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REVISITING FEDERALISM IN NIGERIA

Ozy B. Orluwene, JP
Jones M. Jaja, PhD

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REVISITING FEDERALISM IN NIGERIA

Jones M. Jaja, (Ph.D.) and Ozioma B. Orluwene

Abstract
The paper takes a cursory look at the origin and practice of federalism in Nigeria. Federalism, according to Ali Mazuri, is the institutionalization of compromise relations that are noted for high degree of de-centralization, rigid and written constitutions, plurality of leadership among others. Theoretically, federalism is crafted to deal with sociologically complex polity as presented in Nigeria’s multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious compositions. This is adopted with a view to ensuring unity among the people and faith in their father land, so as to further the end of liberty, equality and justice in the country. The paper will further look at the pitfalls and unity strategies that are being experimented in the practice of federalism in Nigeria. The thrust of this paper is that, further decentralization is the way forward for Nigerian federalism in order to enable the component units participate effectively in the political and economic development of the country among others.

Introduction
The Nigerian state is a historical phenomenon. This phenomenon is the product of imperialism. Imperialism involves the political, economic and social control and exploitation of weaker nations by stronger ones in order to preserve the necessary conditions for capital accumulation (Ifesinachi, 2005:1).

The geographical entity Nigeria came into being in 1914. The British overlord undertook the Nigerian experiment not because they loved the geographical entity but because they wanted good business for their country. The idea of amalgamation was British in origin, prompted primarily by the desire to do good business. Nationhood was a secondary issue (Sunday Punch, Sept. 21, 2003: 4).

The coming together of the diverse heterogeneous groups now known as Nigeria was apparently the handiwork of the British Colonial Masters. According to Ojiako (1981), the first attempt to create a country by the name Nigeria by the British Colonial Authority started in 1906 when the Colony of Lagos and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated into the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

The second attempt was made in 1914 when the two administrations of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated and named the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Lord Lugard was appointed Governor-General with two Lieutenant Governors. It is necessary to state that the unification of Nigeria was carried out to satisfy the interest of the British Colonial Master. Some of the factors that necessitated the amalgamation include, the fact that the North could not muster sufficient funds to maintain/run its administration in spite of the annual grants from the imperial treasury and from the Southern administration. The amalgamation was aimed at relieving the imperial treasury of the burden constituted by its annual contribution towards the upkeep of the North.

The above background information is necessary and imperative to emphasize the objective of the unification of Nigeria in 1914 and to stress that the people were never consulted before the amalgamation was cemented. The colonial master saw federalism as an inevitability not because of the cultural diversity but because of the great possibilities and potentialities for exploitation of the vast economic resources. They were therefore obligated to introduce federalism in Nigeria (Obikeze,
2004). The above comment helps us to appreciate the origin of the present nation-State known as Nigeria.

The paper is in six segments. The first is introduction. The second segment conceptualizes federalism. The third examines the evolution and practice of federalism in Nigeria. Impediments to national integration are discussed in the fourth segment. Accommodative strategies of Nigerian federalism are discussed in segment five. Six segment concludes the paper.

**Conceptualizing Federalism**

Federalism as a concept derived its origin from the ancient twelve tribes of Israel and Archie on league of Greek city States (Daniel Elizer, 1986). The word federalism is derived from Latin world *Foedus* (covenant). The term federal was coined by the Bible-centred federal theologians of the 12th century Britain and New England.

The concept of federalism has attracted the attention of scholars, political activists, politicians and public affairs commentators over the years. The earliest and most profound theoretical exposition is probably the 85 essays that appeared in 1788 under the now famous title “The Federalist”. These essays were actually written in defence and support of the 1787 Constitution of the United States of America.

Federalism is a term described as a structural device for managing the affairs of a plural society. A considerably large number of scholars have written extensively on the concept of federalism. It has almost become a convention to begin its conceptualization with the work of Kenneth C. Wheare generally regarded as the originator of the modern concept of federalism (Okoko, 1998:16).

Wheare (1963:1) conceptualized federalism with the American union as the basis of his thesis. He sees federalism as the formal division of powers between levels of government. According to him:

> federal government is an association of states so organized that power are divided between a general government which in certain matters are independent of the governments of the associated states, and on the other hand, state governments, which in certain matters are in their turn, independent of the general government.

