



Limitations of the Federal Character Principles in Promoting National Integration

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Abstract

The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in series of contradictions that impigns its continuous existence as a single united entity. In response to this development, the government in the past and even at present have introduced and adopted several policies and measures to address key problems relating to national integration. This paper assesses the limitations of the federal character principles in promoting national integration. The paper is anchored on the social contract theory of federalism as its theoretical framework. Data for the paper was gleaned through qualitative method. As such, the paper relied on textual documents such as books, journal articles, seminars, newspapers, published and unpublished thesis and dissertations, magazines and statute books which provided the needed baseline data. The paper found that one of the weaknesses of federal character as practiced in Nigeria is that it tends to enthrone mediocrity in governance at the expense of merit and professionalism. Accordingly, the paper recommends among others that while reasonable balance between states is necessary for equal and equitable participation of all states and ethnic nationalities in all governmental affairs at all levels, emphasis should be placed on merit within various states and ethnic nationalities as against mediocrity.

Keywords: *Integration, Federal Character, Promotion, Nigeria, Federation.*

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I. Introduction

The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in structural and socio-economic contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings which co-here on the central issues. Nigeria is a federation of many different nations. It is the most populous country in Africa with over 180 million people. The country is divided into 36 states and 744 local government areas. The religious, ethnic, and cultural diversities of the federating units no doubt make it a unique one. Nigeria has 374 ethnicities which are broadly divided into ethnic ‘majorities’ and ethnic ‘minorities’ (Oтите 1990, Mustapha 2007). Nigeria is a plural society with different cleavages – ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, as well as geo-political, social and economic challenges – but ethnic heterogeneity is inarguably, the most pervasive of them all Adamolekum, (1986:4).

The problem ethnicity poses is that political competition and access to power is overtly drawn along ethnic lines (Aderonke, 2013). Since Nigerian federalism is based on ethnic and not geographical diversities, it has tended to exacerbate centrifugal forces in the country. Therefore, the struggle for acquisition and access to power in Nigeria has been patterned largely along ethnic lines (Vande, 2012).

As a Nigerian historian puts it:

This becomes more problematic because the state is not a neutral force in mediating political conflict as it can be captured and used to further the interests of the leadership of an ethnic group or a combination of such groups. Afigbo, (1987:5).

The problem of acrimonious existence among the diverse groups and interests in the federation of Nigeria leads to mutual distrust and this has become perennial and endemic in the nation's body politics this has militated against the political stability of the country since independence (Agbodike, 2004). The fear of domination of one ethnic group or section of the country by another and the national question of who gets what, when, where and how when the national cake is shared constitute a major factor of this problem Etekpe, & Okolo, (2011). As a result of mutual suspicion existing among the various social groups, whatever the issues at hand in Nigeria is the patterns of reaction to it will be determined by geo-political as well as religious considerations. This situation seriously hampers efforts at national unity as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the disparate ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements or groups in the country (Kurfi 1998).

However, as a form of political organization, federalism permits both the compulsions of collective action – in terms of shared values, and the need to retain the “Regional Space” to be meaningfully reconciled. In contemporary political systems, the strength and usefulness of the federal design or experiment can be analysed and explained in terms of its capacity to meet two very crucial and vital variables and/or demands, first the need to construct an efficient / effective, dynamic and modern state and second, the desire to celebrate or enjoy diversity Heirmexxy (2011).

The federal project or experiment needs to be seen not merely as a formal set of institutions and processes, but could also be viewed as a strategy for political management. The implication therefore, is that, there is no ideal federal model for nations to adopt and emulate Okolo, (2011). Thus, the federal arrangement that a given nation or a political system adopts must be tailored or designed to suit its own distinct social economic, cultural and political realities, and not necessarily fit an ideal federal design.

It is in this context that this paper assesses the limitations of the Federal Character Principle of Nigeria in promoting National Integration. This paper is approached in four interrelated parts. Part one is the introduction which is just concluded. Part two is the theoretical framework and review of relevant concepts to the paper. Part three is the crux of the discourse while part four and of course the final part covers the conclusion and recommendations of the paper.

Theoretical Framework

Social Contract Theory

Social contract theory is the view that people's moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among themselves to form the society in which they live. The social contract theory emphasizes that Men by nature are equal. Thus, nature has made men so equal especially in faculties of the body and even the mind. Although studies reveal that some men may seem stronger in body or of quicker mind than others, but when all is pulled together, it might be necessary to note that there isn't really much difference. As noted by Hobbes. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself.

Furthermore, according to Hobbes, the justification for political obligation is this: given that men are naturally self-interested, yet they are rational, they will choose to submit to the authority of a sovereign in order to be able to live in a civil society, which is conducive to their own interests. Hobbes argues for this by imagining men in their natural state, or in other words, the State of Nature. In the State of Nature, which is purely hypothetical according to Hobbes, men are naturally and exclusively self-interested, they are more or less equal to one another, (even the strongest man can be killed in his sleep), there are limited resources, and yet there is no power able to force men to cooperate.

