

DISCOURSE ON GOVERNANCE AND NIGERIAN NATIONAL INTEGRATION: DISSECTING THE EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

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Abstract

The quest to have an all-inclusive government devoid of marginalization, sentiment, ethnic bigotry, and to promote unity among the citizens led to the enactment of the Federal Character Principle as a National integrative mechanism, and National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) in order to achieve this target. The paper adopts the functionalist theory in the explanation of the national integration question in Nigeria. This paper present an evaluation of these national integrative mechanisms of the Nigerian government and examines the issues militating against their effective implementations. Thus, to achieve the aim of this paper journal articles, books, and conference papers were consulted and used, while the content analysis method was adopted. The paper, calls for the strengthening of these National Integration measures of the government and stresses the need to adhere to the tenants of these policies and programmes by the stakeholders to achieve its full potential.

Keywords: Federal Character Principle; National Integration; National Youth Service Corp; Nigeria; State Creation

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a plural society, with over 250 ethnic nationalities each with its unique culture, tradition, and beliefs. The three major ethnic groups in the country are Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba, which amongst other ethnic groups operated as autonomous political

entities such as feudal aristocracies, chiefdoms, autocephalous units, and kingdoms before the arrival of the British colonialists (Alapiki, 2005). In 1914, these entities which hitherto operated separately became one, a situation which created seemly geographical unification for easy colonial administration. The amalgamation was a product of political convenience and economic necessity, mainly to fund the Northern protectorate from the buoyant revenues of the Southern protectorate by the colonist (Alapiki, 2005). The amalgamation and the subjection of various ethnic groups with different historical antecedent to form the country Nigeria did not ease the mutual distrust, hatred, suspicion, and fear of domination of one section of the ethnic group over the other; it rather brought choking political competition among the groups with a resultant effect on national integration (Asaju & Egberi, 2015). Thus, the crisis of nation - building and national integration in the Nigerian state, consequently emanated from 'the short-cut' to integration called amalgamation, since hitherto the people of these geographical entities lived separately with little interaction, and the joining of these people in 1914 smacks a violation of the principles of social integration because one will expect a sort of memorandum, which could have prompted or discouraged the process of coming together (Frank & Ukpere, 2013).

Unpatriotic attitude, disunity, inter and intra-ethnic crisis, coupled with the different socio-political background, s and the quest for

predominant value of material acquisition, tribal and ethnic loyalty became the order of the day in the nation, which remains fundamental obstacles to Nigerian integration (Falade & Falade, 2013). Thus, the national integration crisis that Nigeria faces as a country is often manifested in the form of ethnic politics, indigene-settler dialectic, minority question, youth restiveness, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, the quest for resource control, militancy, and the clamor for a (sovereign) national conference to discuss continued unification (Imhonopi, & Onifade, 2013). This clamour and agitations have impacted the government's economic programmes, deepen the existing social and infrastructural challenges, threatened food and social insecurity, as well as intra-religious, inter/intracommunity, and inter/ intra-ethnic crisis (Imhonopi, & Onifade, 2013).

To ensure the collective orientation of the citizens of the country toward the nation in general and to promote national unity and the continued existence of Nigeria as one indivisible entity, the call for national integration was championed to further build a strong unity amongst the diverse commonalities, with different peculiar value and cultural background (Falade & Falade, 2013; Sanda, 1999). In a multi-ethnic-cultural country like Nigeria, the need to enact policies geared toward national unity, peace, development, and integration remains the primary concern of the government and political leaders. This is to facilitate economic growth and socio-political development, as well as culminating in popular participation, empowerment, and enhanced atmosphere of stability, unity, and peace (Omotola, 2007; Akinbi, 2015). This bit to build a strong national integration which is needed for the progress, socio-economic and political development of the country led to the enactment of the Federal Character Policy, and the National Youth Service Corps among other measures. Hence, this paper attempts to examine the emerging issues arising from these measures which were aimed at ensuring national integration in the country. The paper is divided into six (6) sections, namely, which are the introduction, which presents an overview of the issue, followed by the conceptualization of national integration as well as the theoretical

underpin, which centered on functionalist theory, dissecting national integration strategies followed while understanding the emerging issue around national integration and conclusion came thereafter.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

