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Nation Branding and the Citizenship Question in Nigeria: Matters Arising for Political Restructuring

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Abstract

After almost 60 years of independence, the idea of the Nigerian state remains a veiled illusion masking the fading hopes of the country's founding fathers. In the first few decades of its existence, Nigeria inspired the confidence of an African continent that was on a steady developmental trajectory. As the country clocks 60, the Nigerian dream appears to be an elusive one. Amid this quagmire, calls for political and economic restructuring have resuscitated the age-old ambition to return to 'true federalism' and fiscal autonomy of the constituent states. In this study, the authors turn to a less considered argument on restructuring that focuses on the need for a rebranded national identity that Nigerians can subscribe to. The article argues that, while restructuring has invoked different interpretations from many, an important precursor must be a deeper commitment to Nigeria beginning with the advancement of a new national identity for Nigeria and Nigerians. Restructuring implemented without the conviction of being a Nigerian is unlikely to produce any meaningful results in Nigeria's quest for radical socio-economic transformation. In sum, a robust national branding will initiate stronger belief in a truly national identity and inspire collective response to a federalised Nigeria.

Keywords: nation branding, nation building, national identity, Nigeria, political restructuring

Introduction

Throughout its 100-year history, the dictum of federalism and political-economic restructuring has continued to reoccur at different points of Nigeria's nation building processes (Farayibi, 2017). At independence in 1960, the nation's founding fathers subscribed to the idea of 'true' federalism and fiscal independence of federating units in line with Wheare's (1963) proposition.¹ At the time, it was believed that by giving each region the freedom and liberty to dictate the pace of their development, the entire state would eventually prosper from the common wealth of resources domiciled in each region to trigger post-colonial development. Regrettably, the setback to democratic consolidation caused by a military inter regnum less than a decade after independence redirected the historical trajectory and commitment of Nigeria's political elites to the federalism agenda. Because of military rule, the civilian government that originally conceived

federalism for the Republic was truncated, ² lasting only six years (1960-1966), with the country only experiencing democratic governance for four more years (1979-1983) before the stability of civil rule was restored again in 1999. No doubt, the over five decades of military interference has changed dramatically the political and economic configuration of the Nigerian state with the federal government wielding exclusive power over and above the federating units (states and local governments).

The effects of the federal government's enormous power are manifold. First, with the allocation of more revenue to the federal government, there was less financial independence for the state and local governments, leading to increasing fiscal attention at the centre. Secondly, the residents in each of the 36 states and the federal capital territory suffered the dire consequences of a faceless (federal) government that is very much absent in its responsibilities to functionally address the fundamental needs of the masses, especially in terms of the provision of basic amenities and infrastructure. Third, arising from the last point, it turned out to be less likely for citizens to identify with the Nigerian state because many local communities became a government unto themselves by taking charge of the traditional responsibilities of the state in the provision of basic infrastructure such as electricity, water and roads. Fourth, a massive exodus of Nigerian citizens abroad emanated from the rising dissatisfaction with the prevailing conditions of the state. This culminated in a so-called brain drain of the country's best professionals. Fifth, and more related to the theme of this study, was that the discontent with the Nigerian state perpetuated a widespread desire for political restructuring in a manner that would effectively address the damaging consequences of a dubious federal government.

While being at par in terms of development in the 1960s/1970s with countries known today as the Asian Tigers, including Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, regrettably, Nigeria has retrogressed rapidly to a state where it is now regarded as the home to the highest number of poor people in the world, even ahead of India (Olusadum, 2020). Negative development indices such as this make the idea of the Nigerian state a veiled illusion masking the fading expectations of the country's founding fathers. Thus, while in the early years of its independence, Nigeria inspired the hope of a prosperous African continent that was on a steady path towards unshackling the vestiges of colonialism and setting a prominent example for the rest of black Africa to emulate, six decades after its independence, the dream of an affluent Nigeria appears to have waned. Clearly, the political and economic systems established right from independence in 1960 into the several decades of military interregnum from 1966 and including subsequent civilian governments beginning from 1999, the corresponding output has been a damaged national identity and citizenship. The most remarkable effect of this damage is obvious in the image and 'brand' called Nigeria, which was not only battered, but became associated with ignominious depictions of corruption, maladministration, advanced fee fraud, terrorism, poverty and poor governance to name a few. As a result, it became incredibly difficult for its citizens to identify themselves with the state and its institutions (Aluko, 2019).