In Locke's analysis, from this equality of ability arises equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. The federal character principle therefore seeks to advocate for equality among the various sections of the Nigeria polity.

The state exists to enforce the rules necessary for civilized living while morality consists in the whole set of rules that facilitate social living as it governs behaviour that rational people would accept on the condition that others accept them as well. Thus, government is needed to enforce the basic rules of social living (e.g. don't rob/harm people, don't break agreements) while morality may encompass some rules that are important for social living but are outside the scope of the state (this might include, for example, (“don't insult people for no reason”).

Those living under a government are parties to a social contract. Each person agrees to follow the laws of the state on the condition that other persons do the same. That way, we are all relatively safe from each other and we all benefit from the other social good that will result therefrom. Also, on the part of the people, social cooperation through submission to the government is required while the government is expected to provide for the basic necessities for survival in any civil society. The basics expected to be provided by the government include but is not limited to:

- i. Protection of life and property; this means that the government will now pay more attention to the issues of security in the country and not leave everyone living in a state of continuous fear either of armed bandits or kidnappers as we have in Nigeria today.
- ii. Other rules needed to secure the benefits of social living. This means there will be prohibitions on breaking contracts (e.g. promises) and a general requirement of truth-telling.
- iii. Protection of the society against outside threats.

The central theme of the Social Contract theory is that the ruler and the ruled agreed on their respective roles and had obligations to one another. Thus, the contract was established when the all-powerful or sovereign, i.e. the people made an agreement that created the state and gave the ruler of the state certain powers. As emphasized by (Gherghe, 2011). “Social Contract Theory provides a general framework for inquiry, genuine dialogue and analysis into how societies are formed and governed. Social Contract Theory is an attempt to establish the theoretical base for the establishment of an idea civil society and government” (Gherghe, 2011).

In other words just like the federal character commission which seeks to emphasize unity in diversity, the social contract theory was based on the concept of popular sovereignty in which the ultimate source of the power of the state was the people (Baradat, 1984). The contract theory was formulated to take care of the problems of equality, authority and individual freedom in society which, as argued by Unger, are the master problems of politics (Unger, 1975). Again, in strong terms Ellis (2006) asserts that, the principles of Social Contract Theory are by all means the framework of contemporary system of democracy. The array of assertions linking Social Contract theory with democracy no doubt proves that there are links between them.

In explaining the theoretical underpinning of this paper, the Social Contract theory of federalism lays fact that it lent credence to the evolution of federalism and federal character principle in Nigeria and the reasons why Nigeria’s federal practice seems to have failed. The Social Contract theory of federalism is a theory upon which the American federalism is built and has sustained the structure for more than 200 years. The theory holds that; a country that adopts federalism as a system of government comes into existence through a Social Contract agreed upon by all the federating units and that the federal government is a creation of the states. It also states that; the federating states confer some of its powers and duties on the central government to act on its behalf without losing their own independence or diminish in stature and status.

Baker (2000) in his famous works on *the Growth of Federalism* argues that Social Contract theory of federalism found its root in the covenant theology of the early reformed protestantism in Zurich; later to the covenant of federal thought by Heinrich Bullinger in 1534, then to the works of Johannes Althausius and later Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, to the Declaration of Independence and drafting of the Constitution of the United States of America. Each of the phases of the development of Social Contract theory has five common elements. According to Baker:

First, federal thinkers agreed that political society was formed by means of Social Contract or covenant; then came a general view of human nature. Third, federal thinkers placed high value on the community. Fourth, federalists placed all members of the community under a common law who contributes parts of their sovereignties to a common government. Finally, federal thinkers held the community and its leaders to covenant faithfulness by means of checks and balances in managing shared sovereignties...

In their final analysis Thomas Hobbes (1588), John Locke (1703) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1775), who are the chief proponents of the social contract theory agree that it implies; the coming together of hitherto independent entities by surrendering some of their sovereignties to a central authority in a relationship that is independent and coordinate. Locke and Rousseau further stated that the contract is broken when the government becomes an entity in itself and is only interested in its own preservation.

Interestingly, this implies that when the contract is broken according to Locke, the federating units have a moral right and obligation to revolt and start a new contract. It is the view of Locke that people are free and equal by natural right, and that this in turn requires that all people give their consent to be governed.

In the work of Thomas Jefferson (1807) a major contributor to the development of the Social Contract theory of federalism, he stated that;

‘though the federating units relinquish part of sovereignty, duties and responsibilities to a central government, the federating units remain final arbiters of the status and nature of the central government and whether the federal government had overstepped the limits of its authority as set forth in the Social Contract’

Jefferson thus concluded that;

“The government created by this contract was not made the exclusive or final judge of the extent of the powers delegated to itself. Rather the states, however, as the sovereign parties to the constitution, not only had

the right to determine the constitutionality of federal legislation, but also to resist whatever legislation they deemed unconstitutional”.

