Beating on the Drum of War: The Hausa Fulani Hegemony and Restructuring Agenda in Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** It has been argued by sections of the Nigerian state that there exists a grand hegemonic game plan by the Fulani at Islamizing Nigeria. The current happenings of rampaging banditry have been argued by some as evidence of the plot in itself. As a result of this, some sections of the country are calling the government of the day to “restructure” Nigeria’s federation into a working “true federal” state or have the country seize to exist altogether.

**Objective:** The objective of this paper is to interrogates the reliability of this theory of Islamization and to investigate the questions that have pulled Nigeria to the bricks of war.

**Method:** The paper employed qualitative sources and leveraged on both academic, grey literature and newspaper publications as its main sources.

**Findings:** The paper found out that the historical suspicion that has existed amongst the Nigerian people since independence is retrogressive and as such anti cohesion.

**Implications/Originality/Value:** The paper recommends that our common problems of basic infrastructure, security, employment opportunities, social investment among others must be adequately addressed if Nigeria is to halt the drumbeats of war. Therefore, the paper concludes that until the major contradictions inherent within the state is properly tackled, the current problems would continue to reappear in future even if remedial solutions are found today.

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**Introduction**
Following the assassination of the Boko Haram Sect’s head by the Umaru Musa Yar’adua-led government in 2009, Nigeria was thrust into direct conflict with the sect. the carnage this group has inflicted on Nigerians
of all faiths and creeds deserves its own paper. Nigeria is still trying to put an end to the group, which has morphed into other heinous and deadlier sects like ISIS and ISWAP.

In 2015, when the Muhammadu Buhari led government came on board, a new group seeking to break away from Nigeria emerged from the eastern part of the country, this time more notorious than the hitherto MASSOB which aligns itself with non-violence but civil disobedience, the new group IPOB intends to achieve secession by any mean they deem necessary, recently, the group created the Eastern Security Network (ESN) and they have become more bold and deadlier in their attack against state institutions, their current MO resembles that of Boko Haram when it began its course in the 2009.

In the south-west, Sunday Igbohowho is a Yoruba nationalist is seeking to rid the Yoruba “nation” of infiltrators, backed by Pan Yoruba Group Afenifere, Sunday Igboho and his cohorts are seeking a separate Oduduwa state. With all these contradictions within the Nigerian republic, Bandits have decided to terrorize everywhere and nowhere, kidnapping, sectarian violence, religiosity, murder, arson and trouble has enveloped the Nigerian state. There is no denying that Nigeria is currently at “war” with itself, as almost everywhere you look, people are protesting or in conflict for one reason or another, and with the issue of “banditry,” as described by a section of the media, the subject of some grand hegemonic plan by the Hausa/Fulani north at Islamizing Nigeria has resurfaced in the sphere of Nigerian politics, and the situation is exacerbated by the fact that the man in charge has been accused of failing to take “decisive steps” towards his kinsmen. As a result, a number of non-state actors have begun to target state formations and institutions, with some even advocating for Nigeria's disintegration.

It is noteworthy to highlight that the Nigerian 1999 constitution as amended in Chapter 1 Section 10 states clearly that “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion” (Nigerian 1999 Constitution). It is upon this premise that the Nigerian state owing to the constitution is regarded as a “secular” state.

It is also pertinent to note that because of colonial and foreign contact, interaction, de facto crusades and jihads, different sections that make up federating units in the country have a particular religion as a dominant religion in their spheres of control. This has allowed the operation of the penal code and sharia law in operation within the Nigerian state and backed by the 1999 constitution as amended.

In 2015, a new government came into power at the time, the electoral triumph of the then new ruling party, the All-Progressive Congress (APC), was seen as a democratic revolution, ousting the then government of the People’s Democratic Party PDP, which was in power since the return of civil rule in 1999.

Methodology
The data collection method involved the collection and review of books, online materials, Newspapers and a wide range of materials. In addition, an online search for “Islamization in Nigeria” was carried out in order to assess any pattern of search showing interest on the implication of the issue.

