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**NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND FEDERAL CHARACTER
PRINCIPLE: THE CASE OF NIGERIA UNDER
MOHAMMADU BUHARI**

BY

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Abstract

Nigeria, like other African states is a creation of many historical developments. Colonialism for instance brought together people of diverse languages, religions, social, political and economic formations as well as dissimilar administrative styles, social norms, culture and values together into one indivisible entity called Nigeria, without consideration to her pre-colonial differences. It is commendable to note that since independence, Nigeria has contended with differences that existed between various ethnic groups in the country such as the problems of which ethnic group in the country controls the power apparatus of the nation, which section of the country is more educated and populous than the other, the issues of religious differences or even which section provides more resources for the country than the other etc. Consequently, exhausting all primary and secondary contributions subjected to historical analysis, the independence of the country brought afresh, the differences that had pre-dated the colonial conquest. Hence, in a way to contain the expressions of various claims by many ethno-religious groups in Nigeria,

successive administrations since independence had adopted one policy or the other such as federalism, the Quota System, National Youth Service Scheme, Affirmative Action and particularly the Federal Character Principle. Notably, these efforts as stated were to meet the desire of the people of Nigeria in order to promote national unity and integration in the country. The study, therefore, concludes that Buhari's regime has been the worst administration in violations of the Principles and thereby recommends that the most important task facing Nigeria is how to achieve national unity and integration in the country.

Keywords: Country, Nationalities, Ethnicity, Culture, Agitations

Introduction

Nigeria is a country that include people of diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and interest groups. However, it is on record that these various ethnic groups existed and lived independently of each other. Despite that there were traces of relations among them, none of the existing nationalities was able to establish political hegemony over the whole area until Britain in 1914 pronounced the amalgamation of these component units and named the area Nigeria. Thus colonialism brought together a people of different natures and character whose popular consent was not sorted into what is known today as “Nigeria” without taking cognizance of their pre-colonial background and this planted seeds of agitation and conflicts going forward. The abuse of federal character principle and national integration shall be the area of concentration of this study especially as it affects the growth and development of Nigeria under President Mohammadu Buhari and also in recognition of the views of prominent Nigerians and scholars on this study as a good number of eminent writers have dwelt

extensively on the issue in trying to proffer solutions out of the British imposed political arrangement that is distressing Nigeria.

Background

The political arrangement that gave birth to Nigeria was described by a scholar as a product of a British experiment in political cloning.¹ According to Ayode who aptly captured the situation in Nigeria while trying to describe the Nigerian situation, posits thus:

“For some, it was involuntary and shocking for yet others, it was for best an affection for unknown. But for all of them, it was forced brotherhood and sisterhood which has been the subject of continual thinking, panel beating and even attempted dissolution”²

Some scholars saw the 1914 amalgamation as a grave mistake and Nigerians across the North and South. According to Afigbo, the colonial administration bequeathed to their Nigerian wards an enduring legacy of mutual suspicion and contempt.³ No wonder why an elder statesman from Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello described Nigeria as a “Mistake of 1914.”⁴ The amalgamation did not make the North and South become “one” as the mutual suspicion amongst the various groups continued. As we find it today the whole arrangement and idea was to rather ensure exclusively economic and administrative convenience for the British Colonial government while neglecting the differences that both existed in the areas. These differences tend to generate mutual suspicion and misunderstanding which sometimes, results to conflict. Ironically, the erstwhile colonial authorities did not consider all these differences nor did they consult all the “stockholders”. A swift catastrophic result of this colonial self-seeking acts, led to thirty months of civil war that nearly

disintegrated the nation. The era of the civil war came with a challenge of re-integration and the re-integration has not been achieved up to date.