Wheare (1963:10) further states that people will adopt the federal system if they desire a single coercive force in some aspects and independent of the units in other aspects. He added that “by the federal principle, I mean the method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent”.

This statement of the federal principle is qualified by Wheare’s pointing out that it is a principle of organization and practice whose ultimate test is how the federal system operates. Wheare further listed conditions under which such a polity can exist and be sustained. These include among others, the formal and legal divisions of powers and responsibilities among levels of government as manifested in a written constitution, the establishment of an independent judicial system with a Supreme Court.

Although, Wheare has been criticized by other commentators for being legalistic, formal, rigid, euro-centric and idealistic, his formulation continued to serve as the springboard for subsequent analyses.

Appadorai (1975:495), in his postulation expressed the dire need for clear division in certain issues under mutual agreement. He explains that:
a federal state is one in which there is a central authority that represents the whole and acts on behalf of the common interest, and in which there are also provincial or state authorities with powers of legislation and administration within the sphere allotted to them by the constitution.

According to him, federalism is a political contrivance intended to reconcile national unity with the maintenance of state rights. He also recognized the formal division of governmental powers by the constitution and the supremacy of constitution as distinctive features of federalism.

Awa (1976:1) sees federalism:
as the coming together of different (sometimes also distinct) political units under a single political umbrella, a central authority (government) that faithfully represents the whole and acts on behalf of the whole in such areas as external affairs, which are in a sort of social contract agreed to be to the mutual interest of the different constituent units.

Nwabueze (1983:1) throws more light on the concept by stating that:
federalism is an arrangement whereby powers of government within a country are shared between a national (nation-wide) government and a number of regionalized (i.e., territorially localized) governments in such a way that each exists as a government separately and independently from the others, operating directly on persons and property within its territorial area with a will of its own and its own apparatus for the conduct of its affairs and with an authority in some matters exclusive of all others.

Thus, federalism implies and involves:
a) the existence of more than one level of government (central government), as powers and functions are vertically shared among the federal, regional, or state, as well as the local governments within each having its own constitution, flag, coat of arms, anthem, etc;
b) the powers and functions of each level of government are derived not from the central government but directly from the constitution and are separate vertically between the tiers of government;
c) these powers are usually explicitly embedded in the legislative lists – exclusive (for the Federal government), concurrent (for federal and states/regions), and residual (for regions/states or local governments;
d) the existence of written and rigid constitutions;
e) separation of powers among the various organs of government;
f) balanced sizes of federating components;
g) adequate funds to enable each component unit and the federal government operate;
h) dispersed authority since the different tiers of government have their respective functions.
i) resources in regions or states are controlled by the states and an agreed quantum paid into the central pool; and
j) the various levels of government operate as coordinates and equals, instead of subordinates or super-ordinates (Wheare, 1963; Ransom, 1943).

Federalism in actuality is all about treaty making. Therefore, it could be contended that without the legal framework, it would be difficult for sociological factors to work effectively. From the above, three things are clear. First is that constitutional specification is the starting point of any federal arrangement. Secondly, social, political and cultural factors determine and affect the
nature of any federal system. Thirdly, federalism is a concept for promoting unity in diversity and has to be worked upon by the country to reflect economic, social, cultural and historical reality.

Evolution and Practice of Federalism in Nigeria

The people and territories that make up what is today called Nigeria lived in chieftaincies, kingdoms, emirates/sultanates, empires or republics before British colonial invasion. Nigeria’s colonial experience began from the 1851 invasion of Lagos and its eventual annexation in 1861 as a British colony. Further colonial activities through the Royal Niger Company led to the creation of the Oil Rivers Protectorate which was re-named Niger Coast Protectorate in 1896 and the eventual establishment of the southern and Northern Protectorates. In 1906, Lagos Colony and Southern protectorates were merged. While in 1914, the Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated to create Nigeria (Tamuno, 1989).