A. National Integration:

According to the Haas (1968), national integration is the process where elites or key stakeholders with national outlook are persuaded to shift their expectations, activities, and loyalty towards the nation's interests, unity, and development. While Asaju & Egberi (2015) see national integration as creating awareness of common identity among the citizens in spite of their differences in religious beliefs, castes, language, and origin. National integration refers to strategies put in place by the government and all concern individual and groups with the core aim of promoting a sense of unity, togetherness and peaceful co-existence among the citizens of a particular country. According to Jega (2002), national integration is the process where all the citizens of a country increasingly see themselves as one people, with shared historical experiences, bound by common values, and imbued by the spirit of unity and patriotism, which transcends primordial diverse tendencies and traditional practices. National integration is a society embodying strategy of forging peace and unity in diversity, as well as striving measure aimed at unifying the people in a modern state who are colonially created, which thus perceived to be critical and necessary for national progress and development in an antagonistic society (Edewor, Aluko, & Folarin, 2014). According to Khurana (2014), national integration is the recognition of the need for oneness in a country with different religions, castes, regions and who speaks different languages. National integration is that process that strengthens the quality of relations among autonomous social units such as ethnic group, kinship groups, and regional groups in such a way as to make it larger and aggregate from the autonomy of each of the existing units (Osagie, 2002). In an elaborate definition, Imhonopi, & Onifade (2013) sees national integration as a process which produces state omnibus initiatives through its institutions, and guided by respect for the different cultural background,

traditions, ethnicities with the primary aim of harmonizing all interests through adequate representation and dialogue to addressing the diversity and promotion of fairness, justice and equity in the sharing of benefits, state resources, opportunities and responsibilities in the country.

B. Federal Character Principle:

According to Edigin (2010), the Federal Character Principle is aimed at institutionalizing the accommodation of the diverse groups and interests in the country through the process of employment distribution. This position is further captured in the constitution drafting committee (CDC) reports that see the federal character has a provision or an act created to ensure and promote nation's national unity and to harness the diversity existing in the country. The Federal character remains the deliberate effort of the government designed to accommodate less privilege sections of the country (Olagunju, 1987). Similarly, Afigbo (1989) sees the federal character principle as a distinctive aim of the citizen of the country initialed to promote national unity and loyalty, to give the people of the country a sense of belonging through the employment process in the public service. Akinwale (2014) was concerned about the representation of the citizens in national appointment. The role of the federal character cannot be overemphasized especially of ensuring distribution of employment across the civil servants of Nigeria, as only this can guarantee adequate representation in the national appointment. Hence he see the Federal Character Principle as a significant but less discussed area in Nigeria (Akinwale, 2014). To Wahab (2009), the Federal Character Principle is valuable as it ensures the representation of the sections of the country, but he sees as policy measure that negates standard principle of merit in the overall employment process which can lead to poor work quality as a result of seeking balance in the political system of the country. Similar to Akinwale and Wahab, Bodunrin (1989) sees the Federal Character Principle as a political settlement policy agenda that enables all the states and geo-political zones in the country to be represented in government recruitment. While Gberevbie (2010) sees the principle as

going beyond just euphemizing ethnic balancing that has the able to solve the problem and fear of marginalization but the policy has what it takes stabilize the needed developmental quest of the country. According to Ezeibe (2012) the federal character is a positive policy reaction aimed at correcting those practices of the previous administration in the area of diversity of the nation. To him the federal character principle is the deliberate plan cause of action geared toward ensuring the proper distribution of amenities, employment, and governmental projects in the country.

According to Ojo (1999) from the equitable representation perspective sees the Federal Character Principle as the conscious and purposeful efforts of the law makers as well other constitutional making bodies in the federal state of Nigeria to enhance and ensure equitable representation of all the sections and segments of the country in all state owned institutions including the public service and possible the private sectors of the economy. It is a collective and continuous effort of the government aimed at not only ensuring numerical equity in the country but it is a policy agenda of the government geared toward equitable representation of the generality of the citizen of Nigeria in all governmental appointments (Bello, 2012). According to Gboyege (1989), the Federal Character Principle as a policy measure of the government in Nigeria is aimed at correcting the ill of employment distribution under the country long years of military rule in the country. To him, the character principle is that policy established to correct the arbitrary appointment, employment, promotion and removal of public servants in Nigeria by the military government at various times in the history of the nation, hence this is the only sincere measure aimed at putting the citizen in the proper places in the public service of Nigeria. Arguing further, Okpu (1989) sees the Federal Character Principle as correcting mechanism of the government in favor of those sections of the country that have undergone great marginalization under the various military regimes in Nigeria.

