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Full Length Research Paper

Federalism and the search for national integration in Nigeria

Emmanuel O. Ojo

Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin, P. M. B. 1515, Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria. E-mail: eojo12000@yahoo.com.

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The thrust of this paper is to account for the gap between mere aspirations and actual practices vis-à-vis the management of Federalism in Nigeria. The paper begins with the plural character of Nigeria in all its ramifications which makes federalism compelling. The second part which is the theoretical anchor is an in-depth discussion of the general optimism in the literature as regards the capability of federalism to integrate plural and divided societies. The segment on the travails of federalism accounts for the problems in the convoluting polity. The paper however infers that Nigeria needs a 'true' federal arrangement based on a different philosophy rather than "the present warped union where there is too much power and resources concentrated in the centre.

Key words: Federalism, travails, democracy, convoluting, Federation.

INTRODUCTION

Federalism is the bedrock of democratic edifice for a country of Nigeria's size and bewildering diversities. Like India, also a federal state which has been rightly described as a land of "million mutinies" (Roy, 2002:2), Nigeria is a deeply divided and plural society. The polity is known to have many ethnic groups, which scholars have put at different figures (Kirk-Green, 1969:4; Attah, 1987:393-401; Otite, 1990:175-183; Suberu, 1993:39/
1998:227). Nigeria is, one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with well over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa. As recalled by Onwujeogwu (1987, and 1995:60-76), at the beginning of the 1960s, there were over 3,000 ethnic groups (tribes) in the world, about 1,000 were represented in the geographical space called Africa and about 445 were represented in the geo-political space called Nigeria. Former USSR had about 127 ethnic nationalities in its geo-political space; China and India each more than 40 ethnic nationalities. The USA has less than 50 excluding the Red Indians; England has 4, France 7 and Germany about 15. In that wise, "Nigeria has a unique problem not experienced by any state in the world past or present. The problem is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issue of the nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice reigns" (Ojo, 2002:4-5). This uniqueness creates "unique problems unknown to the experience of other peoples in the world… no Western or Eastern civilization has ever evolved a political system that can cope with this gigantic problem of hyper-ethnic instability syndrome" (Onwujeogwu, 1995).

It is not surprising therefore that these ethnic groups are always in conflict and competition for scarce Resour-ces. Indeed, this is not unexpected especially between and among "ethnically defined constituencies" (William, 1980:69). The reason is that almost by definition, ethnic groups are in keen competition for the strategic resources of their respective societies. This is the case in Nigeria and other plural and segmented polities. This is so because ethnic groups are socio-cultural entities, consi-der themselves culturally, linguistically or socially distinct from each other, and most often view their relations in actual or potentially antagonistic terms (Cox, 1970:317). Groups with more effective tactics and strategies normally gain competitive advantages over other groups within their societies (Fried, 1967:71-72). Yet, this success is not without its liability (Elliot, 1975:13). This is why national cohesion is more of a mirage in plural and divided societies than in homogenous ones. It is in this regard that Weiner (Ogunojenite, 1987:224) argues that "developing nations' central problem that is often more pressing than economic development is the achievement of integration". It was in an attempt to weld together her disparate

ethno-religious and linguistic entities that Nigeria opted for federalism in 1954 (Ojo, 2002:4). The assumption then was that, federalism is "a half -way house between separate independent states and unification" (Beloff, 1953:131). It is a process of seeking unity, without uniformity, more so, where size, cultural and linguistic diversity, historical particularism and considerable decentralization prevails as in Nigeria. However, since 1954 when the foundation of classical federalism for Nigeria was laid, the system is still convoluting. Nigeria's ethnic make-up still remains what Furnival (1948:304), calls "in the strictest sense a medley (of peoples) for they mix but do not combine" (Joseph, 1991: 32-33). The Nigerian 'project' remains questionable despite years of federal practice. According to The Economist, (June 19-25, 1999), "Nigerians have no common vision of a nation-state called Nigeria, no sense of citizenship. The name and the football team are about the only things that unite them. Even the footballers however, brilliant individual players though they are, do not work as a team. It is the same with the country" (Odion-Akhaine, 2002:26). Forty- nine years after 'flag independence', the country still totters on as a toddler, often pulled down by joint identity and integration crisis. To observers' consternation, Nigeria's federalism has remained fragile, almost impossible. This is largely due to the successive administrations aversion to true federalism, equity and good governance. The country is also permanently assailed by a curious and depressing distribution crises triggered by a dubious formula for the sharing of somehow real and somehow elusive national cake (Ojo, 2009:6).

In view of the foregoing, and as will glaringly be analyzed in this paper, friction and tension among the over 250 ethnic groups are recurrent phenomena. Cultivation of national outlook has inadvertently given way to a continued lukewarm attitude to nation-building by the frustrated 'nations' whose emotions are stirred by the clandestine tribal organizations co-ordinating the races in the hot race for relevance within the polity (Oladesu, 2002:14). In a nutshell, the impact of all this is that, from independence in 1960 to the beginning of the civil war on July 1, 1967, Nigeria had a very low degree of national cohesion, its diverse ethnic nationalities are looking inwards to themselves for political succour and survival in an incoherent polity. Socio-political integration was further undermined by the lack of meaningful universal symbols (common heritage and common historical past), for example that could have bound the Nigerian polity together (Faseun, 2002:8).