While the idea of restructuring has gained much popularity since the President Muhamadu Buhari's administration came into power in 2015, ³ the first tenure of his presidency has paid little attention to the widespread clamour for political and economic restructuring of the state⁴. Evidently, the recent calls for restructuring under the Buhari's administration were accentuated by the economic decline of 2015 along with debilitating security challenges across the country ranging from Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen-farmer crisis, to the Niger Delta agitations in the South-South region (Aluko and Ogunnubi, 2018). Scholars have provided some arguments for and against restructuring in Nigeria. For instance, Soludo (2018) provides an apt categorisation of the different debates on restructuring in Nigeria based on perceived templates of the various socio-political-cultural groups in the country. According to him, there is "*soft restructuring* (tinkering with amendments of the 1999 Constitution); *hybrid restructuring* (negotiate a new Constitution with sufficient regional autonomy within the federation); and *hard restructuring* (confederation or outright independence for any desiring part of the country). Although this useful appraisal is by no means exhaustive, Soludo (2018) however suggests that systemic failure of the institution of government and the curse of the oil boom fueled the clamour for restructuring. Noting the marked differences in the perceived meaning of restructuring to both the elites and masses, Farayibi (2017) questions the genuineness of the call for restructuring by probing whether this is intended to redefine, reassess and review Nigeria's 'unity' or improve the quest for true citizenship, respect for human rights, peace and the attainment of developed status rather than the under-developed status caused by leadership in effectiveness and low capabilities. Aluko (2020) for instance suggests that restructuring entails making a 'new Nigeria' emerge from the old

structure of impunity by curbing crime and corruption through good governance. He queried the restructuring that made the rich richer while the poor remained poorer and one that positions the powerful to continue to dominate in all affairs. The main question then should be: Of what value is restructuring and who is it intended to benefit? It is perhaps for this reason that major constitutional conferences held since the 1990s have yielded little or no result.

The outline of the paper begins with a conceptualisation of nation branding and its relevance to national identity and nation building. In the next section, we delve into a theoretical explanation of the Systems Theory as a lens to explain the study. Subsequently, the study provides an analysis of our argument on the pertinent issues that must be considered in the debate on political restructuring in Nigeria. In this analytical section, the study problematises the value of a rebranded identity for Nigeria as an antecedent to political-economic restructuring. The concluding part offers some projections on major factors to be considered in the restructuring project.

Nation Building, Nation Branding and National Identity

Nation branding is an offshoot of nation building. It is the branding of a nation in a particular way that uniquely identifies it with no other. Nation branding is defined as the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences (Browning, 2015; Dinnie, 2015). Nation branding includes the creation of national paraphernalia such as flags, anthems, national days, national stadiums, national airlines, national languages, and national myths. At a deeper level, national identity needs to be deliberately constructed by moulding the different ethnic groups into a nation, especially since in many newly established states colonial practices of 'divide and rule' had resulted in ethnically heterogeneous populations. Therefore, central to the idea of nation branding is the creation of a common national history. A successful nationalisation of history would meet two key requirements of both nationalism and modernity: first, national histories always attempt to prove the uniqueness of the nation. Second, the great national histories of the 19th century present the political order of the day as the result of a great national struggle, thus bolstering the legitimacy of the regime at the time in nationalist terms.

Relatedly, nation branding refers to the more abstract process of developing a shared sense of identity or community among the various groups that make up the population of a particular state. Dobbins *et al.*'s (2003) study of the American experience in external nation-branding exercises, opined that it is the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict that underpins an enduring transition to democracy. Thus, nation branding effectively denoted the cultural and psychological dimensions of the transition to modernity. Accordingly, students of 'nation branding' focus their attention on cultural and educational policies of states (Dinnie 2008). Anthropologically inclined investigations examine the particular ways in which the construction of identity was implemented and communicated through schooling, mass media, child socialisation, and the iconography and ceremonies of the nation-state.

Alesina and Reich (2013) conceive nation branding as a process which leads to the formation of countries in which citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences so that they do not wish to separate from each other. Nation branding can therefore be seen as a process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the state power which aims at the unification of a people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. For nation branding to take place the following notions should be understood by the political actors: the existence of a culturally distinct group does not necessarily involve a competing claim to the political loyalty of the population in the modern nation-state (Thaut Vinson, 2020). It is more problematic for states with ethnic- and religious-conscious political elite groups to achieve nation-branding than those with less ethnic- and religious-conscious political elites. This is because ethnic and religious consciousness creates divisiveness and corrodes the national consciousness which is necessary for breeding common political and national identity. Many factors, such as level of democratic development, level of economic development, and social homogeneity, can influence the ease or difficulty of nation branding, but the single most important controllable determinant seems to be the level of effort, as measured in troops, money, and time.