The Clifford Constitution (1922) began with a unitary system of government, while the Richards Constitution (1946) recognizing the diverse nature of Nigerians aimed at creating a political system within which the diverse elements in the country may progress amicably and smoothly into unity without sacrificing the principles and ideas in their divergent ways of life. Thus, regionalism was introduced into Nigeria by this constitution. The Machpherson Constitution (1951) stamped the regional arrangement on Nigeria by granting greater autonomy to the regions, thus introducing quasi-federalism into the country. It was the Lyttelton Constitution (1954) which brought the federal principle more progressively into the country as it introduced three legislative lists – exclusive, concurrent and residual. The country gained independence in 1960 on a federal platform. The independence Constitution had three legislative lists: the exclusive list with about 45 items including defence, currency, immigration, external relations, etc; concurrent list containing about 25 items including higher education, industrial development, tourism, census, etc., and residual powers containing items such as primary and secondary education, health, public works, marketing boards, and others (Akpan, 1983).

Nigeria obtained independence with three regions: Northern, Western and Eastern regions. But contrary to all known principles of federalism, the North was deliberately made larger than the East and West combined. A fourth region – the Mid-west – was created in 1962. The regions were politically powerful, and economically very viable and buoyant. They made foreign policy statements, took external loans and had foreign offices. Each region had its own constitution, coat of arms, flag, anthem, etc; and was “sovereign” in its area of legislative jurisdiction. The federal government was thus very cautious in its domestic and foreign policies and actions especially over Israel and the Middle East. Each region had enough resources to meet its obligations and responsibilities to its people (Crowder, 1978).

The 1963 Republic Constitution retained the federal principle, and the three legislative jurisdictions. This constitution endured until 15th January, 1966 when the Nigerian military took over government of the country. The country witnessed tumults and crises which impinged upon the existing structural arrangements. It could be safely said that there was no serious threat to the federal system in the sense that our fiscal federalism took full cognizance of the need for diversification. The vision that the region should develop their economic potentials accounted for the diversified national economic base of those years: groundnut in the Northern, palm produces in the Eastern and Cocoa in the Western Regions. The phenomenal infrastructural development in those regions in the relatively short period of their existence, lends credence to the importance of diversification. Besides, subsystem autonomy had the salutary effect of imposing responsible economic management on the regions based on the provision of the 1963 Republican Constitution (chapter IX), 50 percent of the
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proceeds of any royalty or mining rents was paid to the Regions from where the mineral including oil were extracted (Anam-Ndu, 1998).

In the First Republic (1960–1965) period, federalism was maintained within the context of a democratic independent nation-state as well as structure and relation of power provided training for Nigerian nationalist who controlled the regional governments. Nevertheless, some ominous seeds which were to signal disintegration, were sown during that period. We refer to the 1963 census figures and the TIV riots of 1964 before then the crisis in the Western Region in 1962 which led to the declaration of state of emergency which amounted to virtual take-over of that region by the federal government with all its attendant consequences on regional autonomy, democratic governance, national unity and cohesion (Nwolise, 2005).

By May, 1999 the military had ruled Nigeria for over 29 out of the nearly 39 years of the country’s history as a sovereign state since independence from Britain in October, 1960. Civilian rulers on the other hand, had governed the country for a total of nine years and six months during the short-lived first Republic (1960 – 1965) and second Republic (1979–1983) respectively. A prolonged programme of transition to the Third Republic which would have ended military rule in 1993 was sabotaged and aborted by the very military administration that had elaborately initiated and crafted the project.

Different military administrations took varying measures that had so much devastating impact on the country’s federal system that they still haunt the nation today, threatening at times, to snuff life out of the system. These measures as summarized by Nwolise (2005) include the following: (a) loss of the power and autonomy of component units, (b) abolition of the federal system, (c) balkanization of Nigeria into 36 states, (d) fiscal debilitation of the component units of the federal system, and (e) suppression of culture of enlightened challenges from component units.

In essence, the political hegemony of centralizing military elites and the instability of civilian rule which promoted the country’s sectional fragmentation, polarization, socio-economic stagnation, account for many of the contemporary tension and contradictions of Nigerian federalism. The gunshots of that early harmattan morning of January 15, 1966, not only eliminated some of the founding fathers of federalism in Nigeria, but also killed the essence of federalism itself (Anam-Ndu, 1999).

