Open Access Journal Available Online

The Quest for National Integration in Nigeria: The Federal Character Principle Revisited

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Abstract : The federal character principle has remained one of the most sensitive issues in Nigeria starting from the late seventies. This is because it has become a necessary factor to Nigeria's federal practice, as it has been applied in the composition and operation of virtually every public concern like the civil service, the armed forces, education, government appointments, party politics, etc. After about four decades of the introduction of the federal character principle, this paper re-visits the principle vis-à-vis Nigeria's quest for national integration. In doing this, the paper relied substantially on secondary method of data collection and content analysis. The core assumptions of the Social Justice Theory as developed by John Rawls (1971), were appropriated for the study. The paper finds out that the implementation of the federal character principle has come with a good deal of commendations, controversies, rancour, misgivings and criticisms over the years. The paper argues that as long as Nigeria remains a federation with diversities, the need to balance these diverse interests in the country will always be there. The federal character principle as the normative expression of the equal rights of Nigerians to participate in the affairs of the country was therefore formulated to take care of these differing interests. What is

322

therefore required is to continue to find ways and means of making the principle acceptable to all and sundry by dealing with the rancour, ill-feelings, misgivings and problems that come with its implementation so as to bring about the needed unity and national integration. The paper accordingly made some recommendations in this regard.

Keywords: Federalism, Federal Character Principle, National Integration, Social Justice, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is a colonial creation. The country is the product of British experiment in political colonization. Nigeria consists of a conglomeration of ethnic groups and fatherlands which are heterogeneous in many respects. These according to Agbodike (2000), include the diversity or pluralism of language, religion, socio-political and economic formations as well as administrative styles, social norms and personality types. There are also diversities among them resulting from factors of historical evolution, disproportionate population sizes, unequal economic resources and educational attainments. There are diversities too, in social wants, needs and preferences as well as in talents and opportunities. These differences among the diverse peoples or ethnic groups of Nigeria have tended to generate mutual suspicion and misunderstanding which in turn have given rise to acrimonious existence and conflicts in the country. These situations, no doubt, hamper political stability and efforts at national integration as it applies to the building of a nation-state out of the diverse ethnic, social, geographic, economic and religious elements in the country.

In an effort to address these issues and also ensure structural balance of claims and gains by the various groups and interests, the government formulated and put into use the federal character principle. This principle, which is now a directive principle of state policy, is also aimed at ensuring a peaceful, united, stable, prosperous and integrated Nigeria. But how successful really is the federal character principle vis-à-vis the crisis of participation and struggle for access to state power among the various ethnic cleavages and political groupings in the Nigerian state? Put differently, has the federal character principle been able to meet the demands of pluralism as well as ensure ethnic balancing, equity and proportionality in the management of public affairs in Nigeria? No doubt,

opinions are bound to differ on this all important question. This perhaps explains why the federal character principle has generated and will continue to generate debate among scholars and public commentators alike. After about four decades of the introduction of the federal character principle, this paper re-visits the principle vis-à-vis Nigeria's search for national integration. For easy of understanding, the paper is divided into seven sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is the theoretical framework. Section three is the methodology while section four is the conceptual clarifications. Section five explores the background to the problem of national integration in Nigeria while section six assesses federal character principle and national integration in Nigeria. Section seven is the conclusion and recommendations.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on some propositions extracted from Social Justice Theory as developed by John Rawls (1971), and other social justice theorists. Social justice according to Rawls (1971), is the people's ability to realize their potential in the society in which they live. John Rawls conceptualizes social justice within a set of institutions which will enable people to live a fulfilling life and be active contributors to their society. In the words of John Rawls:

A set of principles is required for choosing among the various social arrangements which determine this division of advantages and for underwriting an agreement on the proper distributive shares. These principles are the principles of social justice; they provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate

distribution of benefits and burdens of social cooperation (Rawls, 1971, p. 4).

John Rawls therefore, sees social justice as fairness where there is desirability of advantage in the society for the weak and marginalized groups in some respects. He advocates for availability of equal social opportunities for the development of personality to all the people in the society, without any discrimination on the basis of caste, sex or race. No one should be deprived on the basis of these differences, because these are those conditions which are essential for social development and a socially just society (Oparah, 2015). John Rawls model of social justice is therefore, associated with social equality and individual rights. Social justice can be made available only in a social system where the exploitation of man by man is absent, and where privileges of the few are not built upon the miseries of the many (Ahamad and Ali, 2006). The core element of John Rawls social justice is equal social worth which requires that citizens be guaranteed certain social rights as well as civil and political rights.