The questions are clear, has the Nigerian nationalists who fought for an independent country, the elites and her new rulers realized this aberration? Yes, and I repeat again yes because several comments and efforts from different administrations that tend to understand this error and at correcting this uncommon situation have since been pursued towards building a better and united country devoid of divisions. The next question should be are the Nigerian rulers committed to the national integration of their citizens and people and ensuring that equity, fairness and justice is done? The answer is No, most Nigerian leaders and politicians are yet to pragmatically commit to the principles of federal character, social consciousness and patriotism required because several of our leader's actions continued to promote imbalance and tribalism as against National Integration. How far has the federal character principle gone to achieving the extremely needed national integration? Yes, having gone through historical events and developments associated with Nigeria's independence and its desire to live in peace and unity, still the desired unity has not come. Thus, while it has always been the desire of the Nigerian people, some of the past statesmen and political leaders have failed to promote and achieve unity and the willpower to enforce such has always been lacking. Therefore, the institutionalization of the federal character principle into the present Nigeria system as a policy decision has become one of the ways of erasing the mutual distrust that has sometimes in history led to pockets of uprisings in the country cutting across various sectors of the country. For example, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) was established to give effect to section 14 (3) and (4) of the Constitution. Thus, 14(3)

The composition of the Government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to commend national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies⁵.

The federal character principle was the brain-child of the constitutional drafting committee of 1975/1976. According to Amuwo,⁶ he notes that it was basically enacted just to promote understanding, fairness, harmony and impartiality in the distribution of public positions, socio-economic amenities and infrastructural facilities among the federating units of the federation. In addition, the policy was to cure and correct any perceived imbalance in the socio-political system of the country. Yet, there was never a time in Nigerian history when the dream of this principle or even that of national integration became as bad as under the Mohammadu Buhari tenure 2015 - 2023.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria in actual fact is a plural society, its constituent groups are divided apart from each other by significant differences in language, ethnicity, and culture in Nigeria, and this created differences in attitude, outlook and character thereby raising agitations. Faced with these problems, Nigeria adopted federalism as a means of achieving its much-needed goal of national integration. In essence, the federalism adopted is expected to reduce the immensely aggressive inter-ethnic competition and

tension, allay the usually apparent fear of domination, of bringing the government nearer to the people and give the different groups more opportunities, thereby integrating the country. National Integration requires sharing and decentralization of power among the component groups as well as ensuring that the various units endeavor to carry everyone along. It also requires that no component unit should be as large in size with the aim of eliminating others. The case of Nigeria shows that power is concentrated in the central government with various component groups relegated. On the other parts, there exists a fundamental disparity between northern, and southern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This scholarship rests on the structural functional methodology in evaluating the concerns reflected. The structural-functional approach provides a substantial mechanism for the analysis of many social processes. Having said so, a social structure is observed on the foundation of the roles it implements. Prominent scholars of this school are Talcott Parsons, Gabriel Almond, and Fred Riggs amongst others. It is also important to identify that the quarrels of this theory are that social structure does not exist inconsequentially but happens to perform explicit purposes. Social structure in this regard, can be either 'concrete' or 'analytic'. While concrete structures are those which have identifiable forms.⁷ The Federal Character Commission, The Unity Schools, National Youth Service Corps, all together have something unique they serve to accommodate the interest of all Nigerians irrespective of social status and tribe. While the 'analytic' is only identified as power and authority. While it is believed that it is hard to draw a clear-cut line between the two. This theory is important to the study because, the Federal Character principle has a clear objective, which is to advance national integration. The multiethnic, varied and noticeably dissimilar environment of the Nigerian state, as

expected forced our constitution to come up with this principle. Thus, it is essential that apart from the federal character principle, there are other mechanisms used in Nigeria to manage the heterogeneous and diverse nature of the Republic.

National Integration

Nigeria's ethnic problem is a foremost impediment to the existence of a Nigerian state from the time of the transition from colonial to neo-colonial dependence till the present day fourth republic which began in 1999. The problems generated by ethnicity can be seen completely in all the critical phases in Nigeria, be it its resource base, economic standpoint, democracy, the political party system, the electoral process and religion etc. The constant squabbles between the Yoruba, Ibos, the Hausa, or Fulani had always been a problem. Indeed, we have as many problems as who has produced the president most. Which religion has governed most? All these are questions we still see with our so-called class of intelligentsia⁸. Therefore, National integration therefore involves devotion which is a call for supreme sacrifice on the part of the entire citizenry for the whole country if the need arises.

Why National Integration? For the reason that it is clear that entities are the units of integration, and that members of a nation are integrated as they share a common identity. Thus, the term national integration is not applicable to a single nation, but involves two or more nations for example, the Igbo nation, the Hausa nation or even the Yoruba nation. Nigeria is made of about 250 ethnic groups⁹ the plurality of groups as in the case of Nigeria throw up centrifugal forces that tend to tear the country apart. Thus, this truth forces the necessity to integrate the different ethnic groups in Nigeria to become a uniform whole that shares a common identity and purpose. For all intents and purposes therefore, national integration is a process that attempts to erode the presence of micro-nationalities in place of a spirit of

nationhood.¹⁰ This is realized through the collapse of ethnic barriers, the eradication of selfish ethnic allegiances, and the growth of a sense of common identity.

