

FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

JONATHAN OKERE (PhD)
Department of Political Science,
Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State.
Email: okererejoice22@gmail.com

&

ANTHONY NGONADI
Department of Political Science,
Tansian University Umunnya, Anambra State.
Email: manton47@yahoo.com

Abstract

A major contentious issue in Nigeria's convoluting federalism currently is the issue of equitable power and resources distribution. Like virtually all other multi-ethnic states, Nigeria is faced with the problem of 'equitocracy'. The aforementioned problems have given rise to the study. This study examines the issue of Federal character principle and how it can bring about national integration in Nigeria. This study is anchored on Gabriel Almond's structural functionalism theory. The theory is based on the notion that each section of the federation which represents a political system has to perform certain functions and should be accorded a fair opportunity to do so. This paper adopted secondary method of data collection. In the course of the research, the paper discovered that Nigeria lacks the federal temperament and spirit required for the successful implementation of federal character principle. Despite the laudable aims and objectives of the principle, it is still unattainable in Nigeria mainly because of the aforementioned reason. In a bid to feel the impact of federal character principle which will enhance National Integration, the paper however recommends a holistic reform of the system to enhance the much desired integration in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Federal,, Character, Principle, National, Integration*

Introduction

Nigeria is multiethnic society consisting of about 300 ethnic groups. It is a well known fact that Nigeria is a colonial creation. Awolowo (1947) pointed out that Nigeria was "a mere geographical expression". This means that in terms of social relations and national identification, Nigeria was not yet a nation by 1947. As a multinational society, one of the sociological problems of building Nigeria as a nation is multi-ethnicity with its concomitants such as multilingualism and competitive ethnicity. Prior to the coming of the Europeans to Nigeria, the indigenous Nigerian societies were not static and they were not in equilibrium relations. There were varieties of links which existed between the various states and peoples which were links among Kanem Borno, the Hausa States, Nupe, the Jukun Kingdom, the empires of Oyo and Benin, the Delta States and the loosely associated Igbo communities (Hodkins 1960:2).

These various societies though interdependent, apparently did not set up the process to constitute themselves into a society yet they provided socio-cultural framework for all Nigerian society, their relations with one another according to Otite (1979) were as important as their relations with societies outside the boundary of Nigeria. Ethnographers estimate that over 250 ethnic groups make up Nigeria. Each of these consists of smaller social groups for example the Yoruba consists of the Ekiti, Ijesha, Oyo and so on. The Igbo consists of Oguta, Ohafia, Ngwa, Aro etc, the Urhobo of Agbarho, Agbon, Ugheli and others. The Hausa have their various indigenous states; none of these groups however large was a nation in any sense before the colonial regrouping. It was the colonial government that merged them together in 1914 and later Balkanized Nigeria into three regions in 1947 along ethnic lines. According to Mezieobi (1994), whatever is

done or anticipated in Nigeria, particularly at government quarters had ethnic undertone. In employment, admissions into schools, distribution of social amenities and in social relationships, ethnic affiliations and attachments are very strong and conspicuously manifest. Attachment of a Nigerian first to his ethnic group before the nation is a bane to Nigeria's national unity, national consciousness and socio-political integration (Mezieobi 1994). There have been cases of multi-ethnic vices such as allegiance to ethnic group intra cultural and inter-ethnic antagonism, hostility, aggression, bitterness, hatred, and mistrust in the country which have not augured well for the building of a virile Nigerian nation. Rather than harnessing our diversities towards viable nation building, we have become slaves to our ethnic origin to which our allegiance is largely focused at the detriment of nation building.

As Coroma (1987), noted, that in the light of the above multiethnic configuration of the Nigerian State, Nigerian federal character principle was an expression intended to guarantee participation of the various ethnic group in the country. The expression federal character was given special prominence by its use in General Murtala's 18th October, 1975 speech. In the two branches of government, the executive and the legislature, the requirement of Federal Character is met.

According to Komeyi (2009); the Federal Character principle which gave rise to quota system in Nigeria, was established to solve the problems of inequality and marginalization as expected by certain parts of Nigeria. Among other reasons for introducing the quota system were because of difference in the socio-economic development of different parts of Nigeria. Secondly, there were disparities in the levels of educational developments in different parts of the country. Some sections of the country (North) were alleged to be educationally disadvantaged, while some regions (South) of the country were claimed to be educationally advantaged. (Komeyi 2009).

