

Ethno-Religious Sentiments and the Need for Restructuring in Nigeria

Nduka Udeagha

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies,
University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria.

Grace Nwamah

Department of Religious Studies,
Imo State University Owerri, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Ethno-religious sentiments in Nigeria have remained incapacitating threats to peace, security and the avowed resolve of the state to exist as one indissoluble nation. Nigeria as a heterogeneous and pluralistic state is divided along ethnic and religious lines. Some people who champion conservative elements adopt ethno-religious considerations as persuasive socio-political opium. They vigorously embrace and endorse nepotistic proclivities which tend to polarize the Nigerian state and make governance, development, and unity of purpose appallingly problematic. Recurring mistrusts and prejudices between ethnic nationalities and faiths have stunted growth and stifled development in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As its methodology to investigating ethno-religious sentiments in Nigeria and the need for restructuring, the study relies on content analysis. What is basically and structurally affecting the entity is the incongruousness of her diverse ethno-religious constituents. There is need for structural and mindset adjustments that will result in healthy competitiveness and expectedly, harness the diverse potentials and usher a new era of socio-economic development. The paper surmises that restructuring is imperative in Nigeria because it will help to cushion the palpable effects of ethno-religious sentiments that have remained the bane of a corporate Nigeria and national development.

Keywords: Ethno-religious, Sentiment, Restructuring, National development.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates of the peoples, which facilitated the incorporation of heterogeneous ethno-religious groups under one nation known as Nigeria, the pre-Nigerian society had been existing as tribal entities with their diverse religious, cultural and political structures. Thus, as a nation, Nigeria came into existence by British fiat in 1914, following the amalgamation of different autonomous political entities by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard. Since that historic merger event, the existence of Nigeria as a corporate and indissoluble nation has remained a teething concern. The constituent members especially, the nationalists felt that the long overdue

colonial rule has impeded the expected growth and development of the nation. The wave of change seriously moved to the direction of a sovereign state of Nigeria. After some time, Nigeria agitated for self-rule, which culminated in the independence event.

When Nigeria gained her independence in 1960, it was thought that as a sovereign state, they would be able to harness their wealth of plurality and heterogeneous bequests into a multihued of sustainable development and a nation bound in peaceful coexistence and unity of purpose. Rather, it turned out to be the novel genesis of the cauldron that has boiled over the years. Year after year, it appears to be an ill-fated marriage of strange bed fellows, as Nigerians exhibit undiluted parochial leanings and interests that are often indicative of the wide gulflines of ethno-religious sentiments. The self-rule instead of taking the nation to enviable developmental heights, glaringly brought to the fore, the nadir of ethno-religious sentiments among the constituent members.

About six year into the era of self-rule, the military came into the fray and ferociously seized power on 15th January 1966 [1]. They promised to make Nigeria a better society. But military interregnum, which was marked with coup d'état and counter coup, distorted the established federalism that tacitly underlined decentralization of power. More than ever before, this generated disparity in the federalism structure of Nigeria and widened the lines of ethno-religious differences. In fact, the military incursion became so unbearable that it birthed the agitation for separation along ethno-religious lines.

Agitation for separation first became a disturbing issue in 1966 through the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), formed and led by Isaac Adaka Boro. On February 23, 1966 the NDVF attempted secession from Nigeria through the declaration of the Niger Delta Republic. However, the secession could only last for 12 days as the 160 men including their leader Adaka Boro, fought against the Nigerian forces but were roundly overpowered by the federal armed forces. The secession bid was scuttled [2]. Not quite long the Niger Delta bid for secession was scuttled; Nigeria was again plunged into a calamitous bloody pool of magnitude proportions, when Odumegwu Ojukwu, declared the Republic of Biafra in an attempt to allow the easterners to go their own separate way. This resulted in the Nigerian/Biafran civil war that claimed the lives of over three million Nigerians and the nation has not fully recovered from the war. They were also stopped with a "no victor no vanquished" assuasive declaration by the federal military government headed by Yakubu Gowon.

From time to time, various ethnic nationalities have threatened to go their separate ways. That there are separatist agitations from every bloc of the nation underlines the fact that the structure of Nigeria is fundamentally defective and needs restructuring. Different ethnic nationalities are yet to admit the long-unfolded veracity of one nation as the member constituents are still heavy with spleen of a false nation. Accordingly, Adibe [3] observes that there has been increasing agitations for the independence of the Republic of Biafra, mostly by Igbo groups from the eastern part of the country. Among the Yoruba, echoes of separatism come from the call for Oduduwa Republic and to those of them who still want to decide the continuity of the federating units, they call for Sovereign National Conference. In the North are intermittent demands for Arewa Republic. In the Niger Delta is the demand for Niger Delta Republic, this also manifests in the form of call for "resource control". What all these agitations point to is that there is a fundamental problem in the foundational and/or governmental structure of the nation. To that effect, the whole constituent members have a sense

of being marginalized. This has therefore, formed a bulk of national question which answers have been sought from different quarters and sources.

