

Federalism and Separatist Agitations in Nigeria

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Edited by

Godwin Onu and Chukwuma Okoli

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PREFACE

This Volume is an assemblage of thoughts and perspectives that directly or indirectly bear on Nigeria's contemporary National Question. The National Question refers to a motley of issues pertaining to nationalism, sub-nationalism, and national-building. The National Question is crucial because it touches on a nation's unity, stability and sustainability.

Nigeria's National Question has evolved over time, reflecting substantively the dialectics of the country's embattled federalism. It has manifested at different times and in different parts of the country in a variety of ways, including the Biafran separatism in South East, the resource-control militancy in the Niger Delta, the Shari'ah crisis in North, the Oduduwa self-determination quest in South West, Boko Haram insurgency in North-eastern region, and the Banditry crisis in North-western and North-central regions.

Essentially, the Nigerian National Question has been, by and large, a federalist question. The imperative of fostering 'unity in diversity' formed the basis of Nigerian federalism. However, the non-sustainability of the envisioned equilibrium in the federalist experience has been the bane of national unity and integration in the country.

In effect, the practice of federalism in Nigeria over the years has met with more setbacks than sustainable progress. This has arisen principally from the gamut of centrifugal pressures which undermine and negate its functionality and sustainability. The persistent clamour for restructuring as well as the widespread separatist agitations in the country depicts a mortal expression of the crisis of federalism in Nigeria. It also adumbrates the apparent ineffectuality of the federalist system in that context.

In this volume, an attempt is made to reflect on the negative linkage between federalism and separatist agitations in Nigeria. This is against the backdrop of the prevailing waves of sub-nationalist tendencies in different parts of the country, including the threat of secession in the South East. It is expected that the various practical and theoretical insights shared in the volume would go a long way in repositioning the practice of federalism in Nigerian in the interest of unity and stability.

The book will come handy to the communities of scholars, policy-makers and practitioners who are involved in the earnest search for an answer to the federalist dimension of Nigeria's nagging National Question. Students and the general reading populace will also find the contents of the book quite insightful.

Prof Godwin Onu, PhD, Mni
Awka

Al Chukwuma Okoli, PhD
Lafia

January, 2024

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SITUATING FEDERALISM AND SUBNATIONALIST AGITATIONS IN NIGERIA

EDITORS

Federalism is a mechanism for intergovernmental relations whereby two or more levels of governments share powers, each wielding a jurisdiction within a sphere that is coordinate but also independent. Etymologically, the term ‘federalism’ derived originally from a Latin root word, *foedus*, which translates to agreement or covenant. According to Wheare (1964, p.10), federalism is the “method of dividing powers so that the general (central) and regional governments are, each within a sphere, coordinate and independent”. More elaborately, federalism has been defined as:

(A)n organizational principle of a political system, emphasizing both vertical power sharing across different levels of governance (centre-region) and, at the same time, the integration of the different territorial and socio-economic units, cultural and ethnic groups in one single polity. (McLean and McMillan, 2003, p.195)

The first salient marker of federalism is that it is a technique of intergovernmental relations. The relations can be vertical or horizontal. Vertical relations are to do with the interactions between the central and regional governments. Horizontal relations refer to the relationship between the various regional governments (federating units) within a federation. The relation is expected to be functionally mutual. More fundamentally, it should be one of coordination, and none of superordination or subordination (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2013).

The second vital marker of federalism is that it is a method of power sharing. The object of power sharing is not merely and wholly political; it is also economic. The former refers to the division of legislative powers between the centre and the regions, while the latter has to do with the distribution of economic resources and stakes. The economic dimension of the federalist question resonates with the notion of fiscal federalism (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2013). So, in practice, federalism makes it possible for two

or more levels of government to coexist, each with coordinate legislative competences over matters of public policy and finance.

The third important marker of federalism is that it is a constitution covenant enforceable by the collective will and ordinance of the parties to it. The understanding underlying the constitutional covenant is that the union being created is powerful enough to promote and sustain national unity, but also pragmatic enough to preserve local (regional) autonomy. Navigating and reconciling these two apparent teleological odds presents the naughtiest dilemma of federalism across the world (Othman, Osman and Mohammed, 2021).

The fourth marker of federalism is democracy. The politics of federalism is necessarily democratic. Similarly, the governance process of federalism is participatory and consociational, such that regional and national interests are nicely combined in a complex and dynamic web of checks and balances that ensure that every legitimate group interest is accommodated (McLean and McMillan, 2003). The process of federalist balancing with regard to vertical or horizontal power/ resource sharing, requires a significant level of democratization. In the same vein, the operation of the federal system requires a constitutional regime that mediates the various federalist interests, as well as moderates contestations arising therefrom. Such a constitutional regime needs some requisite democratic ethos in order to effectuate its end.