Theoretical Underpinning
This research work adopts the Elite theory of power. This theory first gained traction in the 19th century and was then made popular by Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Roberto Michels (Elite, 2016). The elite theory recognizes that society is divided into two groups: dominant and dependent.

According to this theory, humans must be separated into two groups: rulers and governed. In whatever type of governance, the ruling class controls and exercises the majority of power, wealth, and prestige in society. For example, Michels said that the vast majority of people are indifferent, sluggish, and subservient, and that they are fundamentally incapable of independent thought. These attributes are exploited by leaders in order to maintain their positions of power. They use a variety of techniques to deceive them, including oratory, persuasion, and playing on emotions. (Elite, 2016)
Applied to the context of this work, it can be concluded without remorse that one cannot talk about Nigeria’s retrogressive nature in terms of its economic, social and political state without comfortably linking it to the Nigerian elite, both ruling and governing class. The Nigerian state today faces serial challenges on all fronts, these challenges alone without heating up the polity with agitations, counter agitations and spreading conspiracy theories of some grand plot by the dominant Muslim north at Islamizing the country.

Because, in the end, it's really the elites who benefit directly from these drumbeats of conflict; obviously, they would profit from the process regardless of what happened. It is for this reason that Ezeani believes that one should examine, “What is the nature of these elites, are they coherent and motivated by national transformation agenda or interest, or are they motivated by money and greed?” Nigeria’s political elite is a product of the country’s tumultuous politics. Its origins can be traced back to the colonial sociopolitical structure. As a result, it is a child born history. (Ezeani, 2013). Therefore, the elites must be careful and must trend with caution not to throw the same people they claim to stand for against each other, while their Nigerian passports are filled with visas of all nature and manners of countries where they can jet their families to whenever trouble beacons.

It is at this point that in order to decisively examine the argument of this paper, it becomes important to critique some of the context around Islamization of Nigeria and what restructuring the Nigerian state really means.

Connecting the dots between, Islamization, Hausa/Fulani Hegemony and Restructuring
It's important to define what the term "Islamization" means in Nigerian political jargon at this juncture. Islamization, according to Ole (2018), is “the comprehensive annihilation of Christian presence in an otherwise heterogeneous, pluralistic, secular socio-political Nigeria”. The proponents and framers of this argument have said that this grand plan at Islamization is subtle, slow, and steady. It is quite pertinent to link early enough in this paper, that when the word Islamization is mentioned, the Hausa/Fulani is featured. For in the final analysis of the proponents of this theory, the Hausa/Fulani, who are assumed to control the “Muslim-North” in Nigeria, would be the executioners of the grand plan itself.

This argument is in itself quite unfortunate as Nigeria is heterogenous and plural in terms of religious inclinations and belief systems. From the north-east, west, central and the south-south, east and west, Nigerians of different creeds and beliefs can be found. It is quite clear that majority the states that make up the defunct northern region in the countryhouses more Muslims, even though this position in itself is debatable but what is not debatable is that the majority of the states in the southern region especially the south-east and south-south sub-regions have 90% if not more of its population as Christians. It is also pertinent to note here that Nigeria has an almost even population between Muslims and Christians, this is because according to the estimate by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact Book, the Muslim population in Nigeria is pegged at 53.5%, 45.9% Christian divided between 10.6% Roman Catholic and 35.3% other Christians, and 0.6% for other religions put together (CIA World Fact Book, 2018). This has set a good context for the reliability of the conspiracy theory for some grand plan by the Muslim north to Islamize Nigeria.

For example, Ole has suggested that the Islamization goal in post-independence Nigeria is tied to Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduana of Sokoto, and his personality and tactics. According to Ole, his goal and vision was to convert Nigeria, and perhaps the entire African continent, to Islam; a game to which he was completely dedicated (Ole, 2018).

