Abstract

The geographical entity called “Nigeria” was born in 1914 when the British colonialists amalgamated both the Northern and Southern Protectorates. The two protectorates were hitherto being administered separately. With the amalgamation came the yoking together of peoples who never shared much in common culturally. As was the practice with the colonialists, the opinions of the peoples that were being brought together were never sought on the merger or amalgamation. So, it is right to say that right from the onset of the amalgamation, seeds of inequality and discord had been sown. However, for most part of the time the British colonialists were in charge of the administration of the country, there were no serious conflicts among the peoples. With the independence of the country in 1960, the young nation started facing serious diversity-induced problems such that the nation went into a civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. There have been coups and counter-coups since then. Fifty-eight years after independence, the country still grapples with ethno-religious crises, farmer-herdsman clashes, poverty and general insecurity. This work is of the opinion that the foundations for the problems the country is confronted with presently was laid by the British colonialists through the various colonial policies they instituted. Analysts are of the view that the country’s governance architecture as presently constituted is not helping matter. There are, therefore, calls for the restructuring of the country’s governance architecture in such a way that the federating units; that is, the states, will enjoy some degree of autonomy from the central government. A return to the type of federalism practiced between 1963 and January 15, 1966 is being canvassed by some elder statesmen. These calls for restructuring have, however, not gone down well with some elements in the country. While some of the elements feel that the process might lead to the disintegration of the country, others feel their control over the nation’s resources will be threatened. Those opposed to restructuring, however, seem to be more comfortable with other milder alternatives like devolution, true federalism, and fiscal federalism. This work, therefore, aims at examining the lexico-semantics of the polemics regarding the desirability or otherwise of restructuring Nigeria with a view to having a better understanding of the issue so as to be able to take informed position and offer good recommendations. This work believes that restructuring is being misconstrued by most of those opposed to it as the term means virtually the same thing as the alternatives. The work concludes that the country needs to be urgently restructured in order to forestall the impending forceful balkanisation of the country. The work recommends, inter-alia, that the government should set machineries in motion towards conducting a referendum on the desirability or otherwise of restructuring the country.

Keywords: Appraisal, Lexico-semantic, Nigeria, Polemics, Restructuring.
Following independence, Nigeria was divided into three regions: Northern, Eastern, and Western. Each region had a Native Administration and a Native Treasury staffed by indigenes. Local chiefs were responsible for police, hospitals, public works, and local courts. The Colonial Civil Service administered through intermediaries or agents for diplomacy, propaganda, and espionage. "Warrants" or warrant chiefs were strong leaders who managed the Native Administration. Residency was the coordinator for virtual governmental matters, overseeing the Protectorate centrally. The Protectorate was divided into three regions: East, North, and West. Each region had a Lieutenant Governor and provided independent government services.

In the 1950s, the strong wind of nationalism started blowing across Africa as many African countries began to ask for independence from their colonial masters. The amalgamation of Nigeria had been envisioned earlier, going by the report of the Niger Committee in 1898. In 1957, the Northern Region got its own self-rule. The amalgamation of the colonies and protectorates and Lagos Colony into the Nigeria colony and protectorate was administered on behalf of Britain by a proconsul who was designated the "Governor-General of Nigeria." Lord Lugard was then appointed the first Governor-General. In terms of security, there was a reorganisation of the different militias and the Royal West Africa Frontier Force (RWAFF) into RWAFF Nigeria Regiment (Asiegbu, 1984).

The Protectorate was divided into three regions of East, North, and West. Each of the regions was under a Lieutenant Governor and provided independent government services. The Governor was, in effect, the coordinator for virtually autonomous entities that had overlapping economic interests but little in common politically or socially. The colonial administration operated the indirect rule system in which traditional rulers were given some degrees of control over the affairs of their people. The Colonial Civil Service, staffed by Britons and Africans, was known as the "British Native Staff," administering the Protectorate centrally. The Political Department of the Colonial Civil Service appointed Residents and District Officers to oversee operations in the regions. The Resident also oversaw a Provincial Court at the capital of each region (Afeadie, 1996: 17-19).