Komeyi (ibid), further noted that the past leadership of Nigeria thought it wise to introduce quota system so as to bridge the gap. The Federal Character principle was adopted during the 1977 Constitutional Drafting Committee. It became part of 1979 Constitution of Nigeria. From this point in our nation's history, the questions of merit or competitiveness among Nigerians were not set aside in place of quota system. This system has hindered development and it defiles all logic, as noted by Komeyi.

Regional inequalities in Nigeria, as in many other developing countries, have a long history. These disparities in income, social and economic opportunities are traceable partly to the random distribution of natural resources and partly to historical legacies of past administration. The political economy of managing and allocating the limited national product in any heterogeneous society calls for a good deal of statesmanship, an appreciation of the interest and sensibilities of the various groups and an acceptance of the dire need for balanced development and equitable access to socio-economic opportunities (Ezenwa 1987). According to Ezenwa (1987) in his study of participatory politics: The socio-economic dimension, he noted that it is perhaps in recognition of the importance of fair distribution of the fruits of progress from the standpoint of political stability of Nigeria that the constitution expressly states that: That 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 also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies (Section 14 (3)).

Conceptual Clarification

Interestingly, federal character and national integration are like two peas in a pod in the sense that federal character necessitates National Integration. The implementation of federal character in revenue allocation, Employment, will instill national development, stability and integration in our political system. The above brings forth the question what is federal character?

Federal Character

According to Afigbo (1989:3) the term federal character is one of the inventions of the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) inaugurated by the late General Murtala Mohamed on 18th October, 1975". Other scholars merely traced the origin of federal character to the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Afigbo (1989) corroborated the view, when he argues that "it was in the course of the debate on that

section of the report of the sub-committee on the executive and the legislature which dealt with how to promote national loyalty in a multi-ethnic society that the phrase - federal character was coined". As defined by the constitutional drafting committee (CDC) and enshrined in Section 14(3) of the 1979 Constitution; Federal Character implies the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and 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 group, in that government or any of its agencies. The federal character principle essentially refers to the recognition of the plural nature of the country in recruitment, distribution of administrative and political offices and power as well as the resources of the country (Obiyan, 1998). In conclusion, Answer.Com (2012) sees federal character as a principle which ensures equitable allocation of the nation's resources and also equitable representation of citizens of a country so that no section or segment of the country's population is marginalized or oppressed. This is a basic feature of federalism or federal system of government.

National Integration

According to Durverger (1980:220) national integration is the process of unifying a society, which tends to make it a harmonious city based upon an order, its members regarded as equitably harmonious. This implies that national integration, requires harmony, but the fact is that not all harmonious cities are integrated. Again, integration is a process which permits interaction, which could not be attained by staying apart. Nnoli (1986) defined National Integration as corporation rather than conflict and disagreement that characterize the interaction between members of the society. Nnoli further attributed conditions of extreme socio-economic scarcity, hostility, prejudice, antagonism and conflict among individuals, groups and collectivities as hindrances to national integration. From the above, National Integration implies the evading of all ethnic biases, ties and affiliation and the trapping of these variables by a higher and central authority for the purpose of national unity, stability and development. On the other hand, Amitai Etzion (1965:4) has argued that a community is integrated when "(a) it has effective control over the use of the means of violence (b) it has a center of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards and (c) it is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens".

On the other hand, National Integration is an important aspect of Federal Character principle. It deals with harmonizing the nation together. For Tahir (1986), National integration is the emergence of a situation in which every citizen is a perfect substitute for any other citizen for the purpose of election and recruitment to perform socially determined roles subject only to qualification of residence and technical competence.

Coleman and Roseberg (1958) posits that national integration is the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tension and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous territorial community.

Haas (1974) defined national integration as a process whereby political actors in distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing nation-state.

Methodology

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

Theoretical Framework.

Structural Functionalism Theory

This theory is based on the notion that each section of the federation which represents a political system has to perform certain functions and to be given a fair opportunity to do same. It is in fact on the basis of the efficiency with which the section performs the function assigned to it as a political system that its stature in the scale of National integration is determined.