It is in the same line of thought that Onotu while presenting a seminar paper titled ‘Christian Muslim relationship in Nigeria Muslim master plan’. argued that the Sarduana was quoted to have said “I have earlier spoken of conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. I would like to say that this is only a beginning as there are other areas we have not yet tapped. I hope when we claim Nigeria, we will go further afield in Africa” (Sir Ahmadu Bello in Onotu, 1988).
It is in corroborating Ole, that Onotu opined that though Ahmadu Bello is dead, for many of his followers in Nigeria, The Islamization strategy should be seen through to the finish, even if it means putting this country in a religious strife in accomplishing the set goal. (Onotu, 1988).

While Christians believe that faith and state must be separated, politics must be separated from religion, and caesaropapism must be recognized as a political philosophy with flaws, Ole contends that the Muslim views them as one. Based on this idea, he employs government machinery and the state's economy to further his religion. (Ole, 2018). This is an unfair position evidently as there are classical cases in history and even in recent times where both religion and state have been mixed together.

Be that as it may, of the 196 countries in the world, there are 43 countries with state religions mostly in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and Asia. Similarly, there are 40 countries with preferred religions of which Christianity is the favoured faith in 28 of the 40. Thirteen nations, which include nine in Europe, are officially Christian, two have Buddhism as their official religion (Bhutan and Cambodia), Israel is an officially Jewish state, and Islam is the dominant religion of 27 countries in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and also Middle East and North Africa (The Guardian, 2017).

Returning to Nigeria, with the population of the two major Abrahamic religions of Islam and Christianity nearly spread evenly as well as divided along geographical boundaries, Ole's (2019) and Onotu's (1988) arguments become increasingly tenuous, especially as secularism and westernization have gained traction on both sides of the political divide.

It's why, according to Duffield (2009), "the country's 150 million people are divided nearly evenly between Christians and Muslims, and indeed the two groups normally coexist peacefully notwithstanding these bouts of communal tensions."

The authors of this paper believe even if there was an agenda to gradually bring domineering religious supremacy by one group on the other, it would be the Christians-South attempting to "Christianize" Nigeria as a "so-called secularist" Nigeria with its penal code and western-oriented state operation isn't indigenous to Nigeria or even Africa. It is, undoubtedly, a colonial heritage left to us by the British, who we can safely assume are Christians, and whose system is based on their religious beliefs and orientations.

This brings us to the issues of “restructuring” as an interlinked argument within the debate of Islamization. Evidently, the clamour for restructuring has been a reoccurring decimal in Nigeria since the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 (Harry, 2020). Therefore, this paper would not concern itself with going into conceptualization of what restructuring means, rather, we would deal with the concept as it concerns the argument of this paper.

Restructuring means different things to different people depending on the state or region where one is from or rather depending on which side of the mouth the speaker is speaking from. The reason Epelle and Nweke (2019) opined that “there is hardly a consensus among people on what political restructuring means. This is because the practice of federalism, the world over, has had its challenges”. The truth is, the profiteers of the current system whether from the north or the south are not quite keen to the “disbalancing” of the current order of things.

Be that as it may, we would like to begin this part with simple posers by El-Rufa’i posed in his paper delivered on restructuring at Chatham House. “How much of the debate about restructuring 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”? (El-Rufa, 2017).
Similarly, Uwa, Thomas and Oyindamola (2018) have opined that Nigerians have been debating the reorganization of the country’s federation for quite some time. The southern and northern Nigerians have been pitted against each other in this intense dispute. We may fairly assume that the protagonists in the fight for a better Nigerian federalism are the people of southern Nigeria. Meanwhile, northern Nigerians are adversaries because they have long been suspicious of proponents of Nigerian political restructuring.

Corroborating the above, Babalola and Onapajo (2019) have argued that “Many believe that the status quo is preferred by the northern elite because it appears to favor their political and economic interests. However, the northern elite have had cause to criticize the federal system, particularly when other ethno-regional groups are in power.” The arguments presented by the above-cited authors has clearly given credence to the position of the author of this paper that “restructuring” means different things to different people depending on which side of the divide the speaker is from. Arguably, the restructuring in its essence means more power devolution to the Nigerian sub-regional governments as regards the legislative items on the concurrent and residual list while reducing the powers on the exclusive list for the central government.