Each region also had a Native Administration and a Native Treasury that were staffed by indigenes. Traditional rulers like the emirs in the north and obas in the south headed the Native Administration while District Heads oversaw a larger number of Village Heads. The Native Administration was responsible for police, hospitals, public works, and local courts. The Colonial Civil Service used intermediaries or agents for diplomacy, propaganda, and espionage (Afeadie, 1986: 19-21). However, the system faced some challenges in the Eastern Region as appointed officials who were given "warrants" and hence called warrant chiefs, were strongly resisted by the people because the warrant chiefs lacked traditional claims and the area was relatively democratic.

In the 1950s, the strong wind of nationalism started to blow across Africa as many African countries began to ask for independence from their colonial masters. The struggle started yielding fruits as the colonialists began to grant independence to their colonies. Eastern and Western Regions were granted self-rule in 1957. The Northern Region got its own self-rule two years later. The whole nation eventually became independent on October 1, 1960. On October 1, 1963, Nigeria became a republic. Between 1963 and 1966, Nigeria was operating a federal system of government with three regions of East, North, and West. The regions enjoyed some degree of autonomy that gave them control over some governmental matters. The regions were developing at their own rates as there was healthy rivalry among them.

With the departure of the "common enemy" (British colonialists) in 1960, expectation was that things would change for the better for both the nation and her citizens. This was, however, not the case as the departure of the British seemed to have worsened matters (Anele, 2014). The new indigenous leaders could not effectively manage the affairs of the new independent nation and it did not take long before the consequences of this began to show. Peaceful, free, and fair elections could not be conducted as attested to by the violence that greeted the conduct of the general elections of 1965. The elections generated serious crisis, especially in the Western Region, in which many lives were lost, and property worth several thousands of pounds destroyed.

The inability of both the Western Region and central government to timely bring the crisis under control, massive official corruption and impunity were some of the factors that led to the military coup of January 15, 1966. The coup was led by the Late Major Kaduna Nzeogu. That marked the end of the First Republic. In the words of Anele (2014), "... it was in a political atmosphere thick with corruption, mediocrity, pernicious ethnic and religious parochialism, nepotism and impunity that the first military coup was staged...." Many politicians and a number of military officers were killed in the coup.
The coup brought in Major General T. Y. Ironsi as the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. That was not the plan of the coup plotters as Ironsi himself was to have been killed but for a slip on the part of some of the plotters.

In July 1966, there was a counter-coup in which General Ironsi and other senior military officers, mostly from the East and West, were killed. The counter-coup was staged by officers of northern extraction to avenge the perceived lop-sidedness in the killings of politicians and military officers in the January 15 1966 coup. It was believed in the North that the January 15 coup was targeted mainly at politicians and military officers from the North. Consequently, many military officers from the South, especially the East, including the then Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, General T. Y. Ironsi, were killed in the counter-coup. After the counter-coup, the pogrom of the Igbo began in the North. Igbo that survived the pogrom had to relocate to the East. The situation grew worse such that Colonel Odimegwu Ojukwu, the then military governor of the Eastern Region, had to declare the region’s independence from Nigeria on May 29, 1966 and christened the new state “Republic of Biafra” on May 30, 1966. That was the beginning of the civil war which lasted till February, 1970.

From January 15, 1966, Nigeria was ruled by the military until October 1, 1979 when the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo successfully midwifed a transition to civilian rule programme. The Second Republic was also short-lived as the military struck again on December 31, 1983. The Third Republic which General Ibrahim Babangida’s government tried to midwife suffered a set-back when General Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election which was won by the Late Chief M. K. O. Abiola. When the heat got too much on General Babangida, he put in place an interim national government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, a contraption that was to last until February 1994 when a fresh presidential election was to be conducted. The republic was eventually aborted on November 17, 1993 when the Late General Sani Abacha, until then the Minister of Defence, took over the reins of government after forcing Chief Ernest Shonekan to resign.

General Sani Abacha ruled Nigeria until June 8, 1998 when he suddenly died of alleged heart attack. He was replaced by General Abdul-Salam Abubakar who instituted a short transition period. There was sincerity in his transition programme. He lifted embargo on political activities and endorsed multi-party system. He set up the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The INEC successfully conducted elections into various positions on December 5, 1998; January 9, 1999; February 20, 1999; and February 27, 1999. His government also bequeathed the 1999 Constitution to Nigeria. General Olusegun Obasanjo was elected president and he was sworn-in on May 29, 1999 as the country’s president. This marked the birth of the Fourth Republic. From then till now, Nigeria has had four successful general elections. This has been the longest republic in the history of the nation so far.