With the above overview of the problem of lack of national cohesion in Nigeria, the rest of this paper is organized into three main rubrics. The first is the theoretical framework which is an in-depth discussion of the general optimism in the literature as regards the capability of federalism to integrate plural and divided societies. The second segment accounts for the travails of Nigeria's convoluting federal arrangement while the third major section appraises the major integrative mechanisms put in place by public policy makers to enhance national cohesion. The paper however infers that Nigeria needs a true federal arrangement based on a different philosophy rather than "the present warped union where there is too much power and resources concentrated in the centre" (Osuntokun, 2000:25). We now proceed to setting the framework.

SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

As Chafe has rightly observed (1994:131) "the primary requirement for debating anything to understand first and foremost the actual thing being talked about". No one is likely to dispute the suggestion that this elementary fact is often taken for granted particularly, as it relates to the debate on national cohesion, national integration, national unity or nation-building. It may nevertheless be useful to provide definitions of this principal concept, in order to minimize the possibility of misunderstanding. In view of the fact that concepts may have both cultural and ideological contextualizations and similarly in view of the fact that like power, justice, peace and equality, such concepts including national integration are what W.B. Gallie (1962:121-146) - a philosopher - called 'an essentially contested concepts' moreso that it can not be easily defined in a way that makes it generally acceptable to all. Weldon (Little, 1981:35), also subscribes to this position that they can generate unsolvable debates about their meanings and application. This is not unconnected with the fact that "they may 'contain an ideological element which renders empirical evidence irrelevant as a means of resolving the dispute". Even, an apparently concrete terms like the state, virtually defies precise, generally accepted definition also because of its essentially contested nature too (Dyson, 1980:205-206) . The utility of these concepts stem in some paradoxical ways from whatever it is that makes them inherently ambiguous, and it is their ambiguity, which normally generates theoretical discussion about them. For this fact they cannot be defined in any general sense and only in relation to specific cases, which is what we shall do briefly in this section of the paper as regards national cohesion or integration.

ON NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The literature on integration is replete with different definitions of the term. Maurice Duverger (1976:177), defines it as "the process of unifying a society which tends to make it harmonious city, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious". To Philip E. Jacob and Henry Tenue (1964:9), it is "a relationship of community among people within the same political entity… a state of mind or disposition to be cohesive, to

act together, to be committed to mutual programmes". In the same vein, some scholars have defined it as a process. Donald G. Morrison et al. (1972:385) say it is:

> "A process by which members of a social System (citizen for our purpose) develop linkages and location so that the boundaries of the system persist over time and the boundaries of sub systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community. "

Claude Ake also implies process in his definition of an integrated political system thus:

> "To the extent that the minimal units (individual political actors) develop in the course of political interaction a pool of commonly accepted norms regarding political behaviour patterns legitimized by these norms… (Ake, 1967:3)."

James Coleman and Carl Rosberg (1964:9), looked at it as the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community. For Leonard Binder (1964: 630), integration involves the creation of a very high degree of comprehensiveness. On the other hand, Amity Etzioni, (1965:4) has argued that a community is cohesive 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.
> (c) It is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens'. Indeed, Myron Weiner (1976:180-182) has distinguished five different senses in which the term can be used thus: territorial, national, elite mass, value and behaviour."

Be that as it is, these conceptualizations of integration gives no clear indication of what the end product would look like and how one would recognize an integrated polity. How much cohesion and which commonly accepted norms denote an integrated political or social unit? How would an observer identify integration or is it dependent on some other manifestations (such as conflict) to demonstrate a lack of integration? And what institutional form will an integrated unit take? Will it be democratic or authoritarian? Would it be a centralized organizational entity with full sovereignty or would it be a loosely federal unit? Or are institutional forms irrelevant to integration? Those are posers by Stephanie Neuman (1967:1).

Karl Deutsch et al. (1966:2) offers a better definition as "the attainment, within a territory of a 'sense of community' and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a long time dependable expectations of peaceful community". Put differently, a security community is a group of people who are integrated. According to Deutsch et al. (1966), a "sense of community is a belief on the part of individuals in a group that they have come to agreement on at least one point, that common social problems must and can be resolved on processes of peaceful change. Peaceful change in this context means the resolution of social problems without resort to large scale physical force".

The obvious disparities among definitions of integration illustrate the state of conceptual confusion in the field. Although, as noted by scholars, the term 'national cohesion' may be defined in an endless number of ways without violating the standards for scientific investigation, but failure to agree on the common concept of what integration or cohesion connotes makes useful comparison and theory building very difficult. It is not the question of rightness or otherwise of a definition, but rather a matter of agreeing on a set of sharply defined concepts and submitting them to rigorous testing.

In spite of a general inability of integration theorists to clearly define dependent variables, most writers concerned with nation building in developing countries continue to use the term as though it were a generally understood concept. But despite wishful thinking on the part of many researchers, the term remains vague in meaning. What the field has are various definitions that are incomplete or inapplicable and for the most part are at variance with each other. Thus, little purpose would be served in expanding the typology further. Be that as it may, this writer's conception of national integration is a plural society where component parts are reasonably contented in the polity vis-à-vis equity and justice in resource allocation cum access to equal opportunities.

FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

An early generation of students of inter-group relations or plural societies, considered federalism an effective way of achieving and preserving both integration and stability in deeply divided societies. Whenever events seemed to demand that a compromise be effected between the necessity for unity and co-operation on a wide territorial basis on the one hand, and the need to accommodate the legitimate claims of sub-national groups for self-rule on the other hand, "the temptation is to proffer catch all management formula, such as federalism" (Osaghae, 1998:1) . This tendency to see federalism as a magic formula that can channel irreconcilable inter ethnic hostility into conciliation and federal co-operations" was subscribed to by Carnell in his 1961 essay thus: "in tropi-

cal areas characterized by extreme cultural and ethnic diversity… federalism comes as something of a political panacea". Ivo Duchacek (1977:133) too posits that:

> "the dialectic and disparity between the geographic confines of territorial states on the one hand, and the boundaries of ethno-territorial communities on the other, seem to invite a federal solution". In federalism, we find a system of government that has been referred to as 'the magic formula' for solving the governmental problems of multi-ethnic societies, because as Mazrui points out, federalism is "an institutionalization of compromise relationship".

It is not only democratic, complete with the institutionalization of most essential ingredients, it is creative and flexible enough to incorporate several accommodation formulas' (Mazrui, 1971:300).

In short, it is considered the most appropriate framework for governing multi-ethnic societies for, according to Marc and Heraud, "federalism and ethnicity form a solidarity couple" (Glazer, 1997:71). It is a mark of the truth of this assertion that all known federations today, including those, which have formally abrogated their federal constitutions like Cameroon and Uganda are multi-ethnic. In the same vein, Nathan Glazer, opines that, "to couple federalism and ethnicity immediately suggests one similar solution to the problem of a state containing a number of ethnic groups varying in language, culture and religion. From Glazer, the conclusion one can reach is that ethnic boundaries are a necessary condition for federalism. For Cynthia Enloe (1977:146) too, "federalism, when and if it is considered by political elite is taken up as a lively alternative at a certain point in the polity's historical evolution and in the evolution of each of the various ethnic groups." It is against this background that in Nigeria, federalism offered the best option to accommodate the ethno-linguistic and religious diversities, which were, for the most part, geographically distributed. An example like this among several other third world countries led Macmahon (Osaghae, 1984:150-151) to conclude that "federalism is a means, in countries where diversity is pronounced, of accommodating government to the consent of the governed."

Without mincing word, federalism, accommodate diversities while attempting unity in diversity. As Duchacek (1977:13) puts it, the aim of federal constitution "is an institutionalized balance between national unity and sub-national diversity". To this extent, federalism is "a cure for micro-nationalism" (Sawer, 1969:570.) For Wheare (1967:35), federalism is an appropriate form of government to offer to communities or states of distinct, differing nationality who wish to form a common government and to behave as one people for some purposes, but wish to remain independent and, in particular, to retain their nationality in all other aspects. " (Wheare, 1967) though from the foregoing, federalism is reputed to be an effective political-cum-constitutional design for managing complex governmental problems usually associated with ethnic and cultural diversity, it has however failed to take firm roots in Africa as mechanism for national cohesion. One reason among others is that Africa, a continent of more than a thousand ethnic groups, was to adopt political postures and institutional arrangements that simply denied the existence of such diversity (Mkandawire, 1999:35). Politics being what it is, the public denial of ethnic pluralism did not prevent politicians from mobilizing and manipulating ethnicity. The result was a schizophrenic polity in which the politics of 'ethnic balance' was the rule of the day, practiced by people who denied ethnicity.

Politicians were nationalist by day and tribalist by night (Mkandawire, 1999:35). Therefore, federal experiments in the third world generally, and not just in Nigeria, have been very vulnerable to decay, disruption and disintergration. These experiments have moved typically either towards unification and greater centralization, or towards disintegration and secession of their component parts. Malaysia, India and Nigeria are probably the only states in the third world where federation has survived the first few years of independence in any recognizable form. In all the three countries however, the federal principle has invariably assumed a highly centralized form (Mawhood, 1984:521-531). The general vulnerability of the federal principle in the third world suggests the wisdom of identifying the common conditions in the region, which pose a threat to federal existence. The most obvious of these conditions include ethnic cleavage, economic underdevelopment or dependence, a weak sense of nationhood arriving from a short period of independent statehood. It is not surprising therefore that until the early 1990s when Ethiopia became an ethnic federation and South Africa began its steady march to incremental federalism, Nigeria and Tanzania, to some extent were the only countries that managed to survive the assault of one-party and military authoritarian rule on post-independence federalism. Unganda and Cameroon, which set out as federal systems at independence could not stand the test of time.

But the poor run of federalism on the continent has not diminished the perceived utility of the system as evidenced by the clamour for so-called true federalism in Nigeria, the resurrection of the Majimbo and federal debates in Kenya and Uganda respectively, and the acclaimed relevance of the federal solution in Sudan. Indeed, the dynamics of state reconstruction and the search for how to save the endangered post- colonial state from disintegration, suggest that federalism is likely to increase in relevance and utility in Africa.

However, beyond the afore-stated reasons for the poor performance of federalism in third world countries, at least as regards national cohesion and conflict management, it is imperative to inquire whether federalism is

capable of performing the expected 'magic' or put differently, in the words of Ayoade (1998:5) whether 'to expect federalism to produce a seamless unity is to expect too much from that system. Many federalists expect from federalism what it is not designed to give'. Ayoade noted further that, "experience has shown that it has not proved to be a particularly good device for integrating plural societies into a single political system" (Ayoade, 1998:5).