Akoto (2010) identified nation branding as the conscious and focused application of a people's collective

resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours. It involves the development of behaviours, values, language, institutions, and physical structures that elucidate our history and culture, concretise and protect the present, and ensure the future identity and independence of the nation. From the perspective of Ahmed-Gamgum (2014), nation branding is evident in the area of developing and instituting a democratic policy. Thus, it entails the ability of the nation-state to sustain itself as a sovereign by giving freedom and liberty to its people to use a well-laid mechanism or system of leadership recruitment and leave a legacy or culture of smooth succession of power to future generations. However, nation branding is more than becoming a sovereign state with distinct rights and freedoms for her citizens, but it also extends to the development of behaviours, values, and lingua franca. Nations are therefore built by exemplary men and women and sustained by governmental and non-governmental institutions that promote good governance and socio-economic development.

Identity is a relative concept which draws distinctions between the present and the past and fulfils emotional functions. It is generally complementary, but in reaction to instability and changing circumstances certain identities may become more prevalent in the political, social and economic sphere of the country. National identities are the social practices that contribute actively to a nation's image. National cultures, on the other hand, are characterised by competing discourses through which people construct meanings that influence their self-conception and behaviour (Maguire, 2012). National identities often take the form of stories that are told about the nation in history books, novels, plays, poems, the mass media, and popular culture. Memories of shared experiences of both triumphs and sorrows or disasters are recounted in compelling ways that connect a nation's present with its past. The construction of a national identity in large part involves reference to an imagined community based on a range of characteristics thought to be shared by and specific to a set of people.

Five prominent areas of methods and tools for promoting national identities are identified in the literature (Herbert, 2013). These include: *civic engagement* approaches and tools which can help to foster links across identity groups through forums for civic engagement; *cultural approaches and tools* widely recognised as useful resources to build communication and understanding between groups; *dialogue approaches and tools* deemed useful to help understand how to foster cooperation and social cohesion between groups (It encourages a wider social change by confronting myths and perceptions.); *decentralisation approaches* which in certain contexts can reduce group competition and facilitate the complementary existence of different identities (However, in other contexts, decentralisation can undermine national identity and can reinforce, legitimise and create new divides in societies.); and finally, *building inclusive institutions* across identity divides, especially to ensure that law and order, policing and justice approaches and tools are equitable and serve the interests of all citizens.

Due to the social and institutional decays, economic wastages and political inefficiencies that have battered Nigeria's image, there is a need for (re)branding of the political, economic, cultural and social spheres of the country so as to be able to remain relevant in the comity of states both in Africa and elsewhere in the world (Ogunnubi and Isike, 2018). The extent of decay in the organisational and bureaucratic structures in Nigeria is alarming and political wastages, social recklessness and economic backwardness remain unchecked.

Theoretical Framework: System Theory

Systems theory provides an analytical framework for viewing an organisation in general description and explanations in terms of actions and reactions for definite outputs. Von Bertalanffy (1956) defines a system as *a complex of interacting elements*. Von Bertalanffy fosters systems thinking in all disciplines in order to find general principles valid to all systems. It introduces system theory as a new scientific paradigm contrasting the analytical, mechanical paradigm, characterising classical science. A system, according to Rapoport (1966; 1968), is a set of interrelated entities connected by behaviour and history. Easton (1966) proposed to define political systems more broadly than did Rapoport. According to him, a system is any set of variables regardless of the degree of interrelationship among them. This definition includes a political system.

A system is an organised or complex whole; an assemblage or combination of things or parts forming a complex or unitary whole. The antonym of systematic is chaotic. A chaotic situation might be described as

one where everything depends on everything else (Johnson, Kast and Rosenzweig, 1964). However, as depicted in Figure I, the following are the basic components of a system: Inputs, Transformation process, the external variable, and the Outputs. Inputs - The composition of inputs from the external environment may include people, capital, managerial skills as well as technical knowledge of skills. It also includes the various claimants – groups of people making demands on the organisation such as employees, consumers, suppliers, stockholders, federal, state and local governments. Transformation process – In an organizational system, inputs are transformed in an effective and efficient manner into outputs. This can be viewed from different perspectives. Focus can be on such management functions as finance, production, personnel and marketing.

