship is how people think about behaviors with one another and develop an idea of what a person should be in a relationship,
3. **As mini-cultures**, - meaning that two people involved in a relationship share common perceptions about the world and agree to certain rules in order to co-exist peacefully, and
4. **As collections of contradictory forces**

For the purpose of this study, relationship as implied above, relate to and denote the behaviours in relationship among ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in Nigeria towards each other based on their conflicting interests. Each of the definitions stresses the same key issues, i.e., opposing tensions in relationships and, how people respond to them. Hence, the fourth and final viewpoint is where we can understand dialectical theory (Lusk, 2008) and the restructuring debates. The responses to and

against the calls for restructuring in Nigeria has always crystallized into repulsive comments that degenerate into hate speeches and frosty relationships among the ethnic groups.

The inherent contradiction in the collective group's interests and the methods applied in seeking to achieve them, characterizes some unguarded reactions, inciting utterances and indifference to marginalization or the clamouring for restructuring to eradicate the scourge. Some inconsiderate and sometimes hostile comments rarely weighed its general influence on the relationship that the affected groups share with one another or among themselves, and the resultant behaviour towards the state. Lusk, (2008) admits that every communication influences relationship and accordingly,

Communication between humans is studied largely because of the opportunities it presents to discern behavioral patterns. In studying and observing these patterns, one can better understand how these patterns occur, why they occur and look to producing solutions to any conflict or negatives that may be the result from them.

For example, it is now a common rhetoric that restructuring debates have sharply divided Nigerians more than witnessed since the civil war. This division gives rise to all manner of insurgencies thereby making insecurity to be at its peak, (Bright, 2018). Ironically, those who are interested in dialectics are not necessarily interested in the two extremes, but more so in the conflict that may arise as a result of them, (Wood, 1997 p. 202). What is of interest is the difference of beliefs about the results of dialectics. According to Wood (1997:203) while writers like Baxter (1990) believes that tensions between contradictory impulses are continuous and have no ultimate resolution or endpoint, Marxist and Hegelian viewpoints suggest that contradictions could be resolved. The two parallel positions are significant to this study. Investigating the thesis that "Our politico-economic form has not profited us irrespective of our belief, region or religion", (Bright, 2018), would naturally attracts the antithesis with the prevalent contradiction in the quest to restructure Nigeria.

In spite of the fact that Baxter (2004) has proposed a thesis to demonstrate the obstinate nature of the contradiction, inversely, Marx and Hegel presented the antithesis in the form of antidote to the contradiction. It is either that the restructuring debates is continuous and have no ultimate resolution and endpoint, according to Baxter, or that the contradictions could be resolved as postulated by Marx and Hegel. Thus, the study adopted the two perspectives of dialectical theory, to explore the most obvious or likely outcome of the restructuring debates in Nigeria.

The Thematic Debates on Restructuring Saga

Debates on restructuring Nigerian federal system have become recurring decimal and the concept acknowledged as a trending phrase in the nation's political dictionary. While restructuring signifies the different terms to identify areas that require re-organisation based on perceived interests, the use of the term in the political parlance in Nigeria seems new and represents another form or symbol of academic discourse. Originally, restructuring refers to a corporate management term for the act of reorganizing the legal, ownership, operational, or other structures of a company for the purpose of making it more profitable, or better organized for its present needs. Politically, its aim is to reorganize the political system to reflect what the public considers as a modest means of achieving a functional system. Many prominent Nigerians drive the restructuring debates. The subjects that draw

supports for restructuring separate the protagonists from the antagonists and the debate rages on seamlessly regardless of religious, ethnic and party affiliation.

Accordingly, General Ibrahim Babangida strongly advocates for devolution of powers to give more responsibilities to the states while the Federal Government oversees foreign policy, defence, and economy. In addition, the federal roads in towns and cities should revert to the states while tinkering with our constitution to accommodate new thoughts that will strengthen our nationality, (Vanguard, 2017). Similarly, Chief Supo Shonibare, a chieftain of the Pan-Yoruba Socio-Political Organization, Afenifere, opined that Nigeria needs a federation with independent self-sustaining federating units able to develop infrastructure, critical amenities, undertake other developmental projects, education and health without a centre body interfering, (Aziken, et al., 2017). Furthermore, Mr Akin Osuntokun, Political Adviser to former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and a former Managing Director of the News Agency of Nigeria, asserts that restructuring is a call for the restoration of federalism – the foundational constitution structure to which all Nigerians subscribed as encapsulated in the independence constitution of 1960. This constitution was violated in 1966 and the violation set in motion a chain of events that has culminated in the present abnegation of a 36 states structure against the four regional structures that emanated from the independence constitution (Vanguard, 2017).

Nevertheless, Chief Frank Kokori, former General Secretary, National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers Union, (NUPENG), argues that the reason agitations are going on in this country is that certain people feel they are marginalized but actually, the whole country is marginalized because of bad governance and corruption. He sued for real federalism, where the federal government undertakes defense, currency, Foreign Affairs, and others while the states exercise powers over other affairs, (Aziken, et al., 2017). Interestingly, Chief Guy Ikokwu, Second Republic politician, examined the distortions in derivation principle and the damage it has inflicted on the revenue sharing formula across the successive regimes in Nigeria. Thus, the Nigerian Unitary system of administration, which we have now, is not only an illegal constitutional contraption, but also an unworkable political system and a harbinger of a perverse, chaotic, political and economic conundrum, (Vanguard, 2017).

