

PHILOSOPHY AND RESTRUCTURING THE NIGERIAN STATE: INTERROGATING THE CRITICAL ISSUES

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Abstract

Restructuring has been a topical issue that has trended for quite some time in the Nigerian political space. The incessant and deafening calls for restructuring the Nigerian state has taken various dimensions but the political dimension is more outstanding. This is naturally so because the underlying philosophy behind the existence and continuity of every state and the control of its resources bother on politics. Nigeria is a multi- ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious state hence it is not surprising that social, religious, ethnic and political wrangling brew up in the country from time to time. Peaceful coexistence is an important component of nationhood. It is therefore in this context that the need for the restructuring of the Nigerian state is predicated to ensure rapid and competitive development of the various regions that make up the country. The Nigerian state as presently constituted and construed cannot make much progress hence the dire need for restructuring the country to give equal opportunities to all citizens of the country and perhaps put an end to all cries of marginalization by some sections of the country. Once this is done, a new Nigeria will emerge with egalitarianism as its underlying philosophy.

Keywords: Philosophy, Restructuring, Nigeria, State, Interrogating, Critical Issues

Introduction

Philosophy and restructuring the Nigerian state: interrogating the critical issues is indeed a very interesting topic. It is interesting in the sense that restructuring is a word very much in vogue in Nigeria's current political lexicon. Restructuring the Nigerian state has elicited a lot of social and political discussions among the various political divides in the country. While some critical thinkers and political gladiators argue that restructuring is not very necessary for the country to move forward, other thinkers and political icons argue even more vociferously that the way to go for the country is for it to be restructured in order for all sections of the country to have and feel a sense of belonging. In either case, all those who hold the two opposing views on restructuring the country have their own reasons for

doing so. They are also entitled to their own opinions as freedom of speech and opinion is the right of individuals and groups.

Philosophy on the other hand has been a very curious enterprise. Philosophy has variously been described as the study of general and fundamental questions about existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind and language. Such issues or questions are often posed or presented as problems to be studied and resolved through critical inquiry.

The other way round, philosophy is a way of thinking about the world, the universe and the society at large. Its major stock in trade is questing or asking questions. It works by asking very basic and searching questions about the nature of the universe and the connections between them. The ideas in philosophy are very often general and abstract.

Philosophy promotes the holistic development of the human person as an individual and as a critical and meaningful contributor to the human society. Philosophy helps the individual to become an active world player and not merely an individual that make up the number of people in the world hence it is two different things to live and to exist. To live means to be a meaningful contributor to the world while to exist means to make up the number of people who are in the world. Such people are merely seen but not heard. Philosophy prepares the individual for the arduous and herculean challenge of playing key and positive roles towards shaping the human society through critical thinking and contributing creative ideas towards universal construction and reconstruction.

The question is: what is the contribution of philosophy towards the vexed issue of whether it is plausible to restructure the Nigerian nation or not? From the philosophical prism, the issue of restructuring will be looked at critically and holistically to determine the pros and the cons of the various arguments for and against restructuring as a major and trending political issue and phenomenon in the country. This is where the role of philosophy generally and in this context can be better appreciated.

Philosophy: What is it?

It has been said time and again that philosophy elicits or evokes some feeling in a lot of people once it is mentioned. This feeling is usually that of awe, surprise, wonder and bewilderment, little wonder the great philosophers Socrates and Aristotle stated poignantly that philosophy began in wonder and that wonder is the origin of philosophy.

Philosophy is a way of thinking about the world, the universe and the society. It questions about the nature of human thought, the nature of the universe and the connections between them. The ideas canvassed in philosophy are very often general and abstract. It is in this context that many tend to have a morbid fear of philosophy and dread philosophers and the practice of their trade as more often than not, they have very negative thoughts about what philosophy is and what philosophers do.