Anyaoku (2017) also supported the views of proponents of Social Contract theory when he insisted that; in federalism, component states apart from being independent and coordinate have rights to decide the functions of the central government, how much it gets in terms of finance and can check the excesses of the central government.

Therefore according to Anyaoku;

‘Nigeria modeled its current federal system after the US, but seem to have avoided the critical elements that make the American system function better which is greater autonomy for federating states and individuals; productivity, competition and innovation, and strong institutional checks on power wielders. In particular, to protect and guarantee freedom for citizens from rampaging egomaniacs, the central government needed to be restrained in favour of the federating states. This led to the passing of the Bill of Rights which offered specific protections of individual liberty and justice and restricts the powers of government. The tenth amendment states that powers not delegated to the Federal Government and not denied the states; belong to the states or to the people’.

This theory suits the paper in focus as it tends to elaborate and expose the reason why National Integration in Nigeria has been quite difficult to attain by the federating units or ethnic blocs never had discussions on coming together but were merely foisted into a union crafted by colonial and imperialistic regimes that were intended to satisfy the whims and caprices of the British. McGarry (2004:65) supports this point by insisting that federations that get established on voluntary basis are likely to last longer and operate more smoothly than those that were decreed by fiat into existence.

To McGarry (2004:69) voluntary federations established as a result of negotiation between leaders of the various groups are more likely to be considered legitimate by their citizens than those that are imposed. They are more likely to foster traditions of accommodation. The successful multi-ethnic federations such as Canada and Belgium arose from voluntary agreements.

What this means is that each government exist, not as an appendage of another government but as an autonomous entity in the sense of being able to exercise its own will on the conduct of its affairs free from direction by any government. Thus, the federal government on one hand and the state governments on the other hand are autonomous in their respective spheres. This has never been found in Nigeria federalism and has continued to hamper the political stability in the country.

The essence of federalism is to allow each state or region in a federation a significant measure of autonomy to manage its affairs. The federalist debate in Nigeria centres essentially on the need to understand the basis of the contract of federalism and how to tap from the gains of federalism in managing the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of the Nigerian state for the benefit of all.

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Federal Character Principle

Olagunju (1987) defined Federal Character (FC) as a deliberate design to accommodate less dominant but often forcibly expressed interest. Ezeibe (2012) says that Federal Character involves a deliberate plan to construct means of ensuring the proper distribution of amenities and government projects in a country. Implicit in the above definitions is that FC is introduced where there are observed differences in culture, tradition and inequality either in human, natural or both. Therefore, FC is a palliative principle aimed at uniting once existed autonomous sub-nationalities through quota system for purposes of equality of opportunities and peaceful co-existence. Ezenwa (1987) and Heirmexy (2011) noted that FC was introduced for equitable sharing of posts and even distribution of natural and economic resources. Contextually, the policy evolved through three main phases: implied, expressed and applied/ practiced. From 1914-1953 the principle was saliently applied as encapsulated by the amalgamation policy. From 1953-1976, it was applied under federalism, introduced in 1954. From 1976 to date, the principle is constitutionalised and fully practiced. Throughout the phases, the principle consummated Nigeria into a catholic marriage which may no longer be enjoyed but conditions for separation is near impossible. For the period, it has only achieved co-existence devoid of peace and this is evident in most national issues and developments. Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution provides:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of

persons from a few State or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.

It means that: The composition of the Government of the federation or any of its agencies, shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies (Nnoli, 1996 in Adeosun, 2011).

Pursuant of the above provision, Section 135(3) states that in the appointment of Ministers, the president shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria” provided that in giving effects to the provision aforesaid, the president shall appoint at least one Minister from each state who shall be an indigene of such state (Nnoli,1996 in Adeosun, 2011). Moreover, Section 157 provides that appointment by the President into the offices of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Head of Service of the Federation, Ambassadors, or the principal representatives abroad, Permanent Secretary or other Chief Executive in any Ministry or Department of the federal Government, or any office on the personal staff of the president shall have regard to the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity.

Section 197(2) provides that the composition of the officer corps and other ranks of the Armed Forces of the Federation shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Various other provisions were made in the constitution to ensure that the federal character principle was operative in the political process (Nnoli, 1996 in Adeosun, 2011). Section 153 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution established the Federal Character Commission, as a federal executive body, empowered in Section 8(1) of the Third Schedule of the Constitution to oversee and monitor the implementation of the federal character clauses. The mandates of the Commission are as follows:

- i. work out an equitable formula subject to the approval of the National Assembly for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the public service of the Federation and of the States, the armed forces of the Federation, the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies, government-owned companies and parastatals of the States;
- ii. Promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government;
- iii. take such legal measures, including prosecution of the head or staff of any ministry or government body or agency which fails to comply with any federal character principle or formula prescribed by the Commission, and as provided for in Section 8(3) of the Schedule,
- iv. Notwithstanding any provisions in any other law or enactment, the Commission shall ensure that every public company or corporation reflects the federal character in the appointment of its directors and senior management staff.