Contrarily, the antagonist school share different views but scarcely denies the dysfunctional system in operation despite appearing unconvinced about restructuring based on several other intervening factors that becloud in-depth understanding of the real causes of the system failures. Correspondingly, Nwakanma, (2018), posits that many Nigerians now talk about “Restructuring Nigeria” as the only means by which Nigeria would survive. They put an apocalyptic spin on this issue, and juice it up a bit. Since the resurgence of the debates upon restoration of democratic rule,

Many a time, restructuring and the haunting threat of secession appears as the means by which disgruntled and discontented groups assert pressure on Nigeria. Such pressure comes with many consequences on both the agitators and the government, (Nwakanma: 2018).

In spite of the consequences, the threats between the divides persist in the system and derail government administration. Nwafor-Orizu, et al., (2018) observed that “the protagonist-antagonist stance on restructuring has resulted in the conflict of interest, conflict words and even physical

violence between the two parties resulting consequently to name calling, exacerbation of the political system and loss of lives and properties". It is evident that the ubiquitous nature of the concept of restructuring and the usage in expressing every form of discontent and the consequent venom attacks on the government has not provided any clear template for adoption. Egboisiuba (2017) contends that the curious thing about the clamor for restructuring of Nigeria current federal structure is that none of the advocates has clearly detailed what they want to see Nigeria look like. The consequent opinion of Egboisiuba (2017) on the issue of unclear model or framework is that,

It appears that the latest agitation is another excuse by some Nigerians to blame lack of political, social and economic development of the country on the structure of the nation rather than on their fellow Nigerians and their leaders who have failed the country, (Egboisiuba, 2017).

This perspective, no doubt, adds a new twist to the argument. The views supporting the rationale for restructuring the system and those who oppose the tenets being canvassed tend to present disagreement on the method to adopt, and it remains a concern. The concern corroborates the dilemma or seeming failure to resolve or agree on an approach, hence the observation that despite,

The need to rethink the structure of Nigeria is widespread; and has accelerated. It often takes the form of calls for a "Sovereign National Convention" that would evaluate the country's key structures, (Campbell, 2017).

It involves considering whether Nigeria should follow a presidential or parliamentary system, how revenue should be apportioned, and how "federalism" should work. In consonance, Ogi, (2017) examined the concept of restructuring, the systemic flaws that justify restructuring in Nigeria and the major factors that incubate the agitations for restructuring; including security, electricity, competition, Biafra lingering question, education, etc. It concluded by noting that the problems and prospects embedded in restructuring are the reasons the dilemma is pervasive but needed decisive action to ensure speedy development of the country. As Abutudu (2010) summarily admits, "There are substantive issues that need immediate solution through the restructuring process". The issues might hinge on the foundation of the Nigerian union, the inherent factors that obfuscate the quest for its reform, and many obstacles that deter the launching of the process. Accordingly, abysmal failures in leadership and service delivery irked El-Rufai (2012) to assert:

Nigeria is "A Federation without Federalism". "Our federation has been dysfunctional, more unitary than federal and not delivering public goods to the generality of our people", (El-Rufai: 2012).

Moghalu (2018) corroborates the assertion, stressing that "Nigeria today is called a "federal republic" but in reality, it is a unitary state. This reality is the result of military intervention in our polity through the first coup of 1966". The foregoing remarks in their generality accede to public concerns that the federal system as practiced in Nigeria is dysfunctional and in addition, rationalizes the restructuring debates. The malfeasance of Nigerian leadership in nipping the existential anomalies in the parochial political culture connects intrinsically with the corrosive structures that the colonial forces and

military alike bequeathed to Nigeria, which plague its entire being, including the strip of federal system it practices. Thus, ethnic politics that amplify the divisive debates on restructuring the fractured system for the common good has been the bane. In that regard, Momoh (2002), Hamzat (2005), and Farayibi (2017), explain that, the real reason for this call is beclouded with conflict of interest and evident in the composition and definition of restructuring from different groups. Farayibi (2017) cites lucid examples to show the differences:

The masses see this call as a demand for good governance, accountability and transparency while the elites see this call as a political solution to remain relevant in the present political dispensation, (Farayibi, 2017).

Evidently, the debates on restructuring, in certain respects, lay in-between two extreme sides of the continuum, which is typical of apparent differences in class values and the perception that lends credence to each group's goal preferences and ideology. Although the topical issues that trigger agitations for restructuring has been traditionally narrowed to quests for equality in state structure, proportionate distribution of resources and power sharing formula, the contemporary agitations draw their essences from the incoherent governance process and protracted economic poverty blamed on injustice. Dickson & Asua (2016); Abbas & Wakili (2018), posit that the issues propelling the current inspiration to agitate for restructuring are widespread. It includes the quest for resource control, review of revenue sharing formula, devolution of power, return to regional federal system of government based on six geo-political zones, return to parliamentary system of government, removal of immunity clause from the constitution, creation of state police, and defining the roles of traditional rulers, among others.