Ayoade has equally challenged much of the ordinary optimism as some other scholars have done regarding the ability of federalism to resolve problems of diversity and disparity in the interests of harmony and unity. This optimism, Tarlton (1965) observed, usually found expression in a simple logical formula, 'diversity then federalism. But to Tarlton (1965), there is a limit beyond which diversity and federalism are compatible in that a federal arrangement can be rendered impossible or unworkable if the elements of diversity are very strong or if they predominate over those of unity. As he puts it, "component units of a federal system must, if that system is to function at an optimum level of harmony, predominate over existing elements of diversity…" Charles Talton's (1965) serious scepticism about the possibility of achieving stability in the face of diversity was subsequently to be acknowledged and shared by other perceptive scholars.

One of them is Donald Rotchild (1966:27-28), who analyzed how the application of the federal principle had been made perilously difficult in Africa by the lack of crucial support for the principle from the key leaders in the continent by the centralizing imperative of the modernization process and by the threat, the forces of ethnic intransigence and separation have posed to the continuance of the federal ties.

In the same vein, but in a more comparative study, Ronald May (1970:83-86) argued, that federal government has not proved to be a very stable form of political organization and that in fact, a survey of federal and near federal experiments suggest that federalism is inherently unstable. May, proceeded further to cite examples of federal experiments that have disintegrated or been threatened by serious disaggregative tendencies and have had to be maintained by enforced centralization and/or civil war, such as USA , Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Syria, etc. (Suberu, 1990:145-161).

Indeed, it is instructive to note that Nigeria presently remain the oldest and the only surviving federation in the entire continent of Africa. (Osuntokun, 1996:11). Federal experiments in the third world are, therefore, endangered not only by deep sectional loyalties and largely unavoidable but politically explosive, inter-segmental inequalities, but also by the intensely conflictual nature of third world politics, (Suberu, 1990). Having explore the polemics in the literature, vis-à-vis the suitability of federalism as an integrative device, we now proceed to examine the travails of federalism in Nigeria.

TRAVAILS OF FEDERALISM IN NIGERIA

From 1954 when Nigeria embrace federalism, the polity has been wallowing from one problem to the other, thereby making national cohesion a mirage after all. To start with, unlike Switzerland, despite being a very small country, one of the most decentralized countries in the world as noted by Arnold Koller (2002:27), Nigeria's federal system is highly centralized in all its ramifications. On this problem, Coleman (Peil, 1976:115), observed that "excessive centralization and statism of most developing countries… not only means greater vulnera-bility as a result of unfulfilment of populist expectation, it also means heightened inefficiency".

Above all, it also means the absence of critically important supportive capacity in the society at large because the public cannot respond to direct, or restrain a polity which is so far removed from it as a centralized government tends to be (Peil, 1976:115). It need be emphasized that the persistent military rule over the years has no doubt affected the structure of Nigerian federalism. In line with the military's command structure, Nigeria's federal system has been over-centralized to the extent that it reflects more of a unitary arrangement than a federal one (Elaigwu, 1998:6-7). Though, before the military intervention in 1966, Nigeria began with a formal federal constitution in 1954, which was decentralized to accommodate the diverse ethnic groups, each of the constituent federating units, known then as regions, operated its own regional constitution, police, civil service and judiciary.

Each region even had a separate coat of arms and motto, distinct from that of the federation. With the incursion of the military into governance, the federal government started acquiring more powers to the detriment of the constituent federating units. The first military "interregnum" in 1966, abolished regional police forces. The creation of twelve states on the eve of the civil war in 1967, though it brought government closer to the people, entailed considerable loss of power by the federating units. The Murtala/Obasanjo military junta in their bid to reduce 'divisive tendencies' in the nation, abolished state coat of arms and mottos making all governments in the country to adopt the coat of arms and motto of the federation, bringing about, from the benefit of hindsight, a false sense of unity (see Policy Briefs, October, 1999).

The federal military government took over assets owned by states or group of states like television stations, sports stadia and newspapers, thereby strengthening the federal government at the expense of the states in terms of assets ownership. This made the contest for political power at the federal level a lot more intense among the different federating units and laid the foundation for many years of crisis and instability (see Policy Briefs, October, 1999).

Many actions later taken by the military exacerbated

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this emerging problem. Very worrisome is the fact that local governments have no legislative power over any major tax revenue source although they have administrative and collective jurisdiction on two sources. This negative trend must have motivated Akindele, to canvas the argument that:

What we need today is a non-centralized federal system in which state governments are politically virile, legislatively strong, financially resilient, and indeed, constituted self-confident and self-assertive centres of respect by the political loyalty from the citizens they serve and over whom they exercise authority (Elaigwu, 1998:7).

Nonetheless, the problematic nature of Nigeria's citizenship is another travail of Nigeria's federalism, which has in no small measure whittle-down the efficacy of Nigeria's federal structure. Unlike India where there is no duality of citizenship in which case there is only one Indian citizenship, Indian federalism is like that of Canada. The concept of state of origin does not exit (Sangma, 2002:35), whereas, in Nigeria to pick- up a job outside one's ethnic base at state government level is really a big risk in the sense that such person will be tagged a 'non-indigene'.