In spite of the relative political stability being witnessed in the country, a cross-section of Nigerians are not satisfied with the present political arrangement in the country because they believe it is the way the country is presently composed politically that bogs her down, and are, therefore, calling for the restructuring of the country. Others are, however, of the opinion that there is nothing wrong with the structure of the country, and are, therefore, opposed to any form of restructuring. So, this work aims at examining the lexico-semantics of the polemics regarding the desirability or otherwise of restructuring Nigeria with a view to having a better understanding of the issue so as to be able to take informed position and offer good recommendations. By lexico-semantics, we mean the words and their meanings as used by the protagonists and the antagonists of restructuring Nigeria. Polemics means passionate arguments in support of, or against the restructuring of Nigeria. Restructuring is conceived in this work as a return to full federalism where more political powers and resources are conceded to the federating units by the government at the centre. It is not conceived in the sense of a balkanisation of the country.

How Has Nigeria Fared?

By the grace of God, Nigeria will be 58 years old on October 1, 2018. Her journey in nationhood has been full of ups and downs. It is impossible to have a unanimous verdict on how Nigeria has fared since gaining independence. To some Nigerians, especially the ruling class, the country has not done badly. Such people will not hesitate to make reference to the following as some of Nigeria’s achievements. First, that the nation is being kept as one indivisible unit till date is commendable. They will be quick to point at the ability of the country to continue to survive as a nation after a devastating
civil war with the argument that no country has ever survived a civil war as a united country. Two, politically, Nigeria has grown from 4 regions to 36 states and a federal capital territory. The country also has 774 local government areas; a development that has brought government closer to the people. The alibi usually pleaded by this group of Nigerians is that Nigeria would have been better than what she is now if not for the long period of military rule that was characterised by humongous corruption and lack of developmental initiatives. Because of their belief that Nigeria is making good progress and it is on the right track to greatness, this group of Nigerians believes very strongly that the unity of Nigeria is non-negotiable.

The other group of Nigerians, mostly made up of activists and the masses, however, believes that Nigeria has no significant achievement as a 58-year-old worthy of any commendation. Their own argument is based on the following, among others: First, in spite of the nation’s enormous resources, the masses are still grappling with abject poverty while the political class feed fat on the nation’s resources. Two, there is under-development as the states of infrastructures have remained very appalling. Roads are in very bad shape, and most of them have become death-traps. Power generation and distribution remain poor in spite of huge investments in the sector since 1999. Several billions of dollars have been allegedly spent on power between 1999 and now, and the situation has not significantly changed. The health system is becoming more and more dysfunctional. Government hospitals are not well-funded as needed machines and drugs are not always available. Ailments that should ordinarily be treated by these hospitals cannot be treated and patients suffering from such ailments are referred to foreign hospitals. Poor Nigerians who cannot afford the bills are left with no option than to resign to fate and await their deaths. Owing largely to unfriendly business environment, many companies are folding up in the country and relocating to neighbouring countries where the business environments are friendlier. Again, there is growing insecurity in the land. Nigerians are being killed in their hundreds daily and government and security agencies are helpless. In fact, the life of an ordinary Nigerian now values less than a cow’s. In short, the security architecture has been completely overwhelmed by the deluge of crimes and criminality in the land.

Furthermore, the nation has continued to witness religious conflicts since the 1980s when the menace first broke in Nigeria. Religious conflicts have been more frequent in Muslim dominated Northern Nigeria than in the other parts. The phenomenon has assumed a worrisome dimension now, especially in the North-East where the Boko Haram insurgents still wreak havoc.

The nation is getting disunited the more as against the claims by political leaders that the unity of the nation is non-negotiable. In fact, since after the civil war, the country has not been more divided along ethnic lines than it is now where some ethnic groups now take laws into their hands and go about killing and maiming innocent Nigerians with reckless abandon. Sadly, concrete efforts are not being made to end the killings. The country’s unity is more or less a forced one as there are ethnic militia groups who will prefer life outside the forced union. The Indigenous People of Biafra, led by Nnamdi Kanu, is one of such groups.

Colonial Policies and Nigeria’s Development

Like the Yoruba proverbial cripple accused of carrying a burden precariously on his head rightly drew the attention of his accusers to the condition of his feet, most of Nigeria’s problems had their roots in her foundation. The British colonialists sowed the seeds of most of the problems confronting us as a nation today, wittingly or unwittingly. A look at some of the policies of the colonial administration will help in proving this.