The federal form which survived that military onslaught and on the basis of which the country precariously persisted as an entity, has never since regained its true essence. Two interrelated developments accounted for that demise. First, the coup and the eventual threat to the unity of the country following the secession by the Eastern Nigeria and the eventual Civil War were traumatic events that called for centralized authority capable of pulling the country back into one fold. Furthermore, there was and still has been the professional practice of unified command with which soldiers are familiar. Ever since successive military regimes – eight of them in thirty-three years (1966 – 1999) have perfected the menace of centralization. Till date, the concentration at the center, of a formidable array of legislative and other responsibilities remains one of the disruptive heritage of military rule in Nigeria. One would have thought that the series of constitutional reviews undertaken after the Civil War would have restored the true essence of federalism. Rather, the orgy of centralization was in each case, perfected and constitutionalized (Anam-Ndu, 1998).

The first constitution drafting after the civil war was in 1979. That Constitution was made largely under the pressure of hunting fear and consequently, with an intellectual background that the federating units should be made as weak as they could possibly be. The centralization of power designed and perfected in a single constitution for the federal and the 19 states governments at that time was aimed at forging national unity. Regrettably, it was short of the vision such that unity was at
best promoted through conscious provision for diversity. Today, decades after the civil war, it has become clear that the secession it was no pretence by one region and its consequences had left a permanent fear even among soldier statesmen of harmless worms mistaken for deadly serpents.

For whatever purpose it was meant to serve, another constitution making exercise was undertaken in 1989. The Citizens/Delegates that were involved in that exercise worsened matters as they were largely “new-breed”, inexperienced and unemployed individuals recruited to alienate and displace the experienced politicians of the First and Second Republics, most of whom were banned from political participation. Although the 1989 Constitution eventually came to nothing, the unfortunate outcome of both exercises was the placement of over 67 items under the legislative jurisdiction of the Federal Government while leaving jurisdiction on only 12 items with states in the concurrent list (Anam-Ndu, 1998).

In spite of its reformist posture, the 1995 constitution succumbed to the modish paranoia particularly on issues involving devolution of power. The setting up of a Committee on devolution of power after the dissolution of the National Constitutional Conference gave hope, but it was forlorn as the committee desperately working to actualize General Abacha’s self-succession bid, desecrated all the sensitive provisions in the Draft Constitution which addressed some of the suppressed issues of federalism in Nigeria.

Rather than start from where the 1995 Draft Constitution ended, General Abubakar’s administration not only reverted to 1979 Constitution, but concentrated more powers at the centre than before. Thus, the so-called 1999 constitution has 68 items on the Exclusive List and 30 minor ones on the Concurrent list. Decisively, the 1999 Constitution is a blueprint for unitarism in a country that is supposed to be a federal union of states. It was, therefore, at best meant to consolidate power in a hegemonic coalition of major ethnic groups and thereby impose the hegemony of one ethnic group on the rest of the country under the cloak of multipartyism. It has not reflected the lessons from Nigeria’s political crises since independence, nor insured the future against a recurrence of such crises (Anam-Ndu, 2003).

Amidst intense pressure of centrifugal forces markedly pointing in the direction of state autonomy, the Obasanjo administration called for memoranda from the public to review the constitution. Given the enormity of the problem and the ethnic impulse of the National Assembly on issues relating to power sharing, it is regrettably to note that the past National Assembly for eight years (1999-2007) did not effect the restoration of the missing links in the development of federalism in Nigeria.

Impediments to National Integration

In spite of political independence in 1960, Nigeria has been reeling from one problem to the other, which make cohesion difficult. To start with, Nigeria’s federal system is highly centralized. Coleman (cited in Peil, 1976:115) observes that the “excessive centralization and statism of most developing countries ... not only mean greater vulnerability as a result of unfulfillment of populist expectation; it also means heightened inefficiency”. Unlike Switzerland, which despite being a small country, remains one of the most decentralized countries in the world as noted by Koller (2002:27). Above all, it also means the absence of critically important supportive capacity in the society, because the public cannot respond to, direct, or restrain a policy which is so far removed from it as a centralized government tends to be (Koller, 2002:115).

