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FEDERALISM AND FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE IN NIGERIA: A DILUTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to distil Nigerian federalism and the Federal Character Principle, so as to determine the nexus between the two and to ascertain the effectiveness of the later on the former. Since Nigeria got her independent in 1960 till date, she has been faced with the challenge of closing the deep cleavages among its heterogenous peoples. As one of the most effective framework for governing a pluralistic society, Nigeria adopted Federalism to manage her multi-ethnic state. Despite that, instead of unity, cooperation and consensus, there has been apparent division, disagreement and dissension. The search for national integration led to the adoption of some other political techniques such as the quota system and Federal Character. Since its full adoption in 1979, the application of Federal Character has generated a lot of controversies in the polity and has become one of the most topical issues in both political and administrative discourse. The paper is a documentary research and it therefore relies on qualitative data obtained from journals, newspapers, textbooks, etc. The data was subsequently analyzed using content analysis. Findings reveal that Nigerian federalism is far from ideal and the Federal Character Principle which is aimed at representation and participation to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation irrespective of the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion have not been able to achieve this objective. The paper therefore, concludes that the implementation of the principle has mired the nation's potential for greatness. It has aggravated the North - South dichotomy, undermined merit and allows mediocrity. The paper suggests the need to redefine Nigerian federalism and the entire political system to ensure that ideal democracy and true federalism can be achieved; building virile institutions where merit, credibility and justice would prevail over the application of Federal Character principle.

Keywords: federalism, federal character, democracy and dilution

Introduction

Federalism as a political system in Nigeria is a product of colonialism (see Osifeso 2011 and Arowolo 2011). There is no gainsaying anymore that what is known as Nigeria today existed as many independent heterogeneous societies or nations before the amalgamation of 1914 by Sir Frederick Lugard (Asaju *et al* 2014). Amalgamation need to be well understood beyond the peripheral joining together of the northern and southern protectorates to become one country named Nigeria. In Nigerian context, amalgamation is a fusion of people of different ethnic/tribal origin, geographical, religious and cultural background to bear one name under a foreign/alien colonial government. This so called union has been described by a very prominent Nigerian Political Scientist as a forced brotherhood and sisterhood (Ayoade in Okolo, 2014). As a result, the country has since been faced with the challenges of “accommodating diversities, fostering inclusiveness and promoting national unity amongst its diverse ethnic groups that makes up the Nigeria’s nation – state” (Okolo, 2014). This shows that the union was against the wishes of the forerunners of the various independent societies we referred to as nationalists. This, they demonstrated through the loyalty and solidarity to their primordial ethnic origins than the newly-born nation-state called Nigeria. No wonder, one of the prominent nationalist in Nigeria, the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo described Nigeria as “a mere geographical expression” (Chukwuma, 2014)

However, for easy administration, as some writers argued, the colonial administrators began a journey to federalism as a political mechanism to manage the system, and this culminated with the Lytton Constitution of 1954 that gave rise to true structure of federalism in Nigeria (Konga.com, 2015, Okolo, 2014:122). Osifeso (2011) argues that the British by 1914 merged the geographic north and south together but failed to unite its people. Hence the British policies of indirect rule cum divide-and-rule further polarize the people along not only tribal lines but also spilled into social life with Christianity and western educationally disposed south, while the north was “quarantined against possible contamination by the south” (Osifeso, 2011).

A historical excursion into the distant past reveals that at the terminal period of colonialism, Nigeria saw a relative self-government in the three administrative provinces - Northern, Eastern and Western provinces and the colony of Lagos. The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 stipulated the sharing of powers between the central and provincial (regional) government and at independence; these provinces became regions and formed the basic federal administrative structure of the country, because the Independent Constitution of 1960 inherited the federal structure of the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 (konga.com 2014). History shows that the federating units continued to increase after independent. In fact, in 1963 when Nigeria became a Federal Republic one additional region was created increasing the regions to four. The federating units increased to 12 states in 1967; 19 states in 1976; 21 states in 1987; 30 states in 1991 and 36 in 1996 (Elaiwu, 2002; Edingin, 2010; Konga.com, 2015). Presently 18 more states were recommended in the last national conference due to unending agitation for state to balance the lopsided and unequal geopolitical zones.