Though, citizenship conceptualized as one who by birth or nationalization belongs to a state is not problematic, but when it comes to assigning equal status to citizens both in theory and practice that goes beyond sheer legalism that is problematic. This sociological component of citizenship which breeds differentiation is one of the greatest problems the new states including Nigeria face in their search for national cohesion (Osagae, 1978:63).

There is a conscious notion of my 'state' or my 'home' which afflicts every Nigerian who lives outside his state of origin and makes him go 'home' to build a home marry a wife or vote. Even the deads are rarely buried outside their states of origin! The implication of this is that citizens' allegiance to the federation is truncated because of the state's preferential treatment of its citizens (Ojo, 2001:8-9). A system whereby the state cannot effectively tackle the problem of citizenship negates the tenet of federalism. Laski's (1982:89) view is apt here "a state must give to men their dues as men before it can demand, at least with justice, their loyalty". The reason for the problematic character of citizenship in Africa is partly because of the ethnic groups that are bedeviled by enormous conflicts arising from the mosaics of centrifugal forces which define a citizen, as one who by birth or nationalization, belong to a state.

In Nigeria a 'non-indigene' can best secure a contract appointment even with the government with constant reminder that the person is far away from his home. The most frustrating thing is with federal government owned institutions which in several cases are 'captured' by the host community treating workers from other parts of the country as aliens both in attitude and conduct. Interestingly, citizens that discriminated against pay taxes and perform other duties in their states of residence.

Laski puts it more succinctly thus:

"… a state, which refuses one of the things it, declared essential to the well beings of another is making one less a citizen. It is denying that which its power invest with moral authority. It is admitting that its claim upon one is built not upon its ethics, but its strength (Laski, 1982:92)."

That is, the paradox of federal practice and citizenship in Nigeria.

One other thing that makes Nigeria's federal solution problematic is that of structural imbalance. If Mill's law of federal instability is anything to go by that "a federation is morbid if one part of the federation is bigger than the sum of the other parts" (Ayoade, 1988:6 and 1987:9), the system is in deed far from being valence. It will be recalled that the 1951 Macpherson Constitution created central legislature which had 136 elected representatives and of which the Northern region alone had 68 members, thereby, making it possible for the North to swallow other regions put together or hold them into ransom (Awolowo, 1986:36-51). This problem is not unconnected with the pragmatic nature of the origins of the federal structure, which has created problems of permanent dimensions.

First, the division of the country into three, turned the federation into an asymmetric territorial association in which one part (North), was equal to the sum of the other two parts, that is, the West and East. It is true that there are federal systems in the world in which the constituent states or regions are even or nearly equal in size, population, political power, administrative skills, economic development or relative geographical location (Frenkel, 1986:65), but wherever the disparity is as great as to make one constituent state permanently dominating collective decisions, it results in unitary centralism rather than federalism, which is the case in Nigeria.

Indeed, from all indications, this structural imbalance generated fear of domination among various groups in the country, most especially the minority ones. In terms of landmass, Northern region then had 77.0% Eastern Region 8.3%, Western region 8.5% and the Midwestern region 4.2%. With the 1963 census figures, the northern region accounted for 53.5% of the total population of Nigeria, the Eastern Nigeria 22.3%, the Western Region 18.4% and the Mid-Western region 4.6%. Thus, for three Southern regions, the federal structure as existed made it virtually impossible for the South to control political power at the centre, given the ethno-regional politics in the country. The South thus feared Northern political domination by population and landmass, while the North is equally afraid of southern edge in skills it got through Western education acquired earlier than the North (Elaigwu, 1977:147).

In fact, contemporary development, in terms of states' and local governments' creation exercises cum recruitment into public Nigerian offices has lent credence to the lopsided nature of the structure of the federation.

Table 1. Empirical indication of power (Presidency) between 1960-200.

No	Dates	Identities	States	Zones
1	Oct. 1, 1960-Jan. 14, 1966	T.F Balewa	Bauchi	North-East
2	Jan. 15, 1960-July 29, 1966	J.T.U. Ironsi	Abia	South-East
3	July 30, 1966-July 28, 1975	Y.T. Gowon	Plateau	North-Central
4	July 29, 1975-Feb. 13, 1976	M.R. Muhammed	Kano	North –West
5	Feb. 14, 1976-Sept. 30, 1979	O Obasanjo	Ogun	South –West
6	Oct. 1, 1979-Dec. 30, 1983	U.A.S. Shagari	Sokoto	North-West
7	Dec. 31,1983-Aug. 26, 1985	M. Buhari	Katsina	North – West
8	Aug. 27, 1985-Aug. 1993	I.B. Banbangida	Niger	Middle-Belt
9	Aug. 26, 1993-Nov. 17, 1993	E.A. Shonekan	Ogun	South-West
10	Nov.18, 1993-June 8, 1998	Sani Abacha	Kano	North –West
11	June 9, 1998-May 29, 1999	A. Abubakar	Niger	Middle-Belt
12	May 29, 1999-May 29, 2003(?)	O. Obasanjo	Ogun	South-West
13	May 29, 2003-May 29, 2007	O. Obasanjo	Ogun	South-West

Source: Sunday Tribune, 7th August, 1994, Ibadan, pp. 7-9 and updated by the author.

This feeling that the federation is tilted to the advantage of one of its component units tend to transform a federation into an imperial structure (Duchacek, 1970:195). It is the foregoing that breeds the problem of hegemonic traits by the major ethnic groups in the federation. It is also for these reasons that ethnic minorities who seem not to be reckoned with are restless.