In other words, Abutudu, (2010); Ottigbe & Ottigbe, (2015); Obidimma & Obidimma (2015) observe that the tensions between the component units and the center, between the constituent units themselves, and of various interests often fuel demands for restructuring. Perhaps, the various interests insist on a voice and the correction of perceived structural defects. Acceding to the foregoing assertion, Obidimma & Obidimma (2015) note that, "Nigeria has been a federal state since 1954 and not yet attained even the basic requirement of federalism". Wheare, (1953) defines federalism as an association of states, which has been formed for a certain common purpose, but the member states reserve a large measure of their original independence. Meanwhile, Ogene, (2001) cited Wheare, (1966), to show the synergy between federalism and constitution. He says that the universal principles that regulate the practice of federalism stipulate:

It is a written constitutional mechanism through which governmental powers, functions and procedures are distributed among the national, state and local governments (3 tiers of governments) or constituent units, ensuring in the process the independence and exclusively defined area of responsibilities for each tier of government, (Ogene, 2001).

Certainly, the practice of federalism in Nigeria represents different things from the universal principles. Drawing from the Wheare's definition above, it is glaring that the states or the subsisting regional blocs in Nigeria ceased to exercise any measure of their original independence since after the era of the 1963 Republican Constitution. The states have remained emasculated by the

disproportionate powers, which each constitution authored by the respective military administrations apportioned to the center to loom large in the polity and play domineering roles in the system. The distortion lends credence to the originating disbelief in the legitimacy of the power structure, the consequent agitation for secession, resource control and weird civil strife. Corroborating the foregoing assertions, Abbas & Wakili (2018) argue that although there were compelling reasons to the adoption of federalism, what remains challenging is the extent that the practice of federalism has addressed the issues of self-determination, economic prosperity, and desire for unity over the years. In fact, Farayibi (2017); Abutudu (2010), think that the demands for equity and justice in the allocation of political space from minorities and marginalized groups have all made for a consistent and perennial stream of agitations for restructuring, which suggests that the search for a national community has remained elusive in Nigeria.

In a similar vein, Dare (1986:72) emphasized that in a plural society where ethnic groups face each other in mutual suspicion, the struggle for supremacy among the groups is often staged through the determination of which group controls the central institutions. The nature of the struggle among the groups for power at the center determines the level of political stability within the political system. The greater the controversy on these matters, the greater will be the challenges to the legitimacy of the central institutions, from sections that feel that their access to power has been barred. The foregoing analysis suggests that power contestation may be infinite once the political system serves as means for economic production and distribution. The control of government machinery plays the decisive roles of determining who gets what, when and how! Hence, the inherent debacle in the governance of Nigeria replicate in the seeming failures to overhaul the system and correct the persisting glitch. Farayibi (2017), therefore, reiterates that,

The dominant contributory factors to the present situation in the country include political idiosyncrasy, military incursion, the oil curse, religious fanaticism, elite-masses dichotomy, and Nigeria's politicized unity. The effects of the above-listed factors include poor value system, systemic corruption, institutional failure and leadership abuse, incursion of extremists, religious fanatics, and absence of rule of law, etc.

These factors contaminate Nigeria and serve as fertilizer to the mass discontent with the situation of political leadership and the management of the nation's resources. El-Rufai (2012), agrees to the fact that despite possessing significant natural resource endowments, being Africa's leading economy and most populous nation, Nigerians are neither happy nor content with the current political structure, the 1999 Constitution, and virtually all the institutions of governance at the federal, state and local levels. The destabilizing effects of these agitations or even the potential for destabilization have always constituted a question mark on the legitimacy of the political order.

This state of national dissatisfaction for a variety of reasons and motives has led to strident calls from virtually all segments of Nigerian society for political, constitutional and fiscal reform using various words and phrases - restructuring, true federalism, devolution, resource control, regionalism, self-determination and so on, (El-Rufai, 2012).

Majorly, the ambivalent nomenclatures ascribed to restructuring and the unnecessary nebulous debates generated by the proponents and opponents alike; make reform agenda in Nigeria to suffer unwarranted setbacks. Rather than shared needs to reform its legal, economic and political systems, the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity among others pull them apart. Thus, restructuring debate embodies discord and reflects in the cloudy political atmosphere masking the irreconcilable interests that fuel every agitation and the blatant rebuttals in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, most discussions on restructuring in Nigeria rarely situate the premises of the debates around the internal dynamics of socio-economic organization and the structure of political leadership at the regional/state and local/community levels. Scholars and especially the agitators for restructuring focus on the government at the center, seeking to redefine the federating units, to ensure balance in their numbers and equity in political representation; and how to share both the development projects and financial allocations made thereto. By that limited emphasis, there is neglect of the questions on how to restructure the lopsided structure at the unit levels.

The consequent infrastructural and economic disparity, including marginalization, which is consistent with inequities in size and population at the unit levels, rarely features in the restructuring debates. They consign them to internal grumbling and suffocation under the yoke of the majority groups at each level. The study filled the gap by highlighting the often-ignored arching problems bedeviling the units, which necessitates the deconstruction of the restructuring debates in Nigeria, to pontificate the best approaches to getting the structure properly restructured.

Fixations of Ethnic Groups on Restructuring Debates in Nigeria

Each ethno-religious, linguistic and cultural group has different goals that it seeks to achieve through restructuring project. The coincidences of the goals are derived either from similarity of shared experience or from the dynamics of the emerging consciousness. Across the length of the past agitations for restructuring or reform in the political system, series of the canvassed preferences typify the interests of each group that may differ at each phase of the agitations.