There are so many definitions of social justice given by the various theorists of the concept. But what runs as a common denominator in each conceptualization is the distributive character for imparting justice. For example, Frankena (1962, p. 2), defines social justice as "any system of distribution and redistribution which is governed by valid moral principles". For him, the concept of just society should lay emphasis on the principles and practical aspect of social justice. Thus, he conceives social justice as a part of political justice that emphasizes on the creation of a just society. For Gajendragadkar (1969, p. 47), the

concept of social justice has dual objectives of "removing all inequality" and affording equal opportunities and "economic activities of all the citizens". Gajendragadkar's view also emphasizes the equal distribution of economic goods and opportunities. According to Oparah (2015), the term 'social justice' consists of two words, 'social' and 'justice'. The term social is concerned with all human beings who live in societies; while justice is related to liberty, equality and rights. Thus social justice is concerned with ensuring liberty, providing equality and maintaining individual rights to every human being in the society. The goal of social justice is generally the same as human development. Eileen Baldry (cited in Oparah, 2015, p. 273), argues that "we should all be clamouring for the revival of social justice, that is, ensuring systemic and structural social arrangements to improve equality, as a core political and social value". The concept of social justice therefore involves finding the optimum balance between our joint responsibilities as a society and our responsibilities as individuals to contribute to a just society. According to Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, the relevant institutions of social justice include education, health care, social security, labour rights, as well as a broader system of public services, progressive taxation and regulation of markets, to ensure fair distribution of wealth, equality of opportunity, and no gross inequality of outcome (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/social_just ice).

One can see from all the foregoing that social justice is distributive justice. It is concerned with those principles and ideas which best ensure an equitable distribution of the goods and benefits of a society. The goods and benefits include material resources, good education, and all those things for which society accords respect and recognition like good jobs and the opportunity and means to attain all those things that tend to promote human happiness. Social justice is fairness in the distribution of these resources. A society is a just society if everybody is treated fairly in respect of the distribution of the society's goods (Bodunrin, 1989). But the question of what treatment should qualify as fair treatment, and by implication, what a just distribution is, is not a settled one. This is where the question of what social justice means becomes knotty and sometimes naughty (Uroh, 2000). However, following Rawls (1971, p. 5) position, we can say here that even people who hold different views of what social justice means can still agree that "institutions are just when no arbitrary distinctions are made between persons" in the assignment of "basic rights and duties and when the rules determine a proper balance between competing claims to the advantages of social life". One way of interpreting John Rawls view here according to Uroh (2002), is that justice entails the avoidance as much as possible, of discrimination in the distribution of social benefits or costs. To achieve this goal, Rawls (1971, p. 60), suggests that every society should be organized so that:

1.   Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberties for all.

2.   Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both; (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantages, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

John Rawls theory of social justice is considered more apt and

appropriate in this paper because of its utility and analytical strength in providing explanations for the introduction and implementation of the federal character principle in Nigeria. In other words, the federal character principle and practice in Nigeria can rightly be explained and analyzed in the light of John Rawls social justice theory. The federal character principle as a directive principle of state policy in Nigeria is basically intended to ensure fairness and equity in the distributions of the goods and benefits of the Nigerian State.

Methodology

This paper relied on documentary evidence (secondary data). These data were sourced by extracting relevant information from other sources and previous studies. These documents were mainly publications on federalism, federal character principle and national integration in Nigeria. Thus, secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, periodicals and other written works sourced from libraries were utilized. The study also made use of internet materials that contained information on issues under study. These documents are already in the public domain. What the author did was to refine, interpret, evaluate and analyze them.

The secondary data that were generated in the course of this study were analyzed using content analysis, rooted on systematic logical deductions. According to Kerlinger (1977), content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, quantitative and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication. The foregoing meant that the author organized and synthesized the large volumes of textual

data he generated from all the documents mentioned above, with a view to searching for patterns and discerning what was relevant from the documents. In other words, the author systematically reduced the documents to logical, meaningful and coherent interpretation, and on the basis of that drew his inferences and conclusions.

Conceptual Clarifications

Three basic concepts involved in this paper need further explanations. These are the concepts of federalism, federal character principle and national integration.