**Forceful Merger of Different Ethnic Groups:** Nigeria is said to be home to 522 indigenous languages (Lewis, Gary, and Charles, 2013). It is also believed that there are over 250 ethnic groups in the country. The British colonialists did not seek the opinions of the different ethnic groups regarding the proposed nation before they were merged together to form the present Nigerian nation. So, years after the merger, and even after independence as a sovereign nation, the ethnic groups have not yet jelled into a true nation-state. As observed by Obasanjo and Mabogunje (cited in Eze and Oteh, 2012), even though colonialism attempted to merge different communities, “not much change was achieved in altering communal mentality and predilection”. The allegiance of these ethnic groups is usually first and foremost to their ethnic groups, and then to the country, if at all. This must have been why the late
sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (cited in Eze and Oteh, 2012) described Nigeria as a “mere geographic location”.

**Disproportion in the Land Sizes of North and South**: There is disproportion between the land sizes of the Northern and the Southern parts of the country such that the North is about twice the size of the South. In terms of land size, Nigeria has a total area of 923,768 km²; that is, 356,669 square miles (CIA). The northern part of the country occupies about two-third of this land size; that is, 615,845 km². This was deliberately done by the British colonialists. The size of the North gives it some advantages over the South in many respects. For instance, politically, the North has nineteen states, in addition to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) while the South has seventeen. By extension, the North has more members in both chambers of the National Assembly than the South does. So, it is easy for the North to always have its way anytime any national matter is being debated on the floor of each chamber.

**Faulty Administrative System**: The British colonialists bequeathed a faulty administrative legacy to the nation. In administering the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, Lord Lugard had adopted a system of government which was unique in some way as it was neither a federal state nor a confederation of states. In fact, Lugard’s system had not much planning for the future development of Nigeria (Carland, 1985). Carland (1985) quotes A. J. Harding, a colonial official, to have written thus:

Sir F. Lugard's … state … is impossible to classify. It is not a unitary state with local government areas but with one central executive and one legislature. It is not a federal state with federal executive, legislature and finances,... It is not a personal union of separate colonies under the same Governor …, it is not a confederation of states (p. 90).

Efforts towards correcting this faulty administrative system after independence gave the country a federal system of government from 1963 to 1966. The military incursion into politics in 1966 put an end to federalism and the unitary system was introduced. During that short period that true federalism lasted, the three regions of East, North and West experienced growth and development made possible by healthy competition among the regions. Ever since then, Nigeria has not experienced real federalism. The present political arrangement does not drive resourcefulness and development.

**Economic Support for the North/None for the South**: In terms of economy, the people of the South interacted more with the British and other Europeans because of the trade opportunities which the coastal areas offered. So, the South developed a modern economy that grew more rapidly than the North. This was evidenced by the ability of the Southern Protectorate to finance itself right from the outset. The colonial administration gave financial support to the Northern Protectorate at the initial stage but failed to do the same thing for the Southern Protectorate. According to Carland (1985), the British treasury initially supported the landlocked Northern Nigeria Protectorate with grants, totalling £250,000 or more every year. The Southern Protectorate, however, financed itself from the outset, with revenue increasing from £361,815 to £1,933,235 between 1901 and 1910. Thus it could be safely said that the financial indulgence the North enjoyed from the British treasury during the colonial rule laid the foundation for the North’s present dependence on the resources of the South. The present arrangement where funds generated from the sales of natural resources from the South are spent in the development of areas which appear to be contributing virtually nothing to the national treasury while the natural owners of such resources wallow in abject poverty is breeding distrust among Nigerians, especially those from the South-South.

**Barring of Christian Missionaries from the North**: The British colonial administration barred Christian missionaries from the North in order to preserve Islam as the religion of the North. According to Agbaje (1990), the foundation for the current religious conflicts was allegedly laid by the colonial administration which “underwrote Islam in the Northern part of Nigeria and used it as the basis of political authority in local administration.” He adds that the colonial administration also kept Christian missionaries out from the North in order to preserve the assumed Islamic homogeneity of the region, and adopted the emirate system of political administration with its strong religious content. Islam was, therefore, a de facto state religion of the Northern region.

