

Federalism and National Integration: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

Nigeria, the heart of Africa and world's most populous black nation is a classic case of deeply divided state. It is estimated to be inhabited by over 400 ethnic groups, making her one of the World most ethnically numerous State. These groups are not only differentiated by language, customs and traditions but they also differed in size, power and influence. It is in recognition of this that the founding fathers of Nigeria settled for a federal system of government. This paper examines why federalism and other integrative mechanisms failed to integrate the diverse people that make up the country. The paper contends that non-commitment to the ideals of federalism accounted for the inability of federalism to integrate the different ethnic groups in the country. The paper concludes that for federalism to perform the magic wand, political leaders must be committed to the tenets of federalism.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Federalism, Federal Character, Indigeneity and National Integration.

Introduction

Nigeria is a classic case of a deeply divided society. In terms of ethnic composition, it has been estimated that she is inhabited by over 400 ethnic groups {Kirk-Greene, 1969}. These groups are not only differentiated by language, customs and traditions, but they are also different in size, power and influence, making the country a good example of a state with unequal ethnic relations. Nigeria is also marked by cultural, geographical and religious heterogeneity. It is in recognition of this that the founding fathers of modern Nigeria namely Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa settled for a Federal system of government as a mechanism for coping with the deep ethnic and religious cleavages that exist in the country. Since the adoption of federalism in 1954, the aims of the founding fathers are still far from being achieved. Though Nigerian federalism has survived many turbulent periods, it is still confronted with the problem of how to effectively integrate the diverse groups that make-up the country. In view of the threats of disintegration and political instability to the polity, it is necessary to critically assess why federalism and other integrative mechanisms have not performed the magic wand of integrating the diverse group that make up the country.

The paper is structured into six parts of which this introduction is the first part. The second part is conceptual clarification. Next is theoretical exploration of federalism and national integration and the fourth is evolution and development of Nigerian federalism, closely followed by mechanisms for national integration while the final part is the conclusion and recommendation?

Conceptual Clarification

The essence of conceptual clarification according to Osumah and Ikelegbe [2009] is to give operational definitions to some important concepts used in a discourse.

Federalism

Unlike many other concepts in social sciences, there is no generally acceptable definition of the term federalism. According to Graham Smith [1995:4] the term has been subject to different meanings, applied to many different situational contexts and identifying its defining features can be as controversial as evaluating them.

For Daniel Elazar [1977:26], the problem of defining federalism stems from the fact that there are several varieties of political arrangement to which the term has not been properly applied. William Riker [1975:931, opined that the meaning of the word has been thoroughly confused by dramatic changes in the institution to which it refers. Is federalism a structural arrangement involving a division of power between two levels of government or is it a special type of civic culture- the federal political culture?

In spite of the confusion over its definition, virtually every scholar of federalism accepts that it involves a system of government in which there is a formal division of power between a central government and the constituent units, each having autonomous power on certain matters on which it is not subordinate to the other. The division of power in a federal system is done in one or two ways: Firstly, Enumerated powers are entrusted to the central government and the residual matters left or assumed to be within the jurisdiction of component states, as in the United States, Switzerland and Malaysia.

Secondly, powers not clearly assigned to territorial units are shared by the territorial and central government as in India, Canada and Venezuela [Osaghae, 1986:93].

National Integration

The concept of national integration is one of those elusive terms which gained publicity in political discourse of late but yet is very difficult to define. According to Professor B. J. Dudley [1976:29], it is often not clear how the concept is to be interpreted. Besides, the concept is used interchangeably with nation-building, national development, political development and sometimes as a term embracing all the three.

Ernest Haas [cf Ayoade, 1999: 110], defined national integration as "a process whereby political actors in a distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centres whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre- existing nation-states".

Ogunnojemites [1987:224], also defined national integration as "the building of nation-state out of disparate social, economic, religious, ethnic and geographical elements"

National integration may also be defined as the "process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty towards a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or ... political unity [cf Agbodike, 1998: 183].

From the above definitions, national integration can be defined as the process of ensuring that the component units of a country are brought together to achieve a high sense of belonging, mutual understanding and nationalism.

Federalism and National Integration: A Theoretical Exploration

Scholars are divided on the ability of federalism to promote national cohesion and political stability in multi-ethnic states. Those in support of federalism as a strategy of promoting or preserving integration and stability in deeply divided states include F.G Carnell [1962], Duchacek [1977], Mazrui[1971], Enloe [1977] among others. For K. C. Wheare,[cf Ojo, 1999:14] the doyen of modern federalism, he sees federalism as an appropriate form of government to offer to communities or states of distinct or differing nationality who wish to form a common government and behave as one people for some purpose but wish to remain independent and in particular to retain their nationality in all aspects.