**This position is likely more favoured by those occupying the Niger Delta region** of Nigeria, and thus feel that they deserve the opportunity to manage the resources from their region.

One must be careful as argued Abeeband Roukema, (2021) that “the call for restructuring demand a through and in-depth understanding and analysis of what and how the restructuring should be done and to what extend should the restructuring be done so as to maintain the purpose and objective of federal system without necessarily undermining the benefits and purpose as envisaged by its founding fathers and proponents”.

**Our thesis**

One of the biggest historical mistakes of the Brits for their selfish interest was the decision by the British Crown to bring evidently three different kinds of people, with different religious creeds and orientation together to form a modern state simply because it was convenient for the Crown (Oyovbaire, 1985) and (Akindele, 1996). For in the final analysis, the northern, southern protectorates and the Lagos colony merger birthed unending suspicion by Nigerians across geographical and religious divides as observed Alonge (2005) when he opined that Nigeria evolved out of historical accidents engineered by the British government. The reason Nwabughuogu (1996) concluded that at the end of the amalgamation in 1914, the colonial authorities still faced the dilemma of finding the structural direction to which the Nigerian state would evolve. These are the kinds of issues which we face today of which restructuring has become the chief subject.

Therefore, it is our position that in order to find a sense of balance to quell this constant call, certain internal contradiction that exists within the federal practice of Nigeria and indeed in terms of physical infrastructure must be attended to. It is why El-Rufia (2017) observed that “the state of national dissatisfaction for a variety of reasons and motives has led to strident calls from virtually all segments of Nigerian society for political, constitutional and fiscal reform using various words and phrases, restructuring, true federalism, devolution, resource control, regionalism, self-determination and so on”.

It should be clear though, that the authors of this paper do not in any way argue against devolution of powers to sub-regional governments or against resource control which we believe is what restructuring mean to many people, on the contrary, our position is, if this would bring lasting peace and quell agitations and drumbeats of war across the country, the current government must endeavour to engender it rapidly now through legislative and constitutional amendments.

Be that as it may, there are challenges we face collectively in Nigeria and until these challenges are tackled head-on, these agitations, rampaging banditry, call for secession and restructuring would continue to reprecipitate whether as a true federal state or within this “quasi confusing quite abnormal parliamentary-federal system” which we operate today.
What needs to be done
The magnitude of the growing discontent in Nigeria is inconceivable, so both the ruling and governing classes must act immediately to resolve the internal contradictions that exist in the Nigerian state; these contradictions and quibbles do not acknowledge ethnicity, belief system, or tribe, and when they come calling, they affect everyone regardless of skin color or tribe they speak or belong to; as a result, This paper suggests, among other things, that the state take the following seriously and handle them diligently, failing which the entity known as Nigeria will cease to exist altogether:

Security: The Goal of Establishing a State is to Ensure the Safety and Security of its Residents' Lives and Property
When people no longer feel safe within the jurisdiction of such a state, the essence of the social contract that exists between the state and the people is lost. Therefore, the government of the Nigerian state now more than any time in our country’s history must tighten national security and make people feel safe within the Nigerian space, only then would the infrastructure that the government claims to be building have any meaning to the people. After all, it is only when one is alive that he gets to use the infrastructure being provided. It is why Kastina (2012) concluded that Nigeria's security dilemma necessitates the country's development problems to be addressed.

Basic Infrastructure
According to Proshare (2021), the infrastructure deficit in Nigeria is estimated to be $100 billion a year, which is 189.77 percent higher than the federal budget for 2021, which is projected to be $34.51 billion. With such a massive difference, the Federal government of Nigeria is unable to meet the country's infrastructure needs. Indeed, Nigeria like many countries on the continent lacks basic infrastructure and the necessary financial capacity to provide what is needed. Interestingly, one cannot develop without being able to build the need infrastructure in the country. Direct foreign investment becomes difficult to attract and local MSMEs are stifled to grow. Therefore, in order to envisage a peaceful Nigeria where citizens have a semblance of contentment with the basic things of life, the government must endeavour to provide the most basic infrastructure across the length and breadth of this country to allow people to the presence of government.