This policy made many people from the North (even till the present time) to think that Islam is, and should be, the only religion in the region. Tolerance for Christians in the region is, therefore, almost nil and Christians are thus being persecuted. In the South, especially the South-West, where there was
no restriction on the Christian missionaries, adherents of both Christianity and Islam freely related with one another and this is responsible for the relatively better religious harmony being presently enjoyed in the South.

As a corollary, by barring Christian missionaries from the North, the colonial administration had succeeded in delaying the introduction and spread of Western education in the region. This was not the case in the South where the dominant influence of the Christian missionaries helped significantly in the spread of Western education in the area. The efforts of the missionaries in getting the people of the South educated enjoyed the support of the colonial administration. Today, the North is far behind the South in education and efforts by the Federal Government and state governments in the region to bridge the gap between the North and the South has not yielded much dividends as the gulf keeps on widening.

Besides, the quality of the nation’s education is being regularly lowered by certain educational policies all in the name of encouraging children from the North to be educated. For instance, there are always disparities in the cut-off marks for children seeking admission into the federal unity schools from the North and South. Children from the North are offered admission even with ridiculously low marks while those from the South are screened out even when they have done better in the screening exams. The same thing happens in university admissions under the guise of states in the North being educationally disadvantaged. Many brilliant students from the South are being denied admission while mediocre students from the North take their slots. In a situation like this, how won’t there be discontent?

**The Restructuring Arguments**

Basically, to restructure is to alter or change the pattern, organisation or arrangement of something. However, restructuring as being presently used in Nigeria regarding the Nigerian nation herself means different things to different Nigerians. *Vanguard On-line Newspaper* of 30 June, 2017 presented the views of some prominent Nigerians on what restructuring Nigeria means. The views of Akin Osuntokun, Supo Shonibare, Ibrahim Babangida and Atiku Abubakar as reported by the newspaper are presented here. To Akin Osuntokun, former Political Adviser to former President Olusegun Obasanjo, restructuring is simply a call for the restoration of federalism. Chief Supo Shonibare, a chieftain of Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-political association, sees it as having a federation with independent self-sustaining federating units that are able to develop infrastructure, critical amenities, undertake other developmental projects, education and health without a centre body interfering.”

General Ibrahim Babangida, former military president, views restructuring as devolution of powers to the states to the extent that more responsibilities are given to the states. Similarly, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, former Vice-President, sees restructuring as the process of devolving more powers and resources from the federal government and de-emphasising federal allocations as the means of sustaining the states.

Toromade (2018) also reports another definition of restructuring as given by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar: “When I talk about restructuring, I am not talking about just constitutional tweaks. I am talking about a cultural revolution. It is not about re-shuffling a few responsibilities or resources, but about disrupting the authoritarian politics our democracy has inherited…” He avers that restructuring Nigeria is not an option but a necessity. Atiku reportedly stated this in an address he delivered at the Chatham House, London on the theme; "Next Generation Nigeria: The Importance of Strengthening States' Economic Management" on April, 25, 2018.

The divergence of opinions regarding the present state of Nigeria as a nation as discussed earlier has translated to a dichotomy of views on whether Nigeria should be restructured or not. While there are Nigerians who believe that something is organically wrong with the country as presently constituted and administered, others believe there is nothing wrong with the country. So, while the former want a restructuring of the country, the latter do not want anything of such. Some of those calling for the restructuring of the country want its governmental architecture to be altered, and they have come up with certain suggestions. Some have advocated a return to the old regional system of government operated before the first military coup of January 15, 1966, which was truly federal. Madunagu (2018) suggests that the country should be divided into eight zones with powers to run their own affairs with the centre superintending. Following the narrative, one would easily find that the cacophony of restructuring has been louder in the South than it is in the North.
It would be recalled that when the ruling All Progressives Congress, A.P.C., was in opposition, it also believed that Nigeria needed to be restructured, and so, it made restructuring part of its campaign promises to Nigerians while it was asking for their mandate preparatory to the 2015 general elections. The party foot dragged for some time after it assumed the country’s presidency. The party eventually set up a committee on the restructuring of the country in 2017. The Buhari presidency, however, appears not to be favourably disposed to restructuring.

The proponents of restructuring Nigeria are of the opinion that the country stands to gain a lot from the process. The following are some of the benefits derivable from restructuring as offered by its proponents. A restructured Nigeria will make both the Central Government and the federating units very strong (Odumakin, 2017). Restructuring will also stem corruption as “each region would be forced to manage its resources more prudently and judiciously giving little or no room for wasteful spending” (Adeleye, 2017).