Concomitant with these intractably centralized nature of the Nigerian federalism is the precarious and ambiguous position of the constitutional provision. The scenario exacerbates rather than assuages the country’s cohesion. What is more, the states were often the settings for a perverse form of politico-distributive exclusive, which pitted so-called indigenes against non-indigenes.
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Ironically, this dichotomy is legalized by Nigeria’s federal character policy, which prescribes the equitable distribution of public opportunities and resources among persons from, or indigenes of, all the states of the federation (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, sections 14 and 147). But the concept of indigene-ship is constitutionally defined tautologically in terms of genealogy rather than residency. Thus, under section 318 of the 1999 constitution, a Nigerian can claim to “belong to” a constituent state of the federation if either of his or her “parents or ... grand-parents was a member of a community indigenous to that state”.

This provision has encouraged indigenes to exclude so-called non-indigenes (Nigerians resident in states in which they have no direct genealogical communal root) from valued opportunities (public employment, political appointments, educational admissions, lands and related resources) that are controlled by, or channeled through, the states. In several instances, notably in the clashes between migrant Tivs and their neighbours in Taraba and Nassarawa states, and between the Hausa and the Birom-Afizere-Anaguta in Plateau state enormous violence, involving hundreds of fatalities, had resulted from concerted attempts by indigenes to exclude large, but ostensibly non-indigenes, resident communities from economic and political opportunities controlled by state and local governments (Human Rights Watch 2001, 2002a). This undermines the efficacy of the federal structure.

Unlike in India where there is no dual citizenship, in which case there is only one Indian citizenship and the concept of a state citizen does not exist (Sangma, 2002:35), to be employed outside one’s ethnic base at state government level in Nigeria is really a big risk in the sense that such a person is a “non-indigene”. Indeed, 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 dead are rarely buried outside their states of origin. The implication of this is that citizens’ allegiance to the federation is truncated because of the states’ preferential treatment of its citizens (Ojo, 2001:8-9). Yet, the citizens that are discriminated against pay taxes and perform other duties in their states of residence. A system whereby the state cannot effectively tackle the problem of citizenship negates the tenet of federalism. Laski’s (1982:89) view in this issue is apt: “a state must give to men their dues as men before it can demand, at least with justice, their loyalty”.

The protracted and unabated conflict between the executive and legislative arms of government in the current Fourth Republic provides another cogent example of the faulty constitutional provision. The battle line has produced multiple arenas and cuts across vital constitutional issues that threaten to suffocate the process of democratic consolidation. This gladiatorial contest has found expression in the differences between the executive and legislative arms at the national level, in the differences over the 2000 Appropriation Bills, the 2002 federal budget, the Anti-Corruption and Niger Delta Development Commission bills, the saga of the alleged N4m bribing of members of the House of Representatives to impeach the former speaker, Ghali Umar Na’Abba, the Electoral Act and the failed impeachment process against President Olusegun Obasanjo. Regarding the constitutional provision impediments, Crommelin (2002:439) observes that “the distribution of power provokes a variety of disputes, between levels of government, between governments at the same level, and between people (or peoples) and a government or governments. All such disputes, however, involve basic issues of Constitutionalism: Definition and Enforcement of limits upon governmental authority”.

Another impediment is structural imbalance. According to Mill’s law of federal instability, “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 Nigerian system is, indeed, far from being balanced. It will be recalled that
Macpherson Constitution (1951) created a central legislature which had 136 elected representatives out of which the Northern region alone had 68 members, making it possible for the North to swallow the other regions combined or hold them to ransom (Awolowo, 1986:36 – 51).

This problem is not unconnected with the awkward and lopsided origin of the Nigerian federal structure, which has created problems of seemingly permanent dimensions. First, the division of the country into three units 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 is no federal system 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 dominant in collective decisions, it results into a unitary centralism rather than a federalism. Indeed, from empirical indication, this structural imbalance generated fear of domination among various groups in the country, especially among the minority ones.

In terms of landmass, the Northern region then had 77.0 percent, Eastern region 8.3 percent, Western region 8.5 percent and the Midwestern region 4.2 percent. According to the 1963 census figures, the Northern region accounted for 53.5 percent of the total population of Nigeria, the Eastern region 22.3 percent, the Western region 18.4 percent and the Midwestern region 4.6 percent. Thus, 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 was equally afraid of the Southern edge in skills and western education (Elaigwu, 1977:147).