The scourge of ethno-religious sentiments has continued to pose ominous challenges to the Nigerian state. For so many years, Nigeria has been seeking for answers to the national question. It is in this light that Kukah [4] observes that there have been scores of conferences, experimentation with different concepts, political classes and civil society often touting them as the solutions to the unending problems, including; Power-shift, Sovereign National Conference, Rotation, and the current change mantra of the present All Progressive Congress (APC) government. Nigeria has adopted numerous policies and employed several strategies to solve her social, economic and political problems. Obviously, Nigeria has come a long way, but appears to be nowhere near finding the magic wand for the perennial national issue. This has therefore, given rise to many thoughts on how to manage Nigeria. One of the smoldering subjects in Nigerian polity is the theme of restructuring. Hence every part of the nation always resorts to threats of separation as a bargaining chip or means of registering their frustration in the one Nigerian project. It is therefore, needful to take another look at the current structural components of the nation and have some adjustments. It is against this background that the study examines elements of religious-sentiments and the need for structural adjustments that will culminate in healthy competitiveness and expectedly, harness the diverse potentials and usher a new era of socio-economic development.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

Ethno

Ethno in English language usually appears in a combining form. Ethno is always combined with another area of study, hence the combination of ethno-religious in this study. Ethno-religious is a compound word that embodies and emphasizes ethnic and religious elements. Ethno here stands for ethnic or ethnicity. According to Clements [5] ethnic is derived ultimately from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning nation or people. Ethnicity is the quality of an ethnic. It has to do with an individual's racial, cultural, linguistic, or religious background. Ethnicity in Nigeria is the ancestral race or tribal origin a person belongs to. It is also the state of belonging to a socio-tribal group marked by common traditional and cultural heritage. Nigeria as a heterogeneous society is home to multiethnic groups, from the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba, which are the major ethnic groups, to the very small indigenous groups, like the Bambuko in Taraba, Ekajuk in Cross River, Kantana in Plateau or Manchok in Kaduna.

However, four major common identities of these ethnic groups in the contemporary Nigerian society are that they are defined by a shared history, language, cultural heritage and virtually the same religion. These common features are deeply rooted in the distinctive experiences of different ethnic groups. In this study therefore, ethno, ethnic and ethnicity are used interchangeably.

Religious

As an adjective, religious has to do with religion. It is of pertaining to or concerned with religion. Religion itself is a concept with many variables and meanings. This means that it has no fixed exclusive meaning. Like other primordial identities, religion as a term is difficult to define satisfactorily. There are so many religions in the world with different origins, tenets and mode of practices, and as such there is hardly any single definition that can stand as authoritative. The form of a religion can also change from time to time. But that will not deter individuals from attempting

the definition as suitable to their society or study. According to Trimble [6], the word religion comes from Latin, while there are a few different translations, the most prevalent root is the Latin word "Re-Ligare". "Ligare" means to bind or to "connect". Therefore, in this paper, religion is seen as a system of beliefs and practices that connects man or characterizes the relationship with the Supreme Being and other supernatural beings and elements. Among other religions that are in the minority, there are three main religions in Nigeria; African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity.

The various ethnic groups in Nigeria have their indigenous religious belief systems, prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity which are imported Abrahamic religions. However, majority of Nigerians have embraced Islam and Christianity that are militant in nature. Scholars are in consensus that the introduction and presence of these two foreign religions brought about intolerance, negative sentiments and violence [7-10]. Islam and Christianity are the bane of ethno-religious sentiments in Nigeria.

Restructuring

One boldly highlighted and recurrent word in the contemporary political lexicon of Nigeria is 'restructuring'. Restructuring has become a hit song in the mouths of many Nigerians who chant for a reformed Nigeria. Yaqub [11] remarks that the first time the words with such prefixes as "Re" came into national consciousness was after the civil war which lasted between 1967 and 1970. The military administration of Yakubu Gowon coined the famous three "Re's," which are: "Reconciliation," "Re-construction," and "Re-habilitation" in order to demonstrate the regime's determination and commitment to the events that will help in cushioning the gruesome and devastating effects of the civil war, particularly on the war-torn erstwhile Eastern Region. According to Uwalaka [12]:

Restructuring is a constitution review strategy aimed at bringing government as closely as possible to the people at the grassroots.... The whole idea of restructuring is to achieve unity of objective, efficiency and effectiveness by creating and locating our significant political, economic, social, technological, educational and legal units as near as possible to the people at the grassroots (para. 1).