Chief Emeka Anyaoku, former Secretary General of the Commonwealth, in an interview with Olowoopejo in the Vanguard Newspapers of 16 October, 2017, submits that the situations threatening the existence of Nigeria could be more effectively handled if the present governance structure in the country is restructured. He says the cause of many of the challenges facing the country at the moment is the inadequacy of the country’s governance architecture. He cites the case of the present situation where 80% of the country’s revenue is spent on administration as a major flaw of the present governance structure. His position on this is that no country develops on the basis of allocating 80% of its revenue to administration. He is of the opinion that a restructured Nigeria will restore the sense of nationalism and unity that existed in the immediate years after independence as the regions were healthily competing with one another for development.

The All Progressives Congress’s Committee on True Federalism in its report submitted to the party’s Central Working Committee on the 25th of January 2018 observed that the “major issue with the Nigerian Federation is the enormous exclusive legislative powers of the Federal Government with resultant over-centralization of power and authority”. It then submits that a “further decentralization of some of these powers by devolving more powers, autonomy, and resources to the federating units will foster efficiency and sub-national responsiveness and local accountability”.

It is also believed in some quarters that restructuring will put an end to insecurity and engender peace. For example, Otunba Gani Adams, the Aare-Ona Kakanfo of Yoruba-land, and leader of the Oodua People’s Congress, O.P.C., in an interview with Sahara Reporter on April 22, 2018, opines that restructuring will guarantee security and peace in Nigeria and also help in tackling other societal ills. He states thus; “If this country is restructured in a way that every locality controls the instrumentality of security, the wanton killings of Nigerians will stop automatically...”. He adds further; “We can resolve every problem confronting us by giving every region the opportunity to develop in their own pace, thus, this will give birth to competition and emulation by every region in the country.”

Those opposed to the idea of restructuring Nigeria, especially among the political leaders, are maintaining such stance because they “…significantly profit from the present arrangement which favours concentration of too much money at the centre. This encourages corruption as different tribes are curiously desirous of milking from the avalanche of surplus resources at the centre …” (Adeleye, 2017).

Apart from this, there is also the fear that restructuring might lead to the disintegration of the country. The argument here is that with a weak centre, it might be very easy for a strong region to break away from the federation. The secessionist bid of the Igbo that gave birth to the defunct Biafra Republic is believed in some quarters to have been facilitated by the autonomy which the regions then enjoyed. The recent secession threats by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Zionist Movement are reminders that the desire of the Igbo to be autonomous of Nigeria is still very much alive. This was corroborated by Olisa Agbako (SAN), and former chairman of the Nigeria Bar Association in an interview with The Nation Newspaper of August 27, 2017 who believed that with the secessionist threat of IPOB, the Northerners will very much likely interpret every call for restructuring as covert support for the disintegration of the nation. The secession fear has, however, been declared unfounded by Chief Emeka Anyaoku. He says; “I do not think the suggestion that restructuring Nigeria will lead to breakup is correct. Indeed, restructuring will create the basis for greater unity of the country. The suggestion that restructuring will lead to breakup is totally fallacious.”
One other reason politicians, especially those from the North, are opposed to the restructuring of Nigeria is the supposed love of the North for big government. This was the opinion of Olisa Agbakoba (SAN). He submits that the North does not like restructuring because “… the North likes big government. So, if restructuring means reducing governance, they immediately get concerned…” (ibid.).

The North is also opposed to restructuring because of the fear that restructuring will mean their loss of control over the enormous oil resources that are deposited in the South. There is no gainsaying the fact that northern elements control a sizable amount of oil wells in the nation’s oil industry. With restructuring, all these oil wells/wealth will be lost as the emergent government in the region will ensure that ownership of the oil wells changes hand. Similarly, oil is the nation’s highest income earner and all the accruals from oil and other items are shared among the states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) every month. In fact, there are states that cannot survive without the monthly releases of funds from the federation account made buoyant by petrol dollars. A restructuring of the country will mean less percentages of the oil money going into the Federal Government, and virtually none to the non-oil producing states.

**Appraising the Arguments**

Those who argue for and against the restructuring of Nigeria definitely have their own reasons for taking the respective positions they have taken. We are tempted to believe that some Nigerians are opposed to the restructuring of Nigeria because of the misconceptions they have about the process. Their belief is that calling for restructuring is synonymous with calling for the balkanisation of the country. However, such Nigerians appear to be more comfortable with ‘milder’ alternatives like devolution, true federalism, and fiscal federalism.

