

CULTURAL RESTRUCTURING: A CONSIDERATION FOR NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Nigeria is a modern nation-state, a creation of the British Empire. It is a richly endowed country, yet majority of its populace live in poverty. This paper aims to examine the relevance of cultural development in Nigeria's development strides which has been marred with marked failures, contrary to peoples' expectation of the country as the Giant of Africa. To achieve meaningful research, the study uses anthropological inquiry by which the traditional cultural norms of the people are distilled and examined in the light of a modern nation-state. Data indicate that Nigeria's development has been marooned on the ocean of uncertainties occasioned by political, socio-economic and ethno-religious crises. Furthermore, data obtained in the course of the study indicate that in the bid to achieve maximum development for the country, the various governments since Independence from Britain in 1960 have undertaken economic adjustment and political restructuring. Yet none has met the peoples' desire. The paper concludes by envisaging that cultural restructuring would be of immense benefit to the people of Nigeria.

Key words: Anthropology, Development, Cultural Restructuring, Nigeria, Success

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Nigeria, as presently constituted, was a direct creation of the British Empire which was part of the resolutions of the Berlin Conference of 1884 where Africa's peoples and lands were partitioned among European powers. Nigeria lies in the western part of Africa, with a land mass of 923,768 square kilometres. It is the most populous nation state in Africa with a population of about 200, 388, 533 million as at May 25, 2019 based on the Worldometers of the United Nations. Nigeria, thus, has 2.6% of the total global population, the 7th most populous nation on earth (Worldometers, 2019). Nigeria is a Federal Government with 36 states and a Federal Capital territory.

In the chequered history of Nigeria as a modern nation state, restructuring has been a recurrent decimal. However, most discussions have been limited to

political and economic restructuring, (Ali and Sani, 2018; Atiku, 2018; Babalola, 2016; Okonkwo et. al, 2018). Cultural restructuring has not received the much needed scholarship among Nigerian scholars. This paper opines that cultural restructuring is desirable at this time in Nigerian history. This paper highlights some of the advantages of cultural restructuring as imperative for development in Nigeria.

Understanding Culture

This paper opines that culture is the most prized possession of mankind. Culture is the main fabric of the society, the halcyon of a group of people, the marker of identity and the knob around which the ethos, mores, menu, lores of a people revolve within a given milieu. The definition of culture has many nuances. Kroeber and Kluckhorn (1952) give a list of 164 definitions of culture. This clearly indicates that there is difficulty in giving a precise definition to culture among anthropologists. Tylor (1871, 1920) defines culture as habits and capabilities as well as knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom by persons living as members of a given society. Jefferson and Roberts (1976:10) explain culture to mean “the shared principle of life characteristic of particular classes, groups or social milieux”. Culture is therefore the strongest attachments of mankind. It encompasses values, hopes, loyalties, humour, decisions, burials, rites of passage, menu, dress and fears (Andah, 1988; Monaghan and Just, 2000; Guest, 2013). Scholars like Geertz (1973) and Leslie (1958) also establish that culture is an integral part of human beings and that culture has meanings for those who practice it. Within the African context, Andah (1988) argues that culture is the pattern of acquired human activities transmitted through generations. Thus, it can be stated succinctly that culture gives each community, group and person its identity. It is the bond that uniquely and intimately unites a given group of people together. Culture is the most singular regulator of life. Culture is the life blood of all communities.

Political Restructuring

Political restructuring is a major point of debate in Nigeria. Political restructuring is not new in Nigeria’s lexicon. It has been a recurrent issue since its existence. The first political restructuring was the creation of the Nigerian Northern and Southern Protectorates under the British colonial rule. Later there was a further restructuring of Nigeria into a tripod political structure of Eastern, Western and Northern Nigeria. Several constitutional conferences were held in Nigeria and London. In Nigeria, such conferences include Ibadan conference in 1950, constitutional conference in 1953, and Lagos conference in 1954 and 1960. While other conferences were held in

London in 1953, Lancaster house conferences 1957 and 1958 and another conference was held in 1960. After independence, the political leaders of Nigeria engineered a political restructuring in June 1963 by excising the Benin and Delta provinces from western region to become the fourth region in Nigeria (Library of Congress, 2019).