Philosophy could be regarded as an activity. It is an activity which people undertake when they generally seek to understand basic and fundamental truths about themselves, the world in which they live, and their relationships to the world and to each other. According to Onigbinde (2006:1):

The philosophy is not easy to define, even though it belongs to everyday language. Yet if we are going to understand what someone means by it, we do not require a definition. Nevertheless even though the term philosophy is one with which we already have some familiarity, it is not a simple non-controversial matter.

The question what is philosophy has been a question that has been asked persistently across generations and philosophical leanings. The question even helps to revalidate the discipline of philosophy across the ages thus giving the discipline itself continued relevance. According to Abel (2004:1):

The ancient Greek thinkers who explored fundamental questions about the world and about human existence called themselves philosophers, “lovers of wisdom”. They took time to stop and wonder about such things as the nature of the universe, the purpose of life, and the meaning of ‘good and bad’. In their search for wisdom, they provided by religious and cultural tradition, they used reason and evidence gained from their own experience to formulate new hypothesis. Although not all the Greek philosophers thought it possible to find the ultimate answers to their questions, they all believed that the very activity of seeking wisdom is highly worthwhile.

Oguejiofor (2001:13) speaks of philosophers possessing special wisdom. According to him:

From time immemorial, philosophers have laid claim to special wisdom, a sort of near esoteric knowledge open only to the initiated. The very designation philosophy (love of wisdom) tends to lend credence to this claim. Such knowledge is presented as enabling its possessor to have special insight into reality without bound, including God, angels, spirits, the universe and all its contents including human beings, their activities and existential problems, their political, religious, social organizations and so on. It is not just a theoretical, armchair ability to analyse and understand reality.

Other scholars like Ogundowole (2005:2) Barbet (1990:1), Okeke (2001:1), Ezeani (2005:7) and Ugwuanyi (2006:1) all share very nearly the same view on the very essence and critical importance of philosophy. This claim emanates from the very fact that philosophers possess special wisdom which other scholars from other bodies of knowledge do not possess. This is a lucid claim that philosophers hold on to but usually disputed by scholars from other fields.

The Nigerian State: A Brief Historical Sketch

This segment will only give a very brief historical sketch of the Nigerian federation. Many scholars allude to the fact that the Nigerian federation came into existence in 1914 following the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates by Lord Fredrick Lugard. The road to the eventual independence of the country began with the various constitutional conferences and the various constitutions that were introduced in 1922, 1946, 1954, the independence constitution of 1960 and the republican constitution of 1963.

When the country achieved independence in 1960, it adopted the parliamentary system of government, having a Prime minister and a President who was more or less a ceremonial president and mere figure head. The first republic was terminated by a military coup in January 1966. Another military coup in July of the same year terminated the first military rule and hence continued a cycle of military rules until 1979 when the second republic was birthed. This civilian regime was again terminated in December 1983 by another military coup.

The return to civilian rule in 1999 was another milestone in the political history of the country. With the election of this year (2019), the country has made history for itself by having 20years of unbroken civil rule, the longest ever in the history of the country since independence. It is indeed an historical epoch.

However it is sad to recall that the 20years of unbroken democratic rule in the country has not translated to good life for the Nigerian masses. The country's economy is still in very bad shape and millions of Nigerians still wallow in abject and perpetual poverty in a country that is so richly blessed with human and material resources. The politicians who are elected or appointed to serve do not have the notion of service at the back of their minds. All that they are majorly interested in is how to plunder the commonwealth of the people to themselves. Despite the fabulous wealth accruing to the country over the years, the level of poverty in the country is still very high. The wealth of the country seems to circulate only among the political class and their numerous praise singers and cronies.

Restructuring: Meaning

Restructuring according to *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (2007:1192) means the reorganization of a business, company, etc in order to improve efficiency, cut costs, etc, often involving redundancies. Restructuring is the corporate management term or usage for the act of reorganizing the legal, ownership, operational, or other structures of a company for the purpose of making it more profitable or better organized for its present needs, it can equally be described as bringing about a drastic or fundamental internal change that alters the relationships between different components or elements of an organization or system. The above definitions or descriptions of restructuring imply that it means bringing about a change in a system for good and greater efficiency and higher or optimal productivity.

