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The crux of agitations in Nigeria a striking danger to economic development: A philosophical purview

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Abstract. Too many agitations leading to civil disobedience and violent protest from diverse groups have arisen in Nigeria. Recently, there were EndSARS (nationwide), the Revolution-Now (West), protest by Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (South-East) and Amotekun in the West. These agitations and their consequences are inimical to national development. This study in consideration of the failing state of affairs in Nigeria explored lack of national political philosophy as the primary cause of the agitations and highlighted critical elements of lack of political philosophy to include; marginalization of all sorts, abuse of human rights, brazen disregard to institutionalized federal character principles, corruption of all sorts, and insecurity as the most critical elements depicting lack of political philosophy. Anchored on Prebendal theory or prebendalism and Frustration-Aggression theory, the study contends that when approach to leadership sacrifices meritocracy in the management of her resources in such that the “want-get-ratio” falls, the consequent frustration which erupts in the catalyzing agent of agitations. The finding from the study exploration is indicative that the current presidential system which concentrated power at the center is ill-fated political philosophy judging from ethnic and religious diversities of Nigeria. The study recommends that the clamour for restructuring should be promoted as it will define Nigeria’s political philosophy along conflict areas which will determine her nation building policies and socio-economic development.

Keywords. Agitations, civil disobedience, marginalization, political philosophy, protests

1.0 Introduction

It is truism that the long years of military rule in Nigeria had devastating consequences on the lives of the Nigerian people, her philosophy of purpose and her faith in her sovereignty. These consequences are largely mirrored in her current stagnation with socio-economic life most especially on the frontiers of national development. As much as the long military rule left less to be desired; no thanks to human right abuses and suppression of freedom of speech, the thriving democracy ushered in since the past two decades may not have diminished Nigeria’s woes socially, politically, economically and otherwise (Egugbo, 2020). For instance, since embracing the current 9th Republic, there are more agitations in Nigeria than there were at the inception of 4th Republic (Eluozo, 2019). The situation is disheartening and as much as it is eye opening to the problems and challenges of nation building in Nigeria. Although many may not

accept that the hope on democracy as the panacea to the beleaguered problems of nation building is an illusion; the question remains, what is the primary cause of agitations in Nigeria?

To amply answer this question, there is need to look at the structure of Nigeria Republic and how this structure may have created underlining national challenges. This overview is particularly important in understanding the philosophical perspective of the Nigerian socio-economic challenges of nation-building.

Historically, nationalities existed before the formation of Nigeria at the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates (Mbalisi & Okeke, 2021). These nationalities can best be defined in existentialism as independent nations bound with freedom of choices, common meaning and purposes of life and being aware of their existence and the existence of other people around. The fact that they waged external aggression confirms that those nations were independent nations till amalgamation (Paine, 2019). The amalgamation of Nigeria wasn't unification of those nationalities but subjugation by colonial supremacists done as an act of convenience for the administration of what was to become the largest black nation in Africa. For instance, Paine's evaluation of ethnic upheaval or violence in Africa and the pernicious patrimony of pre-colonial States is an insight into the independence state of many ethnic groups before the eve of colonialism. The heritage of these independent nations is what Paine classified as "destroyed" by the colonial activities in the late 19th century. Hence, the Nigeria of today was born out of British administrative convenience rather than a socio-cultural classification of people with similar or same ancestry, culture, purpose or dreams. This is what became of the entity and sovereignty called Nigeria with its multi-colouration on almost all aspects of life setting the agenda for agitations.