The quests to solve the perennial dilemma of Nigerian unity and development have become so exigent that a lot of hypothesis and suggestions have been put forward as possible ways out. However, restructuring is examined in this study as it appears to be closer to the ideal solution as it bids to address the basic challenges.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS IN NIGERIA

Ethno-religious conundrum is a thorny concern in Nigeria. Nigerians are so entwined with religion that they can hardly afford to dispense with it. Religion is instinctively inevitable aspect of life in Nigeria. It is a commonplace to reiterate that Nigerians are naturally religious. Most Nigerians from different ethnic nationalities are members of different religious groups. Since ethno-religious groups are people who are united by both ethnicity and religion, religion therefore, shapes and orders personal and social life of the people. Generally, in Nigeria, religion is closely tied to a particular ethnic group. As Nigeria is divided along ethno-religious lines, different ethno-religious groups most times express their identity through their ethnic and religious affinities. Therefore, ethno-religious sentiment borders on the thoughts and attitudinal behaviours people

demonstrate based on their ethnic and religious feelings and influences. At the core challenges of national cohesion is the politicization of ethnicity and religion. In this light, Kukah [13] observes that this has to do with “the persistence and subtle recruitment and deployment of religious and ethnic metaphors, sentiments and themes to advance political ends by the political elites”. Negative ethno-religious sentiments breed intolerance. Often, ethno-religious conflicts are rooted in the sheer intolerance of mainly Moslem and Christian fundamentalists.

On one hand, Nigeria is a society suffused with religious sentiments. As people keep reverencing in the religious group or organization they follow and in their stance ideologies they build up religious sentiments. The Nigerian structure has created an ethno-religious worldview in every facet of life. As an emotive issue, religion exerts a lot of influence in the mind of individual adherents. Religion deals with dogmatic and tenacious incentives that stimulate individuals and influence their pattern of behaviour. It is as a result that Sani [14] remarks that;

In Nigeria, religion has been so manipulated that virtually all institutions in the public and private sectors have been polarized along religious lines. Civil servants, community and social workers are usually victims of intimidation and oppression in their places of work. Survival and job security are strongly based on who is of the same religion with the boss. Religion is, thus, not used to serve its purpose (p.1).

An average Nigerian is religiously sentimental. Most times religion beclouds his sense of rationality and humanity. The belief system often morphs into a trigger for tension, crises and killings. This destabilizes the society.

On the other hand, ethnic differences are manipulated by people with narrow minded interests. Politicians and elites from ethnic groups stir up ethnic sentiments as they seek to maneuver ethnic feelings in order to arrive at their own interests. The former military head of states, general Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida observed in Sani [15] that;

ethnicity is currently a huge social movement and human investment across the country. It is not only nurtured around the structure and ideology of ethnic nationalities; it is also increasingly becoming a preferred mode of loyalty by Nigerians as oppose to loyalty to the nation state (p. 1).

At times an ethnic group as a unit based on their commonality of culture and idea of familiar decent does reinforce and project ethnicity as a representing emblem in championing their cause and advancing the significance of their group. As a group, they are impelled by primordial instincts to take on ethnic identity in registering their agitations.

Therefore, ethno-religious sentiments permeate every human institution in Nigeria – political, social, economic, academia, sports, arts, entertainment etc. In their social relationship, religion and ethnicity infuse in every individual as a component of thought pattern and process. The people are inclined to think ethno-religiously, and demonstrate ethno-religious persuasions and sentiments of their groups. There is always a clash and manipulation of ethno-religious interests as they sometimes harbour illusions. Ethno-religious sentiments as a result influence various aspects of national life in Nigeria.

Influence on Politics and Governance

Kukah [16] observed that ethnic sentiments was thrown into the Nigerian political mix when various communities especially among the minority ethnic groups started responding to the skewed and arbitrary fragmentation of the nation through the creation of local government councils and chiefdoms. He further argued that with the subsequent expansion of feudalism frontiers came increase in the feudal space, which brought about more kingdoms and fiefdoms among the people. It led to new identity formations with their propensity to provoke clash usually over new feudal boundaries. As a result, virtually all the ethnic groups started agitating and clamoring for nationhood.

Ethno-religious sentiments also play key role in determining the dynamism of governance and outcome of elections in Nigeria. Over the years, it has been used as a tool by the leaders in Nigeria to control and oppress the people. Commenting on the dimensions of ethno-religious sentiments, Kukah [17] equally highlights the roles of politicians, traditional rulers and religious leaders in what he refers to as the 'ethnicisation' and 'religionisation' of politics. While the politicians express their ethno-religious sentiments through the manipulation of ethnicity and religion in their bid to secure votes and advance their egotistical hold on power, the traditional rulers and religious leaders manipulate the same ethno-religious identities, through beguiling the politicians with ethnic and religious proposals.

Mostly, those that are aggrieved with the outcome of political and other national events are typically overwhelmed with ethno-religious sentiments and consequently pay scant regard to the nation's stability before their own constricted ambitions. Instead of seeking redress or resolution through acceptable mechanisms, they will press the ethno-religious button of the people and whip up sentiments. Religious leaders do not also help matters. Some of them are deeply partisan and involved in some of the controversies that have affected the development of the nation. Instead of enlightening their respective members, their utterances most times fuel antagonism towards opposing faiths. The disturbing influence of ethno-religious sentiments on politics and governance in Nigeria has been a major cause for disunity and violence.

Influence on Job and Employment

Ethno-religious sentiments manifest in the issues of jobs and employments. Those that are placed in a government position to employ and other privileged employers of labour in Nigeria most times favour people of the same ethnic or religious affiliation with them. Most times, this occurs against merit and competence. Consideration for job, employment, contract and other such benefits are skewed as a result of ethno-religious influences.

