

**A DECONSTRUCTION OF PLATO'S CONCEPT OF EUGENIC BREEDING  
AND FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*It is an obvious fact that Nigeria as a country is a diverse society and therefore this diversity is considered to be an integral part of its existence. Hence, the reflection of the "Federal Character" principle in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria since 1979, seeks to ensure that political appointments and other relative appointment to the public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country. The federal character principle ought to have brought about an inclusive government; but nonetheless this has degenerated the Nigerian society into a hub of prejudices and sentiments in every quarter of our structural endeavor. Thus, applying the federal character principle within the contextual application towards the realization of justice and fairness has disrupted the meritocratic basis for effectiveness and efficiency. This paper argues that the federal character principle has not contributed to good governance in Nigeria. As such, the intent of Plato's eugenic breeding is to create a meritocratic base system of appointments devoid of linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic sentiments. This becomes the basis for justice and fairness. Citizenship becomes the standard to effectively seek the common good that will constitute the process of the realization of justice and fairness; rather than making divides as a necessary characterization of our polity. This paper methodologically implemented the qualitative research to explore and deconstruct the intention of Plato's eugenic breeding not as a biological exploration towards sexual orientations but breeding in the sense of selection and recruitment in the political process known as 'social-eugenics'.*

**Keywords:** Eugenic Breeding, Plato, Nigeria, Federal Character, Citizenship

## **Introduction**

The understanding of justice and fairness in Nigeria is considered utmost in factoring religion, tribe, ethnicism that breeds sentiments into good governance, participatory democracy to the realization in the integral development of the human person. This brings to question the idea of the “Federal Character” principle in Nigeria. Nevertheless, there is a constitution in Nigeria that reflects the federal character principle; which of course has its own intention of accommodating every Nigerian into the civil service or public service and political appointments. Yet, despite its good intention, the federal character principle has caricatured professionalism and reduces competence and experience to a quick sand of irrelevance. In the words of the Nigeria’s Deputy Senate President, he opined that it is “regrettable that the federal character has become a euphemism for recruiting unqualified people into the public service”. In fact, the federal character principle has even increased tribal, ethnic and religious domination because of its sporadic effect. In the words of Onyeoziri “the implementation of the federal character has caused a lot of tension among the different federating units in the country” (2002:17). Let’s take for example, if by virtue of given consideration to the principle of federal character system a Yoruba man is made Minister of the Federal Capital Territory; the next thing is to fill key positions within that ministry with his kinsmen from his ethnic group and even from his religious affiliation not minding the need for competence and merit. In theory it makes a lot of sense but practically it is not operational and this will definitely affect the value added growth to the organization. As such, in *Federal Character: Effective Economic Tool of Ethnic Domination* Nasiru N. Haruna argues that:

Federal Character is enshrined in the constitution to prevent tribal or regional domination of any government or its agency. With due respect, it’s inappropriate application creates mediocrity, inequality, corruption, lack of transparency and/or competition and above all tribal dominance by the major ethnic groups. Federal character ordinarily protects minorities, but under the constitution it is operated to protect the majority ethnic groups’ lack of will and competitiveness and open-mindedness (2008).

The federal character principle has been in existence even before independence and was known as “zoning or quota system”. It is this same mindset that has launched into the political leadership arena of governance were “Power Rotation” has now become the basis for leadership choice in the Nigeria polity;