More recent developments, in terms of states and local governments creation exercises as well as recruitment into public Nigerian offices, have reinforced the lopsided nature of the structure of the Nigerian federation. The feeling that the federation is tilted to the advantage of one of its component units tends to transform the federation into an imperial structure (Duchacek, 1977:195). It is the foregoing that breeds the problem of hegemonic domination by the major ethnic groups in the federation. It is also for these reasons that ethnic minorities are restless.

Despite the aforementioned, one of the greatest travails of the Nigerian federalism is the problem of asymmetric power relationships between and among the disparate component units of the federation. The federation is rife with mutual accusations and counter-accusations of domination and marginalization. The South is aggrieved by what it calls political domination by the North. Osuntokun (1994) buttresses the position that Nigeria’s federation is tilted in favour of the North. Some comments by the above newspaper are necessary. The appearance of General Olusegun Obasanjo from the South-West as head of state in the 1970s was accidental. He was next to General Murtala Mohammed who was assassinated on 13 February 1976. Automatically, the mantle of leadership fell on Obasanjo who later handed over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979 in a controversial election. Chief Ernest Shonekan, also from the South-West, was manipulated into office by the military to head an Interim National Government (ING), to placate the Yoruba who were aggrieved because of the annulment of 12 June 1993 presidential election won by their kinsman, M.K.O. Abiola. Thus, the Shonekan administration lacked real power and legitimacy and was short-lived. Obasanjo’s subsequent re-emergence as civilian president from the South-West two decades after vacating that office as military head of state is not unconnected with the abiding need to placate the South-West over the same fraudulent annulment of Abiola’s 1993 presidential election victory. The third observation is that the regime which emerged on 29 July 1966 ought to have been headed by Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe who was the most senior officer in the army then. But reports had it that he was deliberately schemed out after his leadership was rejected by the Northern military and

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political establishment (Oluleye, 1985:38). The fourth is that the South-east, including the Igbos and the South-Eastern minorities, are greatly disadvantaged politically whereas the North, and to some extent, the South-west, have had a disproportionate share of federal executive power.

If the presidential position is largely a Northern affair, the composition of the federal executive from independence to date is perhaps much more sectionally lopsided. 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 resources and responsibilities. Even if it is agreed that the North has the largest population size, which is quite controversial, federalism and democracy are about concessions and ethnic accommodation rather than exclusion and domination.

Northern regional hegemony has never been denied by the Northerners but rather, rationalized on various spurious grounds. Elaigwu, (1977:147) 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”.

Similarly, Sani Kotangora, 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 policy – the presidency (Kotangora, 1990:6). To Kotangora, Nigeria’s presidency is not for the South, because “democracy is a game of numbers. 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”. Also justifying Northern hegemony, Alhaji Maitama Sule, a northern politician opined that “... everyone has a gift from God. The northerners are endowed by God with leadership qualities. The Yorubaman 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” (Sule, 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 the political restructuring and radical resolution of the national question. The perceived northern hegemony was almost wholly responsible for the failed 1990 coup in Nigeria. The coup plotters disclosed that their putsch 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” (Ayoade, 1982:621).

Ayoade (1987:184), observes that, religious bias has proved to be another form of poor distribution in Nigerian federalism. For instance, in the Second Republic (1979-1983), ‘countrywide, Muslims obtained about 70 percent 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 (Ojo, 2005).