If anything the greatest travail of Nigerian federalism is the problem of asymmetric power relationships between and among the disparate component units of the federation. There are accusations and counter-accusations as regards who is dominating whom? The Southern part of the federation is really aggrieved with what it called political domination. Empirical data from 1960, when Nigeria became politically sovereign, buttress this position that the federation is tilted in favour of the North. Table 1 speaks for itself.

On table 1, some basic comments are important. Firstly, the appearance of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo from the South-West as the Head of state in the 70s was purely accidental. He was next in command to Gen. Murtala Mohammed who was assassinated in a military putsch of 13th February, 1976. Automatically, the mantle of leadership fell squarely on him and he had continued as head of state from where Murtala stopped and later handed over power to Alhaji Sheu Shagari in 1979 in a controversial election. Secondly, Chief Ernest Shonekan, also from the South-West was manipulated in to office by the Military to head an Interim National Government (ING), to placate the South-Westerners who were aggrieved because of the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election won by their kinsman.

Thus, his administration lacked real power and legitimacy. It eventually collapsed after 82 days when it was declared illegal by a Federal High Court in Lagos. Interestingly, in the matrix of Nigerian politics, neither Obasanjo nor Shonekan could have ever emerged as Ojo, 2000:106-116). It is a truism that Obasanjo's re-emergence as civilian president from the South two decades after vacating that office as military head of state is not unconnected with the South-West threat of possible secession if not is given the shot at the presidency, which informed the two presidential candidates, coming from the same zone - South-west during the transition programme of Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar.

The third observation is that the regime which emerged on July 29th, 1977 ought to have been headed by late Brigadier Ogundipe who ostensibly was the most senior officer in the Army then. But report had it that he was deliberately schemed out of power game when his leadership was flatly repudiated as a Southerner, not only by the military but by the Northern oligarchy too, (Oluleye, 1985:38). The fourth comment is that the South-eastern zone and most especially the minorities are greatly disadvantaged whereas, the North-western axis have had the opportunity of ruling the country more than others both during the military and civilian administrations.

If the number one seat is a Northern affair, the composition of federal executives from independence to date is perhaps much more sectional in both military and civilian regimes. As rightly observed by Olopoenia (1998: 48-49) "the greatest manifestation of this tendency is the implicit policy of reserving the political and top bureaucratic management positions in certain key ministries at the federal level for people from certain parts of the country". These are usually ministries with the greatest concentration of important rights. The same is true of parastatals and other institutions of development with control over valuable rights. Empirical data also reveals that percentage representation in Federal Executive Council (FEC), since independence is also tilted in favour of the North. Table 2 too reflects it.

"Reparative Justice for the East and ojukwu" Third Eye on Sunday, Ibadan, 13th March, 1994, p.14. Looking at the above table, it is vivid that Northern political Nigerian leader from the South, (Ogbontiba, 1994:8,9 and domination

Table 2. Empirical indication of representation in the ruling body 1960 to 1998 both military and civilian government.

No	Regimes	Regions	Degree of representation (%)	
		North	37.3	
1	Balewa (F.E.C.)	West	37.3	
		East	35/4	
		North	50	
2	Ironsi (supreme Military Council)	West	33.3	
		East	16.7	
			Supreme Military Council	**(F.C.E.)**
		North	60	41.7
3	Gowon	West	40	41.7
		East	0	16.6
		North	59.1	44
4	Mohammed/Obasanjo	West	36.4	36
		East	4.5	20
		North	57.5 (F.E.C)	
5	Shagari	West	2.25	
		East	20	
		North	61.1	
6	Buhari (S.M.C.)	West	27.7	
		East	11.1	
		North	50	
		West	36.7 (1985)	
		East	13.3	
		North	54.5	
7	Babangida	West	36.4	
		East	9.1	
		North	55.6	
		West	38.8(1992)	
		East	5.6	
		North	4.79	
8	Shonekan's Interim National Government	West	31.2(1993)	
		East	21.9	

Source: Compiled and updated by the author from Osissioma Nwolise.

is not in terms of the number one seat and key ministries alone but also in terms of the number of people in the federal executive councils. Agreed that the North has larger population size, which has also been a subject of controversy too, but federalism and democracy are about concessions and ethnic accommodation rather than exclusion. Since 1960 when Nigeria assumed sovereign status, political power has been monopolized by the North as empirically demonstrated above. This hegemonic trait has never been denied by Northern potentates but rather rationalized on various grounds that are at best spurious. Isawa Elaigwu (1997: 147) puts it this way:

> "…there was a relatively delicate division of power between the North and the south. The North's control of political power was counter-balanced by the South's monopoly of economic power in the country. We may go further to suggest that the January coup of 1966 tilted the delicate balance between the North and the South it concentrated both political and economic power in the South, the North felt its sense of security threatened and reacted accordingly."

Sani Kotangora, speaking as a Northern potentate was of the view that:

The south is not content with monopolizing economic power and dominance of the federal civil service but has been thirsting for the choicest slice of the nation's politics-the presidency (Newslink, May 15, 1990:6).