However, federalism has an instrument of integrating and promoting stability in multi ethnic state has failed because of the denial of the existence of diversity in the continent which Ojo [2009:387] puts at more than a thousand. The public denial of ethnic pluralism did not prevent politicians from mobilizing and manipulating ethnicity. The effect of this state of affairs according to Ojo [2009] was a schizophrenic polity in which the politics of ethnic balance was the rule of the day, practiced by people who denied ethnicity.

Therefore, federal experiments in Nigeria and other third world countries have been vulnerable to decay, disruption and disintegration. These experiments have moved either towards unification and greater centralization as Nigeria experience has shown or towards disintegration and secession of their components units as in the case of former Yugoslavia and defunct Soviet Union to mention but a few.

For other scholars, federalism cannot bring about integration in heterogeneous societies. Notable scholars in this camp are Elazar [1987], Tariton [1965], May [1970] and Ayoade[1988]. Elazar[-1987:169} contends that federal solution has not proved to be a particularly successful method for integrating plural societies unless there has been other factors compelling integration.

In the same vein, Tariton [1965] argues that there is a limit beyond which diversity and federalism are compatible. He was of the opinion that federal arrangement can be considered impossible or - unworkable if the elements of diversity are very strong or if they predominate over those of unity.

Ayoade [1998:5-6] disagreed with other scholars who see federalism has having the ability to promote national, integration and stability in multi-ethnic states. In his words"... to - expect federalism to produce a seamless unity is to expect too much from that system. Many federalists" expect from federalism what is not designed to give". He goes further to say that "experience has shown that it has not proved to be a particular good device for integrating plural societies into a single political system".

Evolution and Development of Nigerian Federalism

Nigeria's federal system has been described as "unique", "peculiar", "bizarre", "irregular", "misleading", "purely distributive", or "failed" federation "[Obasanjo,200; Mackintosh, 1962; Diamond,1988; Osaghae, 1992; Welch, 1995; Bach, 1997; Soyinka, 1999].These characterizations according to Suberu and Diamond {2002:5} point to certain specificities and pathologies in the evolution and operation of Nigerian federation. It is imperative at this juncture to examine the evolution and development of Nigerian federalism.

The entity called Nigeria came into being when the British colonial authorities merged the Northern and the Southern protectorates together on January 1st 1914.This union has been described as a forced brotherhood and sisterhood[Ayoade, 1998].

It is pertinent at this juncture to take a critical look at why the amalgamation was carried out. Essentially, the country was amalgamated for economic reason without consulting those who were being merged. The North was economically insecure. The huge deficits it accumulated were paid by the subsidies from the more prosperous southern protectorate and partly by the British grant in aid. Another reason adduced for amalgamation was the practical impossibility of maintaining artificial barriers between the south and the north. People speaking the same language and sharing a common historical heritage finding themselves' in different sides of the North/South pole naturally crossed over at will to see their relative and to transact business[Osuntokun, 1979].

The 1914 amalgamation exercise was in a nutshell an administrative device by the British Colonialist for the facilitation of their Colonial enterprise in Nigeria and not to integrate the people or units into a single whole people or units to a single whole. As Hugh Clifford [cf Nwabughuwgu, 1996:41] rightly noted that amalgamation would normally implore some attempt to merge them the units into a single whole, rather what happened was little more than the placing of a single man at the head of two separate though contiguous Colonial territories [ibid].

Sir Hugh Clifford who succeeded Lugard was opposed to a single and unified Nigeria nation idea [Nwabughuwgu, 1996]. This explains why the Northern Nigeria was excluded from the authority of Nigeria Legislative Council set up by the Governor in 1923.

Indeed, the British pursued a policy which was directed toward the separateness of people of Nigeria especially the Northern people. In the words of James Coleman [1958]

British policy was ... made to preserve the Muslim North in its pristine Islamic purity by excluding Christian Missionaries and limiting western education, by denying Northern leaders representation in the central Nigeria Legislative council during the period 1923-1947, and by minimizing the contact between the Northern and the more sophisticated and nationally minded southerners temporarily resident in the North. All these aspects of British policy and others, tended to perpetuate the individuality and separateness of the North (p.322)

In 1939, Benard Bourdillion divided the country into three administrative units namely Northern, Eastern and Western provinces. He proposed a federal structure of government with regional assemblies in the North, East and West as well as a central legislative in Lagos. His proposals could not be implemented before he left the country in 1943. He was replaced by Arthur Richards. The Richard Constitution of 1946 which came into effect in 1947 sought to provide avenue for grater interaction between Nigeria peoples. For the first time, the North was brought into the same legislative council with the South. Under Richards, the provinces became regions but were still governed under a unitary government. Because of the undemocratic nature of the constitution and its other defects, it was replaced by another one called Macpherson constitution.