The external variable – The external environment plays a key role in the transformation of inputs into outputs. While it is true that organization's have little or no power to change the external environment, they have no alternative but to respond to it. The Outputs – Inputs are secured and utilised by transformation through the managerial functions – with due consideration for external variables into outputs. Outputs of different kinds vary with the organisation. They usually include many of the following products: services, profits, satisfaction and integration of the goals of various claimants to the organisation. Finally, reenergising the system – It is worthy of note that in the systems model of policy making process, some of the outputs become inputs again. The satisfaction and new know ledge or skills in the organisation become important human inputs. Similarly, policies are reintroduced if the outcomes are not worthwhile. Nation branding and national identity are forms of inputs in a country's administrative processes to ensure better socio-political and economic outputs.

Figure I shows the input environment in terms of demands and support into the political system and the outputs in terms of the decisions and policy made on the political system. The feedback mechanism from the policy environment is mostly used to crosscheck the extent of effectiveness of the inputs. Educational need is an example of an input on the political system which has to be integrated and processed as education policy output for the country. At the same time, the output environment which includes the recipient of the educational policy make input into the environment which may include the policy actors for the necessary feedbacks of the effect of implementing the education policy.

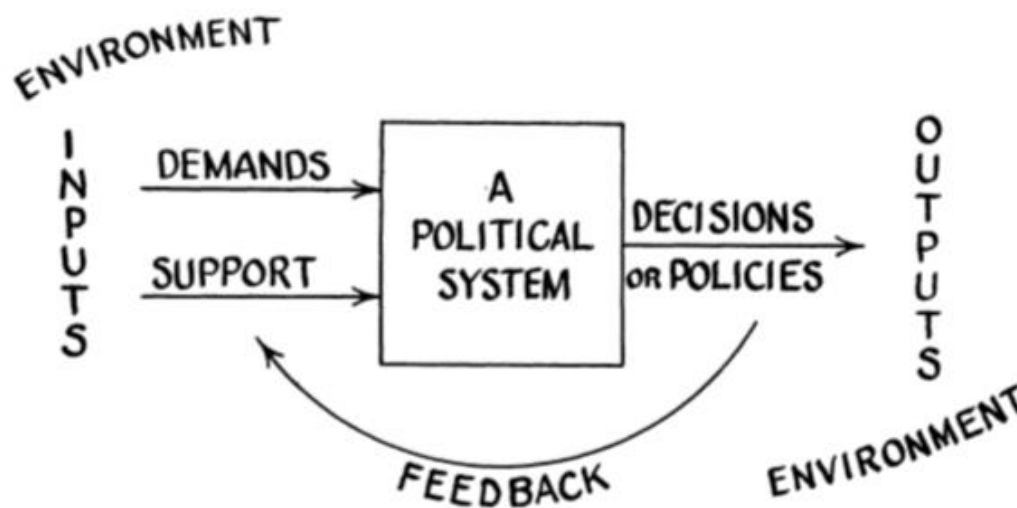


FIG. I

Because systems are coupled together, all behaviour in society is interdependent. To trace the complex exchanges and reduce them to manageable proportions, Easton condensed the main environmental influences into a few inputs that serve as a powerful analytic tool because they summarise variables that concentrate and mirror everything in the environment that is relevant to political stress (Easton, 1966).

However, systems analysis theory has been criticised for having none of the 'stress, conflict, and imbalance characteristics of the normal condition of the modern state' (Susser, 1991). However, in a modern state such as Nigeria, there are many inputs and demands on the system which are not properly integrated and transformed to ensure national development. These are the results of stress on the political, social and

economic system in the country. In this instance, the resultant negative output is systemic failure (failed state). The pointers to this disequilibrium in the system are leadership incapability, ethnic bigotry, religious chauvinism, corruption and poor respect for human rights among others. It is for this reason that it is obvious that, beyond sports, very little factors unify Nigerians across ethnic, religious, political and cultural backgrounds (Ogunnubi, 2013). To restructure the Nigerian system, a reorientation of its people towards a common national agenda that equalises all religious, ideological and class affiliations within the country.

Therefore, an accurate (political, economic and/or social) input with dishonest or incapable internal mechanism transformation processes will result in weak, poor and ineffective outputs. In the same vein, an inaccurate input, with dishonest or incapable internal mechanism transformation process will lead to anaemic, deficient and barren outputs. Conversely, an accurate input with honest or capable internal mechanism transformation processes will ensure strong, effective and widely acceptable outputs. Similarly, an inaccurate input with honest or capable internal mechanism for its transformation processes have the tendency of spotting the weakness in the inputs to correct it and eventually results into strong, effective and widely acceptable outputs. The model of accurate inputs and capable internal mechanism for its transformation processes is what is expedient for any country that aspires to develop and sustain such development. In the case of Nigeria, political restructuring and nation branding of a subscribed national identity are the desired and inevitable outputs for national development.