Federalism

Federalism has attracted a wide variety of definitions and meanings. It has however not lost its essential content or characteristics. The concept of federalism is derived from the Latin word 'foedus' which means covenant or agreement. However, the discussion of contemporary federalism generally starts with K.C. Wheare's conceptualization of the concept. According to K. C. Wheare:

By the federal principle I mean the method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, coordinate and independent (Wheare, 1963, p. 10).

Wheare went further to list the principles of federalism as follows:
1.   The division of powers among levels of government.
2.   Written constitution showing this division.
3.   Co-ordinate supremacy of the two levels of government with regards to their respective functions.
4.   The powers to amend the constitution to be exercised by both levels of government acting in cooperation.

5.   Existence   of   an independent judiciary or body to adjudicate dispute arising from clash of powers between the federal and state governments.

6.   Financial independence of both levels of government as "financial subordination makes an end of federalism".

After enumerating the foregoing principles of federalism, Wheare stated strongly that:

I   have   put   forward uncompromisingly a criterion of federal government – the delimited and coordinate division of governmental functions and I have implied that to the extent to which any system of government does not conform to this criterion, it has no claim to call itself federal (Wheare, 1963).

Wheare's definition and conceptualization of federalism has attracted many criticisms. His definition has been criticized as rigid, legalistic, inflexible, static, unrealistic and unworkable as well as neglecting certain socio-economic, cultural and political factors that actually affect the dynamics and workings of federalism in different cultures and societies. His definition has also been criticized for being a description of American federalism which he saw as the archetype of federalism (Birch, 1968; Jinadu, 1979; Obianyo, 2005; Obi, 2019). Despite the foregoing criticisms of K.C. Wheare, his definition of federalism has continued to form the bedrock for the understanding of the concept. Moreover, subsequent definitions of federalism are either complimentary or supplementary to Wheare's definition. For example, William Livingstone (cited in Dare, 1979, p. 29), defines federalism as "a device by

which the federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected". Friedrich (1963, p. 583), defines it "as a union of groups united by one or more common objectives but retaining their distinctive group being for other purposes. Federalism is on the inter-group level, what association is on the interpersonal level. It unites without destroying themselves that are uniting, and it is meant to strengthen them in their mutual relations". For Ricker (1964, p. 101), federalism "is a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government in such a way that each kind of government has some kind of activities on which it makes final contributions". One can see that the foregoing definitions and many other such definitions of federalism in the literature do not negate or contradict the essentials of Wheares' definition.

Federalism is therefore a system of government whereby political and economic decision making powers are constitutionally distributed among constituent units and levels of government in a country. According to Vande (2019), it is a form of government which is deliberately designed to cope with the twin problem of maintaining unity while also preserving diversity. It therefore connotes an organizational principle of a political system, emphasizing both vertical power sharing across different levels of government and at the same time, the integration of different territorial and socio-economic units, cultural and ethnic groups in one single polity. Indeed, federalism is generally seen and accepted as the best form of government for large and culturally heterogeneous societies like Nigeria.

Federal Character Principle

The Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) inaugurated by the Late General Murtala Mohammed on 18th October 1975 coined the term, federal character. It was the CDC that drafted the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The term gained wide currency and usage after it was embodied in that constitution. The CDC defines federal character as:

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 (CDC Report, 1977, p. X).

The term was later enshrined in section 14(3) of the 1979 constitution. This section states the premise of the principle thus:

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 manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or sectional groups, in that government or in any of it agencies.

The principle was further extended to the states and local government councils through section 14(4) of the same constitution thus:

The composition of the government of a state, a local government council or any of the agencies of such government or council and the conduct of the affairs of the government or council or such agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the diversity of the people within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the peoples of the federation.

These constitutional provisions were respectively repeated verbatim in section 15(3) and 15(4) of the 1989 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. These provisions are also contained in sections 14(3) and 14(4) of the present 1999 constitution (as amended) of the country.

From the foregoing, one can see that the main thrust of the federal character principle is that the various ethnic or linguistic groupings in the country are essentially significant in their differences rather than in their similarities hence the need to reflect these differences in the politics, governance and administration of the country so as to promote national unity. The rationale behind the federal character principle therefore is that all states, local governments, ethno regional groups, areas and communities should be given equal opportunity to participate in the public affairs of the country. This will accordingly promote national unity and integration and assuage the divisive tendencies and perceived injustices which sometimes tend to engender marginalization, frustration, tension, disillusionment, dissatisfaction, instability and disorderliness in the Nigerian polity (Nwachukwu, 2011).