Mohammadu Buhari's Violations of Federal Character

This administration exploited personal and sectional interests rather than a larger entity to develop for the benefit of all Nigerians. While there's no doubt the conception of Nigeria gave the Northerner's land mass that almost doubled that of the Southerners, this uneven division that gave the North dominating power and control of the resources since independence became fundamentally worse under the Mohammadu Buhari eight years regime 2015-2023 as President of Nigeria where glaringly before Nigerians, they saw the principle of Federal Character and National Integration totally broken down with so much impudence. For example, the House of Representatives decried the abuse of this principle under President Buhari stating thus, "The violation of the federal character principle by President Muhammadu Buhari following the recent appointment of the Secretary and Chairman of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) from the same zone is not only unconstitutional but an aberration".¹¹ At no time in Nigerian history has the Federal Character been violated and ignored as seen from 2015 to 2023 under Buhari. A situation where almost all the service chiefs (Security Chiefs), executive positions and heads of major government agencies and parastatals all come from the Fulani North of the country at some point, while the south keeps agitating for a balance of power and greater allocation of resources that informs the purpose for the Federal Character which is to encourage national stability, foster unity and loyalty to the country and more so give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation. Thus, the rise in insecurity and restiveness in Nigeria is a clear manifestation of the failure of Buhari's government in promoting integration and federal character principles as it is seen

that the Commission has not lived up to expectations. Senator Istifanus Gyang had this to say, “Continued violation of the federal character principle and its attendant lopsided appointments by the present administration has been adduced as root cause of agitations in the different parts of the country. He made the assertion as he insisted if the principle was obeyed, every region would have had a sense of belonging.”¹²

Furthermore, a statement by the prominent civil rights association HURIWA, on Buhari's Continuous Violations of Federal Character Principle stating it was disturbingly grave says, “ it is without any doubt that the current government of President Buhari has consistently violated one of the most ingenious and ambitious affirmative actions entrenched to promote national unity, uniquely names Federal Character.”¹³ The group went ahead to state that “President Buhari has gone ahead to inject his sectional politics into the National Pension Commission, and further accentuating the leadership crisis bedeviling the PENCOR by nominating Aisha Umar from the North West geopolitical zone as the Director General of the regulatory body”¹⁴.

Some leaders of the Southern region in 2020, filed a suit at the Federal High Court to challenge President Muhammadu Buhari's alleged marginalization in appointments made by his administration since 2015. The leaders, in the suit filed on their behalf by 10 Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SANs) led by Chief Solomon Asemota and Chief Mike Ozekhome, are asking the court to fine the president and three other defendants in the suit N50 billion for allegedly violating provisions of the 1999 Constitution(as amended) and the federal character principle. Those who sued alongside the president include the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF), the Clerk of the National Assembly and the Federal Character Commission (FCC). The plaintiffs, led by Chief Edwin Clark, Chief Reuben Fasoranti, Dr.

John Nnia Nwodo, Dr. Pogu Bittus, Chief Ayo Adebajo, Alaowei Bozimo, Mrs. Sarah Doketri, Chief Chukwuemeka Ezeife and Air Commodore Idongesit Nkanga (rtd), accused the Buhari administration of deliberately marginalizing the South. Other plaintiffs in the suit marked FHC/ABJ/CS/595/2020, are Senator Kofoworola Bucknor-Akerele, Prof. Julie Umukoro, Mr. Stephen Bangoji, Alhaji Tijani Babatunde, Mrs. Rose Obuoforibo, Mr. Adakole Ijogi and Dr. Charles Nwakeaku.¹⁵

According to them, the present composition of the government of the federation, and most of its agencies, especially as regards the composition of the security and quasi-security agencies, do not reflect the federal character principle. “They added that there is a predominance of persons from a few states and sectional groups in positions of authority and consequently threatening national unity and integration. Some of the issues brought before the court for determination include whether it was not “reckless and adverse to the interest of Nigeria” for the president to obtain a loan facility from the Islamic Development Bank, African Development Bank, the World Bank, China, Japan and Germany amounting to \$22.7 billion, for infrastructural development, only to allocate the bulk of the fund to the North”.¹⁶