2.0 Review

2.1 Nigeria, Her Plurality and Rising Agitations

Nigeria is a country that is heterogeneous in nature. Consequently, the country is blessed with various and diversified cultures, languages, ethnic groups, religions, traditions, and customs. The different ethnic nations that Nigeria is consisted of are referred to either as majority or minority groups. The Igbo are majorly in the South-Eastern region, the Yorubas occupy the South-Western area, Hausa/Fulani in the North-Eastern and North-Western zones, and the TIV in the North-Central region. The four ethnic nationalities are recognized as the major ethnic groups whereas the other ethnic nationalities are referred to as minority groups. Also, the North is dominantly Muslims whereas the South is dominantly Christians with a divide in the West and the North Central. There is, therefore, a noticeable imbalance within the Nigerian state as regards the level of development. Implicitly, as a proactive approach against the obvious fear of dominance and possible unwillingness of each region to surrender their political powers, federal character which implies power sharing between the federal and the component regions was introduced, although it may be said to be far from the solution. For instance, Adedeji and Ezeabasili (2018) bemoaned the lack of true federalism in Nigeria owing to the scrambling of resources by very many divisions across, ethnic and religious lines and even, along geographical divisions which have concentrated more power at the center than its clamoured devolution to State and Local Government Councils.

The internal strives were prelude to calls for a return to democracy and sadly, Nigeria's attempt to return to civil rule in 1993 and her eventual smooth transition to on 29th May 1999 untethered huge expectations against a multitude of previously repressed slumbering political forces such as the ethnic militias fighting against domination of their clime. It may seem that there are more agitations following each democratic dispensation since the 2nd Republic in

Nigeria (Odum, 2016b), this is particularly so because people would have thought that democratic governance is the ideal to rest all cases of agitations and indifferences occasioned by unhealthy competition among most existing groups in Nigeria. Unfortunately, this has not been so with research ironically showing evidence that democratic inception have often exasperated ethnic stress or apprehension in sundered heterogeneous civilisation such as Nigeria (Qvortrup, 2017). It is apparent that democratic dispensations have witnessed more ethnic consciousness than the military era.

To survive ethnic competition, there have been many proactive measures in form of pressure groups undertaken by ethnic groups to checkmate the overbearance of other ethnics for self-defense and protection. The pressure groups have risen to the status of ethnic militia all over the country (Obiorah & Okoye, 2020). For example; in the South-West, there are O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA) (Okumagba, 2011), in the South-East, there are Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), there is Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in South-South, and Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC) in North (Saliu & Omotola, 2008). It is sad that despite the penetration of democracy, the number of these militia groups is increasing on daily basis and they are challenging the socio-political, as well as economic whereabouts as part of the procedure for relaxation of the diplomatic conditions (Qvortrup, 2017). The positions of these groups have continued to emphasize the lopsided nature of power sharing and partial devolution of power in our supposed federalism structures. To drive their points home, these ethnic pressure group has grown to militias and employ force, and utilize the preponderance of youth membership with several ethnic and even international affiliations.

The consciousness of change especially regarding socio-economic development is the major factor fueling the rise of ethnic militia in Nigeria in a bid to protect group from ethnic cleansing and to achieve self-actualization. According to Nnam, Owan, Eteng, Okechukwu, Obasi and Nwosumba (2021), our time is that of militant ethnicity at a great cost of associated social, economic, political and human consequences. These are injurious and inimical to collective efforts towards nation building, cohesion and development in all its ramifications.

Against the backdrop, it is worrisome that various perpetuated crimes take the semblance of ethnic forces as supposedly acting for and seeking to shield or defend their various ethnic engrossment since they are not guaranteed by the inherent political competition. This is largely attributable to the situation in the country in which the state is mainly regarded as indifferent to the aspirations of the component ethnicities especially as regards political equity, fairness in economic and resource distribution and socio cohesion. Unfortunately, the situation (of the rising ethnic agitations now in form of ethnic militia) has made it progressively hard to distinguish between the true demands by these forces on the state and utter lawlessness, wickedness and madness perpetuated by miscreants and selfish individuals lurking under such established ethnic militia to commit crimes and endanger the lives of the citizenry. There is the difficulty in ascertaining the genuine cry for help and that of an ambush under the present circumstances. This is because these classes who aver to act for the ethnic and regional interests espouse or assume varied game plans which does not exclude savagery and wickedly intended measure in the execution of their schemes. For instance, in the teeming ghetto of Kano, Kaduna, Onitsha, Aba, Warri, Port-Harcourt, as well as Lagos, belligerent groups randomly untether extreme barbarity on civil society which does exempt the symbols of governmental authority (Unya & Omaka, 2021).

