

Memoirs as Instruments for Strengthening National Integration: Shehu Shagari's *Beckoned to Serve* in Perspectives

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Abstract

*The problem of national integration has been a matter of concern for so long, and although previous governments have attempted to promote unity and national integration through a number of policies and interventions, the problem has not been fully solved. Shagari being the first executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has attempted to promote national integration through a number of ways which were given in his memoir *Beckoned to Serve*. This paper explores Shehu Shagari's strategies for achieving national integration. Excerpts from the memoir, which served as data were collected by purposive sampling, though other secondary sources were also consulted to confirm data from the memoir. The data was later analyzed using social integration theory. This research brought to fore some of the strategies followed by Shagari towards national unity and the relevance of some positive traits in promoting national unity.*

Keywords: Brotherhood, justice, memoir, national integration, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, and hence the name the 'Giant of Africa', with more than 226.2 million population, as of December, 2023 (Statista.com). It is a multinational state founded on the basis of unity in diversity with an estimation of over 370 ethnic groups of divergent values, culture and religions of which the three major ethnic groups are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The country is roughly divided into the northern savannah region and the southern forest region, separated by the Niger and Benue rivers. The northern region is largely dominated by the Hausas and their major religion is Islam, while the Yoruba and Igbo dominated the south, with Christianity as their major religion. The country emerged as one entity as a result of the amalgamation of the Southern Protectorate and the Northern Protectorate by the British colonial masters in 1914. This amalgamation was an act of convenience as the two Protectorates have distinct cultures, values and religions. Nigeria since its formation, has been experiencing enormous challenges, the most notable being the problem of disunity among its people. This is manifest in the question of ethnic, religious, and political diversities.

The relationship between the major ethnic groups was occasionally characterized by fear and suspicion of domination of one state or ethnic group over the other. This has generated unhealthy rivalry which has hampered national integration. This was what eventually led to the Nigeria's civil war of 1967 – 1970 (Olaniyan, 1985). Unfortunately up to today the problem of unity and peaceful co-existence has not been fully solved. Insurgency, which started from the northeastern region in 2009 has now spread to other parts of the country, claiming lives and destroying property. Herders-farmers conflict is another problem fueling the issue of insecurity and national disintegration, while kidnapping, banditry and armed robbery keep growing day by day. These, coupled with poverty and ineffective governance have further exacerbated the already fragile societal set up. These conflicts have impacted heavily upon the lives of people, resulting in several deaths, economic, educational and psychological trauma, displacement and widowhood.

Previous governments have attempted to promote unity and national integration through a number of policies, programmes and interventions such as the establishment of the unity schools, the N.Y.S.C scheme, the Federal Character policy, the establishment of the National Orientation Agency among others. Although there are several memoirs written by former Nigerian leaders containing their strategies in promoting national unity, the contents have remained hidden especially in academic circles, thus due attention has not been given to them. Shagari being the first executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has also attempted to promote national integration through a number of ways which were highlighted in this memoir *Beckoned to Serve*. The objectives of this paper are to explore some of the strategies followed by Shagari in promoting national unity and integration, and to examine the relevance of certain traits (justice, love and brotherhood) in promoting national unity and integration. Data were collected by purposive sampling from the memoir, though other secondary sources such as books, official publications of government, journals, internet materials were also consulted to confirm data from the memoir. The data was later analyzed using social integration theory. This research discovers some of the strategies followed by Shagari and how they helped in promoting national integration and it also finds that certain traits, such as justice are important in promoting national unity.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 National Integration

Although every individual agrees that national integration is a term that denotes something that is desirable in any society and nation, there is no consensus as to its definition. Integration, derived either from French *intégrate* or Latin *integritas*, means integral or integrate (Ezeobi, et al, 2019). Literally, it means ‘restoration’ and ‘uniting of individual parts into an entity (Oleg & Ilya, 2016). It has been defined in the *Dictionary of Political Thought*, as cited by Naseer (2018) to mean,

different groups within a jurisdiction which have the same rights in law that nevertheless enjoy unequal privileges and desperate social, educational and recreational institutions, integration is the process whereby all such institutions are made available to all members of the state regardless of creed, race and origin with the intention of forming a unified civil society within the jurisdiction of a unified state.