With the federal character principle, all public authorities and the entire public sector are to ensure fair and effective representation of states, local government areas, or ethnic groups as the case may be in positions of power, authority, status and so on. The federal character principle in essence confers

equality on all states or local governments in terms of representation in the civil service, national assembly, government agencies, extra ministerial departments or bodies and the distribution of appointments of ministers, commissioners, special advisers and such other key functionaries of government. This is why the prime factor in recruitment into the public service and even its organization is on the basis of representativeness and the need to promote national unity and integration with sometimes less emphasis on merit. This also goes to explain the lowering to some extent the entry or promotional points for people from less advantaged or developed areas. One can therefore, see that the federal character principle is basically a distributive principle aimed at preventing the domination of government and its resources by people from only one group or a few groups and at guaranteeing to every group, access to power, opportunities and resources (Ekeh and Osaghae, 1989). It is in essence a variant of the consociation principle of proportionality and it is also called quota system or ethnic arithmetic formula elsewhere (Onyeoziri, 1989). This is why Haruna (1994), views the federal character principle from the point of view that the diverse characteristics making up the federal republic of Nigeria are finding expressions which are discernible as the characteristic of the plural nature of the federal make-up of the republic.

National Integration

The concept of integration has no universally accepted definition. Accordingly, it has attracted different definitions from scholars in the literature. For instance, Deutsch (1966, p. 2), defines integration as "the attainment within a territory of a sense of community and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure for a long-time dependable expectations of peaceful change among its populations". For Haas (1958, p. 16), integration is the "process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities to a new centre whose institutions posses or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states". Coleman and Rosberg (1964, p. 9), see integration as "the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and dichotomies in the process of creating a homogenous political community". Similarly, Duverger (1976, p. 177), avers that integration is "the establishment of a closer interdependence between the parts of a living organism or between the members of a society". Duverger emphasized that integration is the process of unifying a society which tends to make it harmonious, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious. To Agi (1990, p. 90), "integration is a process whereby the quality of relation among autonomous social units change in such a way as to erode the autonomy of each and make it part of a larger aggregate".

Despite the varied conceptualizations of the concept of integration in the literature, scholars are not in disagreement about its exact meaning. From the foregoing definitions of integration, one can see that integration is all about connectedness, cooperation, unity in diversity, understanding and co-existence among diverse groups in a society. This is why Bamisaye (1988, p. 34), defines national integration as "the process of bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and establishment of a

national identity". Similarly, Mba and Odo (2003, p. 15), conceptualizes national integration as referring "specifically to the problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which shadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties". National integration is therefore the wielding together of different peoples within a territory into a united whole. The central aim of national integration in any nation is to bring about harmonious and peaceful co-existence among the constituent units and also help reduce or eliminate parochial sentiments, primordial cleavages and attachment to cultural, sectional or regional identities. Okoli and Anam-Ndu (2004), have rightly observed that national integration also implies both the capacity of government to control the territory under its jurisdiction as well as the ability to stimulate a set of popular attitudes like loyalty, obligation, allegiance, patriotism and willingness by the people to place national interest above local or parochial concerns. With national integration, citizens are expected to be loyal, patriotic, and respect the overriding authority and supremacy of the national government.

Background to the Problem of National Integration in Nigeria

One of the problems confronting many post-colonial countries in Africa is how to bring about nation integration. The reasons for this problem can be explained from the arbitrary manner in which the colonialists fused people of different socio-cultural and linguistic background into one entity based on their (colonialists) economic gains and desires rather than the willingness of the different peoples to live together. The colonial masters that undertook the task of fusing the different

ethnic nationalities together did not even seek the consent of the various peoples. There were also no conscious efforts on the part of the colonizers to get the peoples to blend together as one. This is the origin of the problem of national integration in Nigeria and in many other African countries. This is why Weiner (1968, p. 27), sees the problem of national integration as the "process of bringing culturally and socially discrete groups together into a single territorial unit, and the establishment of a sense of loyalty to that unit". Again, Ake (1967, p. 486), broadly defines the problem as follows: "how to build a single coherent political society from a multiplicity of traditional societies; how to increase cultural homogeneity and value consensus; and how to elicit from the individual deference and devotion to the claims of the state". Historically, the problem of national integration in Nigeria and elsewhere has been "restricted to the determination of the nature and diffusion of nationalism in a particular transitional polity and the impact that nationalism had on the developmental process" (Alam, 1981, p. 2).