2.2 Cause and Source of Rising Agitations in Nigeria

Civil agitations or political minded agitations are reactions of the governed towards the anomalies and unsolved conflicts of a government administration or her oversights. Most importantly, agitations become activated when and where there are no avenues and windows to address these anomalies or concerns. As many would think, the causes of rising agitations in Nigeria may not lie on ethnic diversity or her religious divide; there are nations which have been able to tame those differences and progress as one of the most developed nations on earth.

The primary or major cause of rising agitations in Nigeria is lack of suitable political philosophy which has prevented a pragmatic approach to nation building. Without a clear political philosophy which is tailored to the peculiarities of nation building, it may be difficult for any nation to find a suitable system of government which will recognize the socio-political and economic hurdles which need to be surmounted for a holistic nation building to take place (Unya & Omaka, 2021).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The conceptual basis which underpins the current survey is Prebendal theory or prebendalism. The theory is postulated by Joseph (1996). Prebendal theory or prebendalism refers to primitive acquisition of power which in essence depicts the politics of corruption, clannishness and nepotism, a tendency to use power in favour of feudal purpose and relatedness thereby sacrificing meritocracy for kinship. In prebendalism, therefore:

...cronies or members of an ethnic group are compensated when an individual from the group comes into power or where; “state offices are regarded as “prebends” that can be appropriated by office holders who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups (Joseph, 1996).

This kind of Politics has brought about an increase in corruption in Nigeria to the extent that every facet of the country's political system is beclouded with ethnic and religious interest. For instance, one's ethnic or religious affiliations are taken into consideration when something like award of contracts, promotion, appointment among others are done.

In the current constituents of Nigeria, the brazen disregard to the principles of federal character has diminished the social trust held by the diversity of the nation between one ethnic, tribe, and religion to another. The current administration has witnessed untold levels of agitations on account of this ethnic clannishness in the distribution of resources and punishment of offenders. This situation as propounded by the theory is supported by the current agitations borne out of cries of marginalization and exclusion from the current administration.

Frustration-Aggression theory

The frustration-aggression theory (F-A) propounded by Dollard et al. (1939) which was modified by Berkowitz (1962) and Yates (1962) as the typical description of aggressive or hostile behaviour coming from ineptitude to bring about what is desired. According to Anifowose (1982), the theory relies on psychological relationship between motivation and behaviour to explain frustration and aggression. In this perspective, aggression is seen as the variance between what people's expectations - what they feel that they want or deserve (want-get-ratio) and what they actually get (actual need satisfaction). This may be expressed as the gap between the “expected need satisfaction” and “actual need satisfaction” (Davies 1962). If the difference is much, frustration sets in, which on the other hand triggers agitation.

The main point here is that the frustration-aggression theory is not simply to be taken as a natural reaction or merely instinctual as biological theorists and realists may like to think. Instead, it is the result of the exasperation that is possibly aroused in a condition where the rightful desire of a person is more personally denied or by the incidental outcome of the manner the society is ordered. Consequently, the apprehension of the resultant despondency could possibly push such an individual to put up a reaction to express his anger in a way that does not exclude violence against those he considered responsible which often extends to persons that are more personally or incidentally affiliated with them (Best, 2006). The two theories are quite pertinent to this work, from the point that Prebendal theory explains how political corruption have been paralysing security sector in Nigeria, which gives birth to insecurity while Frustration-Aggression theory, demonstrates how the atrocities being committed by the political office holders left majority of the Nigerians in frustration fuelling arguably all sorts of agitations and civil disobedience. With a suitable political philosophy, peoples' frustration will be aligned and integrated into the national policy and lasting solutions will be figure to address and reduce their frustration which is the major trigger of agitations.