Since independence, in 1960 federalism has remained Nigerian’s form of government except for a brief period (between May-September 1966) under the first military regime that attempted a unitary state; with some minor modifications. However, federalism in Nigeria was a *conflict regulating mechanism*. Osaghae (2002:79) supporting this view, asserts that “the management of Nigeria’s ethnic, language and religious diversity, which necessitated the adoption of federal system of government has been rendered less effective by intense politicisation of these

cleavages” hence, the rise of “affirmative action policies to consolidate elite domination by ethnically-based fractions of the country’s political class. Jinadu (1985) submits that this ineffectiveness is due partly to the character of competition to control the Nigeria state taking advantage of some inherent cleavages of inequalities, hence the introduction of the federal character principle.

The effectiveness of these policies in fostering national integration as well as promoting national development in Nigeria has been one of the most controversial issues in any political, social and economic discourse. The problem is that despite the adoption of the federal character principles since 1979, achieving national integration has been very difficult. Meritocracy and equality which are fundamental ideals of federalism has eluded the country. The reoccurrences of ethno-religious crisis, group insurgencies and other related agitations in various parts of the country indicates the failure of the system. The question is, is the problem that of the kind of federalism Nigeria practice or is it as a result of faulty implementation of the federal character principle? Are these two basic political ideals complementary or a dilution? These questions informed the basis of this study.

The thrust of this paper is to establish whether federalism is synonymous with federal character or a contradiction. The paper also attempt to establish whether Federal character constitute one of the features of federalism? How has federal character principle help in nurturing the system and ideals of federalism in Nigeria since its inception as a formalized doctrine? Has federal character achieved its objective?

Methodology

The study is a documentary research. It derives its data from secondary sources i.e. books, journals, official documents of the government, newspapers and magazines and related information downloaded from the internet. The data collected were analysed using content analysis method.

Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis

Federalism: The concept of federalism has been severally defined by many scholars from different perspectives. The term is used to describe a system in which sovereignty is constitutionally divided between a central governing authority and constituent political units (such as states or provinces). It is a system based upon democratic rules and institutions in which the power to govern is shared between national and provincial/state governments, creating what is often called a federation (wikipedia.org/wiki/federalism). Federalism is a principle of government that defines the relationship between the central government and the regional (state) or local levels. Under this principle of government, power and authority is allocated between the national and local government units, such that each unit is delegated a sphere of power and authority only it can exercise, while other powers must be shared.

Similaly, Chukwuma (2014) defines the term as “a system in which two levels of government - federal and regional (or state) exist side by side, with each possessing certain assigned powers and functions”. The most widely acceptable definition of federalism was given by K.C. Wheare, who described federalism or federal principle as “the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each within a sphere coordinated and independent” Monahan (1997:1).

From the definitions given above, there are some basic features that distinguish a true federal system from other political system, namely: There should be at least two levels of government as well as the division of power and authority between the two [i.e. federal (central) and regional (state) governments]; Each of the level of government is coordinated and independent; Both the

federal and state government derives their powers from the constitution which is not only written but also rigid; The supremacy of the constitution. Also, in amending the constitution, no any level of government should have undue advantages over the other; Existence of bicameral legislature; Existence of independent judicial institutions to interpret the constitution to justly and fairly settle disputes, among other functions. There must also be duplication of organs of government at both levels (see Monahan 1977; Anyaele, 2003:172, Chukwuma 2014).

If Wheare's definition is anything to go by and some indices of true federalism outlined above are sacrosanct, it is arguable therefore that, that Nigerian brand of federalism is still far from the ideal. Hence, Mato (2010) and Chukwuma (2014) both agreed that current trend of Nigeria federalism is an aberration from the kind of federalism inherited from the British colonialists. According to Mato (2010), the

Nigeria of 1960 was a better federal arrangement than it is now. In 1960, there were three regions that exercised some measure of authority within the federation. The regions had some liberty and politics was thus both regional and national. The capacity of the federating units was high as a lot of aspirations of both the citizen and even member of the political class were at regional level without insisting on getting the attention of the center. Each region was governed independently without undue interferences from central government at the top. This propelled socio-economic development then as the regions mobilized their available human and material resources for their developmental objectives.

This as well was made possible because each has a relative autonomy to control its revenue. However, the pattern of politics played then as well as the issue of citizenship was shaped by many factors. Prevalent among them were religion and ethnic identity. These two factors (ethnicity and religion) have been the basis for making political demands and seeking political power. Hence, "political parties, voting in elections, appointment to government positions, admissions into government educational institutions, distribution of state resources, creation of more states and local government areas and so on, have been influenced and compromised by ethnic and religious identity" (Osaghae, 2002:78).