At the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference summoned by Gowon in 1966, the Mid-west supported continued Federation with the existing four Regions, with more regions in the future and with Lagos either as Federal Territory or as a separate State. The West and Lagos proposed a Federation with more States on linguistic basis and with Lagos as a separate State. The East demanded a loose association of States comprising the existing Regions. The North advocated for Nigeria to have strong autonomous States delegating powers to a Central Authority for common services, (2014 National Conference Report, P.35). The explicit divergences trail virtually all the later dialogues on how to reform the Nigeria federal structure, especially the most recent ones. The examples presented in table 1, highlight some issues that groups share differing views.

Table 1: Key areas of emphasis in restructuring debates and differences in positions canvassed

Thematic Areas	The Current Practice	The Desired Practice	Nature of Expressed View
Form of Government	Federal system with dominance of unitary features in operation	The practice of true federalism, based on fiscal responsibility, resource control, autonomy and self-determination	No Consensus but differing perspectives canvassed by each zone or ethnic group
Governmental System	Presidential system	Parliamentary system with less cost on administration	No Consensus
Administrative System	Centralized system	Decentralized system/ devolution of powers	Consensus
Legislative System	Full-Time Assembly	Part-Time Assembly	No Consensus
Economic System	Rent Economy dwelling on huge import, low export and lacking in competitive acumen	Productive economy through diversification, to boost agriculture and micro based industrial production with emphasis on substitution of foreign made goods with local products	Consensus
Social System	Parochial symbol based on economic status, bearing class identity, ethnicity, linguistic, religious and cultural tags, which denies equal citizenship and rights	Social status, identity pattern, citizenship, class structure, bearing no insignia of discrimination in sharing the benefits of governance, ownership of property, citizenship and residential rights.	No Consensus on the practice of religion and ethnicity
Security System	Centralized security organization controlled by federal government	Regional or State Police Formation, emphasizing community policing based on local content reflecting local community security architecture	No Consensus
The Unit's Structure	State & local government system with feeble autonomy in operation	Regions, with powers granted each to subdivide itself based on its administrative and development priority needs	No Consensus
Power Sharing and resources	Exclusive Legislative List containing many items and therefore, gets allocation, which	Regional government that is vested with more powers, resources and responsibilities surpassing those of the center,	No Consensus

	is more than what the 36 states, and 774 local governments jointly collect.	(i.e. divesting the center of its overbearing powers, control of the economic resources, and vesting them in the region).	
Policy Preferences	Short-Term Policy, discontinuity in development plan framework and undue emphasis on foreign direct investments as of strategic importance to our economy	Long-Term Policy, continuity in development framework that promotes the strengthening of institutions and building the necessary human capacities to drive the initiative	Consensus
Development Preferences	Discontinuity in implementation of development plan, poor funding of capital projects to boost critical infrastructure, and undue attention on ceremonial programmes with enormous financial wastes.	Investing in critical infrastructure; boosting the economy through industrialization and creating employment. The areas include roads, railway, the power sector, oil sector (exploration, exploitation, refining, storage and distribution), and commitment to rural integration through effective economic network and flexible labour mobility.	Consensus

Source: Compiled by the Author, 2018

Essentially, the conflicting interests among the zones either collectively or differently, intra or inter, herald every national conference that brings the ethnic nationalities to a roundtable to discuss restructuring. We begin the periscoping from the zones in the North. The defunct northern region presently includes Northeast, Northwest and North Central. The Northeast and Northwest zones (in isolation of North central zone) associate restructuring with deepening the practice of the current federal system, which the military transformed into unitary administrative structure. From all indications, they support maintaining status quo, whereby there is sustenance of the advantages they enjoy, both in the numbers of states and local governments, elective representatives, infrastructural facility, revenue allocations and other implied benefits. The foregoing interests formed the central thesis of every memorandum submitted by the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), the apex socio-cultural union binding former Northern region.

Perhaps, the generalized but audaciously highlighted notion is premised on the presumption that Nigeria cannot be balkanized but remain indivisible, indissoluble, and its unity and corporate existence not negotiable. It hinges emphasis on sustaining the structure of the federating units as constituted, to preserve the subsisting constitutional power sharing, revenue formula and political

leadership arrangements, and always improving on the system to filter discontent and absorb the imminent inherent centrifugal forces. However, the North central zone, under the umbrella of the Middle-Belt Forum, canvasses true federalism that supports state's autonomy, both in the control over lands and its resources. They dissociate themselves from the core northern interest on restructuring, perhaps, because of the later invasion of their communities, farmlands and the ruthless killing of their people by the Fulani herdsmen and their invisible support bases. The development has set new agenda for political emancipation of the zone from the Hausa-Fulani feudal and oligarchic enclosure, and opened vistas for fresh political realignments, driven by the realized impetus for self-determination and increased voracious appetite for the economic benefits.

In the case of Southwest, the central idea in their agitation for restructuring, as often put forward by Afenifere, is the enthronement of fiscal federalism and reverting to regional government; where each region was not encumbered in implementing its developed strategies for economic integration, industrialization, development aspirations and boosting corporate social responsibility. Apart from pockets of dissents from few pro-government elements, and propelled by individualistic interests, the states that make up the zone share the philosophical foundation laid by their founding fathers, to promote rapid development of manpower through quality education, physical infrastructure through effective resource mobilization, economic prosperity and general wellbeing of the region. For the South-South zone, the emphasis is on resource control basically, in addition to self-autonomy and socio-economic and political growth at the pace of each region. They appear as the major factors underlining their agitation for restructuring, anchored on the quest for economic justice, which has featured in virtually all the conferences held in Nigeria on the subject of restructuring and partly responsible for the youth's restiveness in the oil rich zone.