Federalism is a system of intergovernmental relations dedicated to a negotiated territorial union. A federated system is thus one whose constituents work together as an integrated entity, wherein the stakes, costs, burdens, benefits and challenges of governance are jointly shared by the parts. Federalism is not just a system of government. More than that, it is the mechanism for harnessing the powers of two or more levels of government into a common, coordinate political jurisdiction (cf. Wheare, 1964).

The essence of federalism is not merely to create “an extended republic with a strong central authority” (McLean and McMillan, 2003, p.196). Rather, the system is designed to serve as a framework for joint fiduciary aimed principally at furthering the efficiency of national governance, development and security (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2013). The teleological import of federalism lies in its potential to wield different sub-nationalities into a functional national union, with a view to fostering shared progress.

Federalism is a constitutional creation. It is mandated and mediated by a written constitution, which spells out the spheres and limits of legislative mandates of the constituents. The constitution also defines the bases and modalities of relations expected of the federating parties (Nwabueze, 1983). The functionality, or otherwise, of a federation is contingent upon its constitutional integrity and viability. Same is also true of its operational efficacy and sustainability. Hence, a federation built on an inappropriate or weak constitutional foundation can only work in abnegation of its very essence and core principle.

The principles of federalism include: autonomy, common purpose, interdependence, intergovernmental solidarity, democracy, constitutionalism, and non-subordination (Othman, Osman and Mohammed, 2021). These principles are not only essential but also indispensable to the practice of federalism. Although there is no universally agreed best model of federalism, and in spite of the fact that federalism is context-specific, the success, and indeed efficiency, of the practice depend largely on how the aforementioned cardinal principles are effectuated within an enabling politico-constitutional regime.

One of the crucial elements of the federalist practice is fiscal autonomy. This presupposes the ability of the federating units to wield and exercise proper jurisdiction with regard to their resource endowments and economic heritage (cf. Elazar, 1991). This requires that a federating unit should be in a position to determine how its economic potentials are harnessed and translated into productive enterprises that are profitable, taxable, and investable. Cardinal to this, are the issues of resource mobilization, allocation, utilization and management.

Although there is no such thing as ‘true federalism’, such a value-based, prescriptive phraseology suggests invariably that what is being practiced as federalism in some climes may, as well, have been a contradiction in terms. As it will be posited subsequently herewith, that has been the case with Nigeria’s federalist experience over the years. This is without any prejudice to the traditional avowals of federalist formalism and nominalism in the country by the successive political regimes and administrations.

In effect, federalism in Nigeria has been an arcane hodgepodge whose essence appears to be in contention with its end. Motivated principally by imperative of fostering ‘unity in diversity’, Nigerian federalism has, over the years, witnessed myriads of contradictions and crises that have not only negated its purpose but also threatened its existence. Curiously, the

practice has, so far, survived some mortal structural impediments, including a civil war and perennial episodes of military dictatorship (see Okpanachi and Garba, 2010).

The failure of the First Republic (1963-1966) in Nigeria dealt a fatal blow to the state and prospects of a functional federalism in the country. The various military administrations that ruled the country from 1966 to 1999 impeded the health of federalism by destroying the autonomy of the regions (federating units) in a systematic manner (Othman, Osman and Ibrahim, 2021). Through their centralist command policies, the military evolved and entrenched a unitarized federalist structure, composed of numerous small and weak states. They also crafted and bequeathed to the country a constitutional regime that is grossly incongruent with the tenets of federalism. For instance, the military-inspired constitution, among other things, concentrated the bulk of the salient legislative powers on the central government, leaving the states with residues of issues that are, by and large, less consequential.

Apart from its unitarist tendency, Nigerian federalism has been characterized by structural and fiscal imbalances (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2013). This is evidenced in the patterns of intergovernmental relations that exist thereof. For instance, the southern half of the country, irrespective of its sizeable contributions to the national patrimony, gains far less than her northern counterpart in terms of aggregate federal allocations. This outcome derives from the iniquitous distribution of states between the two sections of the country. The North has capitalized on this advantage to dominate and marginalize the South, with regard to political representations in national politics.

Part of the consequences of such lopsided federalist structure and relations is persistent federalist contestations which often evince the triumph of centrifugal over centripetal forces in the Nigerian federation (Ngare, 2012). The political elite exacerbate the existing primordial fault lines through identity politics and mobilizing. Ethnicity, religion, sectionalism, clannishness and other parochial cleavages are readily politicized and instrumentalized to advance particularistic interests that are essentially subjective. Consequently, there have been palpable fears and cries of domination and/ or marginalization by minority ethnic groups and indigenous peoples.