In Nigeria's context, nation branding and national identity are inputs in a system aimed at achieving the desired output (of prosperity, development, restructuring, national identity, etc.) in the system if properly integrated in the system mechanism. Easton (1957; 1966) recommends focusing on two major inputs: demands and support. The demand, in the case of Nigeria, is the desire for political restructuring and a unique national identity that Nigerians admire and are subscribed to. The citizens, however, show their support for these demands by voting for a democratic government that is able to process and transform the demands of the people effectively. Through these goals, a wide range of activities in the environment can be channeled, mirrored, summarised, and brought to bear upon the political life of the state. The transformation process is expected to be actualised through good governance and national development. Outputs help interpret the consequences flowing from the transformation process or behaviour of the member of the system rather than from actions in the environment. Outputs are as the decisions and actions of the authorities. For instance, a government's decision to have a certain political reform would be a political input while the implementation of the policy would be the actual output. In the implementation of the constitutional reform for restructuring, a national conversation is imminent as a forerunner for the unbundling of the country's current national identity into a rebranded image that first endorses the appellation of 'Nigeria' as truly representative of the aspiration of the people of the state.

Agenda for Nation Branding and Political Restructuring

It is within the ambition to deepen the debate on restructuring that the authors argue that the first step to an effective restructuring agenda is to recalibrate the minds and hearts of Nigerians for admiration towards a nation that they feel emotionally connected to. In other words, a positive nation branding mission is expedient to fully maximise any projected gains at reframing the political and economic architecture of the country. The thesis of this paper is that, a renewed national identity, emerging from a rebranded nation, will yield the dividends of any eventual restructuring plan. A rebranded Nigeria will position the country's population to a collective responsibility of safeguarding the nation's future in a way that convincingly benefits all its inhabitants. We argue that a successful restructuring arrangement is hinged on the revival of the zeal and nationalism of being Nigerian.

Admittedly, there has been much debate in the public space on Nigeria's federal arrangement and the need for restructuring. However, much of these conversations have remained in the domain of newspaper commentaries and other media outlets (Farayibi, 2017). However, at different periods in Nigeria's history, the clamour for restructuring has led to civil war, Niger Delta militancy, constitutional reviews, and several national conferences including the recent one sponsored by the ninth House of Assembly.

Soludo (2018) attributes this quest to institutional failure and the structural disease of the oil boom which, according to him, are the consequential combination of the 'Dutch Disease syndrome' and the 'Lottery

Effect'. Since the necessary requirements for the transformation of the Nigerian state are lacking, it becomes very difficult for its citizens to believe in the unity of the state and society. Furthermore, recurring security threats in different parts of the country are evidence of renewed agitation for restructuring and perhaps an indication of deeper dissatisfaction with the current status quo. With hardly any agreement on the appropriate model for restructuring, several socio-political groups in Nigeria's geopolitical zones including the Afenifere (South West); PANDEF (South-South); Ndigbo (South-East); and the Northern Elders Forum (Middle Belt, and the former Northern Region) have at different periods proposed modalities for reordering the current architecture of Nigeria. Centrally, these valid calls have unraveled the longstanding ambition to return to true federalism and fiscal autonomy of constituting states. Amidst the differing views on restructuring, what is certain is that there are serious problems with the current multimodal federalism that is practiced in Nigeria; and furthermore, it raises the urgency to find a lasting solution to confront these challenges. Given that the demand for restructuring is important, the submission of this study is that successful restructuring agenda must be initiated from the base of the emergence of a new value system and national identity that Nigerian citizens can subscribe to. Until now, it is obvious that very little national symbols bind the Nigerian people together. In fact, it is colloquially suggested that Nigeria's participation in global sports events are perhaps the only times when the entire country is unified.

An alternative analysis to the question of restructuring in Nigeria submits that nation branding of a subscribed and endorsed national identity by Nigerians is a necessary precondition to solving the lingering problem. Because of the existing disconnection between the national identity of the population and the absence of a solid commitment to a collective nation building ideal, the consequence is the continuous pillage of the country's commonwealth in a way that breeds a ruling class/elite that is unsympathetic to the plight of the masses and festers political apathy from the general population itself. In the authors' argument, a national rebranding of Nigeria to reflect the original intentions of its founding fathers is an inevitable precursor to a successful restructuring goal. This lacuna between the government and the governed further suffocates, isolates and creates a passive citizenry unable or too unwilling to demand from the state the actualisation of the dividends of democracy. Therefore, for restructuring to successfully unfold, there must be a systematic linkup between government's plans and the execution of its developmental plans. Also, the linkup and evaluation of approaches between the input and output derivations from the rebranding activities.