and contradicting the Nigeria constitution on the right to freedom from discrimination and the right to vote and be voted for as Nigerian Citizens which constitutes the basis of the fundamental human right and the Universal Declaration of Human Right. The implication here is the undermining of participatory democracy and the quest of justice and fairness in Nigeria. The questions are what is wrong if a Yoruba man becomes a state governor in Kaduna State? What is wrong if someone from the least tribe in Nigeria becomes President? Why will Nigerians not look beyond tribe, religion, etc. and vote whomever they wish to vote for as long as such person is competent? Why are we so interested in “our very own” become the head and helm of affairs even though when there is a foreseeable benefits or not? Does federal character breed more of a psychological satisfaction of the human person or an integral development of the human person? It is in the light of this the paper despite the various “misinterpretation” tries to deconstruct the intent of Plato’s Eugenic breeding and emphasizes the need for a meritocratic society base on citizenship as the basis for any form of appointments or employment. The paper does not see “eugenic breeding” as a solution to the problem of Nigeria, but that the Federal Character Principle has not solved the challenges of good governance in Nigeria; but the intention of a socio-eugenic process can help in guaranteeing a meritocratic based society were citizenship competence is the underlying factor for recruitment and selection process.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Federal Character**

Federal character suggest an attempt to build a nation where equal opportunities abound and where every individual must feel that he or she has equal chance to participate without bias of ethnic affiliations (Talib 1987:2). These suggest that federal character is a corrective measure to correct an anomaly through reactions that will positively impact on public management and to avoid exploitation from a particular group against another group. Further definition of federal character is a deliberate design to accommodate less dominant but often forcibly expressed interest (Olagunju 1987: 33). It is a design which is aimed at de-politicizing new demand through an institutional arrangement. According to Morenike Taire in *Federal Character at Its Best and Worst: The Unity Schools Example*, she defines federal character as:

an affirmative action drive, a well-practiced global system by which the disadvantaged in the society are incorporated and included,

with a view to creating stronger links between socio-economic groups for the greater good of all (2017).

According to the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC), it conceptualized federal character as:

refers to the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the environment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (1977).

From the definition of the CDC This paper will define federal character as a means and process of ensuring equitable distribution of resources for the common good and progress of society.

### **Eugenic Breeding**

The word "eugenics" has its origin from a Greek word *eugenes* meaning 'well-born'. It is a set of beliefs and practices that aims at improving the genetic quality of a human population. The Oxford English Dictionary describes Eugenic breeding as "the science of improving a population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics". Although philosophers have contemplated the meaning and value of eugenics at least since Plato recommended a state-run program of mating intended to strengthen the guardian class in his *Republic*, the modern decades following Charles Darwin's 1859 publication *On the Origin of Species*, the crazes like wildfire spread through Britain, the United States and Europe. Francis Galton (1883), Darwin's cousin who coined the name eugenics - became obsessed with his relative's theory of evolution. He believed breeding humans with superior mental and physical traits could help the human race evolve in a better way and was essential to the well-being of society. He wrote: "eugenics is the science which deals with all influences which improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those which develop them to the utmost advantage" (2018). Galton was interested in "improving human stock" through scientific management of mating; his explicit goal was to create better humans (Sara 2014). Frederick Osborn's (1937:387) journal article *Development of a Eugenic Philosophy* framed it as a social philosophy - that is, a philosophy with implications for social order in which he advocated for higher rates of sexual reproduction among people with desired traits

(positive eugenics), or reduced rates of sexual reproduction and sterilization of people with less-desired or undesired traits (negative eugenics).

For the purpose of this paper, in the understanding of Plato, this paper will define eugenic breeding from a political rather than a biological function as the process of selection and selecting the best for the purpose of equal distribution of resources and in the act of performance and competence for the growth and benefit of society. Hence, socio-eugenic breeding is the process of selection, and recruitment of the best into leadership position and civil service for better delivery in governance.