Education
No society develops with a weak educational sector; education is said to be the backbone of every society. When people collectively are bereft of education, the future of such societies certainly becomes bleak. For instance, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics observed that Sub-Saharan Africa (45 million) and South Asia (42 million) had the highest actual figures of out-of-school children. At the country level, India, Pakistan, Nigeria (emphasis is that of these authors) and Ethiopia have the highest percentage of children who are out of school (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2005). Putting this into context, one can only infer how seriously the government takes education and what kinds of possible carnage awaits us in the closest future if this tide is not stemmed or rather reversed early enough. Government must increase budgetary allocation to education and begins to prepare for Nigeria’s tomorrow. Our stance is that an informed populace is more inclined to pursue civil measures to make their grievances known than a populace with no or limited education: A population capable of rational thought and critically analyze issues instead of a population susceptible to being easily coaxed or cognitively fondled by the small elite whose end purpose is often to play on the public's emotions which has been clouded by ethno-religious bias.

Enthronement of Democratic Ethos through Building Strong Institutions and Credible Elections
Egwemi (2010), for instance, was of the impression that while Nigeria is a democracy in name, there are still a lot of issues that need to be tackled especially in the face of the shaky nature of the foundation of democracy. It is the year 2021 and the issues that Egwemi was referring to are still very much alive today, now even direr than they were in 2010 when Nigeria’s democratic rebirth celebrated 10years without military interregnum. Though, like most democracies, we have built institutions, these institutions have yet to demonstrate strength, individuals still take these institutions and toy with them as they deem fit. Having
free and fair elections and an independent electoral umpire are an incredible show of the maturity status of any democracy, our democracy still faces this challenge among numerous others. Therefore, in order to stem the tide of resurgent calls for the dismemberment of Nigeria, government must build institutions that the people trust and allow peoples free choices to be made. Because whenever remedial solutions are taken, these problems would resurface again time after time.

Employment opportunities, Equity, Equality, social justice, social investment, among other things, are what governments at all levels must endeavour to provide. This is with the view allow citizens feel part of their state rather than alienated from the state which in turn breeds discontent to pushing them to find solace in their tribes and or religion rather than the state itself.

Conclusions

Everywhere one looks in our country, someone seems to be banging the drum of war and enticing unwary folk to take sides, most of whom have no idea what the drummers' initial goals were. It is not the stand of this paper that there are not internal contradictions within the Nigerian state or within the practice of federalism, however, our conclusion is that alternative dispute resolution strategies must be employed to find sustainable solutions to the problems all Nigerians irrespective of creed, ethnicity or tribe faces daily as they go about their daily living. But the call for war which is the tone of many of the frontline agitators today would only lead to untold hardship, callous and unwarranted deaths and the destruction of lives and property in its wake.

The elites must not use citizens as pawns in their game of supremacy and citizens themselves must not allow themselves to be used as ordinary disposable pieces in anyone’s chess game.

It is why Sanusi (1999) opined that Nigeria has the misfortune of producing elites whose greed and selfishness know no limitations. They are willing to break this country apart and lead us into a senseless conflict unless they can agree on how to accommodate each other. He argues further that when we accuse our elite of ethnic chauvinism and religious fanaticism, we are blaming them for the survival of retrograde notions rather than the caducity. Nigeria's tragedy is not rooted in its diversity, population, or natural resources. Our sorrow stems from a lack of truly nationalist and imaginative leadership, elites capable of harnessing the various streams that flow into Nigeria as melting pot (Sanusi, 1999). Therefore, until the elites become nationalistic in their endeavours and sustainable solutions found to the major contradictions inherent within the Nigerian state is properly tackled, the current problems would continue to reappear in future even if remedial solutions are found today.

Reference

September, 2017.

