

FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AS A STRATEGY OF ACHIEVING NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Andrew O. OBIAJULU¹ and Nobert C. ABAH²

¹Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, NIGERIA.

²Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, NIGERIA.

Abstract

Federal character principle is one of the strategies in use by the Nigeria state to achieve national integration of her citizens. This paper discusses the ontological variables that necessitated this provision. The modus operandi were examined, before its associated challenges were discussed. The Dependency theory as advanced by Dos Santos was used as the theoretical framework. Data used were sourced from secondary sources. Content analysis adopted in reconstructing data collected, emphasized observed exclusion of ethnic minorities in allocation of values even when the federal character principle is in place. The provision is seen as policy wise ineffective. This is attributed to the tendency of a dependent capitalist economy to thrive on the splitting of collectives that make up a plural society. A political system that emphasized responsible governance is seen as reducing the objective condition that necessitated the federal character principle.

Keywords dependency theory, ethnic minorities, federal character, national integration and Nigeria.

Introduction

In his *Six Great Ideas*, Adler (1981) identified what he called ideals we live for. These are: liberty, equality and justice. It is their importance in the self-realization of any normal human being, that they constitute the core ideas in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The ideals are informed by the fact that man within the animal kingdom, is a hologram. Ethnicity or man's tendency to associate along what Kwan and Shibbutani cited in Sands (1976:29), called "consciousness of kind," negates the ideals raised by Adler. It is a social creation. Its associated ills are equally social in character. Most plural societies vary in terms of how they manage the observed social relationships between their component ethnic groups.

Thus, for Willner (n:d, p 1) "in a world of explosive national and international discord, of recurring genocidal hatred, chronic violence and ethno-cultural war, Switzerland offers example ... on how to establish a highly stable and functioning multi-ethnic nation state" .Kendrick (2000:3), writhing on racial intolerance in South Africa averred that "while the united states and other countries have adopted "a one – drop rule" that designates anyone having any non-white ancestry as a member of a non-white population, South Africa has conceived of its multiracial individuals as having an in – between status derived from, but marginal to both parent groups. Some coloured people benefited from their closer association with the white dominant group by sustaining better employment, educational

and housing opportunities than blacks, as having the possibility of becoming “pass-whites”. Pass-whites were individuals who obtained legal reclassification as “whites” from the government. The problem of managing ethnic differences in modern states is essentially one of managing identity of social actors in context (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Kayode, 2015). Whether the source of the identity is linguistic differences, settlement pattern, religious inclination or even an amalgam of any two or more of the above variables, the problem revolves around how observed social differences are managed for a normal and predictable social life to continue.

Conceptualizing Federal Character Principle in Nigeria

The objective conditions that necessitate the inclusion of federal character principle in to the 1979 and 1999 constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria can be traced and explained from different macro theoretical viewpoints. In structuring the Nigerian state, for example the British ignored the entrenchment of a political system that respects the rights of the different component ethnic groups to enjoy the demands and benefits of inclusive government. The British did not come to embark on even development of Nigeria. Their primary intention was to create the enabling environment for enthroning and defending the institutional values and frameworks for capitalism to thrive.

The federal system of government which they foisted on Nigeria through the introduction of the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 ignored local realities that challenged that political arrangement as a strategy of achieving national unity in Nigeria. The constitution dwarfed the relevance of ethnic minorities in the country with regards to a meaningful participation in the political process. It gave the three major ethnic groups (Hausa- Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) an enhanced opportunity to participate in the emerging political process aimed at structuring Nigeria of British dream. Nigeria has about 300 linguistic groups whose identities could not be subsumed under the value preferences and needs of the major ethnic groups. Although the elites from the major ethnic groups used false inclusion and representation of the ethnic minorities from their regional enclaves in clamoring for political relevance, these minorities were considerably ignored and underrepresented in terms of meaningful political inclusion.

As Chairman, Nigeria Railway Corporation, Ikejiani, an Igbo, had 62.6% of employees in the organisation drawn from Igbo ethnic extraction (Oyediran & Toyin, 2015). Jonah (2002) averred that, as prime minister of Nigeria Tafawa Balewa and Ahmadu Bello, ensured that the Hausa –Fulani ethnic group held the Nigeria military irrespective of their educational disadvantage. This type of politics of ethnic exclusion of the out group in the process of consolidating and using state power, is essentially what informed the introduction of federal character principle into the 1979 constitution of Nigeria. It is a measure of addressing endemic inequality of opportunities confronting Nigerians on virtually every aspect of their social life. For Oyediran and Toyin (2015:39) the ethnic, regional and religious cleavages in Nigerian society, are made more problematic by systematic overlapping pattern of inequalities that correspond to the cleavages. These inequalities are caused by a complex range of factors including: history, geography, cultural orientation, religious affiliation, natural resources endowments, current government policies and colonial policies.