As a colonial creation, what existed in the vast area that currently falls within the territorial boundary of Nigeria prior to the advent of colonialism were ethnically diverse entities and groups that in the words of Mimiko and Adeyemi (2005, p. 57), "had existed under distinct political arrangements like empires, kingdoms, chiefdoms, city-states and caliphates". This position is in line with the view of Balogun (1983, p. 69), who asserts that the "first major problem that the incipient colonial administration had to tackle was … the problem of diversity. This, in fact, explains why the three protectorates were governed differently, even though they

all came under the British Crown". It may be pertinent to point out here that the fact of coming together did not, by itself, generate problem among the different peoples that make up Nigeria. Problems began to manifest because the colonial masters failed to encourage and foster unity and a sense of oneness among the different peoples after the amalgamation of 1914. The colonial masters also took deliberate steps to create a sense of division among Nigerians. One of such steps was their divide and rule policy. Nwabueze (cited in Odum, 2016), has highlighted the deliberate step taken by the colonialists in order to keep the North separated from the South during the amalgamation of 1914. Instead of discarding the pre-existing territorial structure and creating a new entity with balanced structure, the colonial masters chose to preserve the North as one monolithic and undivided entity, hence drawing an indelible line to highlight the North-South divide. Through a gradual process of this divide and rule policy, Nigerians were left to continue living with the notion as Coleman (1958, pp. 193-194), rightly captured, that the (Nigerians) were "separated from one another by great distance, by differences of history and traditions, and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers". By making the foregoing differences glaring and engraving it into the consciousness of the people, the colonialists helped to lay the foundation of ethnicity, hostility and divisiveness in the country.

By the time Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the country has failed to develop a sense of oneness (Coleman, 1958; Balogun, 1983). It is important to point out here that the problem of ethnicity and concomitant divisive sentiments in Nigeria were

raging not only at the realms of the north-south divide. Documentary evidence (Coleman, 1958; Ostheimer, 1973; Mbadiwe, 1991; Odum, 2016), indicates that the westerners and easterners of the south were also involved in inter-ethnic rivalry and mutual distrust with one another as they were with their northern counterparts. It is in the foregoing context that discussions on ethnic rivalry in the country tend to locate it at the level of the three major ethnic groups namely the Hausa-Fulanis (in the north), the Yorubas (in the west), and the Igbos (in the east). However, available literature (Nwokedi, 2001; Nnoli, 2008; Odum, 2016), points to the fact that the problem is deeper as there were some other smaller ethnic groups within the different regions that were struggling for identity within the country. This is why Arowosegbe (2005, p. 343), asserts that the "majority – minority ethnic structure within each region … underlined a permanent state of tension and instability" What the foregoing indicate is that there were ethic rivalry and tension not only at the level of the three major ethnic groups but also within the different ethnic groups in the three different regions.

All the foregoing were the reasons why the chances of forming a viable and united nation-state after independence appeared very bleak. Even the people's struggle for independence seemed to have been geared towards simply attaining self-government and not necessarily attaining nationhood. Ogban-Iyam (1989, p. 193), captures this state of affairs when he asserts that Nigerians "were virtually unanimous in their demand for an end to colonial rule but not necessarily concerned with forging a common culture and identity among all nations that have been forced to live under one colonial government". This

scenario may have made Padmore (1971, p. 265), to write that the attitude of Nigerians during their struggle for independence was suggestive of saying: "each region for itself let the devil take care of Nigeria".

If colonialism was the main culprit behind the ethnicity problem in Nigeria, one would have expected that the termination of colonialism would have created an opportunity for correcting the anomaly. But this did not happen as the indigenous elites that took over from the colonial masters failed woefully to tackle the ethnic tensions in the country. Nigerian leaders since independence have even relied on ethnic appeal for their political engagements. This was one of the reasons why the country went through political turmoil some few years after independence and which eventually led to military incursion into politics and the civil war. Despite the fact that Nigeria fought a war so as to remain united, more divisive tendencies keeps cropping up as the country advanced with age thereby giving a seeming credence to Awolowo's (1947), argument that Nigeria is not a nation but a mere geographical expression. Till date, owing to mutual distrust and suspicion, every governmental action taken within the polity tends to be viewed and explained from ethnic lens and basis. Indeed, the following lamentations made by Ogban-Iyam (1989, p. 209), over three decades ago still holds true till date:

Nigeria has for long attained self-government but without unity, brotherhood and a significant positive common culture. This is how the country stands today. The country is yet to become a nation-state which self-government could have created and can still create.