In a true federal system, development is evenly distributed and not concentrated at one level (the center) because the strength for states' survival is guaranteed. More so, true federalism is a mechanism apt for multi-ethnic nation. Supporting this view, Duchacek (1973) posit that the objective of federal constitution is institutionalising balance between national unity and subnational diversity. This implies that federalism ensures that people are united irrespective of their religious and ethnic inclinations. In a true federalism, the electoral process must be free and fair, no god-fatherism or politics of patronage, political appointments must be purely based on merit, promotion in the civil service are done purely on performance and merit; there must be judicial autonomy, freedom for the press, a clearly spelt out separation of power among the executive, legislature and the judiciary, the different tiers of government must have their fair share in revenue generation, allocation and resource control (Chukwuma, 2014).

The federating units or regions were allowed free access to decision making and inputs in the polity of the nation. Nigerian federalism is declining on the altar of ethnicity or tribalism and religious affinity. The Nigeria political elites, the traditional heirs of our societies, show no inclination to fostering national integration, and national identity in the country (Osifeso 2011),

they are always in “the business of elevating their ethnic group over and above the national interest” (Chukwuma), and they exploited these factors in their bid to capture power at the federal level. As a result “the mobility of power dynamics, ability to adjust was deliberately frozen in the interest of power elites..., the competitive struggle was manipulated by these political elites without permitting the shearing of political power by all the social political forces of the society...the North, for instance, was hell bent on retaining political control of the center as this, in their permutation, was the only way of counter balancing southern monopoly of bureaucratic and economic power in the country (Osifeso 2011). All these plunged Nigeria into crises of national integration, hence the adoption of some mechanism for managing these crises. Such mechanisms include the quota system or federal character principle, etc. The problem is that despite the adoption of the federal character principles since 1979, achieving national integration has been very difficult. Meritocracy and equality which are fundamental ideals of federalism have eluded the country. The reoccurrences of ethno-religious crisis, group insurgences in various parts of the country indicates the failure of the system.

The Federal Character Principle: The federal character principle is arguably seen as the best solution to solving some of the defects and fundamental problems of Nigerian lopsided federal system (Ammani 2014). The basis of the Nigerian federalism few years after independent was shaken and this culminated into the civil war from 1966-1970. Some of these problems were neither realized nor envisage by some of the nationalist before independence. Osifeso (2011) rightly observed that the political boundaries inherited at the independence did not cut across tribal lines. This explains the political behaviors in the first republic. The ethnic groups were divided along history, customs, beliefs, religious, languages or tribal lines affinity.

Subsequently, party politics becomes increasingly polarize along ethnic and tribal lines while the political elites represented and defended their ethnic and tribal groups rather than national unity, thereby encouraged ethnic accentuations which instigated the first military coup and counter-coup in the country as well as the Biafran civil war (Chukwuma,2014).

As noted earlier, these problems of national integration or unity and stability have been created at amalgamation in 1914. One cannot gainsay that fact that successive administrations made several efforts to promote national integration and stability. Anyone conversant with Nigerian politics cannot be oblivious of this fact. For instance, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa formed an inclusive national government comprised of the three dominant political parties (which represented and defended the ethnic groups); He also introduced the Quota System which has been used by successive governments for admission of students into government schools, recruitment of military personnel and public (civil) service among others. Even the Major General Aguyi Iron’s regime claimed that the introduction of Unitary System was meant to promote national integration and stability, by dismantling regionalism that accentuates tribalism. General Yakubu Gowon’s regime later restored the federal system and further expanded the structure from four regions to twelve States. This, according to Gowon, was meant to protect the right of minorities in the event of a civil war, and invariably give the minority a sense of belonging in the national arrangement. General Murtala Mohammed further increased the number of states to nineteen in an attempt to find solution to these problems of disunity and agitations resulting from suspicions among the various ethnic groups (both majority & minority).This trends of state creation as a mechanism for resolving the problem of national integration and stability continued through the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida’s and General Sani Abacha’s regimes, even till this moment where eighteen more states were recommended by the last National confab.

Beside state creation as a mechanism for maintaining unity in diversity, the Late General Murtala Mohammed muted the idea of introducing the Federal Character in his address to the opening session of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) on Saturday the 18th of October 1975 (Ammani, 2014, Okolo, 2014).

The paper adopts the definition of Federal character, according to the CDC's report of the 1977, as a working definition. Federal Character refers to

“the distinctive desire of the peoples 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” (see Ammani, 2014).

That was an effort to re-address the unbalanced structure and ethnic domination in government in order to achieve national integration (Osman, 2004). The principle arose out of the need to reduce ethnic conflict arising out of competition for political power, government appointments, citing of public industries and institutions, employment into public organizations etc. (Edigin, 2010). In fact, since its adoption in the 1979, the successive constitutions (1989 and 1999) have retained the federal character principle as part of their provisions. Recognizing its 'necessity', General Sani Abacha established the Federal Character Commission for the implementation of the policy in Nigeria.