Devolution is the process of transferring more political powers from a central government to smaller political units like regions, states or local governments. It is believed that the Federal Government today has dabbled into many trivial issues like issuance of driver licences, issuance of birth and death certificates, registration of marriages, etc. which ordinarily should be handled by the states and local governments. According to Olisa Agbakoba (SAN), the federal government controls around 98 items of power. When power is devolved and the state governments are given control over many more items, the states are going to have more money to run their affairs and will not have to run to Abuja every month cap in hand.

The phrase “true federalism”, is ordinarily a misnomer; there is no such thing in the English lexicon. Federalism as a system of government defines a political set-up in which several regions or states defer some powers to the central government while they, the regions or states, enjoy some measure of self-government. There is nothing like “true federalism” or “false federalism”. It is either federalism or a different system entirely. It is, however, understandable in the case of the hypocritical Nigeria where we run a unitary system of government in spite of claiming to be a federal republic. Fiscal federalism refers to a political arrangement in which the federating units in a federation have the powers to exercise full control over the resources within their domains, generate revenues from such resources and spend such revenues without the intervention of the central government. The federating units do not have to depend on the central government for monthly allocations. What happens instead is that the federating units pay certain percentages of the revenues they generate monthly to the coffers of the central government.

From the aggregate of the views of the proponents of restructuring, however, we want to believe that they have been mostly misconstrued. What they are asking for is not the balkanisation of the country. The kernel of their agitation is that the governance architecture of Nigeria should be restructured. Their demand is not too different from the demands of advocates of devolution, true federalism, or fiscal federalism. It is simply a matter of nomenclature. This much was confirmed by Prof. Akintoye, renowned historian, and one of the apostles of restructuring, in an interview on Channels Television’s “News at Ten” of Wednesday, 5th September, 2018. He advocated for the return of the country to the type of federal system of government obtainable between 1963 and January 1966. He believes that this should not be difficult to achieve as what the Federal Government needs to do is to allow the federating units (the thirty-six states) to carry out those functions which the regional governments were saddled with while the Federal Government limits itself to those responsibilities which the
Federal Government carried out between 1963 and 1966. He is convinced that this is operable within a short period of time if the political will is there.

CONCLUSION
Nigeria, as it is today, exhibits symptoms of a failed-state and a nation on the brink of disintegration. The country has been seriously polarised along ethnic, tribal and religious lines. National cohesion is non-existent as nationalism has given way to ethnicity. Nigerians of different ethnic groups appear to be tired of living together as a nation. This is understandable. Nigerians’ lives are now worth less than cows’. Fairness, equity and justice have vanished from the land. Urgent and decisive actions should be taken to save the country from avoidable catastrophe. Nigeria’s governance architecture needs to be restructured now! This is because a stitch in time saves nine. However, if the leadership of the country continues to ignore the calls for her restructuring and carries on with the false belief that the nation’s unity is non-negotiable, the consequences could be catastrophic.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In spite of the seeming opposition to the restructuring of Nigeria from government and some parts of the country, the hope of getting the country restructured is not yet lost. We offer the following recommendations to achieve this: First, the proponents of restructuring should intensify efforts towards the education and sensitisation of the public about what restructuring means and its benefits to them and the country. This will help clear some misconceptions and fears which many Nigerians have about the process.

The champions of the restructuring project need to involve the masses more in the project. So far, the project has been virtually exclusive to the elites. The voices and efforts of the masses, when added to those of the elites, will definitely make the project people-driven.

Nigerians in all parts of the country should periodically engage in peaceful street protests to state and re-state their demands for a restructured Nigeria. If the capital cities of two-thirds of the states of Nigeria could be simultaneously locked down for few hours through peaceful protests, the government at the centre would sooner than later buckle.

To test the popularity or otherwise of the calls for the restructuring of the country, government should conduct a referendum. The outcome of the referendum will help the government to take the right steps on whether to restructure the country or not. This was what the British government did when there were calls for Britain to leave the European Union, EU. The pro-Brexit won the referendum and government had no choice other than to comply. Nigerian government cannot continue to mortgage the views of Nigerians, with whom power truly lies, on the need to restructure the country.

REFERENCES