Over the years, segments of the country that felt excluded, marginalized or dominated within the framework of the Nigerian federalism have often

resorted to various forms of sub-nationalist agitations, geared towards either federalist restructuring or self-determination (cf. Osaghe, 1999). Such agitations have often culminated in an organized ethnic or sectionalist movement such as the Odu'a People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Sovereign State of the Ogoni People (MOSSOP), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), and the nascent Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Understanding the nuanced nexus between federalism and sub-nationalist agitations in Nigeria forms a critical facet of the country's contemporary national question problematique. This problematique, and a lot more, constitute the focal theme that resonates across the various chapters of the present book.

The chapter that comes next (Chapter Two) focuses on the prevailing perspectives and contending narratives on restructuring in Nigeria, with a view to understanding the object of the restructuring agitations and the way forward. Among other things, the chapter considers what needs to be restructured in the context of the contested federalist practice in the country.

Chapter Three engages the idea of rotational presidency against the backdrop of the imperative for consociational federalism and democracy in Nigeria. The chapter problematizes the principle of rotational presidency as a veritable mechanism for power sharing and ethno-sectionalist balancing in the country. X-raying the significance of rotational presidency vis-à-vis the practice of federalism and democracy, the chapter posits that such a principle ensures healthy federalist relations as well as promotes democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Chapter Four uses the instance of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria to demonstrate how a federal system responds to national emergency. In order to appreciate the efficiency and effectiveness with which the federal government of Nigeria has responded to and managed the pandemic, the paper examines the prevention and curtailment framework deployed by the authorities in mitigating the pandemic.

Chapter Five deals with the subject of democracy versus democratic dividends in Nigeria. The emphasis is on how the practice of democracy in the country has failed to bring forth the needed dividends to the citizenry. The chapter argues that the inability of democracy to deliver expected benefits poses danger to democratic consolidation. The chapter rendered

sundry recommendations towards the consolidation of democratic tradition in Nigeria.

Chapter Six explores the intertwined phenomena of state failure and separatist agitation in Nigeria, a nation marked by its ethnic diversity and historical complexities. The chapter underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to mitigate state failure and manage separatist aspirations in Nigeria, ensuring long-term peace and stability.

Chapter Seven offers a comparative analysis of fiscal federalism and fiscal autonomy of sub-national governments in five selected federal economies. Using a statistical method that measures aspects of fiscal decentralization as coefficients of vertical imbalance and fiscal (de)centralization indicators, the chapter submits that the long-standing fiscal dominance by the federal or central government in most developing federal economies needs to be revisited and reversed.

Chapter Eight dwells on an important issue in Nigeria's national defence and security. It explores the prospects of mobilizing the potentials of defence attaché system (DAS) for national security efficiency cum effectiveness in Nigeria. The purpose of the chapter is to underscore the potentials of defence attaché system in enhancing the efficacy of national security in Nigeria. Among other things, the chapter highlights the necessity for DAS in Nigeria's national security planning and administration.

Chapter Nine considers the nexus between fashion and national politics in Nigeria. It does so against the backdrop of the increasing saliency of fashion as an instrument of cultural expression in the context of identity politics. The chapter examines, among others issues, how the members of a group (say out-group) seek to gain access into another group (in-group) through fashion and political dressing.

Chapter Ten is an exposé on the dialectics of post-Civil War secessionism and their implication for the sustainability of Nigerian federalism. Considering the nascent upswing in neo-Biafra separatism in Igboland, the chapter posits that such a movement is a reaction to the structural marginalization of the Igbo people within the context of Nigeria's lopsided federalist system. The chapter recommends the need for economic and political restructuring in order to make for equity, peaceful co-existence and stability in Nigeria's contested federation.

Chapter Eleven recapitulates the volume by way of conclusion and a submission apropos of the challenge of transcending the crisis of federalism

in Nigeria against the backdrop of the rising threat of hyper-centrifugalism in that context. On the whole, the present volume is an attempt to reflect on aspects of Nigeria's contemporary federalist question, with reference to the nagging issue of restructuring, and others. Although the various chapters in the volume cannot be said to nicely constitute a thematic unity, each of the chapters offers some useful insights into the dialectical discourse on Nigerian federalism in the era of rising unrests and agitations that confront the practice. If the chapters succeed, in any measure, in adding to the prevailing episteme by illuminating the current discourse as well as stimulating future interrogation around the subject matter, then the purpose of the book would have been reasonably accomplished.

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CHAPTER TWO

FEDERALISM AND THE RENEWED CLAMOUR FOR RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA

BORIS HAPPY ODALONU

Introduction

The issue of restructuring is not new in Nigeria. Right from 1960 when Nigeria gained independence from Britain, there has been one form of restructuring or another. For instance, in 1960, Nigeria had only three regional structures. In 1963, another region was created, making Nigeria four regions. In 1967, these four regions were Balkanized into a 12-state structure. Since then, there have been agitations for the creation of more states. Hence, in 1976, the states were expanded to 19 with the creation of seven additional states. The states were further expanded to 21 in 1987 with the addition of two new states, and to 30 states in 1991 with the creation of nine additional states. Lastly, in 1996, the states were further expanded to 36 with creation of six more states. The more states that were created, the more local government areas that were also created. Currently, there are 36 states and 774 local government areas in Nigeria. Thus, the agitations for restructuring continue to be on course up to the 1990s when more states were created, to arrive at the present 36 states (Mohammed and Sulaiman, 2018).