### **The Federal Character Principle and Its Historical Development in Nigeria**

The idea of the federal character principle is not new. It was known by different nomenclature such as zoning or quota system. Its informal origins date back to the pre-independence era of nationalist struggle for participation in the administration of colonial Nigeria and especially after Nigeria became a federation in 1954. Originally, during its informal application, it was concerned with legislative representation and equalization of inter-regional opportunities in education and appointments at the federal level. The Federal Character Principle which made its debut into the Nigerian political and public administrative landscape through the drafting and adoption of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria appeared to be a normative expression of the historical belief of Nigerians in equal access to and participation in the political and administrative affairs of the country in the area of policy formulation and implementation. Hence for Alubo it was “the lack of representation in policy making and implementation by some segments of the Nigerian society in the past that has denied them the opportunities for education and economic advancement” (2003:54); and such was one of the reasons for the Federal Character principle. The Federal Character Commission (FCC) is a Federal Executive Body established by Act No. 34 of 1996 to implement and enforce the Federal Character Principle of fairness and equity in the distribution of public posts and socio-economic infrastructures among the various federating units of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The provisions of the 1999 Constitution in Sections 14 and 153 consolidated the establishment of the FCC for operation in a democratic system of Government. One of the Federal Character Commission duty is to work out an equitable formula, subject to the approval of the President, for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the civil and public service of the Federation and of the State, the armed forces, the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies, bodies corporate owned by the federal or a State Government

and Extra-Ministerial Departments and parastatals of the Federation and States. Aside from the fact that we can trace the history and development of the Federal Character Principle, Afigbo however, was more specific, when he posits that “the term federal character is one of the inventions of the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) inaugurated by the late General Murtala Mohammed on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1975” (1989:3). We could also see traces of such historical development of the federal character principle from 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Gberevbie & Ibietan 2013: 48).

The federal character was stated in the Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution; this statement is to ensure the principle that all public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, religious, and ethnic geographical diversity of the country. This is reflected in the 1999 Constitution Sections 14 & 153 thus:

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

One of the Federal Character Commission duties is to work out an equitable formula, subject to the approval of the President, for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the civil and public service of the Federation and of the State, the armed forces, the Nigerian Police force and other security agencies, bodies corporate owned by the federal or a State Government and Extra-Ministerial Departments and parastatals of the Federation and States.

**A Philosophical Interrogation into the “Federal Character” Principle in Nigeria**  
Philosophy is everything and not everything is philosophy; but the federal character principle is a philosophy that is theoretically in policy but practically not operational in Nigeria; since philosophy is about the interest of everyone in the society to live a minimal good life, it has become very pertinent for Nigerian philosophers to delve into this principle that has kept us in the dark for so long without reaping from its value. A value that was supposed to be meant to enhance development has rather become an unmitigated disaster and if not properly harnessed will be kept in the stratosphere of irrelevance. The federal character principle is a very popular political slogan in various governments that comes into the political scene after elections. As such, this principle despite its

appealing nature has done more harm than good. There is a need to interrogate its operation to evaluate the value it has added to the reason behind its existence since its inception.

What is indeed wrong with the federal character principle? Is the problem with the principle as it is or with the mindset of its existence? Is the federal character principle a problem of application or the nature of the principle in itself? It is important to ask these questions so we do not throw away the baby with the bathing water. What if we begin to interrogate those behind this idea and the intention of behind the federal character principle? Is it possible to really ascertain the level of the intention as it relates to the common good? Or is it a means of making sure some disgruntled politicians who are interested in political power or in the administrative process of selection so as to be part of the decision making body of the country? Is it possible to carve out a Rawlsian position of originality of the federal character principle that is more objective and more inclusive? With these questions in mind, no serious country will settle for less in the era of political technology. The era of political technology is what this paper identifies with Karl Popper's "social engineering" in his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. There is a very close link between political technology and social engineering in which Popper defines "as a science of action and what steps to take if we must make the distribution of wealth more even, or less even" (1945:22). According to Karl Popper:

The social engineer does not ask any questions about historical tendencies or the destiny of man. He believes that man is the master of his own destiny and that, in accordance with our aims; we can influence or change the history of man just as we have changed the face of the earth (1945:22).