In a similar vein, Ihonvbere (2003, p. 190), observes painfully that:

The custodians of state power in Nigeria have done such terrible job at building those elements that pull a people together to cultivate a national identity and culture. The evidence can be seen in the fact that on the eve of the twenty-first century, Nigeria has no national hero, hardly enjoys stability, no national identity …

Federal Character Principle and National Integration in Nigeria: An Assessment

Has the federal character principle been able to meet the demands of pluralism as well as ensure ethnic balancing, equity and proportionality in the management of public affairs in Nigeria? Opinions are certainly bound to differ on this question. This explains why the implementation of the federal character principle has come with a good deal of commendations and criticisms over the years. Despite its many criticisms, the federal character principle which is contained under the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy in the constitution has positively influenced and will continue to influence in several respects the organization and operations of the country's public service.

For sure, the federal character principle has its merits. First, the principle satisfies the quest for representation and proportionality in allocating resources and making appointments among the various groups in the country. In other words, it makes for representative bureaucracy in the public service. Ayoade (2000), has averred that a representative bureaucracy creates support for government policies and also provides a mechanism for the

government party to distribute patronage. According to Krislov (1974, pp. 4-5), "no matter how brilliantly conceived, no matter how artfully contrived, government action usually also requires societal support". Such support is normally guaranteed by drawing a wide segment of society into the government "to convey and merchandize a policy". The argument being made here is that by ensuring representation and participation of the diverse groups that make up the country in the conduct of public affairs, the federal character principle is as well helping to mobilize public support, which is necessary for the successful implementation of government policies.

Second, the federal character principle has helped in ethnic balancing as a necessity in the evolution of Nigerian citizenship and for ensuring less acrimonious relationships among the various people or groups of Nigeria in the composition of public agencies. The formula has therefore, made for a more equal federation where more people or groups owe loyalty to the nation because they see themselves represented meaningfully therein. It is in this regard that Utume (2000), argues that the federal character principle as currently practiced in Nigeria is an equity principle that is essential for national integration. According to him, in a deeply segmented society like Nigeria, equity is one of the strongest ways of establishing confidence among the groups. For it is by it that they can feel a sense of belonging and so commit themselves to the continued existence of the country.

Third, the federal character principle has helped to reduce rivalries and frictions that have characterized relations among states and ethnic nationalities in their struggle for enhanced participation and representation

in the public service. By providing equal opportunity for participation and representation of states and ethnic groups in the conduct of the affairs of the public service, the federal character principle is thus a veritable tool for national integration, stability, equity, development and unity.

Fourth, it has been argued that the federal character principle despite criticisms is neither immoral nor unjust. Rather, it should be seen as a variant of distributive justice (Agbodike, 2000). Ohonbamu (1968), and Kirk-Greene (1971), have variously argued that if the merit criterion were the only one used, most jobs would naturally go to the most enterprising and or educationally advanced of the Nigerian ethnic groups. Thus, to ensure that the others do not feel deprived, the principle of federal character should be used to give them a sense of belonging. And as Lawson (1985, p. 61), has reasoned, "the standards that enable this sense of belonging to be achieved are not necessarily the highest obtainable or available".

Lastly, according to Gboyega (1989), Alhaji Bargudu Shettima, a onetime Chairman of the Federal Public Service Commission has argued that the federal character principle can enhance the efficiency of the public service. Gboyega believes this can be achieved through fair representation on the basis of the federal character principle, which would command public confidence and greater cooperation, mutual trust and mutual respect among the public servants themselves. This will accordingly increase the capacity of the public service.

Despite the foregoing merits of the federal character principle, the principle has been severally

criticized. First, it has always been argued by critics of the principle that its fundamental weakness is that it tends to enthrone mediocrity in the public sector at the expense of merit, standard and professionalism. By ignoring meritocracy and professionalism without recourse to standards, the federal character principle becomes morally reprehensible and an act of injustice. Viewed from this perspective, the quota factor in the federal character principle becomes not only counter-productive but also divisive, and as such constitutes a cog in the wheel of the peaceful and orderly progress and development of Nigeria (Agbodike, 2000).