After sixty years of Nigeria's independence, there are still strong and persistent agitations by some interest groups in the polity, demanding for the immediate restructuring of the existing political arrangement. Their agitations are coming on the heels of the Nigerian federalism that has totally assumed the attributes of a unitary system of government. Pundits have also agreed with the above line of thought, describing the federalism in practice as proxy unitary because Nigeria, being a federalist state, is in character with a unitary system (Ikemitang, 2017). Thus, Nigeria operates a federal system of government, but in reality, the country is actually practicing a unitary system of government (Olakunle, 2017). For instance,

in the legislative list of jurisdictions, 68 items are exclusively reserved for the federal government, to the detriment of the federating units, which are the states and local government areas.

The military administration imposed a unitary system of government in Nigeria in 1966 when the military took over political power through a coup. Due to the hierarchical command nature of the military administration, since the military involvement in politics, Nigeria's federalism has been operated essentially as a unitary system where the central government dominates other levels of government. Since then, Nigeria's federalism has been over-centralized. This has necessitated the reoccurring clamour for restructuring. Currently, restructuring is a topical issue that is making news headlines in Nigeria. Presently, there are so many advocates of restructuring. The restructuring debate has divided the Nigerian political elite into different groups (Niworu, 2018). There are those advocating for devolution of powers to the component units. There are those agitating for creation of more states. There are those advocating for Nigeria to revert to the 1963 regional political structure. There also those advocating for self-determination and separation from Nigeria. Indeed, there are contending views regarding the on-going restructuring debate. However, most of them have divergent views on what should be restructured, while some of them don't even know what restructuring is all about.

Therefore, this chapter explores perspectives on the ongoing agitations for restructuring in Nigeria, with a view to situating the substance and significance of the agitations and the way forward. The chapter consists of seven sections. Section one provides a general introduction of the chapter. Section two focuses on the conceptual discourse of federalism and restructuring. Section three discusses the Nigerian political structure: origin and structure of the Nigerian federalism. Section four examines the reasons and perspectives for the current clamour for the restructuring of Nigeria. Section five explores the need for the political restructuring of the Nigerian state. Section six dwells on the prospects of political restructuring, while section seven concludes the chapter.

Conceptual Discourse

a. Federalism: There are divergent views in conceptualizing the term "federalism". However, etymologically, the term "federalism" is derived from the latin word "*foedu*", which means covenant, agreement, alliance, association, treaty or union. This signifies that it is a marriage or

partnership of persons or groups with the consent to unite for common purposes, without giving up their fundamental rights or identity (Aghedo and Osumah, 2009; Ogunnoiki, 2017). It is most commonly employed to denote an organizational principle of a political system emphasizing power-sharing across different levels of government, such as centre/federal and regions/states, or even local governments, as the case may be; and at the same time, the integration of different territorial and socio-economic units, cultural and ethnic groups in one polity (Ita, Ebong and Inimo-Etele, 2019).

A foremost authority on federalism, widely regarded as the doyen of federalism, K. C. Wheare, defined federalism as a method of dividing powers so that the central and regional governments are each, within a sphere, coordinate and independent. He further noted that each government should be limited to its own sphere and, within that sphere, should be independent of the other (Wheare, 1963). Wheare also set out conditions that can make a federal system succeed. According to him, the component units must be fairly equal in size and population so as to prevent one unit from dominating the other, or a combination of two or more units from dominating the entire federation. However, K.C. Wheare's view of federalism seems to have placed more emphasis on the institutional criteria in his definition, a position which other scholars have criticized as being too legalistic because it has neglected other cultural factors that help define some federal states.

According to Appadorai (1975), a federal state is one in which there is a central authority that represents the whole and acts on behalf of the whole in external affairs and on such internal affairs as are held to be of common interest and in which there are also provincial or state authorities with powers of legislation and administration within the sphere allotted to them by the constitution. A state is therefore regarded as federal when there exists more than one level of government and each level having its own constitutionally proscribed powers and responsibilities (Avbuere, 2019). To Bin (2011), a federation, also known as a federal state, is a type of sovereign state characterized by a union of partially self-governing states; the union is typically constitutionally entrenched and may not be altered by a unilateral decision of the central government. The form of government or constitutional structure found in a federation is known as federalism.