Table 1: ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF VARIOUS NIGERIA CABINETS 1960 -2004 IN PERCENTAGES

Regime	Hausa Fulani	Igbo	Northern Minorities	Yoruba	Southern Minorities
Balewa 1960	60	13	0	20	6.7
Gowon 1967	21	0	21	36	21
Muritala 1975	25	0	35	35	5
Shagari 1983	38	8.8	20.5	14.7	17.6
Buhari 1984	35	10	25	20	10
Obasanjo 2004	30	15	18	18	18

Source: Mustapha (2007:7)

The affirmative action which the federal character principle is aimed at achieving intends to “offset past discriminations, counteract present unfairness and achieve future equality “(Mustapha, 2007:9)

National integration

Conceptually national integration is essentially about how social actors, usually in a plural society, feel accepted, involved, included in deciding, shaming and producing values necessary for their self-realization in their nation state. As a philosophical postulate, national integration assumes that social actors can jettison their primordial, fast –fixed identities, socio –cultural developmental advantages over others etc (usually gotten through socialization) in favour of universalistic principles earlier mentioned by Adler (1981).

National integration in modern states is essentially how ethnic groups involved, have come to uphold the civic cultural values of their state. It is a function of their history (Mustapha, 2001), strategy of management of their identities (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005), economic challenges and policies (Eboeme, 2014) etc. An integrated nation guarantees for her citizens, a fairly predictable and an enhanced access to life chances and the future. Scholars like Nnoli (2008), Mustapha (2007) contend that national integration. In Africa is challenged by identity politics, usually defined along ethnic, geographical, religious, educational and occupational lines.

Theoretical Framework:

It is Dependency theory as conceptualized by Santos (1980) that is the theoretical thrust of this paper. Essentially, the theory assumes that within the World capitalist system, Nigeria is a periphery nation. It depends on the center nations (developed countries) to perform its` various obligational expectation to the governed. It is not free politically, economically, militarily etc. As a sequel, Nigerian state networks more with the center nations in matters of state policy and direction. Socially speaking, the governed, especially those divorced from the mainstream political and economic process, get poorly involved, highly marginalized and manipulated in running the state. They crystallize to that segment of the national population believed by Dos Santo as having been split within the nation as a collective.

Dependency syndrome explains why the philosophical thrust of Nigerian state as contained in her second national development plan, should be the brainchild of United States Agency for international Development (USAID) which drew the plan (Nzimiro, 1976). The National Development

plan was for 1970-74. It was the first after the country's 30-month old civil war. Its implementation challenged the concept of equality of all Nigerians. Its policy thrust saw the Igbo ethnic group at the receiving end of state repressive policies. By splitting collectives, the state ignores local realities influencing how the very idea of a nation is defined. National integration becomes a mere imagination of one making the analysis. The place of federal character in resolving challenges of this problem is one of the missions of this paper.

Methodology

This paper has been written using secondary data gotten through the internet, published books, newspapers etc. Data analysis entailed reconstruction of documented and consulted materials in line with how they enhanced the ideals of national integration. In this regard, illustrative quotes were used to buttress some of the issues raised.

Federal characters principle as a strategy of enhancing National integration in Nigeria

Federating units in Nigeria did not come together out of their own volition. Challenged by circumstances of unequal, geographical, educational, economic development, elites that championed the evolution of Nigerians' development from the British, averred that the concept of National integration in Nigeria is a ruse. Nigerian is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no Nigerians in the same way as there are English, 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 (Awlowo cited in Joe, 2013)

For Nnamdi Azikiwe (cited in Nnoli, 2008) "God has created the Igbo people to lead Africans out of the bondage of ages". With regards to poverty which the idea of political exclusion connotes, Zik notes "Blessed are the common people God loves them, that is why he made millions of them". <http://www.azquotes.com/author/700-Nnamdi-Azikiwe>. For Ahmadu Bello the new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather, Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use minorities of North as willing tools and the South as a conquered territory and never allowed them to have control over their future. inspringquotes.us/author/5230-ahmedu-bello For Balewa "

since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian peoples themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious belief and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite, Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country. www.inspringquotes.us

The above quotes associated with the founding fathers of Nigerian state, illustrate the conceptual divide between them with regards to mobilizing the governed towards national integration. The events that led to the creation of the federal character principle is just a social manifestation of their ethnocentric mindset. The leaders were charismatic and so transferred their mindsets to their followers.