In the same vein, the Southeast zone agitates for resource control and fiscal autonomy, which predates the later day conferences held in Nigeria. Apart from being resolute on the issues during Nigeria-Biafra pre-civil war era, some of the issues resonated during the 1994-1996 conference. Thence, Ohanaeze argued that true nationhood in a multiethnic and multilingual society is impossible without fostering a sense of belonging among all the units. It called for the entrenchment of a true federalism that would give recognition to the rights of states to exploit and develop their resource potentialities, such that state is permitted to keep about 50 percent of the revenue derived from its territory, (Ojukwu & Nwaorgu, 2013). In addition, Southeast, in strictest sense and brazen determination, also advocates for equity in the number of federating units per zone, equity in power sharing or rotation of leadership at the center, and even in preferred forms of government and economic development. From the radical groups, it involves conducting a referendum to facilitate the secession of the zone from Nigeria to form Republic of Biafra. The secessionist fervent emanates from the untoward marginalization of the zone in political and economic spheres, which table 2 below partly illustrates to serve as example.

Table 2: Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria and the component elective positions

Name of Zone	No. of States	No. of Local Governments	No. House of Assembly Members	No. of Reps	No. of Senators
North Central	6	115	154	49	18
North East	6	111	156	48	18
North West	7	187	209	92	21
South East	5	95	123	43	15
South – South	6	123	156	55	18
South West	6	137	176	71	18
FCT	-	6 Area Councils	-	2	1
TOTAL	36	774	974	360	109

Source: Compiled by the Author, 2018

The implicit of this political structure is that the south east becomes marginalized in the politics of revenue allocation and that of sharing of national cake as well as in development planning which has population principle as its yardstick, (Bright, 2018). The 2014 national conference deliberated extensively on balancing the state structure across the zones and resolved as follows:

- ❖ That in the spirit of reconciliation, equity, fair play and justice, there shall be created an additional State for the South East Zone; and
- ❖ That all other requests for State creation should be considered on merit.
- ❖ That State creation should be on the basis of parity between the geo-political zones to ensure equality of Zones;
- ❖ That additional States should be created in each of the six (6) geopolitical zones to bring the number of States in each zone to nine (9); etc.

As has been the case with other zones, in many instances, not all the Igbo states in the Southeast zone subscribed to each of the agenda articulated by Ohanaeze and forming the debates on restructuring. For example, some Igbo leaders support a restructured federation of Nigeria operating on state system as the units other than regional system or a separate country in the name of Biafra. In this perspective, Engr David Umahi – the governor of Ebonyi State, part of the former eastern region that declared itself Biafra on May 30, 1967, contended that,

Ebonyi state is not part of Biafra, we are a sovereign state, and we do not want to be colonised again, as we are a state demanding better treatment in the affairs of our nation, (Nnachi, 2018).

The second and third premises of the text wrongly assume that states in Nigeria are sovereign, in which case, there would be no need for the agitations for state autonomy. Although it could be argued that all the states in Nigeria are colonized by the center, because of its overwhelming powers, the same is not true in the relationship between or among different states. Nonetheless, what

appears as common denominator in the assertion is that a better treatment, as implied therein, largely denotes fairness in sharing federal revenue, infrastructure and political appointments. This is where the crux of the debates situates, and each group seriously guards against any form of displacement in the advantages it enjoys in the economy and leadership of the national institutions. For example, Alhaji Tanko Yakasai, a prominent northerner, among others, once argued that,

The idea behind the agitation for restructuring is to demolish those two advantages that are naturally due to the north in terms of representation and revenue sharing, (The Sun, 2017).

It is most probable that since the three economically viable regional governments that made up Nigeria at independence have been broken down into the present thirty-six states, most of them have little internal revenue-generating capability and are largely dependent upon oil revenues doled out by the federal government. On average, Nigeria's state and local governments depend on federal government transfers for 70 to 80 percent of their revenues. In this context,

Nigerian federalism has come to revolve less around the idea of ensuring meaningful autonomy or equitable political representation and more around elaborately constructed rules governing the disbursement of federal largesse to the states and local governments, (Human Rights Watch Research Mission, 2006).

Remarkable in restructuring debates is the sharp divisions that overly characterize the polity and the relationship among its component units. The recurrence has continued to stultify the unity and corporate existence of Nigeria. It is commonplace within and across ethnic boundaries and easily analyzed from the standpoint of geopolitical zones, though not in isolation of the contingencies. The natures of agitation, the issues forming the agenda for restructuring as presented by each geopolitical zone and among the minorities, lend credence to the dilemmas. They blend with the narrow focus on selfish ambition or perpetuations of class interests, against collective will, hence,

Local elites that aspire to control state governments usually appear motivated more by the selfish desire to gain access to the national cake than by any altruistic feelings concerning participatory democracy, (Wright, 2001).

It presupposes that it is the elites or the agents they instigate that hide under ethnic or religious umbrella to agitate for political restructuring when displaced or disadvantaged in the existing system and not precisely that the structure is the problem. Majorly, the stiff opposition and sometimes indifference of APC led administration to restructuring demands, largely conforms to this mindset of perhaps the reigning oligarchic and opinion molders who claim that restructuring is the least problem facing Nigeria. In this context, President Muhammadu Buhari, affirmed that,

No human law or edifice is perfect. Whatever structure we develop must, periodically be perfected according to changing circumstances and the country's socio-economic developments. When all the aggregates of nationwide opinions are considered, my firm view is that our problems are more to do with process than structure, (Punch Newspaper, 2018).