From the foregoing, federalism can be simply referred to as a form of political arrangement characterized by division of political powers in the

state between the central government and other component units. Federalism has to do with distribution or sharing of powers among the various units in a federation. These units could be two levels of government such as the central and regional governments, or three levels of government in the case of Nigeria that comprises the federal, state and local governments. Examples of some of the countries practicing a federal system of government include; U.S.A, Canada, India, Switzerland, Brazil, Russia, Australia, Mexico, etc.

It should be noted that all over the world, there is no distinctively federal pattern of relations between the national and regional levels of government. In other words, there are no two federations that are structurally alike, since the nature of communities that come together to form a federation differs. However, there are some basic features of an ideal federation, which are as follows:

- i. **Division of Powers:** There is constitutional division of powers between the central government and the component units (regions, provinces, states, local governments). Both levels of government have their separate powers and responsibilities.
- ii. **Supremacy of the Constitution:** The constitution is regarded as the supreme law of the land. No law can be made which will go against the authority of the constitution, and all the arms and levels of government derive their powers from the constitution. The constitution allocates powers and functions to each level of government.
- iii. **Written and Rigid Constitution:** The constitution is always written and rigid and therefore cannot be easily and simply be amended at will by either the central government or the component states. The method of amendment is contained in the constitution and it often involves a cumbersome process.
- iv. **Supreme Court:** There always exists the Supreme Court in a federation that interprets the constitution and adjudicates cases between the levels of government. In case of any disagreement or ambiguity on the contents of the constitution, the judiciary is the final arbiter.
- v. **Bicameral legislation:** There are usually two chambers of the legislature in a federation. A bicameral legislature is one in which the law-making body is made up of two legislative chambers; for example, in Nigeria, there are the Senate and the House of Representatives.

b. Political Restructuring

There are varied perspectives on what restructuring or political restructuring is all about. However, to restructure entails changing the way that an organization or a system is organized in order to make it work more effectively and efficiently (Ita, Ebong and Inimo-Etele, 2019). Simply put, Bello (2017: 10) defined the term restructuring as “the process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts that makes up a system and re-defining the inter-relationship between them in such a way that the entire system performs more efficiently”. According to (Dimeji (2017), restructuring in the context of a nation requires redefining the relationship between the people and the government, including taking another look at the structures and systems of governance as encapsulated in the constitution. Restructuring has political, social, economic, administrative, geographical, structural and institutional dimensions. However, the focus of this chapter is political restructuring.

b. Restructuring

Restructuring may be necessitated when there are fundamental flaws in the structural arrangement of a political system. That is, when power and authority configuration of a country is visibly lopsided in favour of the central government to the detriment of the component units (Avbuere, 2019). Kolhi (1996), cited in Olu-Adeyemi (2017), considers political restructuring as the fallout of the desires of how to create effective political institutions that can both accommodate diverse interests and provide effective government. Succinctly, Ikemitang (2017) refers to political restructuring as an arrangement whereby a decision on public policy issues is shifted from one level or tier of government to another. It connotes the devolution of powers on the federating units. It also presupposes fiscal federalism or resource control, whereby states are allowed some measure of control over the resources in their domains and contribute a percentage to the government at the centre. Similarly, Adeosun, Ismail and Zengeni, (2017) see political restructuring as both political re-configuration of the country and devolution of powers to the constituent units as it is practiced in other climes. It involves ownership, control and management of mineral resources located in a state by the state and power to establish its own police as against the present system where the police are under federal control.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that when political power is not adequately devolved among the federating units in a federation, there will

always be agitations for restructuring. Therefore, restructuring in the context of Nigeria is regarded as a consistent call and move for the political reorganisation of Nigeria's federal structure, the system of government as well as other aspects desired for a constitutional amendment (Abbas and Wakili, 2018). In other words, it is the decentralization of political power in the country to ensure political balance among the levels of government and or among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. Therefore, the on-going clamour for political restructuring in Nigeria is intended to achieve an objective aimed at reducing the powers of the center, thereby encouraging the component units through the constitutional provisions on their role as partners in progress. It will serve as a steering mechanism to properly give focus and locus to attempts of collective identity and distributive politics (Abada, Okafor and Omeh, 2020).

Origin and Structure of Nigerian Federalism

The Nigerian state came into being on 1st January, 1914 when the former Colonial Governor General, Lord Lugard, amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates for administrative convenience. The country was more or less run as unitary colony with twenty-four provinces (12 in the North and 12 in the South), until the establishment of the federal order via the Richards constitution of 1946 (Okadigbo, 1987). Thus, the Richards constitution introduced the concept of regionalism into the Nigerian state.