Almond used a seven-variable list of functional categories, four of which are input functions performed by non-governmental subsystems and the remaining three are output functions performed by the government. The input functions include; interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication and political

socialization while the output functions include lawmaking, law implementation and adjudication. However, Almond is not aware of the fact that certain structures meant to perform certain functions are usually dysfunctional especially in developing countries like Nigeria due to the inability of the system to guarantee a fair representation leading to a state of disequilibrium. This study considers this theoretical perspective relevant because it explains the nature of Nigeria Federal character and National integration. Nigeria is a Federal state with a population that is culturally and ethnically diverse. The diverse interest through the process of interest aggregation and articulation make demands to the government in the form of input which after going through a conversation process, comes as an output from the government in form of the role of adjudication, rule making and application. More so, in a democratic system, it is also not every demand that goes into the system in the form of input that is supportive of it. The democratically elected person must thus possess capabilities of extraction of resources of regulation over individuals and of distribution of goods and services in order to respond positively to demands. In the exertion of both the input and output functions by the various interests in the country and the federal government respectively, with particular reference to Nigeria Federal Character Principle.

Historical Background Of Federal Character Principle In Nigeria

It will be recalled that the idea and pragmatic approach to the issue of Federal character has been with us long before independence. It was known by different nomenclatures such as zoning or quota system. It was intended to take care of the bipolar Nigeria' the North and South. It will be recalled too that Federal character or quota system of representation became an issue in 1953 arising directly from the motion that Nigeria should have self government by 1956. The motion was sponsored by the Action Group (AG), the party in control of Western Nigeria. The motion was supported by the NCNC, the dominant party in Eastern Nigeria. It was opposed by the North People's Congress (NPC), the governing party in Northern Nigeria. There followed very sharp disagreement between the Northern Nigeria leaders who wanted to be self-governing "as soon as practicable" and the Southern leaders who supported 1956.

The bitter disagreement was resolved only when it was agreed that a federation form of government should replace the unitary form of government then in operation. It was agreed that each region could attain self-government whenever it wished. Consequently, Nigeria became a federation of three regions namely, the Eastern, the Northern and the Western Regions. residual powers were vested in the Regions, in effect making them more powerful than the centre. It could be said that in terms of the well being of the people, the Federal arrangement engendered cooperation and healthy competition amongst the regions in harnessing national resources for social and economic development of the respective regions. Between October 1954 when Nigeria became a Federation and October, 1960 when it gained independence, the idea of fair representation of all the regions in Federal appointments became accepted but without specific quotas then, it was only in recruitment into the officer corps of the Armed Forces and the Police that a quota system applied on the basis of equal numbers between the North and the South were created to replace the four Regions and the formula was reviewed and applied on the basis of equal numbers from each state. This has been the policy up to date. There was no similar emphasis on the policy to apply to other areas of Federal establishments.

However, in the case of junior officers in the civil service, emphasis was laid on the staffing of branch officers in the regions (and later in the states) with local indigenes. In this connection, the Federal Public Service Commission issued a policy circular in August, 1960 and again in April, 1985 directing all ministries and Federal agencies to recruit mostly the indigenes of the locality where they had branch offices to fill vacancies in the junior levels, i.e. the staff equivalent of those currently on Grade Level 101-06 (E.C.C. First Annual Report, 1997:1-3).

But it was not until the Second Republic (1979-1983), when it was formally entrenched in the constitution. The spirit of this principle was defined in a supplementary clause of the 1979 Constitution as "the distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria sense of belonging". The constitution went to a great extent to make provision that will aid the actualization of the principle. These included provisions that certain national federal offices should be spread among the constituent states or regions of the country. The same is to apply at the state and local government levels. Further additions to the list of organization/positions of which Federal character was to be applied was made by the 1989 and the 1999 constitution. According to the report of the presidential committee on

the review of the 1999 Constitution, “Federal Character” of Nigeria refers to “the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation as expressed in Section 22(3) and (4) of the constitution”. The committee extends the tentacle of the principle to embrace what it calls “equal opportunity”, which refers to the distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to prohibit any form of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, place of origin, religion, political opinion or disability in respect to access to political, social, economic, education and employment opportunity as expressed in Section 50 (Report of the Presidential Commission on the Review of the 1999 Constitution 2001:126-127).