Restructuring the Nigerian state: Interrogating the Critical Issues

Restructuring is a major and trending issue that has persistently featured on the social and political lexicon of the Nigerian state. It is not a new phenomenon as such as it seems to be a recurring issue of the Nigerian polity. This is particularly so because the propelling philosophy behind the existence and continuity of every state bothers majorly on politics and political permutations. The Nigerian state therefore is not an isolated exception. At this point, some of the critical issues that have heightened and orchestrated the deafening calls for the restructuring of the Nigerian state will be examined critically with a view to raising the stake as to the near-absolute necessity or otherwise of restructuring the country.

Federalism

The political structure of Nigeria which was bequeathed to her by her colonial masters is federalism. Federalism in its essence entails a decentralized system of government with many characteristics or attributes that differentiates it from any other system or other systems. These characteristics or attributes include but are not limited to supremacy of the constitution, equality of power between the various levels of government, equality in ethno-regional representation, fiscal autonomy and autonomy of each government, division of powers and responsibilities. If these benchmarks of federalism are used to examine Nigeria's so-called federal system, it will be clear to all and sundry that the nation is not having a federal system of government in place.

Going down memory lane, Nigeria practiced a federal system of government between 1960 when she had her independence till 1966 when she recorded the first military coup. Prior to the January 15, 1966 military coup, we had in place a federal system of government and the country was equally divided into regions. These regions were highly autonomous up to a very reasonable extent.

However, the coup of January 15, 1966 which brought General J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi to power altered the very dynamics of the federal system of government that the country had in place. In place of federalism, Ironsi's government put in place a unitary system of government that made the federal government very powerful and other arms of government weak subordinates. This has been the major anchor of our problem as a country as no other government whether military or civilian has tried to return the Nigerian state to its original state of federalist system of government. For the avoidance of doubt, we cannot have federalism in place and yet the states are so weak and financially and politically vulnerable that at the end of every month the various states so pauperized and distressed run to Abuja, cap in hand begging for funds in the name of federal allocation sharing. This is a recipe for disaster, chaos as well as anarchy and underdevelopment.

It is either the country is returned to its regional status, the status of having regions as opposed to the current state structure or these states should be made to assume the status of true autonomy whereby they will be politically and economically independent up to a reasonable extent instead of the current status of having 36 weak and ineffective structures called states that are perpetually insolvent and totally incapacitated in terms of generating internal revenue. This is hugely the problem with the Nigerian brand of federation and democracy.

Equality of states in geo-political zones

Part of the problem of the current Nigerian state is the manifest inequality prevalent in the lopsided creation of states among the various geo-political zones in the country. Nigeria has six geo-political zones. North Central has six states, North East has six states, North West has seven states, South West has six states, South South has six states while the South East has only five states. This manifest and unfortunate inequality is injustice and cannot continue to stand in a perceived federation with a flourishing democracy like Nigeria. The Nigerian democracy and federalism cannot be built on a faulty foundation and manifest inequality and we expect it to stand and flourish and the country to develop. Two solutions will suffice in trying to solve this major and intractable problem of Nigeria's federation. One will be to have equal number of states in each geo-political zone or the creation of additional states to boost the number of states in the geo-political zones that have fewer states. Equality of the geo-political zones should be one of the cardinal features of the country's federalism.

Resource Control

The clamour for resource control has been in the front burner of the country's polity for quite some time now. The agitation for resource control has been made more prominent by the states in the Niger Delta region where oil, the nation's greatest and highest revenue earner is produced. The level of underdevelopment and unimaginable environmental degradation in these Niger Delta states has helped the agitation for resource control to gain unbelievable and heightened currency. While one is not advocating for total resource control, it is important to advocate for improved allocation of the revenue accruing from natural resources in areas where they are found. This in effect will curb youth restiveness in these areas as well as curtail the large feeling of marginalization in the Niger Delta areas as well as the frequent clamour for secession by these people. The current 13percent derivation accruable to oil producing states in the oil revenue sharing formula of the country is no longer realistic in the light of present day existential realities on ground.

