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Enhancing National Integration and Inter-Group Relations in Post-colonial Nigeria State through Federal Character: An Analytical Discourse

By Dr. A. F. Usman

Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Nigeria

Abstract- The geo-political entity defined as Nigeria remained the most enduring hangover of the British colonialism. Before the 1914 popular amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates, each of the over 250 ethnic groups that make up Nigerian State existed to some extent independently and distinctively in culture and tradition, but not that they were not interacting with one another in favourable term. What happened in the 1914 episode of the northern and southern unification was reminiscence of a marriage, which may not be so pleasant but cannot be easily divorced. Consequently, the British displayed their political craft by introducing federalism. Still, the 1914 exercise it did not bring to bear the desired integration and inter-group relations. Arising from the problems inherent with federalism or federal arrangement, Federal Character Principle was introduced as a therapy. The degree to which the policy has achieved its fundamental historic objectives in terms of nation building and inter-group relations casts serious doubt on scholarship and therefore demands analytical academic exploration.

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ENHANCING NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTER-GROUP RELATIONS IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA STATE THROUGH FEDERAL CHARACTER: AN ANALYTICAL DISCOURSE

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Enhancing National Integration and Inter-Group Relations in Post-colonial Nigeria State through Federal Character: An Analytical Discourse

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Abstract- The geo-political entity defined as Nigeria remained the most enduring hangover of the British colonialism. Before the 1914 popular amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates, each of the over 250 ethnic groups that make up Nigerian State existed to some extent independently and distinctively in culture and tradition, but not that they were not interacting with one another in favourable term. What happened in the 1914 episode of the northern and southern unification was reminiscence of a marriage, which may not be so pleasant but cannot be easily divorced. Consequently, the British displayed their political craft by introducing federalism. Still, the 1914 exercise it did not bring to bear the desired integration and inter-group relations. Arising from the problems inherent with federalism or federal arrangement, Federal Character Principle was introduced as a therapy. The degree to which the policy has achieved its fundamental historic objectives in terms of nation building and inter-group relations casts serious doubt on scholarship and therefore demands analytical academic exploration. The relevance of this study is anchored on the understanding of why despite the rich content of the policy of Federal Character as fulcrum, national integration and expected objective of inter-group relations has not been adequately achieved. The problematic this raises is that, are there some issues with its operation and application? This study identifies issues and options that may facilitate national integration and inter-group relations in Nigeria within the context of Federal Character Policy. The cardinal issues raises among others are; the confusion of citizenship and indigeneship in Nigerian constitution, north-south dichotomy, challenges of mass mobilisation, the increasing lacuna between the ruling class the mass etc. Using structural plurality theory, the paper advocates for value re-orientation, patriotism, honesty and fairness, credible population censuses and elections, which would definitely enthrone confidence in the hearts of Nigerians and accelerates the process of policy implementation that will furnish genuine integration and inter-group relations.

I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence and resurgence of ethnic, religious and minority tensions and conflicts as well as cries of marginalisation in all sections of the country are clear indications that the issues of national integration and inter-group relation is not yet resolved in Nigerian State. In fact, linguistic, ethnic, religious and regional differences are constantly getting louder voices against national issues. To reduce these issues of national

existence, federalism has been adopted as a compromising formula. Still, the very foundation and structure including the operation of Nigerian federalism promotes mutual fears and suspicion that have endangered inter-group relations among the diverse group. Arising from this background it has been constantly advocated that Nigeria's federal structure need a radical retouch or restructuring to guarantee Nigerian Federal project and address the national question as may be called. One of the measures put in place and constitutionally allows as a tool for achieving and promoting national integration and inter-group relations is the federal character doctrine. Decades after its introduction and application, it seems its very essence cannot be justified at the moment. For easy understanding, the paper is divided into the following; the abstract, introduction, theoretical/conceptual issues, Federal Character as an accommodating mechanism for national integration and inter-group relations: The Nigerian dilemma, reconsidering the Federal Character principle for the interest of national integration and inter-group relations in Nigeria and finally, the conclusion.

II. THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Issues that demands subjection to rigorous intellectual conceptualisation and exploration here are; national integration, inter-group relations and Federal Character Principle as they underlined the analysis that is conducted in this paper.

a) *National Integration*

The concept of integration as crafted by Emile Durkhem¹ cited in A. F. Usman and G. O. Odeh, gained practical currency in the 18th and all through the 19th centuries as they utmost desire of nation state became largely collective transcending individual parochial needs. Consequently, as the wind of political reformism swept through entire globe, the phenomenon found its relevance in a multi-ethnic setting like Nigeria. The concept of integration embraces the following;

- (a) Incorporating diverse cultures and traditions into one,
- (b) Act of dismantling ethnic primordial ties, wedding all ethnic groups into one functional geo-polity and therefore shifting the locus of loyalties towards a homogenous and not heterogeneous nation,

Author: Department of History Usmanu Danfodiyo University PMB 2346 Sokoto-Nigeria. e-mail: afusman2000@yahoo.com

- (c) A state of minimized tension, conflicts, acrimony, suspicion, prejudice, segregation and engineering harmonious co-existence, interactive adjustment, high level of tolerance,
- (d) Holistic commitment to the aspirations and ideas of a single entity in which everybody is happily identified and participates easily and,
- (e) A mechanism of holding a society together.²
- (f) Extrapolating from the above, the concept of national integration connotes bringing together culturally and socially divergent groups into a singular territorial unit like Nigerian State. This kind of socio-cultural and political homogeneity should be a logical consequence or function of productive inter-group relations.

b) *Inter- Group Relations*

Since the time M. Sherif, argues that there are instances of inter-group relations each time people act or interact individually or collectively,³ inter-group relations has been offered varieties of conception. A E. Afigbo cited in Okpeh O. Okpeh Jr, opines that 'inter-group relations presupposes contacts and interaction between group each of which has an identity to make some inputs into the relationship, in short, each of which has some scope and area of autonomous action'.⁴

This conception shows that the phenomenon is a social one as it deals with human beings a logical consequence of human contact predicated on their behaviour and contributions. N. Nwabueze, frame the phenomenon thus:

...the simple or complex, conflicting or accommodating, cooperating, consensus, peaceful or acrimonious, intense, dense or indifferent way that one group is connected or associated with another in the course of their interaction with each other. Inter-group relations as a study focuses essentially on the series of methods, strategies or approaches to the understanding of separate groups and creating or building bridges across potential or actual conflict relationships, or directly promoting harmony. It may also be repackaged curriculum for conflict management and containment based on scientific understanding of group characteristics and a more accurate capacity to predict the patterns of prejudices, preferences, and statements among and between groups in interaction with one another.⁵

This conceptualisation raises two basic issues. First, that inter-group relations is the nature or pattern of contact that come to bear as group interact with one another. Secondly, that it is a study of the mechanism of interactions among and between groups. This conception in part compromised the differences between inter-group relations and national integration as both are engaged in the issues of contact and co-existence among groups but the former remained largely a study than just a phenomenon like the later.

c) *Federal Character Ideology*

Arising from the challenges group differences thrown on national integration project and inter-group relations in Nigerian State, the Federal Character Principle was developed as an accommodative ideology targeted at creating the enabling environment for equitable and fair representation⁶ that could guarantee the success of national integration and inter-group relations exercise. The 1976 constitution drafting committee, the report of which largely led to the institutionalisation of Federal Character conceptualises it 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 national (notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish and harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria).⁷

The 1979 constitution repealed the 1976 conceptualisation and replaced the clause in the bracket with "a sense of belonging to the nation as expressed in section 14 (3) and (4) of the said 1979 constitution". Section 14 (3) defined the focus of Federal Character thus:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies be carried out in such manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies.⁸

The provisions of the 1979 re-echoed in the 1999 constitution, which still states that:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct to its affairs shall be carried in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote unity... ensuring that there is no predominance of persons from a few ethnic or their sectional groups.⁹