In essence, the federal character principle should apply to all the three tiers of government in the federation, to consolidate the federal set-up and play down all centrifugal and centripetal force which can disintegrate the polity. This is the reason why at the national level, all the states of the federation are adequately represented in the federal executive council. Similarly, state governments are expected to do the same thing for all the local governments and communities within the areas of jurisdiction. For easy administration of Federal Character principle, the 1995 Constitution conference divided the country into six geopolitical zones among which the highest national officers are to rotate. The zones are: (1) South-West, (2) South-South (3) South-East, (4) North-Central, (5) North-West, and (6) North-East, although this was not enshrined in the 1999 Constitution.

In conclusion, constitutional niceties, a federal character commission was established by Decree No. 34 of 1996 to “promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of proportional sharing or distribution of all cadres of public positions and socio-economic services, amenities and infrastructural facilities throughout the federation” and to take necessary legal measures against any public official who fails to comply with any federal character principle or formula prescribed or adopted by the Commission” (Policy Briefs, 2008).

Imperative Of Federal Character Principle and The Quest for National Integration

Nigeria’s historical antecedence points a gloomy scenario of the tensions, crisis and problems that are endemic in the Nigerian body polity. There exists an issue of who gets what, which gives rise to mutual suspicion and unhealthy rivalries and which generate inter-group frictions and so exacerbate the disintegration rather than promote the unity of the country. (Agbodike 1998) The national question which has found expression in such phenomena as the census, political party representation, revenue allocation, the failure of the military administrative experiment of General Ironsi’s government and the question of survival of the federation after the blood civil war (1967-70), continue to pose a serious threat to the country. The creation of new states institutionalized another monster of statism by the power brokers from the North (Ibid).

Thus to resolve these issues and to ensure structural balance of claims and gains by the various groups and interests in Nigeria, the federal character principle was conceived and its application became imperative as a directive principle of state policy. The term federal character, was coined by the constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) which drafted 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The term gained wide currency and usage after it was embodied in that constitution (Ibid).

These constitutional provisions were respectively repeated verbatim in Sections 15(3) and 15(4) of the 1989 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and also the 1999 Constitution as amended (Ibid).

In adopting the principle of Federal character, the CDC recognized the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society. The CDC therefore decided to entrench the formula in the constitution to check these cleavages, ensure orderly progress of the country and “to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation” (Ibid).

The idea of Federal character principle is not new. Its informal origin date back to the pre-independence days of nationalist agitation for participation in the administration of colonial Nigeria and especially after Nigeria became a formal federation in the fifties. Originally, during its informal application, the Federal character principle was mainly concerned with legislative representation and equalization of inter-regional opportunities in education and appointments at the Federal level. But in its present formalized and

institutionalized form, as embodied in the 1979, 1989 and 1999 constitutions, virtually every sphere of federal, state and local government operations is involved and consequently politicized (Ibid).

To ensure the smooth application and operation of the Federal character principle, create a sense of belonging and hope in all Nigerians and strengthen the nation's unity and stability, the 1995 Draft Constitution went further to provide for a Federal Character Commission. This Commission is empowered to work out an equitable formula for the distribution of all cadres of posts; to monitor, promote and enforce compliance with the principles of proportional sharing of posts at all levels of government; and to take measures to prosecute heads of any ministry, body or agency who fail to comply with the formula.

Challenges to The Successful Implementation of Federal Character Principle

The implementation of the Federal Character principle has caused a lot of tension among the different federating units in the country. The reasons for the tension it breeds are many, most especially the fozziness that pervaded its application in certain areas; though celebrated by some as the “cornerstone of ethnic justice and fair government in Nigeria”. The federal character principle has also been denounced by others as a euphemism for federal discrimination at best or geographical apartheid” at worst (Suberu, 2001). The basic reason for this is that the policy suffers from a faulty philosophical premise. It is a policy supposedly to have been designed to create a balance. But it ended up benefitting the ruling class in the Nigerian context, resulting in the further disempowerment of the powerless. The consequence is that it removed the check and balances in the formal arrangement that existed before. Since the emphasis was in the non-task inscriptive consideration, it resulted in a geometric diffusion of mediocrity, public service ineptitude and manifest decline in public morale (Ayoade 1998).