The long reign of military rule has no doubt created the structural problem of Nigerian federalism. In line with its command structure, Nigeria’s federal system has been over-centralized to the extent that it reflects more of the unitary arrangement than a federal one (Elaigwu, 1998:6-7). Yet, Nigeria began with a formal federal constitution in 1954, which was decentralized to accommodate the diverse ethnic groups. For instance, 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 acquired more powers to the detriment of the federating units. The first coup in 1966 abolished regional police. Though it brought government closer to the people, the creation of twelve states on the eve of the civil war in 1967 entailed considerable loss of power by the federating units. The Murtala - Obasanjo military junta in its bid to reduce “divisive tendencies” in the nation, abolished states’ 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 (Policy Briefs, October 1999). In addition, the federal military government took over assets owned by states or group of states like television stations, stadia and newspapers, thereby strengthening the powers of the federal government at the expense of the states in terms of asset ownership. This made the contest for political power at the federal level a lot more intense among the federating units and it laid the foundation for many years of crisis and instability (Policy Briefs, October 1999). This viewpoint is supported by Tamuno (1998:29) who attributes the travails of Nigeria’s federalism to “successions of military rulers at the federal and state levels” who perverted the system through “robust centralism”. Similarly, Adejumobi (2002:5) posits rather definitively: “Since independence in 1960, the emphasis has been on maintaining Nigeria’s federal structure and system of government, but the long years of military rule has perverted the idea”.

The journey so far shows that the saliency of the “national unity” otherwise known as “cohesion” “or integration” remains an unsettled theoretical issue in Nigeria. A study of the strategy and tactics of African ruling classes since independence seems to buttress the position. As Ake (1978; 1993:32) and Gana (1987) pointed out, African ruling cliques since independence, have employed the idiom of unity and national integration not only to demobilize the masses but to make the case for the primacy of development over personal freedom, insisting that this requires not only unity of purpose but unanimity of method. In the blind pursuit of such interested goals, they proceeded to justify “the criminalization of political dissent and the inexorable march to political monolithism”.

**Accommodative Strategies for National Integration**

Despite the problems facing Nigerian federalism, the country is 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 promoting interaction and cooperation among the Nigerian elite. The assumption of the policy is that if the elite is forced to interact with the environment outside their natural milieu that they are likely to have better understanding of the Nigerian state. This is the reason behind the establishment of the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) by Decree No. 24 of 22 May, 1973. The scheme enlists all young graduates for a mandatory one-year national service. However, the implementation of the scheme is frustrating both in terms of entrenched ethnic favouritism and brazen misappropriation of funds. For instance, young graduates cannot secure jobs where they serve because they are not indigenes, followed by other discriminatory practices. Even, when employed, it is on contract basis.

Another accommodative strategy adopted in Nigeria is 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 View 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 practice is making it counter-productive. The policy
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has been criticized for invading the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and such other governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from party politics. Another problem is that the policy has been a mask for ethnic-cleansing (Dewan, 1995). It also suffers from a faulty philosophical premise (Ayoade, 1982:21; 1988:13). In essence, the policy is engendering federal instability rather than integration.

In an extensive nationwide survey carried out by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2001:101), the impact of the “federal character” policy on citizenship was explored. It is believed that it has created three types of Nigerian citizens; namely, indigenes, non-indigenes, and those citizens who are unable to prove that they belong to a community indigenous to any state in Nigeria as well as women married to men from states other than their own (IDEA, 2001). Such a multiple system of citizenship inevitably engenders discrimination in jobs, land purchase, housing, admission to educational institutions, marriage, business transactions and the distribution of social welfare services. Most of the respondents to the survey agreed that the situation should be changed to one in which citizenship is based solely on residency.

The constitutional provision as contained in the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria assuaged the exacerbated impediment in Nigerian cohesion through the political representation and accommodation of sub-national constituencies at the federal level which has been advanced by a wide variety of means including, the equal representation of all the states of the federation in the powerful Senate (the upper chamber of the bicameral federal legislature); the appointment of at least one federal minister (member of the federal executive council) and an Ambassador or High Commissioner for foreign missions from each state of the federation; the conscious, although by no means completely successful attempt by the Obasanjo administration, to fulfill the constitutional mandate of “federal character” in the distribution of public positions and resources; and the adoption of a more or less informal ethno-regional power-sharing arrangement by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Suberu, 2005).