Federal character was supposed to protect the right of the minority, accommodate the disadvantaged and ensure even distribution of resources among the various federating units as evident in Section 14 Subsection 3 of the 1979 Constitution:

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 states or from a few ethnics or other sectional group in that government or any of its agencies.

The above provision of the constitution is one of the most controversial provisions, which has generated a lot of controversies and most celebrated issue in Nigeria administrative and political discourse, while its enthusiasts like Edigin, Osaghae, Ammani, etc believe that federal character has helped in consolidating national stability by reducing ethnic competition for political position and ethnic politics and makes it difficult for an ethnic bigot to take over power and subdue other ethnic groups and that the principle is not only desirable but also inevitable in a severely-divided society as Nigeria (Osaghae 1989).

Ammani (2009) enthusiastically sum up the merits of federal character in Nigeria, in Chukwuma (2014) that, the principle provide an equitable formula for the distribution of socio-economic service and infrastructural facilities; provides modalities for redressing imbalances; ensures equitable admission into federal universities; ensures that no one section of the society unduly dominates the elective or appointive positions; provides equal access into Armed Force, the police, etc. protect the interest of minority ethnic groups, ensures even spread in the recruitment into federal civil service among civil servants, has ensured the corporate existence of Nigeria and has douse the centripetal agitations (civil wars).

Rather than basing our judgments on mere speculations, guess works or mere experiences, it is pertinent to lay a theoretical foundation which will “enable a chosen life of action to be anchored in and guided by evidence derived from scientific research...” Anazodo *et al* (2014), and the literature is replete relevance scientific explanations to the ‘epicentric’ politics as well as the basis for inclusive or participatory politic in Nigerian. This paper is anchored on the Group Theory

The theory has its intellectual roots in the doctrines of pluralism as developed by early twentieth century English writers, like John Figgis, Maithland and G. H. Cole (Verma, 1975). This theory stems from the limitations associated with the Elite Theory (Dahl, 1961; Varma, 1975). The focus of the social scientists was directed to pluralist model in which power, instead of being concentrated in the hands of a group of class, is treated as diffused among many interest groups competing with each other for power.

Group theory was propounded by Arthur F. Bentley (1908) to whom behaviourism was credited, While trying to highlight the importance of the group in politics, he observed that society consists of dynamic processes (actions) rather than specific institutions or substantive contents (values). He observed that society, nation and the government are all made up of “groups of men”, each group cutting across many others. These groups, according to him are in the state of perpetual interaction with each other, and politics consisted in the “shunting by some men of other men conduct along changed lines, the getting of forces to overcome resistance to such alterations or the dispersal of one grouping of forces by another grouping” (Bentley, 1940 cited in Varma, 1975).

Bentley conceived group as a mass of activity, and not merely a collection of individuals. He defines group as a certain portion of men of a society, taken not as a physical mass cut off from the masses of men, but as a mass of activity, which do not preclude the men who participate in it from participating likewise in many other group activities. He further argued that, group represented a pattern of process rather than a static form, and as such could emerge only when the interaction among its individual members were both relatively frequent and sufficiently patterned to produce directional activity. If an individual can belong to various groups, it means that the activity of a group is more important than its structural composition.

The theory is based on the doctrine of pluralism. The pluralist theory of interest groups states that “politics is mainly a competition among groups, where each interest group presses for its own policy preferences but where all interests are represented” Nowaczyk (2015). The fact remains that modern society has a large number of groups which remain engaged in a perpetual struggle for power and domination over each other. There is emphasis on the group as the basic unit in the study of politics. The theory view power as diffused among many interest groups which are competing against each other for power; and that groups is a mass of activity directed by interest and the social system. It is the interest which leads to the organization of groups. The theory also views the activity particular to a group as more important than its structural composition since the same individual can belong to various groups. Most demands and support for policy are manifest through organized group. The most influential group will be decided by the amount of competition and the quality of the competing groups.

Pluralism and group theory capture Nigerian politics well. Nowaczyk (2015) vividly depicts an apt description of how this theory works in a polity in his lesson note [Political Science 102: American Government / Social Science Courses: Pluralist View of Interest Groups on American Politics Chapter 4 / Lesson 5] and his explanation is applicable to Nigerian politics as well. According to Nowaczyk, Pluralism paints a pretty rosy picture of how interest groups work in

American politics. It assumes a couple of key things, namely that groups provide a key link between people and government. Once interests are organized, groups can turn to the government and get a hearing.