Goddy (2022) sees the term as synonymous with national unity and is used when the citizens of a country are conscious of the fact that they have a common identity, regard themselves as one and work together to ensure the development of their country irrespective of differences in class, ethnicity, religion, political affiliations or any other differences that may exist between them. It involves the uniting of formerly separate groups into one group with the obliteration of any previous social and cultural group differences as well as the removal of separate group identification. Looking at the above definitions from various scholars, the crux of integration as stated by Kayode & Tony (2015) is nothing more than the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country even though they may belong to different ethnic groups, religions and cultures. Citizens in such a setting recognize themselves as one and work towards cohesion and unity. This is important, because it helps towards building a strong and prosperous nation, and thus each and every individual has a vital role to play in national integration.

2.2 Memoirs

Memoir is an English word derived from a French word *memoire* which means ‘remembrance’ or ‘reminiscence’. It is a factual, non-fiction narrative based on the author’s personal memories, which aims to recount events that has impacted the writer in some way. The narrative captures the author’s experiences for a specific period of life which may focus on family, spiritual journey, political experience or any thematically related event in the writer’s

life (supersummary.com). Most memoirs have the following characteristics or elements;

- i. Narrative form: the author tells the story in a narrative form using first person pronouns
- ii. Thematic: Memoirs are written within a particular theme. A memoir focuses on a particular theme, topic, premise or lesson. It is not about the whole life of the author which would then have been an autobiography, but rather on a particular theme, period or event.
- iii. Uniqueness: Memoirs are usually written in a unique form and style, thus being different from others. Every memoirist writes his/her story in his/her own unique way pertaining to the style he/she conveys his/her words and thought, which is unique from others.
- iv. Emotional journey: Memoirs are written through the author's thoughts, feelings and emotions about the historical event, the experiences and lessons learnt and how he integrated them into his life (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

3. Theoretical Framework

Social Integration Theory

Social integration, which refers to a situation where people with differences, especially minority groups agree to live together and feel part of the larger community has been defined by Jeannotte (2008) as,

...the process of fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity solidarity, security and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

On the theoretical level, Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) who conceptualized the theory of social integration believed that people's actions, customs, ideas and values make up a group's opinion or a common way of looking at the world. Thus, collective understanding unites people and promotes social integration which is very important for the existence of any society. This, according to Beresneviciute (2003, p.97) "indicates principles by which individuals are bound to each other in the social space and how they accept social rules and live together as one community, though conflicts may arise from time to time".

This paper adopts this social integration theory as propounded by Durkheim in analyzing the data extracted from Shagari's *Beckoned to Serve*.

4. Shehu Shagari: *Beckoned to Serve*

This is a memoir written by the first executive President of Nigeria, President Shehu Usman Shagari in which he attempted to record his experiences particularly on politics and governance. The book outlines Shagari's fascinating life from a humble beginning as a son of a village chief going through his early life as a student, a school teacher, his struggles for independence and his life as a politician and finally as the first Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is a book of 540 pages spread through 14 chapters emphasizing on politics and governance. The objectives of the book are:

1. an attempt to record the experiences of the author, from the rigours of the transition from colonial rule to independence through the struggle of building a stable and developed country with democratic institutions and values;
2. arouse the interest of readers especially in developing countries, in the study of the lives and experiences of public officers who have been privileged to reach the pinnacle of their political careers through dedicated service to their people and countries;
3. be beneficial to future leaders who share the same hopes and aspirations for the building of a better Nigeria.
4. educate the Nigerian public and be better informed on history of political happenings of the 20th century in Nigeria. (Shagari, 2001, pp. 25 – 27)

The issue of national integration came into focus with the swearing in of Shagari as the first executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on October 1, 1979. His ascension to power gave him the opportunity to employ any realistic means which he felt would help towards national cohesion, unity and integration, and in trying to translate the motto of his party into reality. The motto of his party, the National Party of Nigeria was 'One Nation, One Destiny'. He believed that fairness and justice to people irrespective of ethnicity, religious and political convictions, would create love and feeling of brotherhood between them which would finally promote to national unity, therefore advocated for that even for his rivals and opponents. Justice has appeared in several places of the *Qur'an* and the *Bible*. For instance, the

Qur'an, Chapter 5, verse 8, Allah has said, “Oh ye who believe, be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not the hatred of any people make you avoid justice. Deal justly, that is nearer to piety and your duty. Observe your duty to Allah”. *Qur'an*, Chapter 16, verse 90 also says, “Surely Allah enjoins justice, kindness and doing of good to kith and kin, and forbids all that is shameful, evil and oppressive”. According to the *Bible*, II Samuel, Chapter 23: verse 3, “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God”. In Deuteronomy, Chapter 16: verse 20, it reads, “That which is altogether just shall thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee”.