Political Positions

It is in this area that one sees the manifest inequality in the Nigerian state. Why is it that a candidate from an ethnic minority cannot win the presidential election in Nigeria under the present system? Some people will argue that this assertion is not true and will readily cite the case of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan from Bayelsa state who won the presidential election in the country in the year 2011.

Jonathan's case was purely an isolated case and also very circumstantial. He came to power in 2007 as Vice President and on 5th of May 2010 the then President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua died while in office and Jonathan took over providentially as the acting president before later becoming the substantive president. It was through that latitude that he contested the presidential election in 2011 and won. However, to prove that there is an open and brazen political inequality in the Nigerian federation, Jonathan's bid for re-election in 2015 was thwarted in a highly controversial presidential election that produced Muhammadu Buhari as the winner of the election amid several and contentious controversies.

Forward to the 2023 general election that is fast approaching, the northern politicians and elites are already stoking the political fire and laying claim to the presidency for 2023. It therefore appears to be that the presidency of this country is meant for a particular ethnic nationality and not for others. Where is the sense of equity in the Nigerian federation? Where is the sense of equality? Perhaps it is in this context that people see some sense in the numerous agitations for secession from the Nigerian state by the various secessionist groups across the country.

Remuneration for Political office holders

Why is it that Nigerian politicians earn outrageous salaries and allowances while the salaries and allowances of civil and public servants can barely achieve much for them, their numerous strivings for the growth of the country notwithstanding? There is so much frittering of huge national resources on the politicians in terms of payment of their salaries and emoluments. Can we have a polity where politics is seen as service to the people and politicians seen as servants of the people? The attraction to politics in Nigeria is as a result of the lucrative affluence that accrues from it. It is not as if the politicians want to serve the people. No they want to serve themselves. If the emoluments of the politicians are made equal with that of civil servants today, many politicians will quit the stage. It is a very simple logic.

Educationally less Developed States (ELDS), Quota System and Federal Character Principle

One way to encourage mediocrity and underdevelopment in a country is to enshrine policies that do not encourage excellence and competition in the laws and constitution of such a country. That is precisely what we have in the Nigerian state. Beginning with the Educationally Less developed States (ELDS)

policy; you have a situation whereby two students write the national common entrance examination to enter a unity school. One is from an educationally less developed state while the other one is not. The one from the educationally less developed state gets 20 in the examination while the other person who is not from the educationally less developed state gets 60. The person who is from educationally less developed state is given admission despite the very low score he got while the other person who gets 60 but not from an educationally less developed state is not given admission. Where then lies the sense of hard work and competition? What is indeed the reward for hard work and higher aspirations and ambitions? What about the quota system and the federal character principle that encourages the employment of less qualified people from certain geo-political region as a matter of constitutional backing to make up their number in service while some other highly qualified people from other areas are left unemployed due to the shameful and retrogressive policy of quota system and federal character principle. Any country that wants to develop must encourage its citizens to strive for excellence and even competition in all their undertakings. It encourages the citizens to bring out their best at all times.

Challenges of Political Restructuring in Nigeria

Restructuring has become an inevitable issue in Nigeria judging from the plethora of opinions being canvassed in its favour. Most of the opinions being expressed are highly in support of the idea of restructuring the country. This notwithstanding, there are numerous challenges that will tend to undermine the high prospect of restructuring the country.

One of the identified challenges is the interest of the elites. The elites in this context include the political class, the wealthy citizens and senior public servants of the directorate cadre and above. These classes of citizens are the current beneficiaries of the lopsided nature of the Nigerian federation and state and they will do anything humanly possible to frustrate any efforts aimed at restructuring the country. Unfortunately, these classes of people see themselves as the owners of the country.

Another challenge militating against the restructuring of the country is the fear of domination by some ethnic nationalities. The north precisely is opposed to the restructuring of the Nigerian state because they believe there is nothing to restructure. The north believes that the idea of restructuring the country will not be to their own advantage and therefore they will not be favourably disposed towards it.