Secondly, that group competes. Labor, business, farmers, consumers, environmentalists, and other interests constantly make competing claims on the government. However, no one group is likely to become too dominant. If one group flexes their muscles, the other group will do the same. Because for every action there is a reaction, power remains balanced. It also assumes that groups usually play by the 'rules of the game.' Few groups rely on lying, stealing, cheating, or engaging in violence to get their way, and that group politics is usually a fair fight.

And lastly, groups weak in one resource can use another. For example, while big business may have money on their side, labor has large numbers on their side. All legitimate groups are able to affect policy by one mean or another.

It is undisputable that Nigeria is a pluralistic society. This view has been shared by many writers (Asaju *et al*, 2014:118, Arowolo, 2011, Amao, 2006 Okolo, 2014, & Osifeso 2011). The fact remains that the current expression called Nigeria today existed as Kingdoms, Empires, Caliphates and Autonomous societies before they were systematically “unified” under one administration in 1900 for administrative convenience, and subsequent amalgamation into ‘one country’ in 1914 (Asaju *et al*, 2014:118, Arowolo, 2011). Then, the British succeeded in merging the geographic north and South together but failed to unify its people...polarizing the people along tribal/regional as well as religious line (Osifeso, 2011).

This reflected in the kind of politics Nigerian leaders played in the First Republic where parties were formed along ethnic or tribal lines as the regions became the political base for those contending for power at the federal level and the politicians exploited tribal and ethnic sentiments to garner supports for their equally regional and ethnically based political parties (Obiozor, 1986). Hence, the Northern People Congress (NPC) limited itself by its title to the Northern Region and was dominated by and spoke for the Hausa/Fulani. Similarly, the Action group (AG) spoke for the Yorubas in the West, while the National Congress for Nigeria and the Cameroon's (NCNC) spoke for Igbos in the East respectively. Just like the Pluralist posits that “groups compete”, Osifeso gave an apt description of Nigeria in the first Republic thus:

In the East, NCNC talked of a progressive government and individual liberty only to practice Iboism in the East. The philosophy of Iboism, in practice, simply means that the Ibos constitute one indivisible ethnic entity. In the West, any discussion about the unity of the Yorubas was centered on its party, AG - a response to Ibos control of NCNC. The AG backed the creation of autonomous state for minority groups within a federal structure if only comparable alteration would be made elsewhere

Today, different groups within the federating units of Nigeria are contending for their own share of the power at the center the ‘national cake’ and this has brought to the fore the suitability and effectiveness of the various national policy interventions especially federal character principle toward ensuring national stability in the Nigerian body polity because according to Dahl (1976) “conflict and consensus are both important aspects of political systems. People who live together never agree about everything, but if they are to continue to live together, they cannot continue to wholly disagree in their aims”. The groups, as indispensable units of the Nigerian political system, devised some sort of political strategies that can help them achieve national integration. Therefore, an understanding of this interplay and group dynamism will lead to an understanding

of the peculiarities, and realities of the practice or implementation of federalism and federal character principle in Nigeria. This actually accentuates the suitability of the group theory as the theoretical foundation for this study.

The Challenges of Application of Federal Character Principle in Nigeria

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 Actualisation of Sovereign State Of Biafra (MASSOB), an Igbo ‘radical’ group recently went on air through “Radio Biafra” in pursuance of the ‘Actualisation’ 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 the 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*” (Ojo in Osifeso 2011).

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 suppose to be complimentary in terms of ensuring equality, unity and national cohesion and integration are in diffusion.

Conclusion

This paper examines the practice of federalism vis-a-vis the federal character principle in Nigeria. It is important to point out here that federal character is not synonymous to federalism. 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.

Recommendations

Despite the noticeable defects of Nigeria's federal system and the faulty implementation of federal character principle in Nigeria, these political techniques especially true federalism still remain one of the best political frameworks for governing pluralist state. They can still be repackaged to enhance national integration, cohesion, stability and development in Nigeria. Hence, the paper recommends the following:

First and foremost, 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.

Secondly, 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.

We have seen right from 1967 till date that creating more states have not been able to solve the problem of national integration because. The painful reversal to regional structure that relatively worked in the first republic is not out of place.

The current Nigeria's federal system must be redefined to reflect the ideals of true federalism. The constitution can be reviewed to reduce the unlimited sovereignty the Federal Government is enjoying. This sovereignty should be co-owned by the federating units so as to reduce the mad rush for the unlimited power at the epicenter. These federating units can decide on the amount of power accruable to each of the units.

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