Under the power-sharing arrangement, the six most important political positions in the federation were shared among the six geopolitical zones as follows: the President of the Federal Republic (Yoruba southwest), the Vice-president (Hausa-Fulani/minority northeast), the President of the Senate (Igbo southeast), the Deputy Senate President (ethnic minority Middle-Belt or North-Central), the Speaker of the House of Representatives (Hausa-Fulani north-west), and the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives (ethnic minority south-south or Niger Delta). As expected, at the end of the maximum two terms of the Yoruba President of Nigeria in 2007, the Presidential slot we speculate would go to the Hausa-Fulani of the North-West. And the other key political positions would be shared among the geopolitical regions as: the Vice President to the South-South, Senate President to North central and Deputy Senate President to South-East. Others are Speaker of House of Representative to South-West and Deputy Speaker of House of Representative to North-East. A major attraction of this power-sharing arrangement is its flexibility and informality as a political party convention, which helps to prevent ethno-sectarian polarization and gridlock that has tarnished more rigid or constitutionally entrenched power-sharing arrangements in countries like Lebanon and the former Yugoslavia (Suberu, 2005).

A further accommodative feature of Nigeria federalism involves the use of the revenue allocation system to redistribute centrally collected oil revenues to all the states of the federation. This distribution policy has helped to prevent large disparities in the access of the various Nigerian groups to financial resources, promote a sense of national loyalty in resource-poor sections, and consolidate the authority of the central government. But the “boomerang effects” of this distributive system are evident in the feelings of economic dispossession in the oil-endowed regions, the economic
dependency and complacency of the sub-national units, the development of a debilitating and divisive "national cake-sharing psychosis," the enervation of any incentives to genuine economic development and diversification, the over-centralization of the federation, and the potentially explosive tendency underscored by the massive PDP victories in the April-May 2003 elections towards hegemonic domination of the entire federation by the ruling factions at the center (Suberu, 2005).

It is, however, crucial to note that minorities’ agitation for self-determination is being tackled. The restless oil-rich Niger Delta region is being gradually placated with higher revenue allocation through the constitutional provision for the re-allocation of not less than 13 percent of federally collected oil revenues on a regional derivation basis. This may redress the problem of ecological degradation and developmental neglect in the region but only if public functionaries in the sector eschew corruption. Beyond higher revenue allocation, a development corporation, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), was established to address the needs of the region.

The transfer of the federal capital from Lagos to Abuja was intended to be an integrative policy. But both the politics and administration of the new Federal Capital Territory have not been palatable. The chairman and some members of the committee that recommended the new capital have since lamented that its integrative essence has been abandoned. The whole essence of the concept of a new Federal Capital Territory as a symbol of unity and nationhood has been completely put in abeyance. The federation is now confronted with brazen demonstration of the "death" of the original concept of Federal Capital Territory for Nigeria as a symbol of unity by the current reference even by government mass media to the Federal Capital Territory as the 20th state of Northern Nigeria. In a nutshell, Abuja, it appears, is organized as northern "revenge project" against southern Yoruba domination of Lagos.

A final feature of the accommodative strategy adopted in Nigeria is the informal dispute resolution – the use of mechanisms outside the constitutionally stipulated procedures, which has been a recurrent feature of conflict management in Nigeria. Such alternative dispute resolution techniques for conflict resolution have featured committee of elder statesmen and women or what is known as Patriots in Nigeria. A graphic example is the intervention of former two Heads of State (General Yakubu Gowon and Alhaji Shehu Shagari) in the impeachment impasses between the Obasanjo administration and the legislature. Both at the state and local government levels, the engagement of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), as well as traditional and religious elite as conflict mediators have contributed enormously in a number of cases to the cessation of hostilities (Bassey, 2005).

Suggestions and Conclusion

Based on the above, the study recommends that there should be a re-structuring of the Nigerian society, economically and politically in the direction of letting the states control their resources. This will reduce the huge sums of money dumped at the centre and consequently the cutthroat and near warfare struggle to control the centre. On the other hand, it will help to unleash the latent productive capacity of every state, which will invariably stimulate healthy economic competitions among states and geo-political zones, leading to substantial economic growth and development through active participation of the states in wealth creation.

Going by the various conceptualization of federalism by different scholars as analyzed and re-echoed in this work, the glaring fact that federalism is a governmental arrangement that is compatible with multi-ethnic, multi-national, culturally heterogeneous societies like Nigeria is indicated. It is therefore evident that the key to national integration based on federal practice in Nigeria lies squarely in the adoption of the measures recommended in this study.
References