An example of Shagari's sense of justice can be seen even before becoming the President, when he was the Federal Minister of Internal Affairs during the Tafawa Balewa rule in 1962. In May 1962, some leaders of the opposition party, Action Group (AG) were accused of importing illegal arms to overthrow the legitimate Federal Government of NPC – NCNC Coalition, thus the leader of the party, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, his lieutenant Chief Anthony Enahoro and over two dozen others were charged with treasonable felony and conspiracy to overthrow the Federal Government and were about to be denied fair hearing. It was Shagari, with his sense of fairness, justice and love for national unity that personally facilitated and authorized the issuance of an entry visa permit to Chief Awolowo's lawyer, a celebrated British legal luminary, Dingle Foot, Q. C and extended his stay in Nigeria when his visa expired. This happened when some people within the NPC – NCNC Federal Coalition Government attempted to prevent the lawyer from entering the country by almost denying him entry visa permit to Nigeria (Okion, 1982).

According to him, fairness and justice were major factors that could create love and brotherhood between people which would eventually lead to national unity and integration. Towards that, he pledged to give fair treatment to each state of the federation regardless of the people of the region and the party in power in that state (Okion, 1982). He translated his quest for justice and national integration into the appointments he made, his speeches, infrastructural developments and political pardons.

4.1 Appointments

In case of appointments, Shagari tried to have an inclusive government by appointing capable hands irrespective of region, religion and gender. He said,

The case for fair access to public office in a divided society is an unanswerable one. Especially where many in authority cannot be trusted to act

on the square towards their non-types... No one group has an intrinsic monopoly of talents.

Ours would be a better country if we recognize our mutual worth, and reconcile our concerns with the ethics of the nation, excellence and fair play (Shagari, 2001, p.242)

No region or religion could claim monopoly of the government of Shagari. This could be attested to by his appointments to various offices. The President had involved all parts of the country when appointing ministers and other public officers by requesting each state to provide him with names of seven nominees from which he would choose. And further, it was not just a matter of representing all regions of the country, but rather it was a question of representation of all sectors, and that was why he emphasized to each state that out of its nominees, one must be a woman and one a youth. This had greatly helped in national unification. Even within his inner circles, he had people from different regions. His Chief of Personal Staff for instance, was Michael Prest, Ambassador Yusuf Sada as the Chief of State Protocol, Charles Igoh as the Chief Press Secretary and Abiodun Aloba as his Chief Speech Writer. Even within his advisers, he had people from all walks of life, regions and religions. Dr. Chuba Okadigbo was his Adviser on Political Affairs, Yahaya Dikko, Special Adviser on Petroleum and Energy, Olufunmi Agbasale Adebajo Adviser on Information, Prof. Emmanuel Edozien, Adviser on Economic Affairs, Theophilus Adeleke Akinyele, Director and Special Adviser on Budget Affairs, Dr. Olufemi Olaifa, Special Adviser on Statutory Boards, Dr. Bukar Shu'aibu, Special Adviser on National Security, and so many others, too numerous to mention here (Shagari, 2001, pp. 286 – 292).

Another strategy employed by Shagari towards national integration was the appointments of women in his cabinet and Diplomatic Corps. Despite the President coming from the northern part of Nigeria, where at that time, the working of women was being frowned at, his personal courage and commitment to national interest had prompted him to appoint women into various important positions in his cabinet. He said, "It was my hope to have females, in the cabinet, but NPN state branches did not help matters. Yet the cabinet was representative enough of the country and its diverse interests" (Shagari, 2001, p.240). Thus, Mrs. Egun Oyagbola from Egbado area of Ogun State was appointed Minister of National Planning and Mrs. Janet Akinrinade, from Iseyin in Oyo State, was a State Minister in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Similarly, Miss Elizabeth Ogbon, from Agbara in Urhobo area of

Bendel State was appointed as Ambassador (Consul-General) to Hamburg, Germany, Mrs. R. Mohammed, a career diplomat, as Ambassador with accreditations to Botswana and Zimbabwe, Mrs. Asinobi from Imo and Mrs. Ivasie, Benue were appointed as additional ministers during his second tenure in office. These women and many others, had demonstrated competence and this had brought credit to the nation and the President.