However, in actual practice, Nigeria formally became a federation in 1954 through the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954. It was the Lyttleton Constitution which came into effect on 1st October, 1954 that introduced real structure of federalism in Nigeria. The constitution specified and guaranteed the sharing of power between the central and the regional governments. The constitution entrenched the Exclusive and Concurrent list of powers by giving out details on issues which were exclusive to only one level and those on which both could legislate (Oyeneye, 2001; Mohammed & Sulaiman, 2018). This was followed the Independence Constitution of 1960 which further incorporated the federal structure earlier established by the Lyttleton Constitution. On August 9, 1963, Nigeria was further divided into four regions by the creation of the Mid-Western region (Aghedo and Oarhe, 2009; Mohammed and Sulaiman, 2018).

The first military coup that took place on January 15th, 1966 brought General Aguiyi Ironsi to power, as the military Head of State. Thereafter, General Aguiyi Ironsi introduced/imposed a unitary state structure via Decree No.34, otherwise known as the unification decree on 30th, May

1966, which abolished the regions and unified the public services (Auwalu and Ndaliman, 2014; Mohammed and Sulaiman, 2018). However, General Ironsi was overthrown on July 29, 1966 and General Gowon became the next Military Head of State. Thereafter, General Gowon promulgated a decree abolishing the unification decree of General Aguiyi Ironsi, created 12 states out of the four regions on May 27, 1967, in order to forestall the secession of the East as Republic of Biafra and restored Nigeria to a federal system of government. However, it should be noted that General Gowon returned the Nigerian state to a federal structure but with a stronger center (Auwalu and Ndaliman, 2014).

On February 3rd, 1976, additional seven states were created by General Murtala Muhammed, making Nigeria a 19-state federation in which local governments were constitutionally recognized as the third tier of government. Thus, Nigeria became a three-tier federation in 1976 and this was enshrined in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. On September 23, 1987, the Military Head of State, General Babangida created additional two states, making Nigeria a federation of 21 states. Also, on August 27, 1991, General Babangida created additional 9 states, making the country a 30-state federation. On October 1, 1996, General Abacha created additional 6 states, bringing the federation to 36 states. It should be noted that the creation of more states led to the creation of more local government areas. At present, the federation of Nigeria is made up of the federal government, state governments of 36 states and 774 local governments, including the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Thus, since 1914 to date, the structure of the Nigerian federalism has dramatically transformed from the level of provinces and regions to the current structure of 36 states and 774 local government areas, as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Auwalu and Ndaliman, 2014).

Currently, the Nigerian federal structure has the semblance of a federal state by the fact that it is composed of three levels of government: the federal government, 36 states and 774 local government councils, with their constitutionally assigned powers and responsibilities. However, in actual practice, the Nigerian system operates more or less like a unitary system because of the enormous powers the constitution confers on the federal government (Osisu, 2015). Apparently, Nigeria operates a federal system government, but in reality, the country is actually practicing a unitary system of government (Olakunle, 2017). For instance, in the legislative list of jurisdiction, 68 items are exclusively reserved for the federal government to the detriment of the federating units - the states and local government areas.

Drawing from the above, Nigeria's federalism is over-centralized in terms of the area of sharing of functions and resources available in the country between the central government and the component units, on the one hand, and between the government and citizens, on the other hand (Ajagun, 2004). There has been a gradual increase in the powers and functions of the centre and a corresponding erosion of powers and functions at the state level. This has led to the continuous clamour for restructuring in Nigeria.

The Substance and Significance of the current Clamour for Restructuring Nigeria

The agitations for restructuring have increased momentum in recent times. Consequently, there are myriads of perceptions and arguments for the current agitations for restructuring Nigeria. However, most of those who subscribe to restructuring have divergent views on what should be restructured, while some of them don't know what restructuring is all about. Notably, most of the advocates of restructuring are from the southern part of Nigeria. This may be as a result perceived marginalization and imbalance in the distribution of resources and or imbalance in the federal structure as currently constituted (Niworu, 2018).

Even within the southern part of Nigeria, some sections want the country balkanised on the grounds that the situation in the country today is so bad that it has gone beyond restructuring. For instance, based on the current situation of the country, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) wants the Igbo to exit the Nigerian state. There is a clamour for Oduduwa Republic by those who say the Yoruba need to be rescued from the shackles of the federation. The Niger Delta region, where the oil money comes from, has been fighting for resource control and some of its groups want out of the federation. It would appear that only the core north is not intensely agitating against the union, at least for now (Kolawole, 2020). The Northern political elite have been silent over the issue of restructuring. Their silence is occasioned by the oil wells they primitively acquired in the southern part of the country (Niworu, 2018). From all indications, the North reject the current clamour for restructuring, as the current system favours them (Adebanjo, 2020).

One of the leading voices challenging the current political structure is Muhammdu Buhari's running mate in the 2011 election, Tunde Bakare. Bakare emphasized that the time has come for decentralization to improve regional capabilities and increase local abilities to generate revenues.