According to Nnoli (1987), the policy to him the Federal Character Principle is not synonymous with mediocrity neither does it intent to replace serving employers from

another section of the country with the existing ones but present the need for adequately represented in the country. Ayoade (2010) explained further when he stated that subjecting recruitment and promotion to federal character discriminates against merit and it is unfair to certain section, hence the principles itself is self-discriminatory. The Federal Character Principle to Chukwuma (2007) has become a mechanism for employment both qualified and unqualified people into the civil of the country. Longe (1987) recognized the need for employment to reflect the policy but caution must be taken so that it is not done at the expense of merit without which work place efficient can be achieved. While using the report of the public service review commission Chukwuma (2007) concludes that the Federal Character Principle looks prospective and discriminatory and it does not actually give the impression of a conscious and deliberate effort to secure the best hands in the country since the objective methods of accessing the performance of people in the service of Nigeria is not guarantee with the presence of the policy. Suberu (2001) has an observation on the Federal Character Principle using varying degrees of assessment of the principle from the two the major sections of the country. He observed that the Northerners sees the policy has a tool that ensures equal representation of the people in the bureaucracy of the government, while the Southern section of the country see it as a discriminatory tool of the government in the employment process of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Supporting the assertion of Suberu, Majekodunmi (2013) was of the belief that the establishment of the principle by the successive governments in the country was to address and mitigate the problem of marginalization to ensure a peaceful, stable and united Nigeria. He is of the view that the Federal Character Principle is an integrative mechanism aimed at ensuring fairness and equal representation of the various units and sections of the country who have been marginalized in the position of employment, power and position.

THEORETICAL UNDERPIN

The paper adopts the functionalist theory in the explanation of the national integration question in Nigeria. The functionalist theory as adopted

by this paper helps to explain the current issues with the Nigerian national integration efforts and the emerging issues in the country's quest for national unity, peace, and development through integration. The functionalist theory is referred to as functionalism or structural functionalism. It is one of the major theoretical perspectives in the social sciences. Its origins can be traced to the works of Emile Durkheim, who was specifically interested in how social order is made possible or how to ensure that society remains relatively stable. The theory focuses on the macro-level of social structure, rather than the micro-level of the social life of the people (Ashley, 2018). Other notable functionalist theorists include Talcott Parsons, Herbert Spencer, and Robert K. Merton. The basic assumptions of the functionalist theory is that the society exhibit a system of interconnected parts which work in harmony to maintain and ensure balance and stable social order and equilibrium through it social institutions such as the family, education, economics, and religious institution each designed to contribute its quota to the overall social cohesion, peace, unity and progress of the society (Mooney, Knox, and Schacht, 2007; Ashley, 2018). This perspective further opined that an institution only exists to play a vital role in the functioning of the society and such institution cease to exist once it no longer plays this vital role, thus the emergence of new need will automatically bring up an institution (Ashley, 2018). Basically, the functionalism or structural functionalism, as it may be called centers on building a framework for the complex social system whose parts work together in order to promote stability (Gerber & Macionis, 2011).

Although the functionalism theory reached the peak of influence in the 1950s, while in the 1960s the theory decline steadily with some criticisms from scholars such as Antonio Gramsci who see it as neglecting the negative implications of social order, and its inability to account for social change and the neglect of social inequalities (Mooney, Knox, and Schacht, 2007; Coakley & Dunning, 2000). However, the assumptions of the functional theory best explain the role of policies such national youth service corps, and the Federal Character Principle, which were enacted at a point in the Nigerian recent history to

strengthen and promote the country's national integration and stability, although each and every one of them has its own emerging issues, which is the focus of this paper.