Another major drawback against restructuring the country is the narrow or clannish political interests of the political class. In Nigerian politics, there is nothing like national interest. All that matter to the politicians is their personal interests and that of their ethnic nationalities. As long as the concept of restructuring does not in theory and practice favour them, then the protagonists of the theory should go to hell. This is the narrow-minded mind-set of the average Nigerian politician and it is very unfortunate to say the least.

Corruption is another major challenge affecting the clamour for restructuring the country. Some highly influential citizens make political capital out of every major national political issue. Restructuring is one of such major political issues that people seem to take full advantage of. For such unstable political characters, they usually wait to see where the pendulum swings. If they realize that the government in power is opposed to restructuring, they will raise their voices to high heavens canvassing views in support of the clamour for restructuring. Once they draw the attention of government, the government will find a way of settling them to make them keep quiet. Once they are settled, they will keep quiet forever. As long as these cash and carry politicians still cull the shots in our political circle, it will be difficult if not impossible to attain political restructuring in the country as they will argue that it will not line up their pockets. Today, a lot of influential Nigerians know for sure that the country is not working. They are not speaking out because they have been 'settled' and they end up speaking from both sides of the mouth when they eventually speak, their views being neither here nor there.

Another major challenge to restructuring the country is the lackadaisical attitude of majority of the citizens towards crucial and pressing political issues including that of restructuring. It may not be wrong to say that many Nigerians are very apolitical. Many are too preoccupied with their personal businesses and other engaging engagements to think of national political issues like restructuring. This 'I don't care' attitude has helped to bring low the tempo of the clamour for restructuring in the country. Unless the citizens rise up to the occasion and make restructuring a national crusade, it has little chances of succeeding.

Restructuring the Nigerian Federation: The Way Forward

According to Agundu (2008:47):

In every state or nation that is politically alive, there is always the tension between two extremes, the unbulging defenders of the status quo and the starry-eyed visionaries of

a new dream. But for any society to grow there must be a continuous cross-examination of the status in line with global changes and in view of its benefits to the generality of the people.

The above citation summarizes the way forward for restructuring in Nigeria. The present Nigerian federation needs restructuring for obvious reasons, one of them being to guarantee the continuity of the Nigerian state. There is need to ensure equality in the Nigerian federation. The idea of some sections of the Nigerian state seeing themselves as the owners of the nation while seeing others as their subordinates should be discouraged in the overall interest of the nation and its development.

Having a new constitution that will be all-embracing will be the key to the eventual restructuring of the country. The present constitution is not people oriented and does not have the full support of the citizenry. It should be eased out of the polity and a new people oriented constitution enacted to take its place.

Citizens should be encouraged to take full interest in the political affairs of the country. Staying aloof from very pressing national political issues is a national disservice and should not be encouraged at all. There should be periodic review of the constitution to be in tandem with existential realities and in consonance with prevailing circumstances. Strengthening of the critical institutions of the state is very important to ensure optimal performance of these institutions.

The federal government should engage the various secessionist groups in the country in serious discussions to assuage their feelings and find a way of ending the agitations amicably instead of having physical confrontation with such harmless agitators. It amounts to double standards to allow Fulani herdsmen to terrorize the entire country unmolested while at the same time using maximum force to deal with IPOB members who are unarmed. Whatever the government does or refuses to do, the people are obviously watching. Whatever holders of power do or refuse to do has a lot of consequences both now and in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Restructuring is actually the way to go for a new Nigeria to emerge. However, it is unfortunate that a lot of people oppose it not because of any serious nationalistic conviction but because of selfish and egoistic considerations. However, it is apt to remind key players in the Nigerian polity that the wrong

acts and actions we support today because it favours us may eventually turn against us tomorrow and may end up being our greatest undoing when the chips are down. Let all Nigerians of goodwill join the queue in support of restructuring as the future of the Nigerian federation which could be maximally secured through a restructured nation is better than any other fleeting gains that can be gotten illicitly.

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