In pursuant to the provisions of the above constitutions, other provisions were made to ensure the conduct of the affairs at the federal level, state and local government recognised the diversity of Nigerian people, with its area of jurisdiction with the aim of creating a sense of belonging so long as the project of integration and inter-group relations is concern.

d) *Structural Polarity Theory*

This theoretical framework advocates for the construction of a working mechanism that could foster inter-ethnic cohesion under a democratic and just scheme. Nkom cited in Okpeh O. Okpeh Jr, put it more clearly that:

The problem of national integration (...if you like inter-group relations... *emphasis added*) resolves round the issues of building a just and democratic social order which gives every individual a sense of belonging, which guarantees each person a satisfactory level of participation and development and which ensure for a people a share of resources of society commensurate with decent acceptable living.¹⁰

The problems of inter-group relations and national integration hovers on the issues of just social order that could serve as a fulcrum and diffuser of tensions as groups interacts with one another. It is within this theoretical ambit one situate the analysis done in this paper so as to see how far federal character has fare in the enterprise of national integration and inter-group relations in Nigeria since inception.

III. FEDERAL CHARACTER AS AN ACCOMMODATING MECHANISM FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTER- GROUP RELATIONS: THE NIGERIAN DILEMMA

Decades after the encapsulation of the Federal Character clauses in Nigerian constitution issues of national integration, inter-group relations and national development took a different dimension arisen from serious issues the applicability of the phenomenon raises, what the paper considers as dilemma within the context of national integration and inter-group relations.

a) *The Flaw in Nigerian Constitution on Issues of Citizenship and Indigene-ship*

The constitution that produced federal character carried along inherent tug-of war between the claims of citizenship and indigene-ship or nativity. With the acknowledgement of this adherent challenges the Political Bureau which was set up to examine and address the issue in 1986 as cited in M. L. Bello recommends that 'the constitutional definition of Nigerian citizenship should, as a matter of urgency, be studied with a view to removing the difficulties and anomaly arising from the interpretation of the relevant section of the 1979 constitution'.¹¹

In short, the crash between the citizenship rights and that of indigene-ship in the constitution seems to be rocking the boat of national integration and inter-group relations in Nigeria. This was what made Ayoade cited in E. C. Ayangaor, to contends that:

A dangerous dichotomy has developed between Nigerian citizenship and nativity of a State similar to the situation in the colonial period when Nigerians living outside their States of origin were regarded as "native foreigners". This category of Nigerians do not enjoy full citizenship rights in those States to which they migrated.¹²

The above demonstrates sufficiently that the operationalisation of the constitution and the principle of federal character seek to disintegrate rather than integrate. This therefore hinders inter-group relations and demands a serious revisit.

b) *North/South Dichotomy*

The principle of federal character tends to institutionalise North-South dichotomy instead of uniting them and promoting positive inter-group relations. Arising from the philosophical premise the policy suffers using the word of Ayoade,¹³ the challenge has been that; while the North conceptualises it to be synonymous with quota system and a means for proportional absorption into federal institutions, the South comprehends it as an attempt by the North to penetrate into area which they regarded as "theirs". This North-South differences based on suspicion of ethnic domination is responsible for series of political compromises and manoeuvres, untidy unions and unholy alliances including emergence of ethnic militias. The Federal Character has fundamentally failed to douse this fear but instead created and widen the North-South divide and engendered mutual distrust and tension, which are impediment to integration and inter-group relations.

c) *Challenge of Mass Mobilisation*

Federal Character constitutes a serious impediment to mass mobilisation for development and by the way creates the enabling environment for maintaining an oppressive social order. Social order or mobilisation here as conceptualised by the Directorate mean;

The process of pooling together, harnessing, actualising and utilising potential human resources for the purpose of development. It is the process whereby human beings are made aware of the resources at their disposal, and also motivated and energised to collectively utilise such resources for the improvement of their spiritual and material conditions of living.¹⁴