After the abortion of civilian rule by the military in 1967, the military regime of Yakubu Gowon restructured Nigeria by creating twelve states on 5 May, 1967. Murtala Mohammed succeeded him and created more states on 3rd February, 1976 hereby increasing the States in Nigeria to 19. Also, under the military regime of Babangida, additional states were created on 23rd September 1987 and 27th August, 1991. Additionally, Abacha added more states by decrees on 1st October 1996 (Amuwo, 2018).

Agitations for political restructuring continued unabated despite the multiple creations of states. In February 2005, The civilian regime of president Obasanjo convened a national conference that was meant to achieve the political restructuring of Nigeria, called the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) (Nwabueze, 2013), but ended up being moribund because it was a selfish effort to perpetuate himself in office, and eventually it became a mere talk shop. President Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated another national conference on 17th March, 2014 in Abuja with 492 delegates that was also aimed at achieving political restructuring. In his words, Jonathan states “to engage intense introspection about the political and social challenges confronting our nation and to chart the best and most acceptable way for the resolution of such challenges in the collective interest of all the constituent parts of the nation” (Okeke and Abdallah, 2014). He, however, lacked the political will to execute the report of the conference.

Economic Restructuring

Nigeria’s attempts at economic restructuring also have a chequered history. Next to political restructuring the next issue competing for attention is the econometrics of Nigeria. Nigeria is a richly endowed country but the poorest of the poor on earth live within its boundaries. All economic indices point at gloomy data. Economic restructuring that is underlined here is defined as a fundamental change that affects the economic relationship of the different elements of the system (Okonkwo, et. al, 2018), for the purposes of making more profit and the satisfaction of the most pressing needs of the populace. Proponents contend that to achieve economic restructuring, Nigeria must also avoid over centralization of her economic activities, invest in strategic infrastructures, adopt a workable economic model, exhibit transparency in business and economic activities, ensure effective and efficient commercial

logistics, encourage innovation and creativeness, access to finance, coordinated economic policies, reduction of trading cost among others things (Atiku, 2018; Okonkwo, 2018; Babalola, 2016).

Also, it can be pointed out that economic restructuring in Nigeria has been undertaken by various successive regimes under the names of structural adjustment programme, currency devaluation, Operation Feed the Nation, Loans Scheme, Money Traders scheme, etc. Yet, none has achieved any meaningful impacts on the populace, rather, they have been visited with hunger and despoliation. Furthermore there is the call for a new type of economic restructuring, namely resource control and fiscal federalism. Scholars like Ali and Sanni (2018), and Babalola (2016) see fiscal federalism which deals with division of monetary relations among tiers of government and resource control, as a contending issue in Nigeria's desire for economic restructuring.

This paper opines that most Nigerians will say that the attempts at economic and political restructuring have failed woefully. It is apropos to now look inward and advocate for cultural restructuring as a panacea for Nigeria's development and progress.

Cultural Restructuring and its Benefits

Cultural restructuring envisaged in this paper has three interrelated dimensions. First, it is a conscious attempt made to unearth, distil, preserve and propagate indigenous lores, ethos and technologies. Second, it also involves investing in local knowledge, resources and skills. Third, it is the placing of culture at the heart of policies that enhance educational, technological and social developments of the peoples. Scholars like Antweiler (1998), Nakashima, Prott, and Bridgewater (2000) have identified important parameters of culture to include conscious reawakening of the cultural wisdom of the people and tapping into the cherished norms of the people.