Federal character was put in the 1979 and 1999 constitution to ensure that government policies and decisions are reflective of the federal structure of Nigeria State. Essentially it is supposed to be the blue print for resource production and allocation. For Tion and Goodman (2015:56) it is supposed to influence "the location of industries, building of roads, awarding of scholarships, and appointment of public office holders, admission, employment and revenue allocation". It is the need to address the challenges of actualizing this constitutional provision, that the federal character commission was inaugurated in July 2002. It is an exercise, aimed at statutorily enhancing the ability of Nigeria's ethnic minorities to have an improved political participation and involvement in matters of state policy and

direction. The empirical limitations cut across different sectors of the Nigerian society which the policy is expected to address. For example Asaju and Egben (2015:130) note that “Federal character principle as applied in educational sector, leads to lowering of standard against national interest. In the army, it leads to the promotion of subgrade soldiers and officers. In the civil and public services of the federation, standard and professionalism are compromised by eschewing meritocracy without recourse to standards”.

Issues on the Use of Federal Character Principle in Enhancing National Integration of Nigeria.

The ideals of national integration as earlier stated are averse to the ethnocentric uttering of Awolowo, Azikiwe, Sarduna and Balewa. The leaders were charismatic. Their thought frames have become routinized not just as regional leaders, but in their relationship with the ethnic minorities. In effect, within the three dominant ethnic groups, the minority ethnic groups became fairly emasculated politically. Urban centers reflect the character of the mode of production of the society having them. As centers of transculturation, the cities in Nigeria remain divided as centers where the component ethnic groups can coalesce and pursue compatible goals. To Nnoli (2008) colonial cities in Nigeria were the cradle of ethnicity in the country. In the cities, tribal unions were important instruments of mobilizing rural-urban migrants in to national affairs. In this way, ethnic voluntary associations became, development partners of the state. In doing so, they recreated primordial institutional values which are at variance with the demand of meaningful national integration. The associations became instruments of political mobilization against the out-group and a source of political platform for nominating political office holders at the national level. Tocqueville (1969:516) observes that, in American society, “Associations might serve representative functions with respect to the state. They help in the development of individual capacities that support democratic system of government.” This is possible because, through associational life, Americans cultivate the habit of collective action, contribute towards public good, monitor the dialectics of state machinery and view their own interest in an enlightened manner. Also, in America, voluntary associations have been disparaged as one of the instruments of social exclusion along racial and ethnic lines. Sisiainen (2009) notes that, in Finland, voluntary associations are so well developed that Finns relate more through them than they do through the state in civic activities. He attributes the success of the Finnish welfare state to the role of voluntary associations in creating the enabling environment for both the leaders and the led to work as a team. Scott (2006) holds a similar view with respect to the role of voluntary associations in Australia. Putman (1993), for Northern Italy, and Anheier and Kendall (2000), for Germany, do not differ in their contention that voluntary associations are indispensable institutions for building trust in the societies they analysed. Unfortunately, the roles of ethnic voluntary association in Nigeria tend to challenge the assumptions of national integration. At the moment, whenever, the unity of Nigeria is challenged through inter-ethnic conflict, residential clusters of the ethnic groups within the cities, remain the centers of civil strife, mayhem and senseless killings.

Federal character is an elitist ideology aimed at containing the contradiction in Nigeria’s capitalist ideology as it affects the ethnic minorities. Perhaps for this reason, Awolowo was quoted as saying that Nigerian ethnic groups “have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent different stages of culture (Awolowo cited in Tion and Goodman, 2015).

Not many scholarly works have addressed how horizontal inequality (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Onwuzuligbo, 2009), ethnogenesis (Okonkwo, 2007), polarize communities considered to be politically and culturally monolithic. Onwuzuligbo (2009) avers that when a people’s identity is politicized especially in the allocation of values, it can propel them to fission as opposed to fusion implied by the concept of national integration. Dependency syndrome politicizes and polarizes communities considered culturally monolithic. These are cultural realities taken for granted by Nigerian elites who champion the Federal Character principle. Because the policy thrust of Nigeria state is elitist and devoid

of meaningful participation of the minority (political minorities), it becomes imperative that coercive apparatus of the state and indeed the criminal justice system, will be highly pronounced as a means of social control when peoples commitment to the demands of nationhood is called to question (e.g. during elections, political trials, rebellions social movement etc). These are indication of a failed state.

Concluding Remarks

As a philosophical postulate, national integration in Nigeria is fundamentally challenged. The British government through the colonial policy of Divide and Rule, made the demands and ideals of nationhood, unattainable. The founding fathers of Nigerian independence did not make any significant departure in de politicizing observed identities challenging meaningful national integration. Federal Character principle, is a super structural reaction, to an infrastructural problem arising from the dependent nature of Nigeria's economy. The infrastructural base is essentially monitored, directed and controlled by agents of foreign monopoly capital both from the center nations and the periphery. They assist the emergence and perpetuation of Nigeria economic problems which apostles of federal characters attribute to ethnicity and identity politics. In the light of the above Kayode (2015:32) is apt to have contended "federal character has not been able to achieve its objectives".