Not only that, the principle in practice has the problem of over generalization to areas where the problems of imbalance do not exist even within the same ethnic group. Because of this principle, federal states and local governments are likely to be overstretched by the mandate of the federal character appointment in the sense that where portfolios cannot go round either at federal or state levels, the groups or zones without representation in terms of political appointment may feel alienated somehow. Thus, the policy is engendering federal instability rather than integration (Oyo, 1996:9).

Perhaps the most chronic of the banes of the principle of federal character in Nigeria is that, it potentially invades the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and such other government bodies that normally requires safeguard, from the ravages of politics. For instance, the way officers are brought into the federal civil service to fill the quotas of states that are underrepresented in some areas without regard to experience and the desire to balance equity considerations with those of efficiency have equally affected morale of more qualified and experienced staff from other areas that are superseded; whereas, federal countries like India have devised means of addressing the resultant contradiction and conflict between the drive for efficiency of meritocracy and the push for inclusiveness in the public service, as required by the federal character principle. In India, equity and inclusion are pursued only at the entry level into the service. From there all progress is a matter of individual merit based” usually on continued success at the All-India Civil Service examinations. This enables individuals to strive for excellence and personal advancement. Additionally, the state benefits in that efficiency and meritocracy are not sacrificed on the late of inclusiveness.

Another observable pitfall of the principle and its application is the unofficial policy of elimination by substitution, which makes it counter-productive. For fairness sake, why should somebody be retrenched, purged, sacked or removed unnecessarily from public service in the name of “federal character” because its operators wanted to put a northerner or the kinsman in such a position”? A national weekly commented extensively on “ethnic cleansing” at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Decrying a system like that, the paper wrote inter alia, “no country can long endure where a section with no justifiable reason(s) whatsoever, should hold others to ransom. History has not recorded such ‘endurance’ but has recorded the tragic failure of such attempts...” (Sunday Tribune 16 July, 1995).

Similarly, in his insightful appraisal of the policy, Ayoade (1998) noted that “as long as the application of the principle discriminates against one group and favour another, no unity can result from such an exercise”. The application is also falsifiable because distributive justice which it aims to achieve is of two types viz; arithmetical equality is the equality of all states, which is assumed. But states are not equal in population and

they are far from being equal too in the size of the pool of eligible candidates for appointment. There is no greater inequality from the equal treatment of the unequals even more appropriately; the appointment must reflect the size of the eligible candidates for state so that excellence is rewarded. Competent people who are disqualified on the ground of state of origin and such other spurious criteria cannot be a willing material on which to erect the unity of the nation. They must feel wanted in order to volunteer themselves for national service (Ayoade, 1998).

It is equally fitting to note that attempts to correct imbalances against disadvantaged regions and social groups are often negative and indeed sometimes punitive, contributing to more inter-group disaffection and mutual suspicion. The policy boundary between the pursuit of meritocracy and mediocrity becomes unwittingly, if not deliberately blurred (Ayoade, 1982:8). When the principle is aggressively pursued in the university and extends to the appointment and promotion of academic and administrative staff under the euphemism of geographical balance and catchment area, even if it means (as it now increasingly does that every young lecturer is made to act as heads of department over and above senior colleagues) simply to fulfill the objective of ethnic balancing (Abovade, 1982:89), one cannot but bemoan the demoralizing effects of the policy on senior colleagues.

From another point of view, the policy as being implemented in Nigeria is elitist and class based (Adebisi, 1989). The effects of the federal character doctrine have always been a source of controversies, deepened by the scarcity of reliable data on the issue and the difficulty of monitoring performance (or lack of performance). Support for the federal character principle is usually justified on the basis of the lack of a genuine alternative (Federal Service base on merit considered an illusory) or the dangers of returning to the past experience (referred as “winner-takes-all” political competition of the sixties).