Second, it is also argued that in the name of representation and national unity, the federal character principle allows ethno-regional patrons and their clients to exploit and mismanage state resources without contributing to any meaningful development. In essence, the principle was formulated, adopted and channeled to serve the overall interest of the ruling class. Agbodike (2000, p. 184), captures this situation better when he observes that:

Under the guise of the federal character principle, the members of the bourgeois class get themselves entrenched in power and exercise control over the machinery of state. Through the application of this principle too, they strive to reconcile their class differences through the operation of acceptable formulae for the allocation, distribution and sharing of national resources and benefits among themselves. While they do this, they capitalize on, and fan the embers of the ethnic differences among the various Nigerian peoples to win the support of the masses in their areas. And in the course of this elite game, members of this class climb to positions, amass wealth and enrich themselves.

Third, by focusing on regional and ethnic balancing or representation in the public service, the federal character principle exacerbates differentiation, sectionalism and ethnicity instead of enhancing mutual trust, accommodation and national unity. Also, the formula while stressing the imperative of ethnic balancing invariably de-emphasizes the nation. In the process too, it strengthens the parochial, particularistic orientations and primordial ethnic sentiments of Nigerians. All these form the basis of disaffection among the various groups in the country. In addition, it is argued that the principle has not adequately addressed the problems of minorities especially in states made up of different and unequal ethnic groups. All these appear to be the emergent paradoxes of the federal character principle, whereby, instead of achieving unity through balancing, the nation is further divided.

Fourth, the principle does nothing to address the more fundamental issues, which is the yawning gap between the rich and the poor in the society. This is why Gboyega (1989, p. 183), sees it merely as "an elite ploy which would not materially improve the lot of the down trodden in whose name it is raised". Under these circumstances, there is bound to be acrimony and socio-economic conflict between the haves (represented by the ruling class) and the have-nots (represented by the mass of impoverished Nigerians). Unless the interests of the masses are taken care of in the application of the federal character principle, in such a way that they have access to the basic necessities of life, the formula is bound to have little relevance to the integration problems of Nigeria. It

will at best provide an ambiguous and deceitful recipe for welding the federation together (Agbodike, 2000).

Fifth, the federal character principle encourages undue politicization of most appointments and promotions in the public service. This is why the implementation of the principle has oftentimes been a major source of rancour and ill feeling among the various states and ethnic groups in the country. For instance, there are situations whereby the best candidates or hands are not employed or promoted to certain posts because of the need to ensure proportionality. This situation no doubt causes low morale and disaffection. Also, as rightly pointed out by Gboyega (1989), the federal character principle is known to imbue public servants with constituency consciousness and mentality. This no doubt frustrates the development of a national attitude and undermines their integrity and impartiality. It also removes the safeguards, which protects them from the ravages of politics. Agbodike (2000), also avers that the principle creates tension and frustration among some public servants, particularly in the south, whose career expectations are adversely affected by the need to reflect the federal character and whose see the measure as a ploy to deprive them of jobs for the benefit of the northerners. All these make the public service an arena of sectional struggles and competition and make people to lose confidence in the impartiality of the government and the neutrality of the service as an instrument of state policy.

From all the foregoing, it is obvious that the federal character principle has heightened mutual suspicion and acrimonies among Nigerians, and has made them see themselves first as members of their primordial group before anything else. This is why at every available opportunity people demand for their own separate state. The reason have being that, one's state is where one really belongs. Some people have also argued that the principle runs counter even to some other provisions of the present 1999 constitution. For instance, section 15(2) provides that "discrimination on the ground of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited". According to Uroh (2000), the federal character principle in fact emphasizes one's place of origin and discriminates against one on that ground. The result has been that sometimes more qualified personnel are denied employment or promotion mainly on the ground that the available position is not for their state or places of origin. Thus the principle of federal character contravenes the provision of section 17(3)(a) of the 1999 constitution which requires that "all citizens, without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment". All these have made critics of the principle to argue that the formula is unjustifiably discriminatory. Accordingly, instead of the principle bringing about the needed unity and integration of the diverse groups in the management of the country's public affairs, it has brought about divisiveness, mediocrity, ethnic tensions and suspicion, sectionalism, differentiation, discrimination, societal retardation, corruption, inefficiency and other negative outcomes. All these might have informed Bala's (1977), assertion that the federal character principle is the solution that has deepened the problem it was devised to tackle.