Coincidentally, the protagonists agree that such sweeping assumption leaves no one in doubts that “President Muhammadu Buhari is opposed to restructuring, because it benefits the Fulani interest, which he represents”, (Punch Newspaper, 2018). However, it may not be entirely false that the ceaseless search for political space and economic empowerment (sharing of the national cake in Nigerian parlance); galvanizes both the internal and external divisions that characterize the nature of relations between and among those that previously shared the same ideology on restructuring. In the main, lack of consensus on the actual meaning of restructuring, even on what to restructure or reform in Nigeria has always presented different disruptive perspectives of the debate. More so the dichotomy in agenda setting, the framework and the underlying interests.

Obviously, each group in Nigeria premises its agitation for restructuring on exclusively group interests, and scarcely on matters that interlace with other group’s aspiration. The phenomenon manifests a mixture of both inter and intra-regional or ethnic contradiction, thereby making the whole thing to appear complicated most times. It reflects in the nature of goal that each group pursues, the underlying political and socio-economic proclivity fueling the agitation, the idiosyncratic ambition of the principal actors and sometimes, the religious and other clandestine motive that creates more partitions across ethnic and religious lines. Pertinently, the swinging trend shows that other than in military regime where policy outputs draw its essence from military fiat, restructuring is tricky to achieve in democratic setting where debates follow fixed procedures and resolutions derived not from the soundness of minority views but from the majority judgment.

However, although it is not likely that all the units that make up a country require unanimity on most crucial issues at each national dialogue, it is crass detour when government relies on any emergent disagreement as latitude to be indecisive in taking appropriate or rational actions needed to resolve some of the identified major problems of the country. This is what characterizes the ethnic dialogues or national/constitutional conferences in Nigeria. Aside the fact that failures of national conference draw from the unbending or uncompromising positions of each group compared to others, government’s insensitivity towards overhauling the system bears the major blame. It is usually the case where the government, to be more precise, is an actor instead of mediator in the struggle, and plays inciting roles by aligning itself with the interests of one side against the other. As a result, the debate on restructuring loses emphasis on existential problems.

Debating the Restructuring Debates within Practical Realities

The emphasis on restructuring has eluded primary concerns about the interests of the common person to meet the necessities of life – food, shelter, clothing, medication and security. The existing structure exacerbates the prevalence of poverty and retrenchment of the poor from the political armchairs where the microscopic elite hegemony that permeates the fabrics of the system rest. In all the states, local governments and political wards, there is incredulous silence on the muzzling of minorities and it does appear that political classes who spearhead the campaigns for restructuring the federal system are unaware of the multiplier effects at the other lower rungs. Every election season is inundated with incessant clamours for balanced representation and equal access to elective and appointive positions among the constituent units in the states and local governments, due to outright negation of the provisions of the 1999 constitution, as amended.

Political actors jettison the federal character principle, (Section 14: 3-4), to allow concentration of persons from the same ethnic, religious, linguistic or sectional unit in political positions. The same is applicable to Section 7 (1) of the 1999 constitution for a democratically constituted system of leadership in the local government system. Some governors appointed and still appoint caretaker or transition committees and sometimes directly or through the State House of Assembly, suspends, sacks/dissolves elected local government officers while their tenure have not elapsed. It has made local government system become a subservient body without powers to control its funds and development programme. Scholars unduly emphasize emasculation of states by federal government, but pretend similar relationship between states and local governments. It shows that restructuring is beyond theoretical formulation but instead, a demonstrable action oriented programme. Thus, when there is neglect of the noble ideals espoused in the law books of Nigeria, restructuring will tantamount to expanding political and economic opportunities, for possible recruitment of displaced and emergent stranded elites in the political theatre. The expansion will dovetail into additional structures that support or promote profligacy, domination, exploitation and oppression, mass poverty through corrupt enrichments of the privileged few who are in positions of authority, and further disarticulation of the progress already attained in the system.

Inadvertently, Nigerian elites, including the supportive masses, are reluctant to interrogate or discuss how to restructure poverty and disease that are ravaging the system, regardless of ethnic, religious, linguistic or sectional divides. There is also inexplicable silence on how to restructure corrupt culture and ethnic chauvinism, and perhaps, suppress criminality that the character of the political economy breeds. In other words, there is no discussion or debates on how to restructure the class structure, especially the artificial bourgeois class, whose sources of wealth do not originate from industrial production but from politics and governance. No one feels concerned about the level of destitution in the country, or bothered that there is complete collapse of welfare scheme in governance. The point often canvassed is diversification of the economy without the complementary critical infrastructure. Furthermore, none of the divides in the debates extrapolates the discussion to include restructuring capitalist system in Nigeria, which the sustenance is divorced from the conventional market forces but held by political opportunism, and engenders large frame of consumption mentality without the corresponding production to build the economy.

