

POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA IN THE LIGHT OF NEHEMIAH 2:1-9

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks into “Political Restructuring in Nigeria in the light of Nehemiah 2:1-9.” Actually, the persistent call for restructuring takes numerous dimensions, but particularly outstanding is in the dimension of politics. It is no surprise though, because the philosophy behind the existence of every State and the control of its resources bothers on politics. Therefore, when there is a damaged cog in the wheel of the politics of the State, it becomes imperative to politically restructure the state. Since this is so, the big question then becomes ‘what is the damaged cog in the wheel of the politics of Nigeria that is a necessity for restructuring? What are the challenges of political restructuring in Nigeria? And what is the way forward?’ It is in a bid to fill this gap that this paper attempts to answer the above questions through an exegetical study of Nehemiah 2:1-9. It is obvious that ensuring the peaceful coexistence of Nigerian multi-ethnic nationalities as one peaceful entity called Nigeria and effecting of rapid and competitive development of the different regions of the country among other factors consists the need for restructuring; while elite interest, fear of ethnic dominations, political idiosyncrasy among others construe the challenges facing political restructuring in Nigeria. Going into re-federalization, value reorientation, institutional re-strengthening, ethnic representation amongst others could help to bring solution to restructuring issues in Nigeria following the example of Nehemiah of the Old Testament.

INTRODUCTION

According to Nwafor-Orizu, restructuring is a song on the lips of many Nigerians. It has trended for decades and seems to be an inter-generational topical issue in Nigeria (12). Restructuring is one of Nigeria’s most vexed socio-political and economic issues in the 21st Century. Suberu noted that despite its positive impact, federalism has been absolutely insufficient to deal with distributive tensions and conflicts. The geo-politics of the country is therefore characterized by agitations for restructuring as cure to the crises of development arising largely from a flawed federal architecture. Scholars, political analysts and segments of the political class have advanced the argument that restructuring is expedient, and a fundamental basis for the development of the country (Suberu, et al 1998). But what should be the content and context of restructuring and how it would promote development is not clear. A look at the positions of the different geo-political zones on restructuring either confuses the subject or ignores critical essentials in the federalism-development debate. The restructuring debate has created dynamics and undercurrents that have put to test, the existing federal system, thereby creating centrifugal and centripetal forces that has largely shaped conversations of the country’s Fourth Republic.

Basically, restructuring is part of a democratization process, and cannot be dissociated from it. Essentially, restructuring will lead to more democratization, hence development. Ordinary citizens will demand more accountability from their regional leaders once they realize that their leaders are responsible for the development conditions of their regions. Hence, leaders would be made more accountable and frugal in the management of public resources. In his Democracy and Development in Africa, Ake noted that “nations cannot be built without popular support and the full participation of the people, nor can the economic crises be resolved, and the human and economic conditions improved without the full, effective contributions,

creativity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority of the people” (138). According to Ibaba, the justification for restructuring cannot be dissociated from demands for good governance (64).

Democracy promotes good governance, transparency, accountability, free participation, inclusion and essentially promotes development. However, the restructuring debate in Nigeria ignores the fundamental issue of democracy as reflected in the views expressed in their various agitations. Ignoring the democratization narrative of federalism and focusing on the resource-material redistribution dimension misses a big picture in the debate.

EXEGESIS OF NEHEMIAH OF NEHEMIAH 2: 1-9

The book of Nehemiah was written during the time Israel was in captivity in the land of Babylon. It has to do with the story of how the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and the return of the people to their land through the man called Nehemiah. His life of determination and tenacity led to his ability of restructuring the city of Jerusalem amidst of various opposition.

Exegesis

Verses 1-8 deal with the request of Nehemiah to the king after his period of prayer.

Nehemiah prayed for four months about conditions in Jerusalem before he spoke to Artaxerxes about them (Nehemiah 1:1; Nehemiah 2:1). Artaxerxes’ reign began in the seventh Jewish month, Tishri (late September and early October), of 464 B.C. (Edwin 161). Therefore Nehemiah presented his request in late March or early April of 444 B.C. Nehemiah was probably very fearful (Nehemiah 2:2) because Artaxerxes could have interpreted sadness in his presence as dissatisfaction with the king (Esther 4:2) (Laney 77). "Persian works of art such as the great treasury reliefs from Persepolis indicate that those who came into the king’s presence did so with great deference, placing the right hand with palm facing the mouth so as not to defile the king with one’s own breath . . ." (Yamauchi 684).