NIGERIAN NATIONAL INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

A. Federal Character Principle: The Nigerian government in its quest to promote national integration, unity and to give a sense of belonging to all the citizens of the country enacted the Federal Character Principle as a strategy to ensure equal distribution of employment across all spheres of government-owned institutions and agencies. According to Adesoun (2011) national loyalty, unity, and integration must reflect on the activities of the government, parastatals, and agencies to avoid the dominance of one ethnic group or state over the other to avoid national issues and concerns. The Federal Character Principle is a deliberate attempt to organize the activities to ensure cohesion, proper distribution of project, amenities, and address the issue of diversity in a bit to promote national integration, stability, peace, and unity in Nigeria through equal employment distribution (Asaju & Egberi, 2015). The introduction of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria has helped in creating an awareness of the need to accommodate all the sections of the country in the overall activities of the government institution across the country to ensure a sense of national integration. It was equally believed that advocating the Federal Character Principle and its objectives, would deeply promote national integration and nation-building which are both seen as the panacea for unity, justice, and peaceful co-existence in the country

B. State Creation: One of the strategies adopted by the Nigerian government over time in championing national integration is state creation. State creation is the process of increasing the number of federating units in the country from its existing form. Historically all the states created in post-independent Nigeria were carried out by various military administrations. This began in 1967 with the creation of 12 states by the regime of Yakubu Gowon, it was followed by an additional 7 states by the Murtala Mohammed regime in 1976, while the Ibrahim Babangida's administration added 11 states between 1987

and 1991, this was followed by Abacha's regime with the creation of 6 additional states in 1996 making it 36 states in all at present (Adetoye, 2016; Onimisi, 2020). According to Adetoye (2016) state creation in Nigeria like the Federal Character Policy is a strategy embedded in the country's constitution to promote national integration, and strengthen unity in diversity inherent in the different ethnic and communal groups, as well as ensuring even development in the polity. The creation of states in Nigeria was equally a device aimed at mitigating fear of ethnic domination, marginalization, allay the fear of intra-group conflicts, and ensuring greater protection to the minority segments of the country (Adetoye, 2016).

C. National Youth Service Corps (NYSC): The need to promote national integration, unity, peace, and cohesion led to the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps, especially after Nigeria's civil service war. The military regime of Yakubu Gowon came up with the NYSC scheme in 1973 to ensure reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction in the country and promote post-conflict peace, which was needed for national integration and unity through the youths (Okafor & Ani, 2014). The core objectives of the NYSC scheme is to develop a result-oriented youth, full of motivation, the right attitude, value, and to bring out the best in them, which is targeted toward the national building, national unity, and integration, which is a long-run service as a catalyst for national development (Okafor & Ani, 2014; Onyishi, 2011). The NYSC scheme was to further inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths, as well as to raise their morale towards national achievements, promote common ties, cultural and social improvement by developing their attitudes through training, assigning them to specific jobs in states other than their states of origin (NYSC Handbook, 1996). The scheme exposes the youth to other people's modes of living in different parts of the country to remove prejudices in their perception, promote unity, cohesion, and a sense of national integration in Nigeria. The NYSC scheme sees these youth as future leaders, whose contribution within the one-year service to their nation adds to the sustainable socio-economic development of Nigeria through selfless

service (Raimi & Alao, 2011). The scheme is still very much desirable considering its contribution to the socio-economic and educational benefit through teaching in the less educated area in the country. The scheme's desire for national integration, unity, peaceful coexistence is still much alive the program has helped in promoting friendship and endearing inter-marriage amongst people of different ethnic backgrounds in the country (Okafor & Ani, 2014). According to Onyishi (2011) through the NYSC scheme, the values of national integration, unity, peace, and agricultural development as well as improved leadership qualities among youth were rekindled through the involvement in electoral duties, immunization program, census, which strengthens the country bond.\

UNDERSTANDING THE EMERGING ISSUES IN THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL INTEGRATION

A. Challenges of Federal Character Policy: The strategy of Federal Character Policy in ensuring Nigerian national integration is faced with issues such as personal interest, the continuous influence of scheme, and most disturbing is the implementation of the Federal Character Principle itself. It is pertinent to note that the quest for a sense of belonging and national integration through the Federal Character Principle may not be achievable if the issue of policy implementation is not taken with the optimum seriousness that it deserves. Furthermore, the lack of national identity, sense of belonging, prioritization of ethnic loyalty, the quest for political advantage on the part of politicians, and selfish interest remains an issue affecting the strategic implementation of Federal Character Policy in Nigeria's struggle for national integration (Asaju & Egberi, 2015). Another issue to Nigeria's national integration arising from the Federal Character Principle is its poor governance and leadership structure, which has increased the complaints of marginalization by the minority ethnic groups, persistent corruption, internal conflicts affiliated with the poor and ineffective application of the policy, and lack of patriotism (Baba & Aeysinghe, 2017; Onimisi, 2018). Another emerging issue regarding the application of the Federal Character Principle is the perceived discrimination, favoritism in