Just over a decade before Nigeria gained its independence, two of the country's nationalists made profound statements that appear to hold true even today. In 1947, Chief Obafemi Awolowo made the observation that: "Nigeria is not a nation, it is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English' or 'Welsh' or 'French'. The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not" (Joshua, 2002; Igbokwe-Ibeto *et al.*, 2020). Sir Tafawa Balewa, who later became Nigeria's first and only Prime Minister, made a similar submission in 1947, stating that: "since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern provinces in 1914 Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper ... It is still far from being united. Nigeria's unity is only a British invention for the country" (Joshua, 2002). Balewa, in 1948, further added that: "Since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs, and do not show any sign of willingness to unite ... Nigeria unity is only the British intention for the country" (See Ekpu, 2017). As we argue, to date, both statements echo the fact that Nigeria's imposed unity of the 1914 amalgamation still requires more than the establishment of a multi-ethnic federal state but a rebranding, restructuring and quest for true citizenship.

Thus, the unfolding debate on a new political-economic arrangement in Nigeria appears more like a deeper reflection of the many historical contradictions of Nigeria that previous constitutional amendment efforts have failed to address. The cleavages of ethnicity and religion still continue to divide Nigeria and beg the question: What then is required for a cohesive Nigeria to emerge – one that all Nigerians are enthusiastic to identify with? The central argument of this paper is that political and economic restructuring must be preceded by attitudinal restructuring (internal and external) with the capacity to transform the national identity and ultimately rebrand the Nigerian state into one that mirrors the aspirations of its people. Hence, the willingness and commitment to the future of the Nigerian state by its citizens and to be identified as 'Nigerians' before anything else is a *sine qua non* for effective political and economic restructuring. In this

regard, a number of reflections are worth considering.

Firstly, it is evident that the idea of being a Nigerian is distinctively illusive and this is a major source of the restructuring clamour. In reality, many citizens do not fully subscribe to the notion of being Nigerian. The consequence of this is the quest to leave the country at all costs and seek permanent residency in or passports for other countries. In effect, the fundamental question therefore is: Are Nigerians happy being Nigerians? Before we begin the conversation on political and fiscal restructuring, it is important to ask whether citizens prefer to be associated with their ethnic nationhood such as the Yoruba nation, Igbo nation and Hausa nation among others than the political system called Nigeria. In the view of this study, the population's response has little to do with the ambitions for restructuring since there have been previous efforts in the past.

In other words, the clamour for restructuring is likely to only satisfy the appetite of the political class and ruling elites. For instance, Akintola suggests that not a few Nigerians would hesitate to accept the prospect of swapping their nationality for that of some Asian and western countries such as Germany, the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom (personal communication 20/11/2018). This assertion is illustrated by the endless list of Nigerian athletes opting to change their name and nationality for countries such as Bahrain and Qatar – a phenomenon that is regarded as strange in the sporting world. Similarly, in 2017, over 100 Nigerians died in extrajudicial killings in South Africa with the government of the former doing very little to engage Pretoria on the matter. On a daily basis, travelers carrying the Nigerian passport are often subjected to undue abuse and stereotypical profiling at the various international airports simply because of their nationality. In some other countries, Nigerians are denied employment because of the perceived fraudulent activities associated with some of its people. Significantly, as with many other cases, what this suggests is a low premium on the Nigerian life compared to what is often obtainable in many other countries.

On this anomaly rests the missing identity and a systemic failure of a Nigerian state wherein citizens see themselves first on the basis of their primordial identity. This is not to say that multi-ethnic federalism is in itself a weakness but that there is still the absence of a truly unifying symbol or narrative that Nigerians identify with or seek to pursue⁵. As a consequence, the excitement of being a Nigeria is punctuated by widespread apathy towards the state and its institutions. Today, Nigerians account for a significant population of African migrants in the US and many African countries, including South Africa. This is despite the fact that there is no major war or conflict in the country. The root cause of this massive exodus from the country is attributed to the failure of the citizens to maximise their potentials and dreams within the country. In effect, as a very religious country with a predominantly Christian and Muslim population, travelling outside of the country is seen as a blessing and testimony of God's divine favour. Clearly this opportunity offers the possibility of escaping poverty and starting a new life to support families back home. It is also in this light that birth tourism has become very popular among Nigerian parents seeking dual nationality for their kids as a way of securing their future. A restructured Nigeria in any of the forms proposed is unlikely to turn around the tide of insouciance with the Nigerian state without first putting in place a system that restructures the minds and hearts of Nigerians through a resolute pledge to the fatherland. With apparent great potential to become a superpower (Nche *et al.*, 2020; Cilliers *et al.*, 2015), Nigeria needs a reformed national identity to awaken its hidden potential and revive its dwindling international status.