4.2 Speeches and Utterances

Many speeches of Shagari have attested to his desire for national unity and integration. For instance, in addressing and welcoming the Federal Ministers to their new appointments, he had encouraged them “to join hands with him in the unique constitutional endeavor to build a new and better nation for posterity to come” (Okion, 1982, p. 367). He had also spoken of the need to create “a new spirit of meaningful co-operation and national integration and development starting with the unity and complete understanding among the different arms of Government” (Okion, 1982).

Likewise, in his meeting with media Executives when he assumed office, he emphasized their role in promoting national unity when he said,

I called for this meeting not only to further familiarize ourselves but also to exchange views and ideas on how best we can all join hands to promote unity, stability and peace in order to create a favourable atmosphere for all the governments of the federation to take off successfully irrespective of party leanings. As members of the Fourth Estate of the Realm, you have sacred responsibilities to this nation. On your shoulders lie the duty of fostering national cohesion and engendering a sense of belonging in our people (Okion, 1982, p. 373)

In his meeting with the senior officers of the three arms of the Armed Forces – the Army, Navy and Air Force – the President said the meeting has given him a forum not only to meet you but also to seize the opportunity to express my appreciation for the laudable role of national building the Armed Forces have found themselves within the last 13 years, and for making history in formally handing over power to me as the elected representative of the nation. We require not only the co-operation but, more importantly, the

absolute and transparent loyalty, dedication to duty, fortitude and support of your chief and all of you” (Shagari, 1979, p. 335)

To the seventh group of the National Youth Service Corps in July 1980, the President had emphasized on the importance of the scheme as a vehicle for national unity and integration. He said,

The Youth Corps scheme is an important and practical vehicle for uniting the people of this country. I have received reports of many Corps members, all of them serving in states other than their own, who have decided to take permanent jobs in areas where they served. In fact, I am happy to note that many interstate marriages have taken place among corps members and between them and citizens of the areas where they are working. This augurs well for the future of Nigeria. They are laying the foundations of a truly strong and united country” (Shagari, 1979, p.222)

Shagari has equally tasked different organizations in the country to be means of promoting national cohesion, unity and stability. He said, when addressing members of the Lagos Island Club, which was a multi-racial, multi-national premier social club of Nigeria, in December, 1980,

This premier social institution has a vital contribution to make in our efforts to build a virile, united and stable nation...it is a very good instrument of defusing tension and anticipating areas of conflict in our community. But in order to perform this function creditably, the club must continue to be national in outlook by embracing many people from all spheres of life in the country...it could be a forum for inculcating national consciousness and fostering national unity which will spearhead the effort to solve basic national problems. (Shagari, 1979, p. 245).

Shagari had equally emphasized on the role of the traditional rulers and institutions throughout the country as promoters of unity and national

integration. For instance, in a speech at the celebrations of the 150th Anniversary of the Foundation of 'Egbaland', Ogun State, Shagari emphasized on the need for peaceful coexistence amongst all people of the country. He said,

The continued understanding among the Egbas and other Nigerians living within their midst augurs well for peace and unity of this great country. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to all Nigerians to cultivate the same spirit of love and brotherhood. We should learn to tolerate and respect each other's views and depoliticize and de-emphasize all those things that tend to divide us. By so doing, we shall, by joint effort, be laying a healthy and strong foundation for unity and prosperity (Shagari, 1979, pp. 303 – 304)

In his bid for unity and integration, himself a devout and pious Muslim, he used to preach for tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different religious groups. This was what prompted him to invite the Pope John Paul II to visit Nigeria. The Pope accepted the invitation and visited the country in February, 1982. This gesture had strengthened the inter-religious and peaceful coexistence amongst the different religions in the country. While receiving the Pope at the State House, the President had said,

though ours is a secular state with diverse religious creeds, we do in fact, live in harmony among ourselves, respect each other's religious beliefs and rise as one people on an august occasion like this. The people of Nigeria have embarked on a drive for a new revolution aimed at strengthening the moral fibre of our people which is about love and brotherhood, honesty, integrity, and respect for those traditions that make a nation (Okion, 1982, p. 388)