The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 was a step further towards the establishment of federalism in Nigeria because the Constitution empowered regional legislative bodies to make laws on specific matters to their regional governments. This was subject to the approval of the central government. The constitution broke down in 1953 because of many problems and crises which attended its implementation. Prominent among the crises were the exclusion of Dr Nnarni Azikiwe from the House of Representatives in 1951, the Eastern regional crisis of 1953, the 1956 motion for self government and the Kano riot of 1953.

These developments led to the decisions by the British Government to have the constitution redrawn to provide for greater regional autonomy and removal of power of intervention by the centre in matters which could, without detriment to other regions be placed entirely within the regional competence [Omu, 1996].

The Lyttelton Constitution introduced in 1954 established a federal system of government with the three regions forming the units of federation. The constitution transferred residual powers to the regions instead of being left with the centre. The issue of revenue allocation was decided which emphasized the principle of derivation, regionalized civil service, judiciary and commodity marketing board. But it was a federation that was continued to be hunted by the twin forces of regional imbalances and the quest for sectional security [Nwabughuogu, 1996]. There were series of constitutional modifications before the attainment of independence on 1st October, 1960. Three years later, the country became a republic.

It is imperative at this juncture to analyze the developments that have taken place in Nigerian federalism since 1960s.

It was J.S. Mill [cf Idang, 1973], who argued that for the successful operation of a federal system "there should not be anyone state in a federation so much more powerful than the rest as to be capable of vying in strength with many of them combined. If there be two, they will be irresistible when they agree and when they differ, everything will be decided by a struggle for ascendancy between the rivals".

K.C. Wheare [1967] doyen of federalism was also of the opinion that no one or two units should be so powerful that they can overrule the others and bend the will of the government to themselves.

Nigeria federal system in the First Republic was unbalanced. The Northern region accounted for 29 percent of the country's total area as compared to the Eastern region of 8.3 percent and the West 8.5 percent. The North also had a demographic advantage over the two regions in the south- by the 1963 census figures. It

accounted for 53.5 percent, the Eastern region 22.3 percent, the Western region 18.4 percent, the Mid- West 4.6 percent and Lagos Federal Territory 1.2 percent of the total population of 55.6 million [Elaigwu, 1986]. It was therefore not surprising that in the Southern part of the country, there was fear of Northern domination of the country by virtue of their population. The North also feared the Southern domination of the civil service, parastatals, and economic sphere. The southern control of these sectors could be attributed to their earlier contact with western education which had become a passport to job opportunities in modern sector [Elaigwu, 1986].

This lopsided federal structure endured until the military intervention in the politics of the country on 15th January, 1966. This intervention fundamentally altered the country's federal trajectory by reversing the power equation in favour of the centre rather than the regions [Gana, 2000:2].

Military rule has no doubt affected the structure of our federation. In line with the command structure, Nigeria's federal system has been over centralized to the point that it reflects more of a unitary arrangement [Elaigwu, 1998]. This defect in the operation of Nigeria federal system under the military prompted Akindele [cf Elaigwu, 1998], to campaign the argument that:

What we need today is a non-centralized federal system in which the state governments are politically virile, legislatively strong, financially resilient and indeed, constituted self confident and self assertive centers of respect by the political loyalty from the citizens they serve and over whom they exercise [p.7]

Nigeria federalism under the Second Republic [1979-1983] was centralist in nature. The centralist tendencies in the 1979 federal constitution include the assignment of more powers to the central rather than the component units. For instance, sixty-two items were assigned to the federal government embracing virtually the whole gamut of public affairs within the legislative competence of the centre.

Under the present dispensation, the federal constitution of 1999 which traced its parentage to the 1979 constitution is also centralist or unitary in nature. The constitution assigned more powers to the federal government than the state. For instance, the exclusive list contain sixty-eight items which includes citizenship, immigration, defense, policing, external affairs, mining, nuclear energy, regulation of political parties and the public debt of the federation [Adeosun, 2000: 70].

Mechanisms for National Integration

Various measures have been articulated and executed by different governments in the country with the objectives of bringing together the different groups that make up the country. Some of these measures are discussed below.

The National Youth Service Corps Scheme which was established by Major- General Yakubu Gowon administration in 1973. The scheme makes it mandatory for fresh Nigerian graduates of below thirty years of age, to undergo one year national service in states other than their own. The objective of the scheme includes among others:

To inculcate discipline in our youth by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves.

To develop common ties among our youth and promote national unity by ensuring that as far as possible, youth are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin; each group assigned to work together is as representative of the country as possible; the youths are exposed to modes of living of the people in different part of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups. To encourage members of the corps to seek at the end of their service, career employment all over the country, thus promoting free movement of labour [Ujo, 1994: 184-185].