Secondly, although restructuring has invoked different interpretations from many stakeholders in the country (Farayibi, 2017; Soludo, 2018), it is important to also consider the degree of commitment to the Nigerian ideal through the development of a new national identity for Nigeria and Nigerians. Who is a Nigerian and is there truly a Nigerian people? While these questions may appear philosophical, a critically reflective response will undoubtedly reveal that restructuring implemented without a committed subscription to first being a Nigerian and recognising the identity of the Nigerian people is unlikely to produce any meaningful outcome in Nigeria's quest for radical political and economic transformation. A restructuring that is initiated by a robust national branding agenda and a conversation around being Nigerian is poised to initiate stronger believe in a Nigerian project and inspire collective resolve to reshape the future course of national development.

Another important issue that must be considered is the prevalence of ethnic loyalties over and above national loyalty which in itself attacks the substance of the legitimacy of the central government (see Ogbu, 1996). Olatunji's frustration in a Facebook post perhaps sums up the point of this article. In his view,

“Nigeria will not change and it's not a curse. Unless we acknowledge that we are our own problem”. Her comments reflect the reality that no amount of restructuring will fundamentally change the course of Nigeria's future until Nigerians themselves begin to see the need for a changed mindset. A changed mindset begins when there is an evident national development plan devoid of ethnic sentiments and religious segregation in terms of the availability of basic and affordable amenities of life, good infrastructures and higher respect for the human lives and human dignity.

Making Restructuring Count

There have been a series of inputs and interventions by the Nigerian government, private firms, individuals and the international community in the Nigeria rebranding project. These efforts have not yielded much because of some fundamental gridlocks which must be upturned before Nigeria can achieve significant progress in its development like the ones recorded by the western countries, some Asian countries and a few African countries.

LeBas, (2020) and Thaut Vinson (2020) opined that the level of segregation of the citizens within and outside Nigeria is very high. Nigerian citizens are categorised based on their state of origin and sometimes local government. Citizenship of Nigeria becomes a generic factor of consideration. This classification is coded in the federal character principle and enlarges the gap of ethnicity, nepotism, religiosity, favoritism and gross fissure in the human interrelationship among Nigerians. If resources and national recognition are focused on the state of origin, Nigerians will first of all see themselves as members of an ethnic or religious group of a state before relating with the entire state. Simply put, the state of origin emphasis makes the Nigeria state a mere coat to cover the general populace and not the substance. For the rebranding and restructuring of Nigeria to come to the fore, there is need for a national policy that checks the categorisation of citizens on the basis of their originating state.

Also, the level of investment in education and infrastructure must be improved. The areas categorised as educationally less developed zones should be focused on with free education and incentives that make learning interesting. Stringent policies to punish offenders must be put in place and implemented. Education is a basic tool for rebranding the mind and comportment of any person. The outbreak of terrorism and militancy in some parts of Nigeria is as a result of poor education to orientate the people about their rights and duties to the Nigerian state. Infrastructural development is as well a vital component in the rebirth of Nigeria. The net effect of this on the quality of life in Nigeria will be unprecedented. Good roads to interlink the urban-urban, urban-rural and rural-rural communities, stable electricity production and distribution system, portable water and efficient security for lives and properties are important elements in how the Nigerian state appeals to Nigerians. Citizens are less likely to be affectionate towards their state when the system itself is failing in its responsibilities. As we have argued, the feedback will be that of apathy in the political process and a resort to any means possible to leave the country.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need for political leaders to better manage the country's diversity. Nigeria has about 500 different ethnic groups but the different languages in many regions are mutually comprehensive. Therefore, instead of expounding the cleavages of ethnic diversity through politicised federal character principles, the different regions should have developmental plans for harmonising the differences in each area and preventing the usurping of political largesse of one group over the other. This will enhance the psychological rebranding of Nigerians. The differences in term of ethnic divergence will be seen as unnecessary but this will ensure regional growth and representativeness.