Nehemiah realized that the moment had arrived for him to ask Artaxerxes to revise his official policy toward Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:11; Ezra 4:21). This too could have incurred the king’s displeasure. Nehemiah’s walk with God is evident in that he talked to God as he was conversing with the king (Nehemiah 2:4; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Nehemiah 2:4 contains a beautiful example of spontaneous prayer, one of the best in the Bible. "One of the most striking characteristics of Nehemiah was his recourse to prayer (Nehemiah 4:4; Nehemiah 4:9; Nehemiah 5:19; Nehemiah 6:9; Nehemiah 6:14; Nehemiah 13:14) (Yamauchi 685). "Quick prayers are possible and valid if one has prayed sufficiently beforehand. In this case Nehemiah’s prayer is evidence of a life lived in constant communion with God. Nehemiah had prayed for months, but he knew he was completely dependent on God’s work in the king’s heart at this moment" (Breneman 176). Divine working and human planning are not necessarily contradictory. "Prayer is where planning starts" (White 35).

Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes 12 years after the king had appointed him governor of Judah (Nehemiah 5:14; Nehemiah 13:6). Nevertheless he may have also gone back sooner than that (Nehemiah 2:6). One writer calculated the date of Artaxerxes’ decree to rebuild Jerusalem as March 5, 444 B.C. (Hoehner 64). This date marks the beginning of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27). Sixty-nine of those seventy weeks (173,880 days) were literally fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem, presented Himself at His ’royal entry’ as Israel’s messiah, on about March 30, A.D. 33. The prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled to the very day (cf. Luke 19:40-42). The seventieth week of Daniel, the Tribulation (cf. Matthew 24:4-28; Revelation 6-19), will find its fulfillment in the future" (Laney 78-79).

The fortress by the temple (Nehemiah 2:8) was a citadel that stood just north of the temple. Its name in Hebrew was Birah (or in Greek, Baris). It was the forerunner of the Antonia Fortress that Herod the Great built and to which Luke referred in the Book of Acts (Acts 21:37; Acts 22:24) (Bahat 45-46).

". . . there were good political reasons for Artaxerxes to grant Nehemiah’s request. Inaros had led a revolt in Lower Egypt in the late 460s, aided and abetted by Athens. The Persians had largely squashed this rebellion by 455, but pockets of resistance held out in the delta marshes thereafter. Then, early in the 440s, Megabyxos had led a revolt in Syria, which was probably put down just before Nehemiah made his request. Also, just

about 445 the Athenians negotiated the Peace of Kallias with the Persians and hostilities between the two powers ceased. At this point in time Artaxerxes certainly recognized that a stronger Judah populated by loyal Jews would help to bring greater stability to Syria and would provide a bulwark on the border with Egypt" (Vos. 91).

Verses 9-20 talks about the return to Jerusalem led by Nehemiah for a good restructuring of the land.

Because of the opposition of the Jews' neighbors, Artaxerxes sent a military escort to accompany Nehemiah to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:9). It is not certain how many Jews traveled with Nehemiah on this occasion. The writer gave us no numbers. Sanballat may have originated in Horonaim in Moab, but he seems more likely to have come from one of the Beth-horons (Upper or Lower) located just a few miles northwest of Jerusalem (cf. Joshua 10:10-11) (Rowley 166-67). The Elephantine papyri (ca. 400 B.C.) name him as the governor of Samaria, which he may have been then or after this event took place. Tobiah seems to have been a Jew-his name means "Yahweh is good"-who had attained a position similar to that of Sanballat in Ammon, east of Judah, under the Persians (Brockington 130). Scholars have traced nine generations of his influential family.

Probably Nehemiah wanted to survey the damage to the walls secretly (Nehemiah 2:12) because, had Israel's enemies observed him, they might have stirred up the people of the land to riot against him.

"He wished to lay his plans without any possibility of leakage to the enemy before their execution began, and then to let the execution be so swift that the work would be finished before they could successfully appeal to the king against it once more" (Rowley 559). Perhaps Nehemiah only surveyed the southern parts of Jerusalem's wall because those were the only sections still standing. Jerusalem was always attacked where she was most vulnerable, from the north; thus there was little preserved in that direction" (Yamauchi 689).

Another reason for Nehemiah's secrecy was probably that he wanted to formulate a plan before the Jews could marshal arguments why they could not rebuild the walls (Nehemiah 2:16). When he did present his ideas (Nehemiah 2:17-18), the people responded positively. This is an evidence of Nehemiah's wisdom as a leader. Nehemiah continued the policy of not allowing the people of the land to help rebuild Jerusalem, that Zerubbabel had begun (Nehemiah 2:20; cf. Ezra 4:3). He also continued to trust in God's enabling power primarily, rather than in his own ability (Nehemiah 2:20; cf. John 15:5). Nehemiah was clearly a shaker, a mover, and a doer.

Donald Campbell identified 21 principles of effective restructuring that Nehemiah demonstrated in chapter 2.