the exercise of the commission duty; it is also argued that the policy rather than promoting national integration, promotes mediocrity at the expense of merit especially abuse that characterize its application in the Nigerian civil service appointment and promotion, admission into school thus throwing up more issues than solving issues (Ayoade, 1998; Adesoji and Alao, 2009).

B. Issues associated with State Creation: Although the purpose of state creations in Nigeria was to ensure national integration in the face of obvious diversity, to curb the fear of marginalization and domination in the country, however, this target has not met the much-needed integration and unity because the continuous marginalization of the smaller section within the state so created. The tendency for the strategy of state creation not meeting its intended aim of national integration because of the fissiparous issues and continuous ethnic manipulation of political gains remains glaring (Alapiki, 2005). The creation of a state provides an emerging issue that goes beyond fear of domination to marginalization in the development of infrastructures which is perceived to occur along with the interest of the political elite within the states in the country (Adetoye, 2016). The strategy of state creation for national integration and unity turned out to be a tool in the hands of the political elite, who used it for their interest and to patronize political allies as well as decimate perceived political enemies thereby relegating the issue of integration of the country (Suberu, 1994).

It appears that state creation in Nigeria has only helped in aggravating the existing loyalties to the ethnic and primordial sentiment of the political elites against the quest for national integration and promotion of unity in the country. It is also important to note that the various state creation exercise in the country came with their attendant effect on the already preexisting intergroup conflicts and inter-ethnic violence, thus heightening national disharmony and low-level national integration among the citizens of Nigeria (Alapiki, 2005). According to Eze, Elimian, & Chinwuba (2015) state, creation exercises so far have contributed to the segmentation and compartmentalization in Nigerians, especially into indigenes and non-indigenes, and which

has generated more cries of marginalization and exclusion. It is clear that the more states are created, the more the cries of marginalization and exclusion persist.

C. National Youth Service Corps and Emerging Concerns: One of the challenges confronting the NYSC scheme presently is insecurity. The security of these youths who are serving the country in other states outside their state of origin is hindering the effective utilization of the said target of the government which is to promote Nigerian national integration. The death of several NYSC members in the states that they were posted to serve and to promote unity and integration in recent times especially in some sections of the country due to electoral violence, religious fanaticism, ethnic sentiments and other forms of conflict has thrown up some issues of concern (Okoro & Ani, 2011). Perceived corruption and favoritism are other issues threatening the core mandate of the scheme. Onyishi (2011), equally identifies corruption as seriously hampering the over goal of the scheme. The NYSC scheme has also thrown up the issue of ethnicity, cronyism, and favoritism in the posting of corps members, in addition to exposing these young Nigerians to security risks as clearly seen in the 2011 General Elections where some NYSC members lost their lives, coupled with corruption, misappropriation of funds, and unfortunately majority don't get jobs where they serve because of the tagged of non-indigenes which they host state seen them as, and discriminatory practice melted on them, which is a long run affects the purpose of the scheme (Imhonopi, & Onifade, 2013; Al-Shameri, 2017).

Conclusion

This paper revealed that security issues and corruption concerns especially in the national youth service corps scheme, while political influence and the issues of non-adherence to the implementation of the Federal Character Policy remains another hindering block, as well as the continued marginalization and elitist control equally remains a source of concern for the state creation as a measure of national integration in Nigeria. Thus, this paper suggests an increase in physical infrastructural equally across the geopolitical zones of the country, while access to quality and affordable

education, transparency, and accountability in all government dealing as this will help in building trust among the citizens, fairness, justice, and peacebuilding would be of significant importance to Nigerian national integration. Equally, a sincere adherence to all Nigerian national integration strategies would ensure national cohesion. It is imperative to note that this paper relied heavily on the secondary second of data, hence future studies could choose other forms of data collection and pick one of the strategies for in-depth analysis.

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