Afigbo (1989) in Aderonke (2013) asserts that federal character principle is anchored on the distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote National Unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Ezenwa (1987) and Heirmexy (2011) in Okorie and Greg (2013) also posit that federal character was introduced for equitable sharing of posts and even distribution of natural and economic resources. Federal character suggests an attempt to build a nation where equal opportunities abound and where every individual must feel that he has equal chance to participate without bias of ethnic affiliation (Talih (1987) in Ezeibe (n.d)). Federal character is both a reaction as well as a system. It is a positive reaction to correct those practices of the past, especially in the conduct of public management which tended to exploit the diversities of the nation and by so doing cause ill will. Also it is a reaction to those practices which tended to reflect selfish and parochial consideration, especially those negative forces which placed self-interests above national interest. The federal character principles involve a deliberate plan to construct means of ensuring the proper distribution of amenities and government projects in the country. The principle of federal character was formulated and put into use by successive governments in Nigeria to address and hopefully mitigate the problem of diversity so as to ensure a peaceful, stable and united Nigeria. The question begging for answer is whether Federal character has been able to achieve its laudably goals of National integration.

The federal character principle essentially refers to the recognition of the plural nature of the country in recruitment, distribution of administrative and political offices and power as well as the resources of the country. The essence federal character principle is to allow the composition and conduct of public institutions and affairs reflect the country’s diversity. It is premised on the ground that when national institutions and affairs are reflective, in composition and conduct, of the pluralism of the country then, a sense of belonging is likely to be evoked from the citizenry. It is also designed to mitigate, if not obviate, the bellicose political struggle that characterized previous Nigeria’s democratic systems (Obiyan and Akindele, 2001). Federal character principle is, in part, designed to deal with the problem of imbalance, marginalisation and discrimination.

Concept of National Integration

Integration is the process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious. From this presupposition, the success of integration depends on the perception by the federating units of how equitably cordial the binding order is, at least, in terms of harmonious federal-state relations and interethnic relations (Ojo, 2002). Akinbade (2004) views integration as the process of maintaining the territorial integrity of a state. What this means is that, in a deeply divided society with 'babel' of voices like Nigeria, integration becomes a necessary task that must be implemented for the purpose of securing stability and adaptability within the State.

National integration is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept. This thinking according to Fatile and Adejuwon (2012) arises from the plurality that seems to attend attempts at conceptual explication of the term. From the conception of national integration, two things stand out. The first has to do with the geographical or territorial mass of a country. In the light of this thinking, national integration could be achieved if the different parts that make a country are lumped together as a monolithic whole. This implies the unification of different parts of a state which will serve as a forum co-operation and interdependence. The second perspective sees national integration as a process together the various interest groups in a territorial entity to the pursuit of common goals or objectives (Okafor and Okeke, 2008; Iwokwagh, 2008).

This second perspective is more relevant to this paper. National integration was firstly used to refer to specific problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. In this sense, it is generally presumed that there exists an ethnically plural society in which each group is characterized by its own language or other self-conscious cultural qualities. This integration is used to refer to the tensions and discontinuities on the horizontal plane in the process of creating a homogeneous progressive reduction of cultural and regional territorial political community (Bamiseye, 2003).

National integration can also be seen as the process whereby several desperate groups within a given territorial are united together or cooperate under conditions which do not appear to permit satisfaction of their system needs in any other way (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2012). According to Elaigwu (1987), national integration is determined by the degree to which members and groups in a plural society adapt to the demands of national existence while co-existing harmoniously. On the practical note, national integration is a process, not an end in itself and it is usually affected by contending social forces. National integration is a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty toward a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or political units. National integration is a process whereby political actors in distinct national setting are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institution possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing nation-state (Ogunojemite, 1987; Oyeleye, 1987).

As noted by Mazrui (1972), the five major aspects of national integration includes; the fusion of norms and culture; the promotion of social interdependence; the narrowing of the gap between the elites and the masses, the urban and the rural areas, rich or poor etc; the resolution of emergent conflicts; and the sharing of mutual experiences so that people can discover that they had undergone some important experiences together.

For there to be national integration, Ibogje and Dode (2007) stated that there must be a central authority to serve as a common central authority to serve as a rallying point. In the quest for national integration, citizens are expected to respect the overriding supremacy of the national government. "This entails subordination of institutions and cultural values to the demands of the central authority. Often, intra- and inter-ethnic crisis result in tasking the state's security apparatus. The ability of the state to resolve or regulate the recurring crises and to create an enabling environment where the people's respect and love for their nation is enhanced would definitely affect the tempo of the nation's integration positively. National integration, thus, covers a vast range of human relationships and attitudes, the integration of diverse and discrete cultural loyalties and the development of a sense of nationality; the integration of the rulers and the ruled and the integration of the citizens into a common political process. As diverse as these definitions are, they have a common link in that they all point to the fact that integration is what holds a society and a political system together.