The pervasive nature of corruption in the political system has made an average politician in Nigeria to become not only selfish but also to engage in governance as a medium for poverty alleviation. Thus, bumptious personification of leadership position perceives greed as an adorable political culture, just as limited perception or definition of politics as solely confined to conflict of interests hinders the spirit of give and take, which is the major gateway to achieving restructuring. It is not enough to agitate continuously for equality in the numbers of federating units across the geopolitical zones. For obvious reasons, the number of states and local governments per zone does not portend development or better living conditions for the citizenry. In most part, they symbolize approved channels for authoritative allocation of values, among the privileged few. Ironically, there has not been any empirical evidence showing that the zones with the highest numbers of administrative outposts have attained extraordinary developments when compared with those with small numbers. Perhaps, the latter may fare better as development indicators in each state suggest.

Restructuring campaign is no doubt, elite driven gambit and not tailored, in many considerations, towards benefitting the masses. The identified problem is that the seeming misunderstanding of the

economic motivations behind every elite sponsored campaigns results in the failure of the masses to disconnect from such venture. It gives the political class a further advantage to play the game. Thus, the manipulative techniques applied by the elite class to hoodwink the masses into unwarranted state of docility without deserving investigation into their conducts, work like a spell in prodding unexamined human action. For instance, each state and local government is entitled to monthly revenue allocations from the center. The revenue allocation serves as aid to development aspirations, although the demeanour of the political leadership can make or mar it. It explains why there are insufficient or inadequate evidences to reconcile the huge revenue allocations in relation to projects implemented, completed and delivered in many states and local governments.

The fundamentals of restructuring supposed to aim at ensuring that those in positions of leadership are accountable. However, people rarely challenge the insensitivity of Nigerian leaders concerning the rampant abuse of public office and waste of public funds, hence the reasons that the federal system does not work properly. The existing institutions under the present structure are not only weak but derive their essences from the officeholders. There are adequate structures but lack of approved behaviour to allow it function effectively. The 1999 Constitution and other extant laws in use in Nigeria, despite some lapses, have made far-reaching provisions but there is low compliance with them. The lack of compliance means that the debates on restructuring should focus on attitudinal change and not creating each community into a state or local government. The prevailing negative political culture and inordinate ambition to get political power at all cost, suggests that notwithstanding whatever system that is adopted, whatever structure that is put in place and whatever law that is established to regulate the institutions, once there is no complementary positive attitude to enforcing those rules and securing compliance, all the systems will be nullity. Therefore, the rationale for restructuring should aim at building and strengthening institutional capacity, where attention is on the rules other than the role players.

Synthesis of Thesis–Antithesis Logjam on Restructuring Debates

The foregoing discussions show a tendency to abdicate all the systems already practiced in Nigeria and create a new model. In earnest, a political or governmental system is not termed unitary or federal and cherished either because the constitution centralizes powers at the center or divides governmental powers among the federal units. The failure of the systems already practiced have proved these ascriptions wrong and does not require further demands for their restorations as muted in the restructuring debates. Every system operates by its definition and approved conventions; therefore, Nigeria needs its own system with synchronizing operational prescriptions.

As a colonial creature, it is obvious that borrowed systems do not absorb the diverse pre-colonial orientation in our economic and political leadership. It requires an indigenous system that takes cognizance of the peculiar political environment and circumstances, and adapts itself to solving them. Hence, the absolute need for a homegrown model of government that fits into the compounding ethno-religious, politico-economic and socio-cultural dynamics of the country. This is where the political class, the governing elites and perhaps the masses have shied away from doing the needful since independence in 1960 and it has become more challenging than before.

In this regard, “**Equalitocracy**” system of government shall be a preferred system to adopt in Nigeria. The model is derived from **equality**, and the major assumption of the system is that political community can equitably share political and economic opportunities among the different units in a

country, to foreclose perceived feelings of marginalization, discontent, frustration and aggression. The system consists of diverse administrative structures at distinct hierarchies and operative in varying sequences. At the center, the office of President shall rotate among the six zones but alternating at intervals between a zone in the north and south in alphabetical order, for a maximum single term of six years in each turn. See an example of the orders of the turns below:

Turn A = North East Zone

Turn B = South East Zone

Turn C = North East Zone

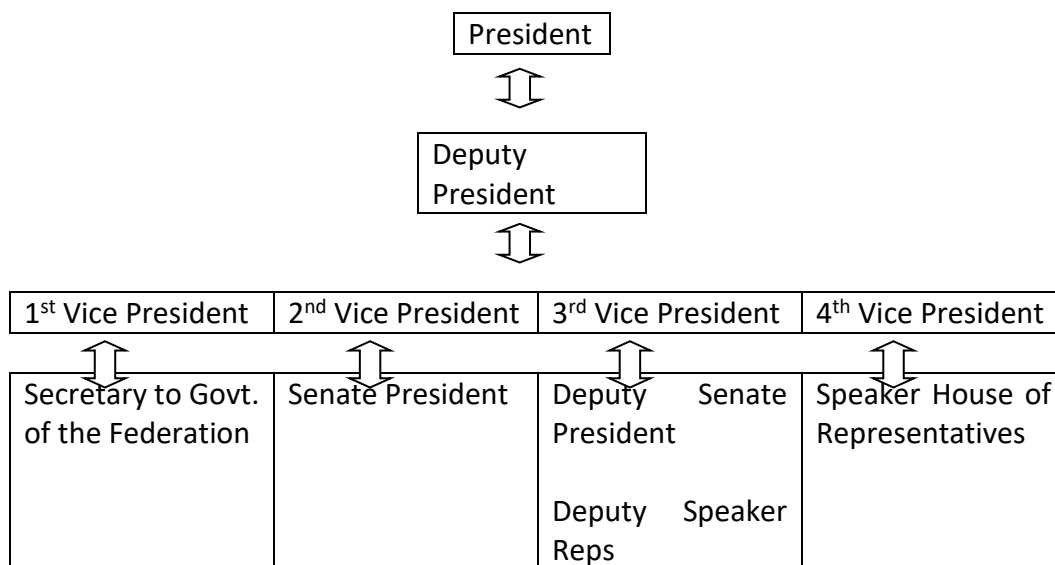
Turn D = South-South Zone

Turn E = North West Zone

Turn F = South West Zone

Any zone whose next turn is to occupy the office of President immediately at the expiration of the tenure of the sitting President shall produce Deputy President. Other outstanding zones shall each have a Vice President who is subordinate to both the president and his deputy; they will each operate at their respective zones in a designated office called presidential liaison office. The table below illustrates the sequence in which the headship of executive and legislative arms of the national government will be shared among the six geopolitical zones in the country.

Figure 1: Formula for Alternating National Executive and Legislative Positions



Research Design

The above membership of the executive and legislative positions shall form a National Leadership Council, replacing the existing Council of State; and meeting to discuss national policies before extending their resolutions to the national executive council for adoption. A follow up laws shall specify their powers, functions and command structure. As already indicated in the foregoing table, the positions of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, President and Deputy President of the Senate and Speaker and Deputy Speaker of House of Representatives shall alternate among the zones that did not produce either the President or Deputy President of the country at every point, in the order streamlined above. The operation of the prototype system based on rotation and equal

representation among the six zones at the center will apply at the other levels of government, though with different numbers of zones or units.

The executive and legislative positions shall rotate among the three senatorial zones in the state, in alphabetical order thus: – ‘A’= Governor, ‘B’= Deputy Governor and ‘C’= Secretary to the State Government. At all time, the zone that produced the Secretary to the State Government shall produce the Speaker of the State House of Assembly, while the zone of the Deputy Governor will produce the Deputy Speaker. At the local government, there will be three political units, to rotate the executive and legislative positions, alphabetically - ‘A’= Chairman, ‘B’= Deputy Chairman, and ‘C’= Secretary to the Local Government. The positions of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the local government council shall rotate as in the case of the state. Councillorship shall routinely rotate among the distinct units that make up the political ward in the community. The nomenclature or head titles ascribed to each category may not necessarily follow the outline prescribed for the center; it can always vary without significant impact on the structure.

Ordinary rotation shall apply to the positions of Senator, Reps Member and Member of State Assembly, among the senatorial zones in the state, federal constituencies, and state constituencies. To complement the effective operation of the system, each state shall control its resources but shared 50:50, i.e. paying 50 percent of net profits as tax to the central treasury on all economic activities. The six zones and central government shall share all the revenues that accrued to the federal government in the ratio of 70:30; i.e. 70% to the zones and its affiliates and 30% to the center. Most responsibilities in the Exclusive Legislative List that fall within the administrative jurisdictions of the zones shall devolve to each state in the zone for implementation.

Nevertheless, regardless of the existing 36 states and 774 local government areas, the six zones in the country shall form the basis for sharing political positions, revenue and development projects, at the center. Each zone shall use the adopted formula across the other levels i.e., state, local government and wards, in descending order, to share its own appointments, revenue and development projects. The state and local government shall be autonomous within each of the six zones based on noninterference in the domestic affairs of each administrative hierarchy but develop a mechanism for checks and balances among those in positions of authority. The measures will promote egalitarianism, fairness in wealth creation and distribution, peaceful coexistence, devoid of destructive social strife and divisibility tendency. The template is apt for experimentation in a developing country like Nigeria.

Conclusions

The study x-rayed the conundrum of restructuring debates and the divisions it has brought to bear in the relationship among the different zones or ethnic groups in Nigeria. Besides the fact that both the elites and the masses across the divides share dissimilar opinions on what is meant by restructuring, there is common understanding that the federal system as presently practiced in Nigeria does not function well and needed to be reformed to address the nation’s challenges. However, the persistent indication of disagreements on the possible alternative shows lack of innovation on the part of governing elites, who propagate the culture of imitating or borrowing inappropriate system that refuses to address myriads of unusual problems confronting the country.

In many instances, there is apprehension that rather than Nigeria's governance getting better by each passing day, the country seems to degenerate on daily basis, with recurring incidences of agitation against marginalization, widespread ethnic and religious violence, insurgency, herders-farmers clashes, banditry, kidnapping, corruption, election fraud, abuse of power, government's insensitivity to public plights, and bad governance. Overall, it is despicable and regrettable that,

Poverty in Nigeria has assumed the moral character of war, and this is what you see reflected in much of the ethnic violence in this country, (Human Rights Watch Research Mission to Nigeria, 2006).

Nonetheless, there are lessons learnt from the various systems that Nigeria has practiced, starting from parliamentary, presidential, unitary, federal and military to diarchy. In other climes where the system originated, each evolved as a child of circumstance and in response to particular systemic challenges. Nigeria has practiced each form of the system, as dictated by the exigencies of imitating or borrowing culture and not borne out of necessity prompted by the nature of problems the country experience. Perhaps, none has proved apposite in Nigeria; even the much talked about parliamentary system, or does any qualify as befitting to deserve reintroducing or retaining further. The holistic approach proposed by this study is antidote to the menace of marginalization in every sphere of governance at all levels, and the same will limit further agitations for restructuring.

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