Similarly, the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) in the second term of President Muhammadu Buhari, faulted the membership of the Board of Trustees of the Nigeria Police Trust Fund, which was announced by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2020. HURIWA condemned that the board which had retired Inspector-General of Police Suleiman Abba as chairman is lopsided and against the Federal Character provisions of the Nigerian constitution. The association accused the president of being insensitive to the provisions of the constitution and the heterogeneous nature of the country by appointing Abba from Jigawa State and Ahmed Aliyu Sokoto from Sokoto State, both

from the North-west geopolitical zone, as chairman and secretary, respectively, of the board. It stressed that the Minister of Police Affairs, Alhaji Muhammad Maigari Dingyadi, was also from Sokoto State, in the North-west.¹⁷ The statement by its National Coordinator, Emmanuel Onwubiko, HURIWA said it was shocked that Buhari did not involve the states in the constitution of the trust fund, despite the fact that the Nigeria Police is a common agency of all tiers of government.

The Nigerian Senate, the upper legislative arm of the Nigerian government was not left out in the complaints against President Buhari's violations of the Federal Character principles and its consequential effects on national integration. The Senate charged President Muhammadu Buhari in 2021 to respect the Federal Character principle and uphold merit in all appointments he is making into public offices after a plethora of flawed appointments into sensitive positions in the country. This is coming as a result of the Senate spokesman, Senator Bashiru Ajibola, protesting against the lopsided appointments to the Board of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).¹⁸ “Speaking during the screening of the Acting Judge of Federal Capital Territory as substantive judge, Garba Abdullahi, the Chairman of Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters, Senator Opeyemi Bamidele, warned the federal government not to undermine the Federal Character principles and uphold merit in all appointments. He emphasized the need for merit and compliance in the consideration of citizens for an appointment, including the ones that will come before the Senate for confirmation”.¹⁹

Find below a table comprising President Buhari's appointment in the first 100 days in office to justify the violations under his watch as observed.

Table 1 President Muhammadu Buhari's appointment before the end of hundred days in office:

S/N	Name	Geopolitical Zone	Appointment
1.	Lt Col Abubakar Lawal	North West	Aide De Camp to President
2.	Femi Adesina	South West	Special Adviser, Media and Publicity to the President
3.	Abdulahi Kazuare	North West	State Chief of Protocol/Special Assistant (Presidential Matters)
4.	Garba Shehu	North West	Senior Special Assistant, Media and Publicity
5.	Ahmed Idris	North West	Accountant General of the Federation
6.	Babagana Munguno	North East	National Security Adviser
7.	Abayomi Olonishakin	South West	Chief of Defense Staff
8.	Tukur Buratai	North East	Chief of Army Staff
9.	Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas	South South	Chief of Naval Staff
10.	Sadique Abubakar	North East	Chief of Air Staff
11.	Monday Riku Morgan	North Central	Chief of Defense Intelligence
12.	Lawal Daura	North West	Director General, State Security Services
13.	Mahmooh Yakubu	North East	Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission
14.	Habibu Abdulahi	North West	Managing Director, Nigerian Ports Authority
15.	Paul Boroh	South South	Special Adviser Niger Delta Amnesty Office
16.	Baba Haruna Hauro	North East	Acting Director General Nigerian Maritime Administration, Safety and Security Agency NIMASA
17.	Umaru Danbatta	North West	Executive Vice Chairman/Chief Executive Officer, Nigerian Communications Commission
18.	Babatunde Fowler	South West	Executive Chairman Federal Inland Revenue Service
19.	Aliyu Gausu	North West	Director General Budget Office of the Federation
20.	Engr Babachir Lawal	North East	Secretary to the Government of the Federation
21.	Abba Kyari	North East	Chief of Staff to the President
22.	Col Hameed I Ali	North Central	Controller-General Nigerian Customs Service
23.	Kure Martin Abeshi	North Central	Controller-General, Immigration Service
24.	Sen Ita S.J Enang	South South	Senior Special Adviser to the President on National Assembly Matters
25.	Emmanuel Kachukwu	South South	Group Managing Director Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation

Source: Sotubo September, 2015.²⁰

Nigeria as a country has an extremely bright and exciting future in one indivisible and indissoluble nation that is propelled by unity in diversity and all hands must be on deck to ensure this aspiration is guided jealously. This should remain our guiding principle as we continue to guard jealously the spirit and letters of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Buhari administration in my assessment failed in all ramifications and did not show any respect for the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria nor did he live a good legacy to upcoming leaders in Nigeria on the need to promote national integration and federal character given the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria.