Some employers or the people responsible for employment and hiring of labour especially in the government established institutions and agencies mostly possess the tendency to employ and hire on the grounds of nepotism, which most times underscore tribal and religious considerations. At times, this is at the expense of merit, proficiency and professionalism. This therefore, tends to discourage hard work and healthy competition. It rather promotes nepotism, corruption, diverseness and underdevelopment. Moreover in some instances, to secure a job in government establishments, one has to be 'connected' or know someone that is 'connected'. This connection chain and circle are influenced by ethno-religious considerations and ties. Tribe's of people or the same nativity, the same religious organization and friends are preferred and favoured.

Whether it is company, ministry, business enterprise or corporate organization, once the “*oga* at the top” is interested in a particular applicant, it doesn’t matter whether he merits it or he is incompetent, he will be offered the job. Sometimes, the president, governors, senators, members of the House of Representatives, commissioners, special advisers, personal assistants and other top politicians influence political appointments and job openings to favour their own people. People that are more qualified and deserving of the opportunity are at times sidelined and denied.

Appointments to various leadership positions by the current president Muhamadu Buhari led federal government appears not to truly reflect the agreement of the federal character which is aimed at promoting national unity and sustainability. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as) amended; Section 14 (3) clearly states that [18];

The composition of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

It is equally on this note that Ochorome [19] regrettably lamented that “when President Muhammadu Buhari started crowding his government with his kinsmen, townsmen, clansmen and people of his ethnic, sectional and religious backgrounds, I was shocked that many otherwise respected opinion leaders did not see what was wrong with it”. His political appointments especially to the key positions appear to favour the northern Muslims more. “He loaded both his ‘kitchen cabinet’ and various juicy agencies and departments of the Federal Government disproportionately with Muslim Northerners” [20]. Some of these people include; Amina Zakari of the National Electoral Commission, INEC, who is alleged to be his blood relative and Professor Mahmood Yakubu, who took over as the substantive chairman of INEC; General Tukur Brutai the Chief of Army Staff; Dr. Maikanti Kacalla Baru as Nigerian National Petroleum Commission (NNPC) Group Managing Director (GMD); a retired colonel Hameed Ali, Comptroller-General of Nigerian Customs Service; Babachir David Lawal, Secretary to the Government of the Federation; Abba Kyari, Chief of Staff to the President, among many others [21-23].

These were the skewed appointments during Buhari’s first term, which ostensibly continued to influence his second term. This is considered to be against the federal character law that mandates the government to ensure and implement “the principles of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government” [24]. Some people believe that a critical and careful analysis of his key appointments show that they are lopsided, gender insensitive and geared towards disadvantaging the southern Christians and favouring the northern Muslims. This endemic nepotism has frustrated Nigeria from realizing its enormous human potentials and economic advancement.

Influence on the fight against Corruption

It will be a platitude to say that Nigeria is a corrupt nation. In the main, Nigeria is seen as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Corruption is a malevolent spirit that has viciously cast a devious spell and cruelly hypnotized most Nigerians. The Nigerian state seems to be vulnerable to the epidemic of corruption that it has festered for years without commendable treatment or appreciable handling. Nigeria as a nation has lost billions of naira to the scourge of corruption which

is ably aided and sponsored by ethno-religious sentiments. In fact, the mass of ethno-religious sentiments in Nigeria are blended with the vice of corruption.

Ethno-religious sentiments are stoutly cyclical and stalwartly intertwined. It breeds corruption and also results in the inability to fight corruption. Corruption in Nigeria has permeated every strata of the society that it is best regarded as institutionalized [25]. With enervated munching, corruption has eaten deep into the structural fabric of the nation that every average national is considered corrupt. Corruption is absolutely convoluted that citizens tend to shield the people from their ethno-religious groups. The Acting Chairman of the Nigerian anti-graft commission, Economic Finance Crime Commission (EFCC), Ibrahim Magu observed that the corrupt Nigerians use sponsored people to claim that they are being persecuted because of their religion or ethnic identities. As a result they do their utmost not to answer the all important question of whether or not they were guilty of the corrupt allegations charged against them [26].

The issue of ethno-religious sentiments and the vice of corruption in Nigeria are aptly captured by Adejumoh [27], as he observes that;

While corruption has constantly posed a threat to our economic and social stability, there are other issues that have eaten deep into the marrow of this nation. These problems day by day threaten the existence of the entity called 'Nigeria'. These twins 'ethnicity and religion' are the mother of all problems acting as the malignant causing anarchy and acrimony in the land.

Ethno-religious sentiments evoke or arouse the feelings of belongingness and narrow the mind towards inconsiderate interests. Corruption is one of the greatest problems of Nigeria which has caused a lot of troubles. There is a symbiotic relationship between ethno-religious sentiments and corruption in Nigeria. Ethno-religious sentiments unlock opportunities for corruption and consequently shield corrupt individuals.