Writing a national history that citizens identify with is critical to nation branding and national identity. A history that is not coloured with colonial rhetoric but by the unifying purpose of objectifying the country's historical achievements and mile stones while also celebrating the sacrifices of its heroes past is necessary. It is when this happens that Nigerians will truly rise to the first few words of the country's national anthem – ‘Arise, O Compatriots’. A fulfilling restructuring plan is only possible when the call to fellow citizens is heeded by all of its population and by implication great and lofty heights are therefore attainable. Internationally, Nigeria needs to rebrand her image and presence in other countries. There is hardly any country in the world today in which Nigerians are not present. Nigeria needs to ensure that the kind of entry permits received from their destination countries are genuine. Also, businesses undertaken in such countries must be legal and contribute to the growth of such countries and their homeland. This will promote good

feelings towards the Nigeria state by other countries of the world.

The output of recurring systemic failure in Nigeria in areas such as political corruption, embezzlement of public fund, diversion of public resources for private uses and illegal saving and transfer of cash from either foreign or domestic financial institutions should be kept at bay. Policies to punish offenders should range between banishment from public office, politics, long-term imprisonment and capital punishment. This will deter corrupt practices, bad governance, bad leadership, weak institutions and will send signals to other citizens of the country and any other international collaborator of fraudsters to relinquish such acts. The image of Nigeria will be improved, leading to more rapid economic development.

Finally, the use of sports can be maximised to enhance the unity and prevent further division within the various states in the country. National sports horizons should be broadened, and more youths should be encouraged to participate in age-grade sports beginning from the primary schools up to the universities. All sports, especially Olympic-recognised sports, should be emphasised rather than just football. This will make the youths patriotic to represent their country in any international forum. It will also reduce the emphasis on ethnicity and religion and enhance language integration across the federating units.

Conclusion

Countries of the world have peculiar brands and plans that focus on national development. Whenever such arrangements do not produce the desired effects, they are often replaced without any hesitation. Nigeria as well has its brands and national development plans. However, over the years, these brands and plans have become obsolete, moribund and ineffective. They are not providing the needed development, growth and integration. In response, agitations for national restructuring have surfaced in a bid to address the economic and political deficiencies within the state. This study therefore raises the need to rapidly rebrand Nigeria for a proper repositioning of the country.

This study has submitted the view that while it is important to consider all aspects of the restructuring debate, an overarching and seldom contemplated discussion is the imperative to rebrand Nigeria through policies, plans and processes that put the citizens at the forefront of nation building. We have argued that the absence of a subscribed Nigerian state by all citizens is at the root of the increasing outcry for political and economic restructuring. Because citizens do not feel themselves to be first Nigerian, the alternative is to find regional convergence for socio-political and ethnic governance. Invariable, the benefits of restructuring will be short-lived in the absence of a true subscription to a national identity and desire to remain within the Nigerian state.

This study has provided some inputs, feedback suggestions for governments in Nigeria to effectively restructure and rebrand as a country of repute among the comity of states. It recommends that the model of accurate inputs and capable internal mechanism for the input transformation processes is expedient for any country that aspires to develop and sustain its development. It also provided suggestions on key aspects of rebranding and restructuring such as political, psychological, economic and social focus for Nigeria. These will serve as a policy base for the government at all levels in Nigeria to embark upon so as to enhance development and growth of the country.

Endnotes

¹ K.C Wheare (1963: 11) proposed that a federal system must be dependent on 'division of powers between one general and several regional governments, each of which, in its own sphere, is co-ordinate with the others; each government must act directly on the people; each must be limited to its own sphere of action; and each must within that sphere, be independent of others'

² The Aguiyi-Ironsi military dictatorship promulgated a decree jettisoning constitutional federalism in Nigeria in favour of unitarism.

³ In fact, a cardinal point of President Buhari's All Progressive Congress' (APC) party manifesto was centred on the restructuring of the Nigerian state.

⁴ This is despite the promise of 'true federalism' by the APC government in its campaign manifesto for Buhari's election

(Soludo, 2018).

⁵ In a WhatsApp group chat of former graduates of Political Science of a Nigerian university, the question was posed: 'Mention two unifying factors for Nigeria and Nigerians?' Participants agreed that sports (mainly football) and language (pidgin) are two main unifiers. Other suggestions of national symbols included the national currency, the national anthem and pledge, flag, coat of arms, national heroes which are supposed to be rallying ingredients for national identity.

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