Lagos indigenes were not left out in calling for President Buhari's attention to his deliberate disregard for the federal Character principles. Lagos state indigenes under the auspices of Lagosians Advocacy Group (LAG) also sued the Federal Character Commission (FCC) and 18 others before a Federal High Court in Lagos over alleged continuous and deliberate violation of constitutional rights of Lagos State indigenes regarding appointments into public offices and career positions.²¹ The suit, which was brought before Justice Ambrose Lewis-Allagoa, was filed by four legal practitioners, Yakubu Eleto, Adeyemi Onikoro, Shittu Akeem, and Nurudeen Aregbesola, and the list is endless.

Conclusion

It has become obvious that Nigeria cannot make any meaningful development in the absence of unity. Some founding fathers of Nigeria adopted federal character and National Integration as a reasonable instrument for the achievement of the goal of national development and unity. The logic was to see if there could be unity in diversity which means that there could be ways of bringing different ethnic groups into a modern nation. However, amidst all

the efforts, the goals of national integration are not yet possible owing to the numerous problems inherent in Nigeria's federalism. It is therefore the task of this work to contribute in no little measure to the solution of the problem of national integration in Nigeria.

This paper observed that there are identifiable reasons that create this inequality and make it persist that the Federal Character Commission cannot handle. Amongst the major factors remains the inability of determining who the next head of state will be, that the application of the federal character principle is at the discretion of the president of the country at any given time and, the yet-to-be-enacted "law" for the zoning of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria among the six geo-political regions in the country as recognized for political and economic convenience.

The following reasons may be attributable to its ineffectiveness;

1. The commission needs more legal backing
2. A standing tribunal is needed to try the Heads of Government and Agencies that flout its recommendations in the running of the country.

Unlike the federal character with an already established law, a good number of Nigerian elites have dwelt on the subject of integration which they perceive as an inescapable program capable of re-inventing the new nation, but ironically, either our present and past leaders are insensitive in tackling the problem of national integration even when the principle had become a state policy or that their activities encourage self-aggrandizement thereby frustrating the efforts at realizing integration through ethnic balancing, equality and fair play. Nigerian independence in 1960 left the new nation with the challenge of integrating all the component parts into a united country. Thus, national integration became the greatest task of the new nation. While a good number of scholars have written on integration extensively, it is imperative in the context of this study to elaborate on the word "integration" which is believed can be a way out of the indifference, the

unpatriotic behavioral and general problem of nation-building in Nigeria. Myron Weiner categorized integration differently as follows: national integration, territorial integration, value integration and integrative behaviour²². In Myron's view, and for the purpose of national integration, it is the building of nation-state out of desperate social, economic, religious ethnic and geographical elements.²³ It involves the translation of diffuse and unorganized sentiments of nationalism into the spirit of citizenship through the creation of state institutions that can translate into policy and programmes and aspirations of the citizenry.

Finally, as against national consciousness, the ultimate task facing Nigeria as a country today is the danger to national unity, the danger of self-determination has been promoted by sections of the country as a result of the clear evidence of exclusion in the leadership positions in the country, the identity politics and religious cleavages are among the challenges faced by the country. Since the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern parts of what became Nigeria, national integration has been a main concern of governments in Nigeria. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, the Unity Schools, the Federal Character Principle, and State Creation amongst other efforts are examples of state policies intended to achieve this goal by binding the country together.²⁴

Clearly speaking, the effect of integration plans and programs in Nigeria has fallen far below expectation, as primordial ethnic loyalties are still deep-seated above the national interest expected to be achieved. The paper also revealed that the anxieties in the country particularly in the Southern part of Nigeria is not unrelated to the apparent sidelining and exclusion from the political economy of the country as presently constituted. One of the ways to put an end to this hostility is to give the people of Nigeria an equal sense of belonging, through federal appointments and allocations in the running of the country.

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