Kotangora contended further in an interview by Newslink Magazine, with the screaming headline "Nigeria's Presidency, Not for the South", that democracy is a game of number. If they (Southerners) want to take it(the presidency), they can come and kill the people in the North so that our population can reduce". To him, political power will remain in the North perhaps forever

and that the only way the south can cling it is to "come and kill the people to win the presidency" (Newslink, May 15, 1990:6). To another Northerner, it will be, "morally and politically unfair not to allow the majority to decide who shall be president when a grave North-South imbalance persists in education and bureaucracy" (Suberu, 1995:433). Also justifying Northern hegemony as a deliberate ploy, Alhaji Maitama Sule, a Northern politician and member of the core elite opined that:

> "…everyone has a gift from God. The Northerners are endowed by God with leadership qualities. The Yourba man knows how to earn a living and has diplomatic qualities. The Igbo is gifted in commerce, trade and technological innovation. God so created us individually for a purpose and with different gifts (The News, April 8, 1996:15)."

This kind of conquest and monarchical spirit is an outright negation of federalism, (Ayoade, 1982). This also informs the basis of Southern agitation for political restructuring and a quick resolution of the national question. The perceived Northern hegemony was almost wholly responsible for the failed 1990 coup in Nigeria. According to Major Gideon Orka who led the coup:

> "…the need to stop intrigues, domination and internal colonization of the Nigerian State by the so-called chosen few (who are responsible) for 90 percent of the major clog in our wheel of progress. This cliques has an unabated penchant for domination and unrivalled fostering of mediocrity and outright detest for accountability, all put together have been our undoing as a nation (Nigeria would by now have become 'a newly industrializing country') like Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, India, and even Japan (Ihonvbere, 1991:620)."

The coupists disclosed further as part of the reason for their putsch that it was a:

…well conceived, planned and executed revolution for the marginalized, oppressed and enslaved peoples of the Middle Belt and the south with a view to freeing ourselves and children yet unborn from eternal slavery and colonization by a clique in this country (Ihonvbere, 1991:621).

In an in-depth study, Ayoade (1987:184) observed that religious bias too proved another form of poor distribution in Nigerian federalism more so, when equity and justice was put into abeyance. For instance, he noted that in the second republic (1979-1983), "countrywide, Moslems obtained about 70% of all executive and board positions".

On the other hand, the North too is less comfortable with southern domination of strategic sectors of the economy most especially the bureaucracy. The table below shows the position of the major ethnic groups in the country as at 1997 (Table 3).

It needs be emphasized that Southern hold on the bureaucracy is not a matter of deliberate manipulation or ploy to marginalise the North. But rather the educational gulf between both regions simply because of the South's early exposure to western education. In as much as position in the public service is a function of skill, the South may tower above the North for some time to come. The data above proved disequilibrum in power relationships. The unpalatable effect of the lopsidedness are political instability, ethnic disharmony and threat of secession. However, all the aforementioned travails are far from being exhaustive of all the absurdities of Nigerian federalism. We now turn to the conscious efforts at redressing the problems to achieve national cohesion.

MANAGING THE CONVOLUTED FEDRALISM

Despite all the highlighted problems facing Nigerian federalism, the country is still often regarded as a pioneer and an exemplar in Africa in the use of power-sharing mechanisms and practices to promote inter- ethnic inclusiveness, or discourage sectional imbalance and bias, in decision making processes (Suberu, 1996:71-72). It is these integrative mechanisms that have been holding the convoluted federation together. Commencing from the post civil war time, policy makers came up with the idea of an enhanced interaction among the nascent elite. The assumption of the policy is that if the emergent elite are forced to interact with the environment outside their natural milieu that they are likely to have better understanding of the Nigerian state. That is the ultimate objective behind the setting up of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme (NYSC) through Decree No. 24 of May 22, 1973. The scheme has been conscripting all young graduates for a year mandatory national service.

However, the implementation of the scheme is frustrating both in terms of favoritism and brazen misappropriation of funds. In fact, with problematic nature of citizenship in the country, it has been frustrating Nigerian Youths rather than integrating them. For instance, young graduates never dream of securing job where they serve for fear of being tagged 'non-indigene' and the accompanying discriminatory practices. Even, if employed, it is on contract basis.

Another accommodative strategy adopted in Nigeria is the one relating to politicians participation and rulership otherwise known as the 'federal character' principle. It is defined as "fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence" (Government's views and comments on the Findings and Recommendations of the Political Bureau, 1987:86-87). As laudable as this integrative mechanism is, the wide gap between intent and actual practices is making it counter-productive. The policy has been criticized for invading the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and such other

Table 3. Percentage labour distribution in Nigeria as at 1997.

No	Ministry	North	West	East
1	Presidency	36.5	43.5	20.28
2	Nigerian police Force (ASP-IG)	35.61	43.35	22.04
3	Judiciary	15.15	63.64	21.21
4	Justice	6.58	55.92	33.50
5	Internal Affairs	27.23	24.4	30.33
6	Nigerian Army (civilian)	13.00	51.00	30.00
7	Finance	8.68	68.85	22.47
8	Federal Audit Dept.	5.4	74.00	20.6
9	Federal Inland Revenue	5.1	72.1	22.79
10	CBN (Total 1994)	33.00	38.5	28.5
11	CBN (exec. Directors and Equiv.)	16.17	62.03	21.8
12	Economics Ventures in which FG has substantial interests (1994)	4.1	86.7	13.3
13	NEPA (1994)	14.92	52.59	32.49
14	NITEL	20.13	53.31	20.59
15	TRADE	16.16	64.65	19.19
16	Industry	5.28	68.20	31.8
17	National Planning	8.33	63.74	27.93
18	Agric and Water Resources	10.83	57.5	31.67
19	Power, Mines and Steel	12.93	58.21	28.86
20	Science and Technology	14.3	48.97	37.73
21	Transport and Aviation	13.55	53.56	35.09
22	Works and Housing	6.3	64.18	29.52
23	Education	13.04	47.98	38.38
24	Health and Social Welfare	5.12	66.54	28.34
25	Health (1994)	10.00	61.45	28.55
26	Employment, Labour and Productivity	9.86	53.97	34.17
27	Information and Culture	11.41	65.59	23.00
28	Youth and Sports	11.58	54.74	33.65
29	External Affairs	37.00	42.00	21.00