By the time Nigeria won her independence from Britain in 1960, its artificial origin, coupled with other factors, had bequeathed it a number of fundamental problems, one of which is the challenge of integrating, into a cohesive socio-political whole, the various entities and strange bed fellows that were lump together by the colonialists (Ayodeji, 1997). The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings cohere on the central issues. These are linked to national unity, local autonomy and self-determination, equitable distribution of revenue, rewards, opportunities and power. They also include the observation and implementation of fundamental human rights, among which are the rights of franchise and empowerment, and socio-economic rights to basic needs' satisfaction, sustainable environment and life (Anifowose and Seteolu, 2004). The Nigerian federal principle has been struggling against the forces of social cohesion. The problem of ethnic minority has been receiving attention of scholars and practitioners of governance and development. This

is because ethnic minority is usually sidelined and ignored by the majority in decision making and resources distribution. The consequence of such politics of exclusion has been agitation and demand for social inclusion, which at times by violent actions. Since society is a system of human cooperation, the question of how society can mainstream the minority groups in decision making on welfare matters requires adequate policy consideration (Akinola and Adesopo, 2011). One of the three factors that is important in understanding how a society functions, as identified by Tocqueville (1966), is the peculiar and accidental situation, which providence places people.

II. Method

The method of this paper is qualitative documentary research method using secondary data. The research involved exhaustive, systematic and objective retrieving of information, relevant to the subject matter from a vast amount of existing textual document. This evidence was reviewed, analyzed and evaluated in order to establish the facts as well as trends and draw conclusions.

The sources of data for any paper are determined by the nature of problem under investigation. Thus, the sources of data collection in this paper would be derived from secondary sources. Sources of data/information for this paper therefore included but not limited to books, newspapers, encyclopedias, magazines, government policy documents, conference proceedings, reports, memos, unpublished dissertations, letters, documents, international journals, policy statements, annual reports, pamphlets, videos, photographs and films.

Given the method of data collection that was adopted, qualitative content method of data analysis was employed to explain information gleaned from baseline data that was obtained from the 1999 constitution as amended and other reports on political office sharing among the various regional and key ethnic groups in the country.

Ways in which Federal Character Principle is contributing to National Integration

The advantages of the federal character in promoting national integration include providing an equitable formula for the distribution of socio-economic services, amenities and infrastructural facilities; providing the modalities and schemes for redressing imbalances, real or imagined; and ensuring equitable admission into federal universities. Politically, the federal character principle ensures that no one section of the society unduly dominates the elective or appointive offices. It provides equal access of Nigerian citizens from the different background for recruitment into the Armed Forces, the Police, and other paramilitary services. The federal character principle also ensures even spread among civil servants as it serves as criteria for recruitment and even promotion. It is also applied in the deployment of tertiary institution graduates for the National Youth Service Corp.

It is employed in resource allocation through the instrumentality of the Federal Accounts Allocation Committee (FACC). It also ensures the corporate existence of Nigeria and has helped to douse the centripetal agitations. It also protects the interest of the minority ethnic groups. But in reality and actual practice the principle has rather become a problem when it supposed to be a solution. It has failed in its objective of redressing the imbalanced in structure and ethnic domination in government and other public institutions so that national integration could be achieved. So far, the application of the principle shows that it is not capable of resolving the problem of national suspicion among the ethnic groups. It has so far failed to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts such as the Jos-Plateau Crisis, Boko-Haram Crisis, Tiv-Jukun Crisis, Agileri-Umuleri Crisis among others. Also, the long list of requests for the creation of more states and local government areas during the recent constitutional conference is a case in point. It has no limitation on the powers of the executive in the allocation of resources in an attempt to satisfy the various segments of the society. In operation, the majority ethnic groups are sometimes put at an advantage over others, since a less qualified person may have an unfair advantage over a more qualified one. From the point of merit, Federal character principle seems counterproductive.

The principle rather promotes mediocrity instead of meritocracy. The interface here is to draw a border line between mediocrity and meritocracy. The percentage for employment into government establishment, admission or allocation of government resources on merit is less than other criteria when combined. People who lack technical know-how are made to mane sensitive positions to the detriment of those with capability. Nigerians are now being discriminated against in the country on account of ethnicity. This cannot make for loyalty to the Nigerian State and therefore bring about the much sought integration. According to Shuaib (2009) in Edigin (2010) federal character principle in Nigeria promotes mediocrity and incompetence in the public service.