The scheme, to a large extent has justified its establishment. It has succeeded in mobilizing manpower to areas of crucial need all over the country, especially in the educational sector.

The scheme is educative. It provides a chance to acquire a wider knowledge of our country, its people and their problems and potentialities. In this process, a corp member is most likely to be more broad minded in dealing with national issues.

It has resulted in the encouragement of inter ethnic marriages and domiciliation in ethno-regional areas other than one's own.

However, there are some negative aspects of this scheme which hinder national integration. For instance, many of the graduates are either not employed or are themselves unwilling to take up appointments because of the uncertainty of future prospects in those states, for reason of statism arising from the vexed issues of Indigeneity [Odunnuga, 1999].

The Unity schools and federal government colleges were established to bring youths from the diverse ethnic groups into close contact very early in life and create an enduring environment of love and trust for each other that will lead to a reduction in mutual suspicion and mistrust.

The Unity school as strategy of integration has its own problem. It has led to discrimination of children from the so-called educationally advantaged states.

The federal character principle is another measure adopted to promote national integration. This

principle means that the distribution of appointment to high offices must reflect the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria [Ojie and Ewruhadjakpor, 2009]. The state and local governments must be similarly run to reflect the different ethnic groups that make up the place.

It is important to note that the pursuit of this policy has proved inadequate for effective national integration. The principle subverts the principle of justice and fair play to the individual citizen, It sacrifices national progress and development on the altar of ethnic sectarianism as mediocrity takes' precedence over meritocracy in the conduct of affairs of the state [ibid].

The federal character principle has created more problems for national unity than it has solved. A principle that robs Peter to pay Paul cannot integrate Peter and Paul. The principle discriminates against one group and favors another [Ayoade, 1998; Adeosun, 2009].

The inadequacy of the federal character principle to promote national unity led to the evolution of the principle of rotating presidency. The rotation of the highest office in the land would bring about a sense of belonging among the different ethnic groups that make up the country. This is because, the geographical zones to which the country has been divided will each have an opportunity to present candidate for the highest office in the land thereby increasing their stake in the corporate existence of the country. The defect of this policy is that it is capable of further heightening the divisiveness in the country polity. This is because some people would argue that it should be extended to all tiers of government.

Another measure adopted by Nigerian government to promote the unity of the country is state creation. State creation is seen by most Nigerians as the quickest means to accelerated development. The popular notion is that development radiates from state capital and that the more such centers exist, the faster the rate of national development. Unfortunately, state creation has not produced accelerated development or even development. Rather, it has diverted resources from development to the creation of infrastructure and the expansion of non-productive sectors [Ailoje, 1997].

State creation rather than promote national integration has increased our disunity and sense of alienation. Non-indigenes are treated little better than aliens in states other than their own. Even if they so wished, non-indigenes cannot integrate into the state where they work, pay their taxes and may even have been born. Restrictions are placed on the right to own property; they tend to be confined as in colonial times to specific residential quarters [Sabon-Gari] that constitute easy target in the case of social, religious or communal unrest. In the field of education, non-indigenes are required to pay higher school fees in some states.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:

In this paper, I have tried to examine the suitability of the federal system in promoting national integration. Analyses have shown that the way federalism is being practiced in the country could not serve as a viable instrument for integrating the diverse ethnic groups that make up the country. The study has shown that Nigerian federation of the First Republic truly fulfilled all the ingredients, fundamentals and practice of orthodox federalism. The incursion of military into Nigerian politics undermined our federal system and ever since, Nigeria has been a federal in name and not in practice. It was this structural defect in Nigerian federal system that necessitated the call for the restructuring of the polity. The failure of federalism as an integrating mechanism led to the introduction of such integrative mechanisms as Unity School, National Youth Service Corp, Federal Character, State Creation and Rotational Presidency and they were thoroughly discussed and analyzed.

RECOMMENDATION

Government should de-emphasize tribe and ethnic origin in all official documents. The National Assembly should as a matter of urgency amend the constitution and remove all references to Indigeneity from the constitution.

As it is now, the Nigerian federal system of government is centralized. There is need for reassignment of legislative powers and resources to the constituent units in order for them to be able to discharge their constitutionally assigned duties.

The application of the federal character principle must be revised. The principle should be applied such that 90 percent of appointments are on merit, five percent on the equality of state and five percent on ecological ground. Besides, the principle should be phased out after fifty years which is enough for the so-called educationally less developed states to catch-up with the rest of the states.

In the final analysis, if Nigerian political leaders adhered strictly to the federal tenets or principle, it is a viable system of allocation of power as well as an instrument for national integration.

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