- "He established a reasonable and attainable goal
- He had a sense of mission
- He was willing to get involved
- He rearranged his priorities in order to accomplish his goal
- He patiently waited for God's timing
- He showed respect to his superior
- He prayed at crucial times
- He made his request with tact and graciousness
- He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance
- He went through proper channels
- He took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan
- He investigated the situation firsthand
- He informed others only after he knew the size of the problem
- He identified himself as one with the people
- He set before them a reasonable and attainable goal
- He assured them God was in the project
- He displayed self-confidence in facing obstacles
- He displayed God's confidence in facing obstacles

- He did not argue with opponents
- He was not discouraged by opposition
- He courageously used the authority of his position (Campbell 23).

POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA

Political restructuring simple means to organize a system in a new and different way (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2017). The current federal system in Nigeria has come under intense scrutiny, seeking for its reorganization from politicians and sociocultural group leaders. The media both print and online are inundated with demands and agitations to restructure the arrangement which predate the 1960 independence from Britain. However, some were of the view that there is the need to reconsider the Nigerian federal system.

Okojie (2013) stated that the idea here is not to identify the numerous problems that confront Nigeria. Rather, it is to identify some basic issues in the Nigerian federal system that have circumvented its efficiency in the management of group fragmentation and specifically the root causes of inter-group conflicts in the country. Similarly, some of the demands are for the distribution of powers, Okojie (2013) opined that Horowitz (2007) himself notes that where there are sub-ethnic cleavages in homogenous sub-states, devolution of a “generous” share of powers will likely reduce conflict at the centre. Nze and King (2005) similarly find that a cardinal principle of federal arrangements is that powers should be so weighted as to maintain a fair balance between the national and regional governments. They, however, conclude that Nigeria has over time breached this principle, and, as such, it is run as a unitary state masqueraded as federal. By section 4(2) of the Nigerian Constitution, the national government has exclusive powers over any of the items contained in the Exclusive legislative list and a concurrent jurisdiction with sub-states over items in the Concurrent List where its laws prevail in cases of inconsistencies (Nze and King, 2005).

Concentration of powers in the national government as a means to foster national integration has been noted as one of the major causes of fundamentalism, militant ethnic nationalism, conflict and political disorder in sub-Saharan Africa (Selassie, 2003), in Nigeria, it minimizes the depth of group loyalty and affinity in the country (Okojie, 2013). However, apart from the calls emanated from the apparent failure of the Nigerian governments to properly operate a true federalism; most of the agitations have political, religious and ethnic undertones which are not directed towards national development and cohesion. It is on the premise, the demands for the political restructuring has been placed on the political microscope and raised critical questions by the Governor of Kaduna State Mal. Nasir Ahmed El-Rufa’i. El-Rufa’i (2017) enquired that how much of the debate is propelled by a desire for national progress and how much is mere politics, opportunism and search for sectional entitlement? Is the debate mostly driven by our fractious politics and competing interests, or are there real grievances whose resolution will create a critical juncture and opportunity for national rebirth.

The critical questions raised by El-Rufa’i are not unfounded and out of place based on the people that are championing the political restructuring agenda. The leading proponents of political restructuring are politicians who are out of power and left out in the power scheming in the present administration. Second, a group of politicians who are nurturing presidential ambition in 2023, therefore, want to use the political restructuring as a bait to get support from other geopolitical zones that are marginalized in the federal structure and dissatisfied with the appointments in the present administration of Muhammad Buhari, particular Southeastern Nigeria. However, in central Nigeria, the call to restructure Nigeria is ignited by the incessant clashes between farmers who are believed to be predominantly Christians in Benue, Plateau and Southern Kaduna but in Nasarawa State farmers are probably predominantly Muslims and herdsmen who are mostly Muslim. This occupational conflict between farmers and herders has been sensationally coloured by some media both print and online as an attempt by Fulani to eliminate ethnic groups who are overwhelmingly Christians from their ancestral land. To deepen our democracy, we need to address the damage being done to our politics by hate speech and the growing industry of fake news and conspiracy theories attributing murderous intentions to ethnic and religious groups.

Finally, the issue of reinventing a new political class committed to issue-based politics is the pathway to democratic consolidation (Ibrahim, 2018). Based on this ethnic and religious interpretation and colouration of the farmer-herdsmen conflict, some of the chief priests of the political restructuring calls for the creation of Police due to the inability of the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies to prevent, arrest and stop the lingering killings in the farming communities in the region.