3.0 Lack of Suitable Political Philosophy

Despite the amount of resources whether human or material resources, no nation can really progress without a clear political philosophy. Without clarity about how to govern and administer a nation, how to manage her resources and distribute her resources, too many challenges will rear their ugly heads and threaten both the unity and progress of any nation. Political philosophy is what Ake (1967) defined as tailor-made principles of a nation which is home grown in accordance to the peculiarities of a nation including; the composition of her nationalities, socio-cultural characteristics, economic realities, religious diversities and goals towards nation building and national development.

Political philosophy aims to assemble socio-cultural fragments units of people into a single territorial unit with an established national identity under a centralized authority which controls the political units, regions and followers irrespective of their socio-cultural and economic background (Jimoh & Vincent, 2019). A suitable political philosophy is integrative of all components of a given nations and composites all social groups to cohere and regard one another as members in the same state with enlisted obligations towards one another (Eme & Onyishi, 2014). In the case of Nigeria, there is more to achieve if there is a suitable political philosophy; a suitable political philosophy will be able to fashion out how the diversities of religion, ethnic, and culture will co-habit and how the resource sharing will account for their integral development simultaneously (Ozumba, 2017).

Judging from the current state of affairs regarding the political performance and socio-economic development of Nigeria, it is apparent that there is no enacted political philosophy following Nigeria's independence in 1960 or whose tenets are in principle followed (Ngangah, 2020). This particularly spells bad omen for a young nation whose aspiration to become the giant of Africa and by extension a key player in global politics and economy is now threatened. The symptoms of lack of political philosophy are ever present in Nigeria in many ways; however, agitation is one of the leading symptoms.

3.1 Elements of Political Philosophy in Nigeria

Agitations are symptomatic with elements which may emanate from lack of clear political philosophy such as: weak institutions to engineer change, marginalization of all sorts, lack of freedom of speech and freedom after speech, abuse of human rights, brazen disregard

to institutionalized federal character principles, corruption of all sorts, insecurity, lack of meaning progress on all frontiers, and religious extremity etc (Ozumba, 2017). The challenges are currently trending in Nigeria of toady without any hope in sight.

The critical elements that are ever present in most critical agitations in Nigeria have presented the following at the center of all agitation:

- i. Marginalization of all sorts
- ii. Abuse of human rights
- iii. Brazen disregard to institutionalized federal character principles
- iv. Corruption of all sorts
- v. Insecurity

3.1.1 Marginalization

Tracing the causes of agitations in Nigeria, one cannot escape listing marginalization first; marginalization is denial and like all denials, marginalization comes with repressed feelings and sentiments which usually looks for ventilation (Jimoh & Vincent, 2019). Without ventilation, repressed feelings are forced to erupt in many forms which may not be palatable such as peaceful demonstration or violent demonstration. In Nigeria, evidence abounds in the current administration (2015 – date) that the South-Easterners are systematically excluded from his administration in terms of appointments, projects and recognition. The current administration has not equally hidden her dislike towards the South-East who is predominantly Christian Igbo; the President current utterances referring to the region as a dot in a circle and 5% voters rekindled hostilities between the North and the South. Such hostilities have fuelled heightened agitations including the now popular Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. To worsen the situation, the IPOB leader was lasted and denied bail despite the court granting his bail. His recent abduction in Kenya and repatriation to Nigeria has been met by wide international criticism.

3.1.2 Abuse of human rights

With human right abuses commonly manifested in lack of freedom of speech and controlled press, agitations are inescapable. The current administration has a history of human right abuse with the emasculation of press freedom. Several high profile individuals and activities have been invited and detained over their shared opinions and interviews granted on the state of the nation by the Department of State Security Service (DSS). In the case of invitations to Nnamdi Kanu, Sunday Igboho and Sowere etc. there is evidence that their fundamental human rights were breached during their invitations by the DSS (Unya & Omaka, 2021). These incidents are pointers to agitations as they are interpreted and mirrored with ethnic and tribal sentiments.