The federal character principle has been a historical decisive factor to believe as the only way out of tribalism but not much has been done to change the status-quo of remodeling this primitive principle that has taken us backward as if to say we still live in a semi primitive society. The intentions of those behind the federal character principle base their argument of its existence in the various historical developments of the Nigeria Constitution as a moral basis for its operation. Yet, this is what Karl Popper has to say in order to dislodge the moral basis of the federal character principle and the need for it to be interrogated. He said thus:

The social engineer and [political] technologist will hardly take much interest in the origin of institutions, or in the original intentions of their founders... rather, he will put his problem like

this. If such and such are our aims, is this institution well designed and organized to serve them? As an example we may consider the institution of insurance. The social engineer or technologist will not worry much about the question whether insurance originated as a profit-seeking business; or whether its historical mission is to serve the common weal. But he may offer a criticism of certain institutions of insurances, showing, perhaps how to increase profits, or, which is a very thing, or how to increase the benefit they render to the public; and he will suggest ways in which they could be made more efficient in serving the one end or the other (1945:23)

Despite the various criticisms of the federal character principles and its operation in Nigeria one can at least know that there is an urgent need for a new approach to old thinking for a better result and outcome. There is a need for politicians and those responsible for the legal framework of our constitution to go beyond constitutionalism to a much more process of constitutionalization. Constitutionalism does not adhere to progress without restricting us to the constitution; but constitutionalization gives room for adaptation and growth and considering that the very nature of our constitution in Nigeria which is both a written and unwritten constitution depending on the approach and perspective; nonetheless, every constitution ought to be flexible and open to growth because it is expected that the rule of law is the oxygen that makes the constitution alive and active. The chief opponent of the of the federal character principle according to Aliyu A. Ammani is the fact that it has undermine merit and as such for those according to him who argue against the federal character principle argue that:

It has been used to accelerate the promotion of mediocre and incompetent civil servants, military and paramilitary officers into top positions, because advance in the service is based on criteria derived from the federal character.

This is even more unfortunate considering when a new government comes to power in Nigeria; the basis for judging competence of the incumbent is the ability to select representatives to key positions from various geographical zones and for juicy appointments. Hence, when President Muhammadu Buhari came to power there were issues as regards those he placed in strategic offices and also considering the zoning formula. Despite the fact the current administration might not have necessarily operated the federal character principle; the political arrangement from the interplay in party politics still does not justify the act of

not following the federal character principle. Thus, the inability not to follow the constitution has not contributed anything extraordinary as expected different from what has been on ground. This underscores the fact that the Nigerian political arrangement ought to go beyond sentiment and prejudice in search for social engineers and sound political technology to advance the course of Plato's eugenic breeding as the basis for a meritocratic base society; and this Matthew Hassan Kukah opines in *Ten Years of Democracy in Nigeria* that "we must work hard to escape the laagers created by ethno-regional and religious entrepreneurs" (2009:3). This is exactly the reason Plato suggests that the Philosopher King who has undergone this process of eugenic breeding through selection has the competence to rule despite his sentiments against democracy. Democratic representation has its basis in operating the federal character principle in Nigeria; the indirect representation from various constituency carries with it a federal character but which also has brought about the problem of Citizenship and Indigeneship. As such, the difficulty in our democracy in bringing the best to rule and represent us as a people has contributed to our backwardness. It is in relation to this Matthew Hassan Kukah asserts:

For now, we are shooting in the dark because the politics of Nigeria is in the hands of a cabal who believe that rather than aspiring towards an environment in which the best person will win, we are merely creating a condition for the regionalization of power. A situation where a tiny elite simply decides that the Igbos and the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba should give us a candidate cannot be said to be a route to Democracy in whatever shape of form (2009:13).

It is quite difficult for someone who was born and has acculturated and enculturated in a particular state or ethnic group to acquire political rights of representation. This is why Indigeneship supersedes Citizenship in Nigeria all in the name of the federal character principle. The expected result is corruption in a very large scale because he who pays the piper dictates the tune and this according to Matthew Hassan Kukah is the reason "an Abiola can win an election, but if the signs that he cannot be relied on to defend these interests, then he must go" (2009:14).