It is also perceived as a confused balancing of the merit principle and the quota system. it has no limitation on the powers of the executive in the allocation of resources in an attempt to satisfy the various segments of the society, in operation, the majority ethnic groups are sometimes put at a disadvantage since a less qualified person may have an unfair advantage All these have a diverse consequences in terms of discipline,

morals and overall effectiveness and efficiency in the public service as it breeds corruption and promotes ethnicity rather than nationalism, The discretion here is that the implementation and application of the Federal character principle should be based on equity, fairness and justice. Merit should be strictly adhered to and applied especially in strategically important sectors of the economy. Nigerians will not be interested where the president, governor, minister or a worker comes from if the economy is growing and absorbing able-bodied men and women as they come out from schools. Nigerians will be gladdened to see any president no matter where ever he comes from or whatever his religious background, who will guarantee 24 hours of power supply, access roads, security of life and property, freedom of movement of goods and services. The fear of one section of the country dominating every position available should be discouraged. The argument that if merit is used one section of the country would dominate the others cannot be said to be true, because there is no state without qualified manpower to mount strategic positions. Therefore, meritocracy should be the guiding principle.

Limitations of the Federal Character in Promoting National integration between 1999 to 2021

1. Limitation of Federal Character Principle in State Creation

In Nigeria, federal character principle is not sidelined in State creation because the Federal Character Commission recognizes the division of Nigeria into North and South (East and West). In state creation, Nigeria has 18 States each between North and South. Since the origin of federalism and regionalism in Nigeria in 1946, the major regions have been the North and South. The further division of the South into East and West was for British administrative convenience and political consideration (weaken the South by further dividing them without doing same to the North). These three administrative units, Northern Province houses the Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality, the Western province houses the Yoruba ethnic group while the Eastern province houses predominantly people of Igbo. Though these three groups were not the only existing ethnic groups in these regions, the dominance of these three overwhelmed the minority. No wonder only these three groups were considered when the 1946 constitution was imposed on Nigeria (Ugwu 1998).

The emergence of this unholy trinity from the old duality of 1914, subsequently busted into 36 states and the minority groups continue to mount pressure for more states. The conflicts origination from request for creation of more state is so horrific that one might begin to question the rationale for Nigeria. No wonder Awolowo (1947) noted that:

It is only the accident of British suzerainty which had made Nigeria one country or one nation socially or even economically.... Socially and politically there are deep differences between the major tribal groups. They do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent different stages of culture.

Notably, colonial constitutions were concerned with only the major ethnic nationalities. It was not until July 1966 when Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon and team struck and took over government of Federal Republic of Nigeria in a counter military coup that the emphasis on this unholy trinity began to dwindle and the minority voice was heard. Gowon's regime reversed some of the unjust decisions against the minorities in Nigerian. He gave people from minority ethnic groups political appointments and subsequently broke up the unholy trinity which gave the three major ethnic groups controls over the minorities in Nigeria. In May 1967 Gowon carved out 12 states in Nigeria, 6 for the South and 6 for the North from the unholy trinity plus the mid-West that was created in 1963.

After the General Murtala Mohammed blood free coup of 1976, he further carved out more 7 states to total 19 states in Nigeria favouring the North with 10 states and South with 9 states. In 1987 General Babangida created 2 more states 1 from North and 1 from South to give Nigerians a 21 states structure. In August 1991, he further created 9 states to give Nigeria a 30 states structure and balancing number of states between the North and South to 15 states each. In 1996, General SaniAbacha completed the creation of 6 new states to give to Nigerians the 36 states structure with 18 states from the North and South respectively in observance of the federal character principle. Today, Nigeria is loosely divided into six geo-political zones. While each of these geopolitical zones has between six and seven states as the case may be, the south –east zone has only five states. This tendency has warranted an intense call from the south east residents and representatives for the creation of one more state in the region in respect of the federal character principle.

2. Limitation of Federal Principle in Revenue Allocation

Disparities in income, social and economic opportunities are traceable partly to natural endowment, partly to the formula for distribution of national resources and partly to historical legacies of colonial administration. The federal character is also applied in allocation of revenue in Nigeria. This is because any heterogeneous society like Nigeria without a justifiable formula for sharing resources between groups is bound to experience wars and all sorts of socio-economic slouches. It is in recognition of the importance of fair and equitable distribution of national cake to ensure political and economic stability in Nigeria.

Nigerian constitution clearly stipulates some responsibilities to the central government and other power are reserved to the states or local governments while some others functions are shared by the three of them. The constitutions also make for a controlled distribution of the revenue and recourses of the nation to these levels of government. Federal character principle also guides the government expenditure in each region or state. This determines the spread of government services to the people (See Section 162 Sub-Section 1-10 and Section 163 Sub-Section a and b of 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria).