Influence on National Unity

The most threatened aspect of ethno-religious sentiments in Nigeria is on the blueprint of national unity. In the Nigerian context, national unity is the harmonious agreement of all the constituent members, especially, multiethnic nationalities with different religious and political beliefs to peacefully coexist as one indissoluble nation. National unity, therefore, implies that Nigerian peoples irrespective of whatever clan, creed or class; shall be relating and existing as citizens of one nation bound in peace and unity. However, when religious consciousness is brought to the front burner of national polity, it reinforces traits of the religion as the common property of a particular group. At that point in time the people determine a course of action in order to protect their interest in the federation. Adherents of the ethno-religious groups are easily swayed by emotions.

More so, if unity is a state where different groups like religious organizations and different areas like ethnic nationalities are joined together to exist as one in peace and harmony, then it is not true that Nigeria is a nation bound in "peace and unity" as proudly claimed in the national anthem. The unity of Nigeria mostly appears to exist in her name, 'Nigeria'. Little wonder the nation has been severally described as a mere "contraption" by scholars, analysts and leaders. Adeniyi [28] refers to it as a "lugardian contraption", Ishowo's [29] choice of title for his book is "Nigeria, a Bizarre Contraption", Brimah [30] alternatively considers it as "Disintegrated Contraption". Such lamentable and

regrettable description of Nigeria started quite early in her historical development. Tafawa Belewa, the late Prime Minister in 1948 described Nigeria unity in the following lines:

Since 1914 the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any signs of willingness to unite...Nigeria unity is only a British invention [31].

Obafemi Awolowo had earlier in 1947 described it as a “mere geographical expression” [32]. Similarly, Asari Dokubo, leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) described it as a “luciferian contraption of convenience dubiously crafted to criminally sustain the parasitic and predatory expansionist and supremacist Gambari North” [33]. In their efforts to undermine the one Nigeria project and vociferously express the marginalization of the Igbo ethnic nationality, which reinforced the clamour for a Biafra sovereign nation, Nnamdi Kanu and his IPOB members have constantly and consistently described Nigeria as a “Zoo”. These irreverent and derisive descriptions are cursors to the displeasure and disappointment of the people from different ethno-religious backgrounds about the one Nigeria scheme and the unity of Nigeria.

Whenever religious elements are directed to a group, it activates their parochial religious convictions as opposed to the common interests of the nation. The force of their conviction in this regard sometimes overrides the core principles and tenets of their religious group. They believe in the superiority of their warp religious convictions and at times manipulate the core principles of their faith which typically encourages peace and love. This conviction is mostly stirred by some members of the religious group who always want to use religion as a springboard to achieving their narrow interests. The ethno-religious group one belongs to in Nigeria to a very large extent determines and influences his choices in life and mode of interaction within the society. Unhealthy ethno-religious dispositions have continued to make national unity precariously unstable and perilously uncertain.

STRUCTURAL DISPARITY AND INEQUALITY

It appears that the British colonial interests in their quest to acquire expedient platform for operation did not factor in structural imbalance of the merger. They just merged different autonomous units into one for the convenience of administrative purposes. Adibe [34] keenly observes that there is obvious disproportion in the geographic size and population among the various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups that constitute the Nigerian state. He stated that the northern part of the country constitutes about 70 percent of its land mass and an estimated 53.6 percent of its total population. However, the north is much poorer than the south and lags behind the south in terms of education and other modern indices of development. Based on this, while some northerners believe that the north should control the majority of administrative power, some southerners always oppose the idea which brings about power tussle between the north and the south.

In a similar vein, Obaze [35] argues that if there is a common denominator for restructuring, it is the fact that broad segments of the nation feel convincingly marginalized. The South-south claims that in spite of being the hub for the nation’s wealth, they are continually neglected and devastated from oil pollution. The South-east’s grievance is anchored on the aftermath of the civil war, where some properties and wealth of the Igbo were divested and handed only twenty pounds each; yet,

about sixty years of independence, the Nigerian presidency has continued to elude the Igbo. The grievances of the North is that most of the nation's insolvent states are in the region; the largest pool of unemployed Nigerians and the largest numbers of illiterates and untrained youths are in the area. Similarly, the Chairman of the APC's Committee on True Federalism, El-Rufai, [36] reiterated that it is unequivocal that the current Nigerian federation is not balanced and in serious need of structural balancing and that the problem is however, in the details. While some push for the abandonment of the present political structure through separatist agitations, which perhaps are unrealistic in their expectations. He believes that most Nigerians cherish the unity in diversity but seek the enthronement of a fairer, meritocratic system that elevates social justice above other considerations.

Structural features of the Nigerian society, such as geopolitical inequality in terms of number of states that make up each of the six political zones, are among the structural variables that make corporate existence worrying and warring. The six geopolitical zones are:

1. North Central- Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and Federal Capital Territory (FCT)
2. North East- Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe.
3. North West- Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kastina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara
4. South East- Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo
5. South South- Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Rivers
6. South West- Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo.

The above geopolitical zones indicate that while there are 19 states plus the FCT in the north, there are only 17 states in the south. Also while all the geopolitical zones have six states apiece, apart from the North West that has seven, only the South East has 5 states. The geopolitical structure of Nigeria favours the north more on the account of its numerical command. This geopolitical disparity affects the politics of the nation.