References

- Adler, I. (1981) *Six Great Ideas in Politics and social Sciences*. Kindle e-books @ amazon.com accessed @ <https://www.ameron.com/six-greatideas-morhimei-adler...BOOIDIUOVO>
- Asaju, K & Egberi, I (2015) "Federal Character and National Integration in Nigeria: The Need for Discretion and Interface" in *Review of History and Political Science* vol. 3 (1) pp 126-134 [URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.15640/rhps.v3/a12](http://dx.doi.org/10.15640/rhps.v3/a12).
- Awolowo, O. in Max Joe (2013) Facts About Nigeria quotes by ObafemiAwolowo January 5 @ naijafacts.blogspot.com.ng/2013/01/quotes-by-ObafemiAwolowo.
- Aziagba, KT. & Yio, B.J. (2014) Ethnic Minorities In the Struggle for True Federalism In Nigeria: Rethinking the Federal character principle in Egwewi .T.,Ongu, C. & Wuam, T (eds) *Federalism, Politics and Minorities in Nigeria*. Essays in Honour of Prof. G.N Hembe Baluti and Dahlila Publishers.
- Azikiwe, N.(n:d) A-Z [Quotes.comretrived@http://uswww.azquotes.com/author/700-NnamdiAzikiwe](http://uswww.azquotes.com/author/700-NnamdiAzikiwe)
- Eborieme, O.J.(2014) "Colonial Foundations of Majority and Minority Identities The conceptual Issues and the Development of Epie-Atisa ethnic consciousness and Ijo nationalism in Nigeria" in Egwemi, V; Orngu, C.S. and Wuam, T.(eds) *Federalism, Politics and Minority Rights in Nigeria*. Lagos: Bahiti and Dahlila Publishers
- Jonah, K. (2012) Federal Character Principle in Nigeria *The Nigerian Voice*, 19th September .
- Kayode, A. (2015) "Federalism and Federal Character Principle in Nigeria: A Dilution" in *Review of Public Administration and Management* Vol.3, (7), pp32-44.
- Kayode, A. and Egberi, T. (2015) "Federal Character and National Integration in Nigeria: The Need for Discretion and Interface in *Review of History and Political Science* Vol,3 (1) pp126-134 June)
- Mustapha , A.R.(2007) Institutionalizing Ethnic Representation :How Effective is the Federal Character Commission in Nigeria CRISE Working Paper No 43 of June
- Nnoli, O. (2008) *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: PACREP
- Nzimiro, I. (1976) *Crisis in the Social Sciences: The Nigerian Situation*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press
- Okonkwo, N. (2007) *Nri Kingdom:A Lost Race*. Lagos: Intra Press

- Onwuzuligbo, I. (2009) Causes and Management of Intra-Ethnic Conflict in Aguleri and Umuleri Communities, South Eastern Nigeria [accessed@graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/heid/files//shared/execution/-education/global](http://graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/heid/files//shared/execution/-education/global) south workshop paper-onwuzuligbopdf
- Osaghae, E. and Suberu, R. (2005) A History of Identities, Violence and Stability in Nigeria CRISE Working Paper, No 6 Downloaded @ <http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk>
- Oyediran, P. and Toyin, O. (2015) Federal Character and Political Integration in Nigeria *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration* Vol.3,(4) July pp37-50
- Putnam, R.D. (1993) *Making Democracy work : Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Sanda, A.O. (1976) "Ethnic Relations in Sociological Theory" in Sanda, A.O. (ed) *Ethnic Relations in Nigeria* Ibadan: Caxton Press
- Santos, D. (1970) The Structure of Dependency *American Economic Review* LX May pp231-236
- Scott, J. (2006) *Mediation in Voluntary Organizations*. ADR Bulletin Vol.8, No 6
- Sisianen, M. (2002) New and Old Associations as Trusting Networks: Tracing Social Capital in Jyväskylä *Social Capital and Urban Networks of Trust* in Jouni Hakli & Claudio Minca (eds) Farmham: Ashgate
- Tocqueville, A. (1969) *Democracy In America* 1-11. New York: Knopf
- Tion, P. and Goodman, O. (2015) "Federal Character Principle in Nigerian Constitution and Its Applicability: Issues and Challenges" in *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.20, (12). December pp 51-57
- Wilner, A. (n:d) The Swissification of Ethnic Conflict @ ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/fedgov/article/download/4397/4412

Biographical Notes

Andrew Okolo OBIAJULU, (*PhD*, Ibadan), is a Senior Lecturer and former Head, Department of Sociology / Anthropology, and the current Sub-Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, NIGERIA. His area of specialization / research interest is social policy and theoretical sociology. E-mail: andyobiajulu@yahoo.com.

Norbert Chijioke ABAH, *PhD*, is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, NIGERIA. His area of specialization / research interest is public policy / public administration as well as labour and legislative studies. E-mail: abbanobert@yahoo.com