3. Limitation of Federal Character Principles in Education Sector

Notably, the different ethnic groups, regions and subsequently states that have existed and exist in Nigeria developed at varying pace in different sectors and the educational sector is not an exception. Since the British government stepped in to educate Nigerians as clerical staff to help in keeping the colony in a subordinate position for colonial continuation exploration, Nigerians have continued to struggle for this limited chances for education. However, British government education style in Nigeria was alien and enslaving, hence, Lord Lugard noted that:

The chief function of government primary and secondary schools among primitive communities is to train the more promising boys from village schools as teachers for those schools, as clerks for local native courts and as clerks for the administration (Ene, 1968).

Meanwhile, the significance of education is outstanding as educational attainment has a correlation with occupation of top economic and political positions in both the public and private lives. In 1955 and 1957, both the Western and Eastern regions respectively introduced the Universal Primary Education while the North was entirely left out. By independence, education had become an issue for the federating units in Nigeria. In 1974, the National Policy on Education was formed. The main thrust of education in Nigeria was to achieve integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizenry and equal educational opportunities for all citizens at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Hence the aim of this outfit was to inculcate national consciousness and national unity, the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society (Adamu, 1978).

Again deliberate attempt has been made to institutionalize the federal character principle in Nigeria's public affairs. In the educational sector where for instance, the Northern Nigeria is obviously disadvantaged while the South is advantaged, a policy is often recommended to right this wrong. Buggs (1987:142) argued that the panacea for this inequality lay in adoption of the federal character principle in staffing, locating schools and admission of students into schools. Thus he recommended one state one university in Nigeria. Today, more students are admitted in Nigerian universities based on the logic of locality and educationally least developed states than those admitted on the basis of merit.

So far, the application of the principle shows that it is not capable of resolving the problem of national suspicion among the ethnic groups. It has failed in its objective of redressing the imbalance in the structure and ethnic domination in government and other public institutions so that national integration could be achieved. It has so far failed to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts and centripetal agitations in Nigeria. For instance, beside the Boko Haram group who want to carve a Caliphate in the North-East, there is *Arewa Consultative Forum*, for the Hausa/Fulani and others in the North; from the South-South, there are "Ex-Agitators/militants and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC); from the West, the *Afenifere* and *Oduduwa People Congress (OPC)* speak for the Yorubas, as the *Ohanaeze-Ndigbo* represents Igbo's interest. Also, Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State Of Biafra (MASSOB), an Igbo 'radical' group recently went on air through "Radio Biafra" in pursuant of the 'Actualization' in their name.

Those who are against the application of this affirmative action not oblivious of the fact that federal character is a "fine idea in principle, but the practice is tricky..." they are aware of the fact that for national integration to be achieved and sustained there must be policies or "some sort of ethnic arithmetic must be ensured in Nigeria's national representative institutions. But they are opposed to a remedy worse than the disease" (Osifeso, 2011). Federal character was supposed to benefit the "underprivileged" but as Ojo (2009) opined, it was designed for the benefit of the ruling class in the Nigerian context, resulting in the further disempowerment of powerless. Hence, it made nonsense of the checks and balances embedded in the original arrangement resulting in geometric diffusion of mediocrity, public service ineptitude, and manifest decline in public morale (Suberu 2001 in Osifeso 2011).

Echoing the defect in this policy, Osifeso (2011) argued that the principle is "engendering federal instability rather than integration that it was intended to serve. Thus, the policy has merely promoted ethnic and sectional consciousness. He argues further that "no unity can result where the application of the principle discriminates against one group and favours another... the principle is even predicated on false premise. Its objective is to achieve distributive justice, the equality of states". This according to Ojo (2009) amounts to

injustice because it is not feasible. "States are not equal in population and they are far from being equal too in the size of the pool of eligible candidates for appointments. There is no greater inequality than the equal treatment of unequal".

Another factor that militates against the effectiveness was fear of domination arising from competition for political power at the center and control of administrative system leading to the institutionalism of federal character principle with the intention of ensuring fairness in public service and addressing ethnic domination. But its application has appeared to be incapable of resolving the problem it was meant to solve. Its opponents argue that the federal character principle sacrifices merit for mediocrity. It also emphasizes on the factors that disunite us (Nigerians). Such factors like language, religious and ethnic affiliation have been the factors that disunite the people over the years.

Many Nigerian experts and analysts are kicking against the application of federal character principles especially now that Nigerians (both the leaders and the led) are determined to change by shifting the paradigm from the business as usual which has crippled the naturally endowed nation's efforts to develop. For instance, the vice president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo has advised that merit should be given paramount consideration as a criterion in the appointment of persons into public offices instead of federal character. He asserts that in the selection of players for Nigeria's national football team, Nigerians expect the best to be chosen by the team manager or the coach in order to get the desired results... At that instance, nobody considers where a player or players come from. All they expect of the coach are players who merit places in the team and can get results". Speaking further, the Vice President said "I don't take my health for granted. So when going for a medical doctor, I go for the best not considering which part of the country the doctor comes from... if we take government seriously, we must as Nigerians look for merit before federal character" (Thisdaylive, 30 August, 2015).