Structural disparity also relates with income inequality. One of the most serious challenges of Nigeria as a nation is income inequality. Matthew Page, the former US intelligence community's leading expert on Nigeria in Akinwotu and Olukoya [37] observes that in Nigeria, "it is this disparity between rich and poor, more than poverty itself that generates anti-government sentiment and could fuel civil unrest down the road". This economic inequality is a key factor that encourages crimes and conflicts. Inequality in income distribution of the nation impedes growth and progress of the people and the nation. A situation where about five per cent (5%) of the total population of the country has about forty (40%) of its total wealth; and about sixty percent (60%) of the population lives in extreme poverty [38] is quite unhelpful. They fight for political power to exploit the masses.

As a result, the gap between the haves and the have-nots keeps widening on a daily basis. The poverty level in Nigeria is very alarming and it reflects the level to which Nigerian masses have suffered economic deprivations and injustices in the form of exploitations. Recent survey has revealed that Nigeria is now the poverty capital of the world. According to Kazeem [39] "A new report by The World Poverty Clock shows that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the most extreme poor people in the world" (p.1). The large swathes of Nigerians live in extreme poverty. To this end, Udeagha [40] observes that;

A greater number of the Nigerian teeming population are in conditions where eking out a living is a herculean task. In a situation where the vast majority of the population wallow in abject poverty and penury, while a microscopic few who represent an infinitesimal fraction of the same population lives in ostentation and flamboyancy is pathetically uncalled for (p. 65).

The swarming majority are deprived of the necessities of life – food, shelter, clothing, safe water, security, proper education, quality healthcare etc. It is on this note that Gaskia [41] equally lamented about the disturbing number of Nigerian population that are poor in a nation, “where we also have the richest African and the richest black woman in the world, yet it has the largest concentration of poor people in the world. That is a huge contrast. This means ours is a country with the greatest inequality in the world.”

Morbid greed and sinister selfishness by the political class have also generated a lopsided government financing structure. For instance, in 2010, the former governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in a lecture at the Igbinedon University, Benin, lamented that the federal legislators gulp about 25% of the overhead Federal Government budget [42]. This is against critical areas like agriculture, education, health etc. Recently, one of the National Assembly members, Senator Shehu Sani, a member of the All Progressives Congress (APC) that represented Kaduna Central revealed their salary structure. He said that the salary of senators is 750,000 naira per month, plus allowances of 13.5 million naira per month, which makes it an official total package of 14.25 million naira per month [43]. With the total of 469 federal lawmakers, Nigeria’s bicameral legislature, modeled after the Federal Congress of the United States, has 109 senators and 360 members of the House of Representatives, drawn from the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The high cost of maintaining this number of politicians that are almost duplicating duties is quite wasteful.

They feed fat at the expense of Nigerians, most of who are scavenging and scratching all over, looking for a minute morsel to eat. Therefore, the structure of government financing is lopsided and imbalance. These structural disparities and inequalities are the bane for ethno-religious sentiments and agitations in Nigeria.

THE NEED FOR RESTRUCTURING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Restructuring is imperative now because of the nature of the Nigerian system of government which has not yielded satisfactory results in terms of unity, social and economic development. The fundamental aspect of the restructuring is located at the constitution. There is important need for constitutional review. This will capture some of the issues that border on fiscal federalism and revenue allocation. It will help for the decentralization and devolution of powers so that more responsibilities will be given to the states. But the federal government should retain some powers as bordered with foreign affairs, defence, and currency. The constitutional amendment should access and assess the reports of 2014 Constitutional Conference led by Justice Idris Kutigi and the reports on Restructuring led by the Kaduna State governor, Mallam Nasir el Rufai, as a workable guide [44]. The reviewed constitution should accommodate the issue of leadership rotation in a manner that it will alternate between north and south and within the geopolitical zones. Perhaps, if the issue of leadership rotation would be clearly enshrined in the constitution, it will relatively address Muslim Christian squabbles, and issues of Northern and Southern dichotomy. Thankfully,

there are Muslims and Christians in either divide. This will relatively address ethno-religious sentiments that have to do with politics.

On one hand, Nigeria is sharply divided into two, North and South. On the other hand, it is further divided into six geopolitical zones. In order to have a balanced structure between the south-north and the zones, two states in the Northwest should be merged as one in order to bring the number of states in the region to eighteen (18), while an additional state should be created in the southeast. This will make it equal six states in every geopolitical zone. The southern zones will be eighteen (18) states and the northern zones eighteen (18) states and the FCT, retaining the 36 states structure. This will help to bring a balance in the structure and address the issue of state creation that has constituted a major concern in the polity. In a situation the north has nineteen (19) states and the south (17), there will continue to be feelings of marginalization and agitation for state creation. That the southeasterners are the most agitating segment for separation in the present-day Nigeria is not unconnected with this imbalance in the geopolitical make-up. This will help to have parity between the majority zone or region and the minority zone. These zones should be acknowledged in the Nigerian constitution and reinforce to function as federating units.