### **Plato's Concept of Eugenic Breeding and the Quest for Meritocracy**

The philosophy of "breeding to better the human race" is an old one - an ancient one that could still yield relevant result despite its rejection in the past and present. In 380 BCE, the well-known Greek philosopher Plato published his seminal work, the *Republic*. This book contains the first written direct reference to

the selective mating of the human race that exists in the historiography of eugenics. In Book V, Plato says to Glaucon, his older brother: “do you not take the greatest care in breeding? There is no reason to suppose that less care is required in the marriage of human beings”. Plato then goes on to say: “The good must be paired with the good, and the bad with the bad, and the offspring of the one must be reared, and of the other destroyed; in this way the flock will be preserved in prime condition” (48). Plato’s *Republic* advocated a program of selective mating to produce an exceptional class of humans. This means that the most intellectual and beautiful people among any given society should see it as their moral duty to reproduce and create similar outstanding specimens. What was Plato’s interest in positive eugenics? How can the thoughts of Plato suit contemporary understanding of Eugenics in relation to social and political philosophical ideologies? Was Plato actually discussing literally about the applications of eugenic breeding or it was just an analogy? John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe in *The Roots of Racism and Abortion: An Exploration of Eugenics* opines:

Plato’s discussion includes military matters, and he talked about a class of people who would be devoted to guarding the society, a kind of warrior class. Soldiers should be fierce when dealing with enemies; but should not be a threat to their own neighbours. Achieving and maintaining this balance is difficult. Plato felt, and so he discussed some ideas for breeding the kind of people he wanted. His ideas about breeding soldiers are shocking, and it is possible that Plato was making fun of someone’s ideas. But, whether Plato took the ideas seriously or not, 19<sup>th</sup> century eugenicist were fascinated (2012:15).

It is important to note that Plato’s intention was to select and confirm a merit base society in which it could solve social problems (Sara 2014). When we consider the intent of Plato’s eugenics it would be used as an option to remove racism, tribalism, favoritism, ethnicism, nepotism and other vices that would not constitute justice and fairness in the distribution of resources (Agar 2004:155). Green also recommends against interventions that would reinforce or increase unjust inequality and discrimination, economic inequality, or racism (2007:216). Despite the enormous value in eugenic breeding base on its intention, no doubt the methodology if taken literally ought to raise some objections but when translated into a desired goal of selection process in extracting the best from the society to engineer and reengineer the societal structures then its strategy becomes imperative. As such, the term *neo-eugenics* becomes very apt in solving

social problems which some subcultures advocate as variants of eugenics. This has nothing to do with 'reproductive eugenics' but this has to do with a methodology and strategy in selection process in bringing competent and meritocratic individuals to help solve problems racism, ethnicism, nepotism and unnecessary affiliations; which will be known as "Political Eugenics". The term 'political eugenics' is in relation to social philosophy; rather than biological eugenics; which is, basically sexual reproductive than a political eugenics which is based on political appointment.

Plato's thought in creating a better society is the enormous task of the *Republic* in which his recommendations if taken literally without critically absorbing it. This Karl Popper observes in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies* thus: "Many of his thoughts were taken so much for granted that they were simply absorbed unconsciously and therefore uncritical" (1945:35). This might lead one to think that much of "Plato's sociology is presented by him in such close connection with his ethical and political demands that the descriptive elements have been largely overlooked" (Popper 1945:35). As such, there is a need to understand Plato more critically in trying to understand the intent of his eugenic breeding as a process of selecting the best for a better society rather than using every form of sentiments to take society backwards. This is exactly the reason Plato thinks a philosopher king will be the best ruler, because he has been appointed based on merit and not federal character but for the interest of the common good of society.