Be that as it is, in an extensive nationwide survey carried out by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the impact of the ‘federal character policy on citizenship was explored. It is widely believed that it has created three types of Nigerian citizens:

- The most privileged and those who belong to the indigenous communities of the state in which they reside.
- Those citizens who are indigenes of other states are less favoured.
- The least privileged are those citizens that are able to prove that they belong to a community indigenous to any state in

Nigeria, and women married to men from states other their own. Idea (2000:100-101).

The organization observed further that such a multiple system of citizenship inevitably engenders discrimination in jobs, land purchases, housing, admission to educational institutions, marriages, business transactions and the discrimination of social welfare services. Most of the respondents agreed that this situation should change to one in which citizenship is based solely on residence.

It is in view of the aforementioned pitfalls of the implementation of Federal Character Principle in Nigeria that General Abacha’s military administration created federal character commission in 1995 to stem widespread complaints of marginalization, deprivation and imbalances in the Nigerian polity through a fair distribution of services, goods and socio-economic amenities provided by government ministries, parastatals, corporations, agencies and institutions at the federal, state and local government levels. In other words, the commission was established as one of the channels for the attainment of peaceful coexistence and stability in the country (Newswatch, July 31, 2000:14-19). The impact of the commission is however yet to be felt.

Conclusion

It is an acknowledged fact that the federal character principle has gone a long way to reducing various factors of mutual distrust and rivalries among the diverse groups and interests in Nigeria. But it is instructive to note that while some gain in the process, others lose and so the implementation hurts in certain quarters. There is therefore the need for all groups, views and interests concerned to be consulted and taken into consideration in the course of its implementation. It is also important to ensure that those who implement the policy do not use it as an instrument of stifling the progress and initiative of any group nor as a punitive measure against any group. This calls for the emergence of an enlightened leadership imbued with the requisite statesmanship

to direct the affairs of the nation and ensure the continued survival of the peace, unity, stability and national integration of the country.

Ethnic differences and sectional interests should not be seen as an unmitigated evil. Rather, efforts should be made to transcend them, and to harness and incorporate their virtues in the march to stable and integrated nationhood. Nigerians should be made to stress more those things that unite than those things that separate them. They should see the Nigerian nation as the rope that ties up their common destiny. They should endeavour to rekindle the nationalist fervor which united all Nigerians from all corners of the country against colonial rule. In so doing, however, they should heed the warnings not to misconstrue the nationalism of the 'nouveau riche' with the well-being of the masses.

Above all, 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.

Recommendations

Despite the obvious shortcomings, and the controversies surrounding the notion and application of federal character, there seems to be a general acceptance of the principle as a normative expression of the equal rights of all Nigerians to participate in the political, administrative and economic affairs of the country. The formula has come to stay. What is therefore necessary to seek ways and means to make it less rancorous and problematic, and to channel it in such a way as to ensure the overall unity and progress of the country. On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are articulated:

First of all, the creation of state exercise should be carried out with caution. This is to ensure the viability of the states and their ability to discharge their statutory and other functions for the common good of all and orderly development of the country. Moreover, despite the multiplicity of states and local governments, it is still not possible or feasible to give ethnic group (some 250 of them) in Nigeria a state. The interest of the minorities in the present states and local governments who could not be given new states or local governments can be taken care of in other ways.

Efforts should be made through appropriate legislation to remove the 'indigene syndrome' engendered by the federal character principle and the discriminatory policies, laws and regulations which legalize its operations.

Again, the federal character principle should be applied with less stringency but with fairness among ethnic groups, states and local governments that are homogenous, to avoid creating cleavages and divisions where none may have, strictly speaking, existed. This will save such societies from undue polarization.

We share the view expressed by a former Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, that the principle of merit should not be completely sacrificed on the altar of federal character. The appointment of persons to various positions should be made from the best available in any group or section in the country.

Finally, it is worthy to note that the present application of the federal character principle is all bourgeois-oriented and does very little to relieve the plight of the masses of this country. For example, the indigenization policy which put capital in the hands of a few Nigerians did not benefit the masses.

The political system should arrest the exploitation of the masses and redress their feeling of insecurity. It is by tackling these crucial welfare issues that the great majority of Nigerians can develop a sense of national identity, transcending parochial loyalties of ethnicity, religion, language and region.

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