Consequently, it is needful to evolve a six-regional government with a central government. It will retain the current six geo-political zones structure. It envisages being a sort of reflection that will capture some images of the 1963 constitution, which is arguably the best the country has ever operated with [45]. This will help to boost regional governments that were the catalysts for the developmental strides of different blocs in the 1960s. These regions will absolutely be in control of the resources that are being generated from their zones. This will help the regions to mobilize tax revenues that will give support to development. The regions will make concerted efforts to survive and thrive. The federal government will no longer serve as a feeding bottle to some states that are not making efforts to grow.

It will help to tackle especially, ethno-religious sentiments, intolerance, and terrorism. In a situation that every region bears its burden, some of the problems that have constantly and consistently threatened the peace of one Nigeria will become a state or regional affair and perhaps dies off. A situation where some regions keep benefiting more from national budget allocations or getting intervention funds from the centre to manage for instance, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and rebuilding infrastructure that have been destroyed by terrorist groups within the region sometimes makes the state or region complacent and calls for restructuring. A region like the northeast that is the home of *boko haram* terrorism appears to benefit more from defence budgets. Such violent agitations and attacks that have resulted in branding some people ex-militants or repentant *boko haram* members, granting them amnesty and budgeting huge amount of money for their training and education is a tacit call for future trouble that will lead to purport repentance and eventual amnesty. Such scenarios favour nonconformists from some sessions. The only progress will be that such unprofitable circle will continue to revolve as some dissidents would be boosted by such misplaced gestures to take up arms against the state.

The current presidential system of government appears to be costly and breeds corruption and underdevelopment. There is therefore, need to switch to the Westminster model, popularly known as parliamentary system of government. Nigeria was coupled together and founded on the foundations of parliamentary system of government, which was the system of government the

British colonialists bequeathed the nation. Nevertheless, in 1979 they switched to the United States of America (USA) model of presidential system. The parliamentary system has been assessed to be more suitable to the ethno-religious heterogeneous composition and cultural pluralistic system of Nigeria [46]. As Fasan [47] equally highlighted, this is not just for the fact that most world countries operate parliamentary, for only about 46 of the 193 member states of the United Nations operate presidential system and out of 54 members states of the Commonwealth, about 40 of them operate parliamentary system, but for the reason that the most successful ones like Australia, Canada, India and Singapore operate parliamentary system. Studies have also shown that presidential system is more expensive, the “parliamentary democracies have 1.5 average higher per capital income and 1.5 higher average rate of economic growth rate than presidential democracies” [48]. It is perhaps in clear understanding of the differences between the two systems of government which Nigeria has experienced, that 71 members of the House of Representatives drawn from different political parties like, African Democratic Congress (ADC), All Progressives Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), sponsored a bill demanding the return of Nigeria to the parliamentary system.

The lawmakers maintain that parliamentary democracy is the best for Nigeria. Some of their reasons include that parliamentary system fosters economic development, facilitates equality of income distribution and opportunities, helps for quick passage of bills, whereas presidential system brings about lower output growth, more prone to inflation, higher income inequality, frustration of economic goals, cedes excess power to the president and has contributed in making Nigeria the poverty capital of the world [49]. Comparatively, therefore, parliamentary democracy will be more suitable and better for Nigerian political stability and economic growth.

Moreover, the key important aspect of the model of restructuring canvassed in this study is the restructuring of the mindsets of Nigerians. The main trouble with Nigeria is the intolerant refusal to coexist as one nation. The unhealthy frame of mind that harbours this negation embodies nepotism, parochialism, chauvinism, fundamentalism, and other primordial forces that result in conflicts of interest and churns out the crop of leadership piloting Nigerian affairs. Contrary to Achebe's [50] thesis, in his book, *'The Trouble With Nigeria,'* more than the leadership issue he hypothesizes, the trouble with Nigeria is fundamentally about how the diverse ethnic nationalities and religious groups that were coupled together into one entity called 'Nigeria' can live in harmony, peace and unity. It is this problem that apparently besets leadership recruitment. To Achebe “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership”. Leadership trouble is however, a byproduct of it and unfortunate contributory aspect of this fundamental problem. Leadership issues conspicuously compounds the fundamental trouble with Nigeria. Most of the people that assumed positions of leadership were bedeviled and tormented by this mindset both as individuals and narrow-minded influences from their ethno-religious groups.

The mindset that has incessantly and consistently brought about conflicts of interest in the polity is a malady that needs a potent and formidable restructuring therapy. Okunrinboye [51] rightly observes that “Conflict of interest is a social vice which degrades right ethical conviction, moral decency and behavioral fortitude among people of a nation. In Nigeria, conflict of interest encompasses selfish pursuits and mundane interests of politicians and those of their cronies”. Mostly, agitation for political office is not for collective interest but for selfish interest. The prevailing mentality that sees politics as a vocation and a means of acquiring wealth is unhealthy to

national development. Instead of nursing political ambitions for the purpose of serving the nation, most politicians chose the line of politics for their own selfish interests. This is a problem not just in politics but in every segment of life in Nigeria, including civil groups, academia, military, sports, religions, corporate organizations, entertainment industry, etc. The propelling force in public service among most Nigerians is self-aggrandizement. People of different ethno-religious backgrounds always oppose each other and tend to stifle development.