### **Citizenship and the Philosophy of the Common Good: A Nexus for Justice and Fairness**

The very moment in Nigeria the psychic understanding of citizenship rings a bell then, the federal character principle will be thrown into the deep sea of irrelevance. Citizenship is the basis for the philosophy of the common good. The common good is a philosophical foundation and the operational basis is citizenship. In fact, according to Egbosa E. Osaghae in *The Problem of Citizenship in Nigeria* he asserts: "citizenship is the hallmark of the modern nation-state" (1990:593). Citizenship as the basis for the legal framework which defines citizens as one who, by birth or naturalization, belongs to a state both in theory and in practice to all citizens (1990:593). This is where the problem lies; in theory and practice. For as long as there is a dichotomy between theory and practice then:

The centrifugal forces of ethnicity, religion, statism and regionalism among others, produce discriminatory practices in the

subunits of the state which negate the constitutional provisions, by treating citizens unequally (1990:553).

According to Femi Omotoso,

Despite the constitutional provisions guaranteeing the citizenship status of Nigeria, yet within the country, the issue of Indigeneity is making Nigerians to become second-class citizens in states other than their own. Indigeneity is becoming albatross in the goal of national integration and is creating problems for Nigerians as they are denied their constitutional rights in states other than their own (2010:146).

It is important we do a philosophical import of the philosopher Diogenes when asked to which citizenship you belong to and he said "I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world", and this started a mass movement. Suddenly people were calling themselves "cosmopolitans" - *cosmos* meaning the entire known world and *polites* meaning citizen. The problem in Nigeria lies in our greed and one can understand the reason citizenship is deficient operationally. In Nigeria the concept of leadership comes to play here and this still goes back to the problem of federal character principle where an appointed official tend to carry his relatives and ethnic friends to fill positions not necessary based on merit. Secondly, the idea and erroneous understanding that leadership comes with it financial gains also comes to bare as most Nigerians are more inclined to better the lots of their tribes and the tendency is that if for example someone from Edo State is made commissioner of education in Kaduna State, such person most likely will steal resources from Kaduna State to his village in Edo State and put the educational coffers of Kaduna State in penury by building houses, schools in his own village.

National citizenship in Nigeria is far from being resolved and this inability is due to the fact that various ethnic group that compose the Nigerian nation state have conceived different attitudes to Nigerian citizenship. Recently, I went to a state seeking for lecturing job in a Federal College of Education; the three persons whom I met to guide me through the process of tendering my application and for directives of the said office to give the application asked me "which state are you from"? Unfortunately, on meeting the Registrar face-to-face, the same question was asked after going through my curriculum vitae. Seeing the disappointment on his face and knowing the direction of his thoughts, it was various obvious one

will need a high powered recommendation for one to be employed. Those who asked the same question before the Registrar shared the same countenance. This is the Nigerian predicament; and this is very obvious to note that if we begin to check further the output of those from the said institution, the conclusion is at your own risk. When decisions are made for the improvement of any organization and the non-indigenes seems to be at the upper hand due to their competence, the progress in that organization becomes futile. For example, in a department of Religion and Philosophy in some Universities in Nigeria, the department decides to split and thereby creating a department of religion separately from the department of philosophy, if the department of philosophy will be headed by a non-indigene, the department remains the way it is until they are able to get an indigene who can begin the department of philosophy even though the indigene is not competent. There is also a temptation for the non-indigene to be appointed on the basis of merit but at the long run will only mentor those of his/her own ethnic or religious extraction. Our decisions should aim at improving society rather than making society worst. The aim and purpose of social philosophy is to create a minimal good society where everyone will be happy and live a minimally good life and not a selected few. Even the selected few should always see the common good as the basis of their actions and in actions; and in so doing we shall be making our society a better place to live in.

### **Conclusion**

The federal character principle will make lots of sense if the intention is aimed at a meritocratic society in dire need of progress. What is more important is the fact of having social engineers to drive and galvanize and improve the whole sector of the Nigerian economy and even if the person is from whatever tribe, religion, etc. we ought to be more interested in the common good as the philosophical basis for citizenship. If the federal character principle has not yielded its result from the current state of affairs of our situation then it demands an outright removal as we begin to imbibe more of citizenship for social engineering and transformation for a better society. Hence, the imbibing of the intent of Plato eugenic breeding into political eugenics can be the fastest alternative for understanding citizenship and a nexus to help us progress from where we are.

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