Currently, Nigeria's centralization of political power distorts its political economy by encouraging redistribution instead of productivity. By themselves, most of the constituent parts of the country are not economically viable. Nearly 70 per cent of Nigeria's state revenue comes from an oil-rich region about the size of Ireland (Ola-David, 2018). According to Olu-Adeyemi (2017, p. 43), the intention of the restructuring currently clamoured for in Nigeria is:

The reorganization or rearrangement of the constitutional, operational, fiscal, functional, structural, attitudinal, resource management and the other national-question concerns of the ethnic nationalities that constitute Nigeria for the purpose of making Nigeria to be more efficient, more acceptable, more productive, more functional and above all, more equitable. This restructuring is expected to devolve powers from the central to the constituent units, respect resource control, structurally balance the number of states per region, allow for State Police, encourage comparative advantage of natural endowments and among other things, allow the government at the center and each constituent units to function as co-ordinate and independent entities. (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017, p. 43)

What is salient about the current pro-restructuring agitations in Nigeria that the current political structure of the country needs to be changed. This is because the current political structure of the country can no longer serve the purpose of encouraging unity in diversity in Nigeria (Abah & Nwokwu, 2017). Again, given the present economic realities, the hitherto political thermostat of the nation is not only weak, but lacks the propelling force to regulate the political temperature of the country. Nigeria, as it stands currently, is not working, and cannot experience development unless a fundamental political restructuring is first addressed (Ikemitang, 2017).

However, on the contrary, those that are averse to the restructuring idea have equally posited that Nigeria has since the First Republic, undergone series of restructuring journeys without commensurate progress. Besides, the country has also failed to consolidate on the gains of restructuring and or making a conscious effort to improve on the challenges. Therefore, they opined that those clamouring for restructuring are, perhaps, looking for avenues to position themselves for relevance and wait for the opportunity to milk the country dry (Ikemitang, 2017). The North is opposed to restructuring of Nigeria because there is nothing to restructure (Nuhu, 2016). In the same vein, Yakassai (2016), one the Northern elite, argued that those who call for restructuring in Nigeria today are doing so with some kind of hate in their minds against the North. For them, the

proponents of restructuring are trying to find a way of denying states from the North the opportunity of getting the kind of shares they are receiving from the federation account

From these opposing stands of restructuring, the clamour for restructuring might, in the short term, trigger upheaval, upset entrenched power arrangements, and exacerbate existing tensions in the Nigerian polity. However, in the long-run, political restructuring would be beneficial for both the northern and southern parts of Nigeria (Ola-David, 2018).

The Need for Restructuring in Nigeria

There is no doubt that the current political structure of the country, in which the federal government wields overriding political powers to the disadvantage of the federating units, is not healthy for national development and peaceful coexistence. The country should therefore be restructured in such a way that there will be an equitable distribution of political power and resources among the different federating units (Ede & Chiaghanam, 2018). According to Abah and Nwoku (2017), the kind of restructuring that can reduce to the barest minimum the high level of agitations and protests in the country is that which is based on devolution of more powers and resources to the constituent states.

Drawing from the perceptions of the advocates of restructuring, a lot of issues need to be addressed in the Nigerian polity. Some of these issues that need to be restructured include:

- a. **Resource Control:** Resource control in Nigeria has been concentrated to an exclusive reserve by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The federal government is in charge of all the mineral resources in Nigeria. The undue control by the federal government over the mineral resources is oppressive because it is being exercised without due regard to the requirements of justice, fairness and equity among the federating units. It negates the principle of true and fiscal federalism. Thus re-structuring, as it is presently being demanded, seeks to revert our federal system to the true federalism where the federating units have access to and control over the resources in their domains (Nwabueze, 2017).
- b. **Security Challenges:** Federating units in all federal states in the world have their coercive agencies to maintain and enforce law. In Nigeria, the state government does not have control over coercive force to maintain and enforce laws in its domain. Therefore, the

federating units in Nigeria need to have their separate and independent police force to conform to the requirements of federalism (Nwabueze, 2017).