Development experts in Nigeria have limited their scope to economic restructuring and political restructuring. They are yet to discover the link between culture and development. They see development as necessarily connected and limited to politics and the economy. They might be wondering if the past cultural achievements and the present traditional norms of the various peoples of Nigeria, in fact Africa, can be of any value to the search for development of the country. By taking western concepts and paradigms as the best of human achievements, they contemptuously relegate cultural achievements to the background, while focusing more on western-oriented

socio-economic and political developments. Yet, culture gives a true identity of who we are. No country can grow outside its culture.

Cultural restructuring is valuable to our desire for development. UNESCO has identified culture as a means for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2009). It goes on to assert that, placing culture at the heart of development policy constitutes an essential investment in the world's future and a precondition to successful globalization processes that take into account the "principles of cultural diversity". It is for this onerous reason that UNESCO in 2015 launched the Culture for Sustainable Urban Development Initiative (UNESCO, 2015)

Cultural restructuring from UNESCO's perspective as being envisaged will be capable of achieving these:

- (1) Psychological benefits: Cultural restructuring will be a source of psychological and emotional stability and wellness for the people. This paper posits that cultural advancement is best suited for the development of traditional peoples' psyche. It emboldens them and buoys up their psyche which has been battered by foreign contacts. Since culture defines our identity, cultural advancement through restructuring is the greatest stabilizer.
- (2) Educational benefits: There will be educational benefit of knowing the past when cultural restructuring is promoted in the country. It will forge intellectual enterprise by allowing locals to forge their destinies and restore their dignity. In the throes of Westernization, *Sinoization* (Chinese influence) and Globalization, the enhancing of cultural identity cannot be over emphasised.
- (3) Social benefits: One of the benefits of cultural restructuring is that it will help to preserve group identities amidst the competing ideologies and philosophies of the modern world. It will also revitalise communities by enhancing social networking and social cohesion.
- (4) Cultural benefits: In another dimension, cultural restructuring being envisaged will help to connect the present with the past through traditions and customs. This is a valuable tool in the decolonization and freedom from the effects of neo-colonialism that have ravaged the people.
- (5) Economic benefits: Furthermore, cultural restructuring will also create tremendous economic income through cultural activities, tourism, job creation from traditional crafts, and sales of traditional products and cultural services (UNESCO World Report, 2009). Unfortunately, the

economic benefits of culture have not been harnessed in Nigeria, despite the rich cultural heritage of the nation.

- (6) Inter-group relations: The benefits of cultural restructuring to the enhancement and study of intergroup relations is enormous. The spectre of ethno-religious crises which have befallen this country can be ameliorated if the people know their forebears have been interacting peacefully in the pre-colonial times. In this area, cultural restructuring has a great role to play, because it will show that our cultures are results of interchange informs of enculturation, diffusion and influence from our neighbours.

Conclusion

Nigeria, no doubt, has gone through a tortuous path in its journey of nationhood. This paper observes that, as presently constituted, the Nigeria's project has failed to meet the yearnings of its citizens because of its present Federal structure which fails to meet the standard of true federalism. Proponents of political restructuring in Nigeria argue that Nigeria cannot make the desired progress because it is bogged down in an unreasonable and undemocratic political system in which individuals and ethnic configurations in the nation's states are not positioned for optimal production for the development of the country. Advocates for economic restructuring equally observe that Nigeria cannot make meaningful economic progress with the present unsustainable fiscal policy.

The paper identifies future directions for cultural restructuring in the country. These will include diverse areas like using it for technological achievement, inter-group relations, economic benefit in the area of tourism, educational benefit, and using it as an assessor of globalization and decolonization from neo-colonialism. It is on this ground that a call is made for cultural restructuring of Nigeria. It is envisaged that with cultural restructuring Nigeria will achieve a greater level of development. The paper calls for the alignment of cultural restructuring, economic restructuring and political restructuring. The appraised triadic restructuring of Nigeria if executed with dedication will give Nigerians the impetus for greater achievement in socio-economic, political and cultural development.

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