Furthermore, there is the lack of willingness to cooperate as constituents of a sovereign nation in order to foster unity and progress. The pervasive enmity among Nigerians is deep-seated and has gotten out of hand. This great animosity and mutual distrust is principally on dissimilar ethno-religious and political leanings. Members of different ethnic, religious and political backgrounds at any slightest unfavourable opportunity always express their angst by unbridling revulsion and lashing out on one another. This is coupled with the adoption of sabotage and other damage techniques as effective tool of disorganization, distraction or disorder. This has been worsened by the unrestrained availability and accessibility of social media.

The Nigerian section of social media is flooded with hate speeches, acerbic vituperations and acetic invectives. There are opposing groups of 'wailers and hailers' in the Nigerian social space, who constantly unleash stinging odium against each other. The recent legislation against hate speech is a clear testament of the acerbic venoms that characterized their mindsets. The legislation is largely viewed as the political elites' tool of silencing the people's opinion and criticism, but it is a spin-off of embittered frame of mind. Often, this hinders the drive for collective actions that would strengthen the fabrics of the society and engender development. The entrenched culture of mistrust among ethno-religious components and constituents of Nigeria is a mindset that needs serious restructuring.

Therefore, if Nigeria must work, its citizens from diverse ethno-religious components and constituents should restructure their minds and endeavour to accept the marriage of 1914 as what has come to be in order to make progress as a nation. A continuous blame game will always produce lingering regret and anger. To make progress as a nation, Nigerians must restructure their thought pattern and discontinue blaming that mistake of amalgamation, harbouring resentment and angst as a result.

More importantly, there should be a retooling of Nigerian education system in a manner that it arrests the young minds and molds it towards national unity and patriotism. The model of education Nigeria is operating with is a western legacy that largely served colonial interests. Government should make the education of every child from primary to secondary, free and compulsory. From primary level, the children will be made to understand the significance of Nigerian unity and importance of patriotism. It proposes to be an education model that will consider the ethno-religious dynamics of Nigeria and capable of arresting especially the young ones, who are the future of the nation and structure their psyche towards common good. Restructuring of mindset of Nigerians for the purpose of peace, unity and development should be borne in mind while drawing the model educational curriculum. This will help in ameliorating the present challenge. Though based on the present state of affairs, it demands a lot and will take time to achieve, but it requires strong political will and spirited efforts.

Another challenge with Nigeria is not paucity of ideas or the ability of setting up committees of inquiry in any matter of national importance. The major challenge is mustering the required political will to implement them. At every issue of national concern committees and panels are always set up with a view to coming up with pragmatic suggestions. A lot has been suggested and written about many challenges concerning the nation but they have suffered lack of attention and implementation. If the recommendations of the government committees and other contributions from analysts and scholars are thoughtfully implemented, it will help to engender relative peace, unite more peoples of diverse ethno-religious backgrounds and put Nigeria on a developmental pedestal.

CONCLUSION

Though as a nation, Nigeria has so many problems and challenges to contend with, ranging from poverty, unemployment, lack of quality education and good health care system, bad roads and erratic power supply, corruption and leadership failure, none has threatened the peace, unity and corporate existence of Nigeria as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation, like those that manifest through negative ethno-religious sentiments. Expressions of ethno-religious sentiments in the Nigerian polity have culminated in scores of crises, secessionist agitations, electoral violence, civil war, violent attacks and terrorisms. The greatness of Nigeria lies in the ability to review and evolve her diverse structure in order to break through the ubiquitous barriers and create a better future. The process of national integration and development is never a write-off, if the bull of ethno-religious sentiments can be firmly arrested by the horns.

In fact, there is nothing wrong with the geographical entity called 'Nigeria', but there are many things wrong with the peoples that constitute the Nigerian space. The entity is blessed with vast landmass, enormous natural and human resources, a conglomeration of ethnic nationalities and cultures, a hodgepodge of religious groups and belief system, an amalgamation of different people with diverse trainings and distinct thoughts. With the providence availability of all these developmental catalysts, Nigeria should have been an oasis of development and one of the greatest nations on earth by all assessable standards. Nigeria is imbued with virtually all the enviable and prized qualities of greatness; unfortunately, she exudes an apparent contradiction of a nation inherent with such endowments. Instead of being the anticipated paradise, Nigeria is a dilapidated paradox. As a result, the ominous eruptions of ethno-religiously induced pent-up sentiments are always high.

A little misunderstanding can trigger crisis of monumental proportions, which could result in wanton destructions and loss of properties and lives. Therefore, Nigeria needs a unity that is clearly and collectively negotiated and accepted. This is the most pragmatic means of curing divisive syndromes and defusing ethno-religious intolerance and sentiments, which have bedeviled the unity and progress of Nigeria.

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