Lastly, Agbodike (2000), writes that the major and most problematic feature of the federal character principle, as presently operated, is the complexity of the interests and units as represented by the north-south, state, local governments, ethnic and religious group affiliations. He avers that the creation of more states and local governments and the establishment of federal educational institutions in every state to enhance greater representational opportunities lead to the multiplication of governmental and administrative units and facilities which become disturbingly expensive to the nation. This is often done against the evidence of the inability of the new states and local governments to discharge their statutory duties as a result of them not been viable.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

After four decades of the introduction of the federal character principle, this paper examines the principle vis-à-vis Nigeria's quest for national integration. From our discussions and analysis, it is obvious that the federal character principle has some shortcomings. This is why the formula has been severally attacked and criticized by scholars, public commentators, statesmen and politicians alike. However, as long as Nigeria remains a federation with diverse cleavages, the need and clamour to balance these diverse interests in the country will always be there. The federal character principle was therefore formulated to take care of these differing interests. In fact, the principle is now generally accepted as a normative expression of the equal rights of Nigerians to participate in the political, administrative, economic and other affairs of the country. And there is every

evidence and indication that the principle has come to stay. This is in the unlikely situation that the diverse cleavages in Nigeria will cease from existing, or that federalism as a form of government will be abrogated in the country. What is therefore, necessary at this juncture is to find ways and means of making the principle acceptable to all and sundry by dealing with the rancour, ill-feelings and problems that come with its implementation in the country so as to bring about the needed unity and national integration. It is in this direction that we follow Nwachukwu (2011), to make the following recommendations.

First, there is the need to balance representation brought about by the federal character formula with the principle of merit. The appointment or recruitment of persons should always be done form the best available in any section of the country. However, recruitment to positions that require specialist training such as pilots, architects, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc, should strictly be based on merit. To do otherwise will be tantamount to exposing the citizens and the nation to great danger. Furthermore, there is the urgent need to enthrone merit by giving all Nigerians equal and affordable access to education and further training to serving staff. This will also help to bridge the educational gap between the north and the south.

Second, there is the need to remove the "indigene syndrome" and other discriminatory policies, laws and regulations brought about by the federal character principle. This can be done through appropriate legislation by the National Assembly. According to Agbodike (2000), it is an aberration of nation building and national integration to see fellow Nigerians, some of whom

were born and may have lived in a place all their lives, being thrown out of jobs and discriminated against because they are not indigenes of the area. We therefore join him and Osaghae (1989), in asking the government to see that every citizen of Nigeria who settles in any part of the country is treated as an indigene of the place and endowed with residency rights, as is the case in the United States of America.

Third, there is the need for all concerned groups and interests in the country to be adequately consulted and taken into consideration in the course of implementing the federal character principle. Moreover, the principle should not be used as a punitive measure against any group, state or section of the country. This calls for the emergence of leaders with nationalistic zeal to help direct the affairs of the country and also ensure the continued survival of the peace, unity, progress and stability of the nation. This will no doubt be a good road map to nation building and national integration in the country.

Fourth, in line with Obi and Abonyi (2004), there is the need to restructure the present federal set up in the country by reducing the powers of the central government. The over-centralized federalism presently practiced in the country whereby the centre has too much power and resource only fuels the struggle to capture the centre by the various contending groups and interest. They do this most often in the name of federal character or quota system. In a restructured federation, more powers and resources should reside with the constituent units who will be at liberty to develop at their own pace. If this is done, the struggle (via federal character and quota system) to control the centre will reduce. Also, the restructuring should be

able to alter the asymmetrical political structure that has over the years improvised the masses, thus allowing a few elites to corner state power and resources in the name of federal character. The masses should therefore, be given opportunity to meet their basic needs, participate fully in decision-making, have equal opportunities for employment, education, access to goods and services provided by government and improved conditions of life. The restructured political system should therefore, arrest the exploitation of the masses by the elites and accordingly address their needs.

Lastly, the Federal Character Commission should always endeavour to implement the federal character principle without fear or favour. This will go a long way in building an efficient and stable polity founded on a just social order and high sense of patriotism. As the Commission does this, they should heed the advice of Agbodike (2000), that the federal character principle should not only concern itself with the inter-ethnic distribution of national resources, privileges and benefits but should also ensure that modalities are worked out by which its beneficiaries can make reciprocal contributions to the overall common good, progress, stability and national integration of the country.

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