Sources: Federal staff List, 1997. Data on percentage Labour distribution in Nigerian. Also see Tell, Lagos, August 2, 1999, p. 14.

governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of party politics. Another problem is that the policy has been used to achieve unintended purposes of ethnic-cleansing sort-of (Sunday Tribune, July 16, 1995:5) . In the words of Ayoade (1998:13), it suffers from a faulty philosophical premise. One problem which it has not been able to resolve is the question of arithmetical or proportional equality among the states of the federation (Ayoade, 1982:21). The snag is that the policy is engendering federal instability rather than integration.

In an extensive nationwide survey carried out by Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2001:101), the impact of the 'federal character' policy on citizenship was explored. It is widely believed that it has created three types of Nigerian citizens. First, the most privileged are those who belong to the indigenous communities of the state in which they reside. Second, citizens who are indigenes of other states are less favoured and third, the least privileged are those citizens who are unable to prove that they belong to a community indigenous to any state in Nigeria, and women married to men from states other than their own. IDEA (2001), 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 distribution of social welfare services. Most of the respondents agreed that the situation should change to one in which citizenship is based solely on residence. Hence, a system like this can hardly promote national cohesion.

The removal of federal capital from Lagos to its present site at Abuja too was intended to be an integrative policy. But both the politics and administration of the new federal capital territory has not been helpful. The arrangement is so haphazard that the chairman and some members of the committee that recommended the new capital have openly lamented that the essence of the new capital has been jettisoned. The whole essence of the concept of a

new federal capital territory as a symbol of unity and nationhood has been completely put into abeyance. In a nutshell, Abuja, it appears is organized as 'a revenge project'. The disintegrative potential of Abuja has been well analyzed in an earlier work and needs not be recounted here, (Ojo, 1998:27-46).

It is crucial to note that minorities' agitation for self-determination is also being tackled. The Niger-Delta region which appears too restless is being gradually placated with higher revenue allocation to the region for producing oil which is the main stay of Nigeria's economy. The 1999 constitution allocated 15% to those oil producing states via the derivation principle. Though, it is early to judge the impact of this constitutional provision, it may redress the problem of ecological degradation and developmental amnesia in the region only if public functionaries in the zone eschew kleptocracy. Beyond higher revenue allocation, a development corporation, known as Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC), has been established to take care of the region. The integrative mechanisms discussed in this paper are far from being exhaustive. The problem with them all is the wide gap between intents and actual constitutional practices. Space constraints do not allow us to appraise the national language policy, Unity schools, states and local governments' creation exercises and the Federal Character Commission (FCC) among others

Conclusion

From this study, Nigeria's federal system is plagued by various contradictions. A federal system that claims to be secular is presently enmeshed in religious upheavals because of the adoption of shari'a in some Northern parts of the country (Ilesanmi, 2001:529-554). Yet, managing a federal system, particularly one transfixed on a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, calls for "the precision and dexterity of a chemist rather than the randomness and crudity of an alchemist" (Otubanjo, 1986:5- 11). Put differently, managing a federal system is a delicate balancing act requiring flexibility and rigidity, particularly, rigidity on matters in which the operating principles are unambiguous. Therefore, the distribution of power, privileges and liabilities must follow commonly agreed princeples both in form and in intent. Indeed, no federal system can survive on an ad hoc basis neither can one function effectively where the spirit of its operating principles are consistently abused.

Perhaps, the underlying problem inhibiting Nigeria's national integration is the absence of "a self-sufficient political/ideological commitment to the primary concept or value of federalism itself" (Frank, 1986:171-173). This is what Ayoade (Osahae, 1984:143) calls "commitment to the ideology of federalism", or what Friedrich (1963:175) calls "federal spirit". Thus, Nigeria's political practice seems to be antithetical to the principle of federalism. A federal arrangement that is still unable to resolve the problem of finding an acceptable revenue allocation formula is not good enough.

Nigerians need to find a solution to the country's crisis of unity in fiscals federalism, political re-structuring (Enahoro, 2002:a and b), derivative revenue sharing and the extensive decentralization of the present warped union where there is too much power and resources concentrated in the centre (Osuntokun, 2000:25). In essence, Nigeria needs an entirely different governance approach based on a different philosophy that will guarantee groups' rights by recognizing the heterogeneity of the polity. It is apt to conclude this piece with the view of a Canadian Political Science, Professor Jean-Pierre Derriennic, who has written: "it is not, as is often believed, cultural linguistic or religious heterogeneity that is dangerous for civil peace; it is the refusal to accept this heterogeneity…" (ISS Roundtable, 2002:24).

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