4.3 Physical Infrastructure

The administration even before its debut, had an elaborate blueprint for the programmes to be implemented. These were in the sectors of agriculture, housing, education, health transportation, and industries among many others. Many programmes and projects were successfully completed while others

were started but not completed. But what is impressive was his all-inclusive government where he tried to apportion the work to all the regions of the country. For instance, in the sector of Agriculture, the Administration immediately it assumed office increased the allocation of funds from 6% to 15% of the annual capital budget. Dams and irrigation canals were built across the country such as the Bakalori Dam in Sokoto, the South Chad Irrigation in Borno State, the Ogun River Dam in Ogun State, and so on. Fishing terminals and Strategic Commodity reserves were also built in various locations in the country (Shagari, 2001, pp. 304 - 305).

In the case of Housing, a Ministry of Housing was created and low-cost houses were built throughout the federation. This programme was aimed at providing some 200,000 housing units in the urban and rural areas, at the rate of 2000 units per state, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Special housing programmes were also undertaken in Steel townships like Aladja and Ajaokuta as well as in the satellite towns like Abesan in Lagos State.

In the Education sector, Shagari's administration embarked upon the programme of improving the standard of education at all levels, and introduced the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system in 1982 and helped all the states with technical assistance and equipment. It also established new universities apart from the already existing 13 universities, in those states that had no Federal universities, such as Bauchi, Benue, Imo, Ondo, Niger and Ogun states. Seven existing colleges of Education across the country were also upgraded to degree-awarding institutions. These were those in Abraka, Kano, Ondo, Alvan Ikoku in Owerri, Port-Harcourt, Uyo and Zari'a. Eight new Polytechnics, spread throughout the country, were added to the already existing 17. These were located at Ado-Ekiti, Bida, Bauchi, Idah, Ilaro, Uwana (Afikpo) and Yola. All these are indications of how Shagari's administration tried to spread higher institutions across all regions of the country.

Coming to the Industries sector, considerable development was recorded during his administration, especially in steel development. To this end, a special Ministry of Steel Development was created which immediately embarked upon implementing major projects. These were the Aladja Steel Plant which was commissioned in January 1982 and three inland steel Rolling Mills in Katsina, Oshogbo and Jos. Ajaokuta Steel complex was also started in 1980. Vehicle Assembly plants were also established across the country in collaboration with concerned state governments such as Anambra Motor Company, which was commissioned in 1980, the National Truck

Manufacturing Company in Kano, which was commissioned in April 1981. The Steyr Motors at Bauchi and the Leyland at the Ibadan which already existed were further developed. Two cement factories were added on the existing factories. Salt refineries were also established at Ijoko in Ogun State and Oghareki in Bendel and many other industries in various part of the country (Shagari, 2001, pp. 310 – 311).

4.4 Political Pardons

The President, in his effort to build a peaceful, stable and united nation was magnanimous enough to pardon both Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon (rtd) and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. This act of pardon was facilitative in the process of reconciliation and national integration which was well received throughout the country. He said,

After I became President, it was the same Sati Gogwin who acted as my emissary to Gowon in London, with a message that Gowon could return home a free man. As regards Ojukwu, tremendous pressures were similarly brought to bear upon me

in the eastern states...Again, happily, I was able, after series of consultations with all concerned, to grant unconditional pardon to Ojukwu in the third year of my first term (Shagari, 2001, p. 222)

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that although various political leaders have written different memoirs mostly on governance and national integration, their contents have remained hidden except during inauguration where only limited politicians and people in governance were invited. This paper has tried to explain some of the strategies followed by Shagari in promoting national unity which were in his memoir. His stance with regards to justice and fair play in appointments to public offices, apportioning of infrastructural developments to various regions and even general governance were testimonies to his love for national integration. The paper has further highlighted the relevance of positive traits such as justice in inculcating mutual love and feeling of brotherhood among citizens which eventually translate into peaceful co-existence and unity. Shagari believed that his efforts towards national unity has rather been achieved. He said,

Besides, there was the urge to pursue the important task of national cohesion through the promotion of peaceful co-existence, love and understanding between the diverse communities which together constitute the Nigerian Nation. Our efforts in this direction had already begun to bear fruit as was later demonstrated... (Shagari, 2001, p. 440).

Shagari's *Beckoned to Serve* has indeed provided a valuable model on national integration for future leaders to come.

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