NEED FOR POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA

It is evident that there is need to restructure Nigeria politically. The agitations to this effect are loud and clear. This call has been on for quite a long time though successive governments in Nigeria have not done much to address it. The best that has been done has been the organization of the 2005 National Policy Reform Conference (NPRC) and the 2014 National conference, whose findings and results are yet to impact on the nation. Why the nonchalant attitude to the call for restructuring in Nigeria? Bello (2017) advanced three reasons;

- i. Some people believe that such exercise may not succeed in moving the nation forward and may be counterproductive'
- ii. Those who called for restructuring in the past failed to explain what they meant and did not define the scope, modalities or timing of such an exercise;
- iii. The calls for restructuring have been from individuals and minority groups.

The agitation for political restructuring today however, has gone beyond the bounds of individuals and minority groups. It is a national issue that must not be ignored. This is because the failure to address this in the past have caused some hurt feeling, suspicions and distrust which invariably have hampered the pursuance of peace, unity, and nation building. If Nigeria must move forward as a nation, politically restructuring is inevitably sacrosanct.

Moghalu (2018) identified four reasons why Nigeria must restructure. He averred that restructuring is very essential to the nation because it will reposition our democracy for better results. For him, the periodic elections cannot do as much as restructuring can do. Restructuring helps to revitalize the periodic elections thereby positioning them for better governance. It will also according to him, reduce the cost of governance at both the Federal and regional levels. Nigeria as an entity is a creation of the colonial masters, a lumping together of many ethnic nationalities who did not come together to negotiate their future. These ethnic nationalities had no terms of agreement as one people hence the Nigerian nation could be referred to as a nation in the making, waiting to be born. Given the diversity inherent in the ethnic components of Nigeria, the best form of government that could guarantee national unity and social cohesion and at the same time foster sustainable development is true federalism. This form of government will ensure the total overhauling of the 1999 constitution currently in use for the achievement of national unity. True federalism will encourage the development of all the component parts; regions and zones of the federal state at their own pace and instance. Though we are said to be practicing a federal system of government, what we have on ground is nothing but a unitary system, where the centre holds power and dictates for the states and regions (Omordia, 2018).

Political restructuring is therefore needed in order to set things right politically. From the above analysis, it is evident that there is no justice and equity in the Nigeria polity. Political restructuring is needed to ensure this. The present Nigeria constitutional and political structure concentrate power in Abuja and favour some parts of the country and according to Nmorka (2019), disenfranchise others; from where the country's natural resources flow. This is so because they are denied the power to control their resources and are made to depend on what Abuja gives to them as allocation. This surely is political aberration and federal anomaly. The main essence of a federal system of government is that it is formed by its constituent units and an appropriate balance of power between the constituent units and the centre is maintained. This unfortunately has been perverted in Nigeria hence the injustice and disunity in the polity. Restructuring is needed in Nigeria to correct these political errors and make the nation functional again and leaders in Nigeria should imbibe

Nehemiah's approach as discussed above. The Nigerian nation has been destabilized by the current conditions the failed system has caused.

According to Budaya (2018), when we fail to appreciate the fact that the Nigerian problem is not the "process" but the "structure", conflict, animosity and distrust will continue to thrive in various quarters. For instance, the conflicts, instability, security challenges and all the other socio-ethnic crisis which have defiled the apprehension of the overstretched and over-centralized police force, and the "siege-style security governance in which our armed forces are constantly deployed to check-mate internal uprisings and ensure lasting security will not work, until we address the structure of Nigeria (Oloromo, 2018). Political restructuring is imperatively necessary in Nigeria in order to uphold the rights of the people. The constitution in operation today is not people oriented. We need a people's constitution, a democratic constitution based on the life, experiences and needs of the people, a constitution which will be portent enough to address the daily issues that bedevil the people. The constitution in use today was made by the military juntas and this has failed to guide our democratic practice as the government of the people, for the people and by the people.

To restructure Nigeria politically is to follow the path of economic and social transformation. It is through transformation, reformation and restructuring that the economy of any nation is revived and receives its boost to impact on the people. The geo-political zones and regions of the federation should be allowed to devise ways of revitalizing their resources for their economic transformation. If they harness the sources of their resources, development would be sustained. Again, in the manufacturing sector, the regional governments can engage in inter and intra-regional trades as well as international trade. Here, it should be clear that the restructuring that is based on the 36 state structures may not be very effective because some states are not natural resources viable. Political restructuring should be regionally or geopolitically based for national development.

CONCLUSION

Political restructuring as a means of building and repositioning the political and social order for better development can be encouraged through the doctrine of civic responsibility of the various religious groups. Political restructuring, basically, is a project that involves a reconveyance of the various ethnic nationalities and regions to address the problem of the country and to project a way forward. In its content, restructuring will include the following; a. A review of resource control, b. The relationship between the federal government and the regional governments; c. The contribution of the regional governments to the government at the centre; d. The representation at the federal level by the regional governments; e. Regional policing in relation to federal policing; the relationship between the regions' trade and development programmes, initiatives and cooperation between them for the enhancement of national development.

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