Nigeria's case is not the issues of awareness of the resources at our disposal as we have graduated beyond that level. The grand challenge now is that of pooling together freely without any forms of discrimination or barrier our human resources from diverse ethnic affiliations for collective interest. This is what Federal Character would not allow giving its restrictive posture that is anti-national integration and anti inter-group relations; the two precursors to national development. In short, it is documented that federal character was applied in selecting football players in national team; the result of which was lost of all the matches.¹⁵ The initiators and operators of the phenomenon takes equality for freedom and freedom for equality thus, upsetting the applecart. The implication of this kind of choice is well captures in the

words of Milton Friedman that; A society that puts equality before freedom, will get neither but a society that puts freedom before equality will get a high degree of both.¹⁶ Federal character recognised ethnic differences and even region thereby preaching a very limited freedom and equality. Freedom and equality it stands for, is only limited to ethnic and regional confines and as such fails to give inter-group relations and national integration a wider constituency to operate. This shows constraints on the kind of role individuals or groups are allowed to play and the kind of partner they can choose in transactions.¹⁷

d) *The Widened Gap between the Ruling Class and the Masses*

As an ideology of the minority ruling class the constitution, guaranteeing it is crafted to defend their interests. Its provisions hold a lot of promise to the economically dominant class. It primarily draws attention from the internal economy where the masses swim in abject poverty and material want, and secondly, legalises the dominant and exploiting class position in our society. The petty bourgeoisies such as the top ranks in the arm forces, civil services, politicians compete amongst themselves for the share of the State property and privileges. It is this inter and intra-class division within the ruling or economically dominant class that Federal Character is scheme to give cover and on this note it cannot give ethnic balancing for which is supposed to but enthrone ethnicity and division.¹⁸

e) *The Definition of National Integration and Inter-Group Relations*

The working of Federal Character Principle undermines and repudiates the very and various definitions of inter-group relations and national integration. While both phenomenon stands for positive interactions that cut across social, economic, political and cultural layers of the society, cooling tensions and leading to homogenous setting,¹⁹ Federal Character is based on the adoration of ethnic dichotomy. As a matter of fact, the ideology of the Federal Character re-enforces the parochial, particularist orientations and ethnic cum tribal attachments of Nigerians. This development informs and forms the root of disaffection that has hindered interaction among various Nigerian groups. In brief, the Federal Character equation and formula has not arrived at the answer to the problem of minorities especially where there is minorities in the minority.²⁰

From all that have said so far, as long as the application of the doctrine of Federal Character perpetually discriminates against one group at the detriment of the other, national integration and inter-group relations are hamper. Its application equally contravenes the principle of distributive justice, as it stands confused on the issue of arithmetical equality and proportional equality. States are not equal on two

main grounds; population and the number of eligible candidates for appointment. Its applicators or operators fail to note this and therefore, apply simple arithmetic equality where the equality of all states is concerned. Nevertheless, it is significant to stress here that the highest level of inequality is the equal treatment of unequal. Proportional equality seems more just than arithmetical equality, which is discriminatory and fundamentally militates against inter-group relations and national integration.

IV. RECONSIDERING THE FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE FOR THE INTEREST OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTER-GROUP RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

From all that has been analysed so far, it is abundantly clear that the principle of Federal Character is a very delicate one that demands flexibility and rigidity at the same time. The allocation of resources and power distribution, privileges and liabilities need to follow a unanimously agreed pattern both in thoughts and in practices. Given the background history of our country, issues of ethnic identity, citizenship and proportional representation are significant front burner of Federal Character Principle as it defines the very nature of inclusiveness, sense of belonging and participation as well as inter-group relations and national and integration. Flowing from this, the first step is to redefine citizenship and indigene-ship rights in the broader context of our national interest. Nigerians born in other States or local government areas after specifies number of years should be declare indigene of their place of birth and those who are born to non-indigene parents after primary, secondary education with mastery of the language of the local area once they reach a specify age should be declare indigene. This with resident rights to any Nigerians, who choose to reside in any parts of the country and their ability to vote and be vote for, would correct some anomaly in the constitution. This therefore means the demands of the constitution for indigene-ship as criteria for citizenship need to be review.