In the same vein, a current Nigerian senator, Ben Murray Bruce has said the application of federal character and the quota system in the country has impeded national development. According to Senator Bruce, Nigeria must make progress though tribe and tongue may differ. The only way to do this is by saying goodbye to ethnicity and hello to merit... consider the progress that Nigeria made before the quota system (1960-66) and the retrogression we have made since 1960 till date. The difference is clear. Federal character cannot make an electrical power station work, it can't make refinery work. Only merit can ensure this. As a result of federal character Nigeria Airways went from 30 aircraft to bankruptcy and a debt of over \$60m by the year 2000. Quota system and federal character lead to a sense of entitlement in beneficiaries and resentment in others. Merit is a better way of life (Eniola, 2015).

There seems to be wide consensus among social scientists that federalism provides a linkage of peoples and institutions based on mutual consents, without the sacrifice of their individual identities such as tongue and tribe as well as their religion. No wonder, federalism is considered to be the most appropriate framework for governing a pluralistic state like Nigeria. According to Mar and Heraud in Osifeso, (2011) "federalism and ethnicity form a solidarity couple". This view agrees with Duchacek (1973) who posits that the aim of a federal constitution "is an institutionalized balance between national unity and sub-national diversity." It could be safe to deduce here that true federalism is a cure for problem dissension, disintegration and friction arising in a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria. Federalism is reputed to be an effective political and constitutional design for managing governmental problems usually associated with ethnic and cultural diversity (Chukwuma, 2014). Hence, if considered from merit and result oriented perspectives, it is obvious that the federal character principle is counter-productive, in fact a dilution.

The dilution here is that, the principle of federal character which is suppose to stimulate the ideals and aims of federalism in a pluralistic Nigerian society has failed because both the Nigeria's federal system and federal character principle in Nigeria have not being able to "Encourage genuine power; they have sparked dangerous rivalries between the centre and the constituent parts. The fall-out from this has been sporadic violence, ethnic strife, inter-communal tension and no holds-barred struggles between the various rival interest groups jockeying for the nation's power and purse" (Osifeso, 2011). Therefore, the two political ideal which are supposed to be complimentary in terms of ensuring equality, unity and national cohesion and integration are in diffusion.

III. Conclusion/Recommendations

Nigeria's experiences under successive governments as revealed in the paper, exposes the limitations of federal character principle as a mechanism for enhancing national integration and participatory democracy in a plural society like Nigeria. One of the fundamental weaknesses of federal character as practiced in Nigeria is that it tends to enthrone mediocrity in governance, at the expense of merit and professionalism. Federalism is one of the most effective mechanisms to manage a pluralistic society like Nigeria. However, findings reveal that

beside the lopsided structures inherited from the colonialists 'mistake', religion, ethnicity among other factors remain the cobs militating against the success of federalism in Nigeria. More so, our past leaders who inherited government from the colonial masters at independence did not all go out for one Nigeria. While some went for an indissoluble Nigeria, others were overtly and covertly against it. It is also discovered that the application of Federal Character principle in Nigeria, was as a result of the failure of *pseudo-federalism* adopted after the First Republic. However, the affirmative action - Federal Character has to a great extent, failed in its objective especially in strengthening the ideal of federalism i.e. equal and fair representation and participation as well as the distribution of state resources. Accordingly, it is recommended that; the implementation and application of the principle of federal character must be revised from its present status quo. Its application should be in such a way as to give succor to the weak and marginalized, and limit the power of the strong. The principle should be applied such that 70% of appointments should be on merit, equality within the States. For stability and the achievement of national integration, it is imperative for Nigerians to see themselves as belonging to one indivisible country, where tribes and tongue may differ but in brotherhood we stand. The reign of justice, equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law and the rights of all citizens will go a long way in guaranteeing true national integration in Nigeria.

The ruling class or political leaders must say and do things that promote accommodation, integration and can unite the people rather than manipulating religion, tribe, language or place of origin for their political gains. We can exist and progress without consideration for these dividing factors.

The paper had revealed that the aims of Federal character principle is not out rightly bad, hence it can be used at the entry level into schools, appointment or employment and public services, etc, but merit should come first before consideration for other factors like where one comes from.

More so, there is urgent need to inject people who are ready to serve, credible and capable of being productive. When people are productive, where you come from, the language you speak, your religious affiliation becomes irrelevant.

Another important area of focus is to evolve viable institutions that are immune to sectionalism, religious bigotry and tribal sentiments. Most of our political institutions are weak and they allow bigots to have their ways. It is therefore recommended here that there should be concerted efforts towards radical attitudinal change because the present attitude of Nigerian towards national integration and transformation is in deficiency. There is need to transform our attitude towards imbibing the tenets of existing in a federal structure.

Lastly but not the least, the Federal Character Principle should be applied with less stringency but with fairness among ethnic groups, states and local government that are homogenous, to avoid creating division where none may have existed.

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