- c. **Structural Imbalance:** There are six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, namely: South-East, South-West, South-South, North-Central, North-East and North-West. Out of these zones, only the South East has 5 states. The North-West has 7 states, while the other zones have 6 states each. Therefore, there is the need to ensure that the zones have equal number of states. Again, there is also the need to balance the skewed nature of local government areas across the zones. For instance, Lagos and Kano states were created in 1967, and later in 1991, Jigawa State was carved out of Kano. No state has been carved out of Lagos, yet Kano has 44, while Jigawa has 27 Local Government Areas. Put together, Jigawa and Kano now have 71 Local Government Areas, while Lagos still has 20 Local Government Areas.
- d. **Over-Centralization of Power:** The Nigerian state is a federation, but her governmental structures and operations are tilted towards the unitary form of government. Governmental structures and powers are highly centralized. For instance, the powers and functions of each level of government are clearly spelt out in part 1 of the second schedule of the 1999 constitution, the exclusive legislative list contains sixtyeight items, instead of eight that it should. Likewise, the concurrent list, detailing responsibilities shared by the government at the center and the federating units, has thirty items; fifteen of them are similar to those contained in the exclusive list which include, but not limited to, education, agriculture, information, etc, (Abada, Okafor and Omeh, 2020). Thus, there should be devolution of powers. At least 50% of the items on the exclusive list should be moved to the concurrent list that will enable both the states and the federal government to legislate on them.
- e. **A New Constitution:** The Nigerian Constitution, upon which Nigeria's democracy is based, was bequeathed to the nation by the past military regimes that were headed and dominated by Northern Muslim military officers. The constitution was drafted to favour the northern section of the country to the detriment of other sections. Hence, the constitution is full of defects and needs to be entirely repackaged. For instance, Nigeria is a secular state but Sharia Law and the political autonomy to establish a Sharia Court of Appeal in northern states with civil jurisdiction were enshrined in the

constitution, thereby violating the basic secularity or religious neutrality of the federal government (Agbiboa, 2015). There is no point in reviewing, amending or revising the 1999 Constitution that was imposed on Nigerians by the military.

The Prospects of Political Restructuring

Any further attempts to turn deaf ears to peace moves at restructuring the nation in terms of devolution of more economic powers to the federating states will not augur well for the continued peaceful co-existence of Nigeria (Olakunle, 2017). Restructuring will no doubt make the country more stable politically and bring more economic progress. A properly structured Nigeria will encourage hard work and competition among the federating units, thereby allowing each unit to develop at its own pace (Ede and Chiaghanam, 2018).

Nigeria's federalism, as it exists today, encourages parasitism, dependency and laziness. It encourages injustice, corruption and marginalization, and is not only antithetical to growth and development, but also breeds needless tensions (Ita, Ebong and Inimo-Etele, 2019). Therefore, the restructuring of the Nigerian state, with regard to its federal practice, is long overdue and inevitable. The present structure is a pointer to the tension at the heart of the agitations by many right-thinking Nigerians calling for a restructuring and a renewal of the federation to make it less centralized, less suffocating and less dictatorial in the affairs of the country's constituent units and localities (Abubakar, 2018). As stated by Ita, Ebong and Inimo-Etele (2019; 14), restructuring the Nigerian federalism is imperative and this would bring the following benefits to the Nigerian polity:

- (i) **Promotion of National Integration and Stability:** Restructuring will bring about cohesion among the people, which will in turn foster stability and unity among Nigerian citizens. Integration is very important in nation building, as it examines the problem of diversity and inter-ethnic rivalry and breeds peace and unity among people.
- (ii) **Fairness among Ethnic Groups:** Restructuring will bring about fairness and justice among ethnic groups, which will in turn eliminate the issue of favouritism in Nigeria. A good example of this is the government of the late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua that was able to solve the Niger Delta issues.

- (iii) **Economic Stability:** Federalism, if properly practiced, will bring about economic stability in Nigeria. The idea behind the creation of federalism in Nigeria was to bring about economic development and establish an effective administration. Therefore, restructuring will bring about stability in the economy, and would eliminate any form of crisis which could emanate from ethnic rivalry. Each region would be forced to manage its resources more prudently and judiciously, giving little or no room for wasteful spending.
- (iv) **Political Stability:** The motive behind restructuring is to promote unity and to bring the government closer to the people. Federalism was borne out of the idea of peaceful coexistence among citizens where government is brought closer to the people, and there is stability and cohesion in order to promote national integration.
- (v) **Eliminate the Problem of Uneven Distribution of Government Allocation:** Restructuring Nigeria's political structure will address the problem of uneven distribution of budgeting allocation by the federal government by ensuring that allocation of revenues to different regions is not politicized. A restructured Nigeria will be a Nigeria in which the central government will no longer be able to automatically pull funds un-evenly from different parts of Nigeria, while re-distributing the same funds unfairly and inequitably (at the expense of the larger contributors) among the various states and local governments - regardless of the quality of policy choices and good governance efforts by state and local government leaders.

Conclusion

Observably, the federating units (states and local governments) in Nigeria are subordinate to the federal government, instead of being independent and coordinate. It is obvious from the preceding sections of this chapter that the Nigerian federalism is faced with a myriad of problems which have precipitated the clamour and agitations for political restructuring (Ita, Ebong and Inimo-Etele, 2019).

Without doubt, most of those agitating for restructuring are not calling for secession or break up of the country. Rather, they are asking for the operation of ideal federalism where powers are evenly distributed among the levels of government. In other words, they are demanding for devolution of powers, especially political and economic powers, among the federating states so that the component units in the Federal Republic of