3.1.3 Brazen disregard to institutionalized federal character principles

At no time is Nigeria divided along ethnic and religious lines than now. Largely, this is as a result of brazen disregard to institutionalized principles of federal character which was actually meant to checkmate the rise of ethnic and religious clannishness (Eluozo, 2019). In the current administration, federal appointments has largely swayed to northern Muslim males, a situation which other ethnics have conceptualized as sectional leadership notably the poor representation of the Southern Christian Igbos in the current administration. These forms of anomaly fuel people's agitations who are excluded in various forms (Odum, 2016b).

3.1.4 Corruption of all sorts

Admittedly, no generally accepted defining of “corruption” exists. Corruption is variously explained by different thinkers. However, it is commonly regarded according to Liu as:

...the corruption of public officials in the state; organs use power in the hands for bribery, corruption, extortion, fraud and other acts...the legitimacy of the national public power comes from the people; the government is the executor of the sovereign and its power comes from the people’s trust. When public power deviates from the original track, being abused, corruption problems arise (Liu, 2016).

Corruption is endemic challenge to any national development; in Nigeria the systematic and institutional dimensions of corruption have always sabotaged national effort of meaningful development. For instance; the Transparency International (TI), has consistently ranked Nigeria low in Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. According to Eluozo (2019), this is in contrast to steady improvement it made from 2010-2014. CPI rating relates to the understanding of the extent of corruption as witnessed traders and analysts which span between 100 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt). A record low of 52 in 1997 in CPI is indicative of how bad the country has gone in just a decade. In comparison to the West African region, Nigeria is below average.

3.1.5 Insecurity

The current wave of insecurity in Nigeria could be said to be the greatest concern of Nigerians and one of the leading causes of agitations. On daily basis, citizens are maimed, brutalized and killed by bandits, kidnappers and terrorists without any proactive solution from government. Apart from the mortal risks associated with insecurity, the citizens are no longer able to go about their normal business of life; which has grossly affected people’s means of livelihood. Most calls to tackle insecurity from all quarters are yet to yield fruits; consequently, people have taken on protest and agitations as their last resort.

3.2 Implication of the Study

Judging from these elements, it is no long hidden that the current state of affairs in Nigerian governance does not work anymore. There have been genuine calls for restructuring Nigeria which many believe that her power is much concentrated at the center with over dependent on oil without allowing growth for other regional resources. The clamour for restructuring is an attempt to finding suitable political philosophy which could work for the nation. For instance, the political philosophy behind restructuring was based on regional autonomy which many have believed allowed regional and state competition politically, economically, socially and otherwise.

The idea is borrowed from the ousted regional arrangement of Nigeria affected independent and many advocating for the principle see it a defining alternative which can restore energy, innovation and proactive governance to the people. To move Nigeria forward, a complimentary political philosophy should be able to recognize the differences in the diversities and harness them.

3.3. Recommendations

The call for restructuring in Nigeria is a wake-up call to define the political philosophy of Nigeria; it implies and de-emphasizes Nigerians over dependency on mono economy and political structures aligned at the center with false federalism. The sooner Nigerians embrace

decentralized powers at local, State and regional structure in accordance to their strength and resource opportunities, the more meaningful will our political philosophy recognize our diversities as strength.

3.4 Conclusion

No nation can truly progress without a clear political philosophy. Persistent agitations are signs that the current political philosophy of Nigeria (presidential system of government) which concentrated enormous powers at the center is not working. Equally, the perennial ethnic and religious clashes are indicators that the regional arrangement as a political philosophy may well save our ailing nation. How the current administration of Nigeria responds to these calls to a large extent defines how long the agitations will continue and how the nation may cope with agitations inherent political, economic and security related crisis.

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