Secondly, Nigerians need a serious purging and re-orientation against the backdrop of the fact that many of their political, social, economic and cultural behaviours of the leaders or ruling class originates from primitive accumulation derives. This is the situation of the class that crafted Federal Character and often times manipulates it for their interest. Though one may not excuse the constitution of being part of our problem, the challenges did not completely lay in its bosom. E. Toyo, puts this succinctly that:

No constitution is a perpetual perfection. The trick of the bourgeoisie all along is to ignore the real cause of acrimony and conflict in Nigerian political life and shift

the blame on the constitution. Yet a whole eternity of repeated constitutions cannot restore patriotism, create honesty and cannot end the perennial tugs-of-war which are invitation to power hungry military opportunists.²¹

E. O. Nwabueze, re-enforces this that 'a constitution, however carefully constructed, cannot function among a people fundamentally at odds with one another'.²² Stemming from Toyo and Nwabueze's observation, one note that constitution is written by people for people and operated by people. Nwabueze, may be corrected that Nigerian people are not completely at odd with one another and they had history of closer and beneficial ties with one another before the colonialism messed things up. Be that as it may, until the reorientation is done through series of serious purging and Nigerian ruling class are completely liberated from primitive accumulative tendencies the idea of Federal Character operating in a way and manner that could guarantee national integration and positive inter-group relation would remain a mirage.

Thirdly, inter-group relations and national integration may be encourage if the Federal Character functions as a reciprocal system or mechanism in cooling ethnic and regional differences. The system should work like that of division of labour. This will make the oil producing communities to be aware that their very existence depends on food producing areas or vice-verse and the grain producers as well depend on the tuber-producers, etc.,.

Fourthly, the ideas of moving towards classical or true federalism need to be de-emphasised. True federalism means a federal arrangement with clear demarcation of power and functions among all levels of government. Though there has been a serious clamour for this, it is no longer fashionable. Ranjit Sarkaria cited in Elaigwu, put this properly that:

The classical concept of federation, which envisaged two parallel governments of coordinate jurisdiction, operating in isolation from each other in water tight compartment, is no where a functional reality now. With the emergence of the social welfare State, the traditional theory of federation completely lost its ground. After First World War, it became very much a myth even in old federations... by the middle of the twentieth century; federalism has come to be understood as dynamic process of cooperation and shared action between two or more levels of government, with increasing interdependence and centrist trends.²³

As it is in the twenty-first century, the old conceptualisation of autonomy of component units in their area of jurisdiction has given way to cooperation, interdependence and interactions. This arises from the complexity of the modern state and government, the need for homogeneity as well as foreign trade and

globalisation that preaches relations across ethnic borderlands.

Finally, there is a need for constitutionally guarantee rotational presidency between zones and between minority and majority ethnic groups. Presently, the constitution recognised six geo-political zones in the country; this may serve as the platform for zoning. The zoning system should be held with utmost sense of sanctity far beyond political manoeuvring as tempering with it could destroy the very existence of the country and thereby marring national integration and inter-group relations.

V. CONCLUSION

This historical piece is not essentially poised to praise or condemn the Federal Character Principle. Neither was it its intention to criticise any group of people or class in contemporary Nigerian State. Its target is to analyse the success of the Federal Character as an accommodating ideology crafted by the ruling elite or class for promoting inter-ethnic cohesion or inter-group relations in Nigerian States with the aim of suggesting possible ways of making it more result-oriented. It is noted that the ideology of federalism is rooted in the trouble or trauma of ethnicity orchestrated by colonial tactics of divide and rule and that the applicability of the Federal Character Principle has raised fundamental challenges that has grievously defeated its objective. Thus, the weeping of marginalisation and violent agitation among diverse ethnic element that made up Nigerian State. The peace therefore submit that with the review of some sections of the constitution, value re-orientation, enshrinement of rotational presidency in the constitution, discountenance of the ideal of moving to classical federalism and addressing other issues that touches privileges of Nigerian people, distribution of power and resources, the phenomenon will become more relevant as an integrative mechanism. Otherwise, the principle that robs Ahmed to pay Musa cannot unit Ahmed and Musa, neither can it enhance relations among them.

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