On Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria
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ABSTRACT

From Angola to Armenia and from Kosovo to Kenya the world is witnessing the rise of virulent ethnic nationalisms. This article has three main objectives. First, it aims to provide a broad overview of the theoretical quagmire of notions of ethnic conflict. Second, by means of examining Nigeria as a case study it examines how variables such as governance, civil-military relations, economics and religion effect notions of ethnic identity. Finally, it proposes certain policy-relevant recommendations to address the problem of ethnic conflict in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic conflict is an issue that, particularly during the last decade or so, has crept to the forefront of international political debate. Events such as those unfolding in Rwanda, Burundi and the Balkans, have brought the issue to a position of prominence, but it is not a new issue altogether, as various instances in Africa amply illustrate. Polarisation between ethnic groups and resulting conflict between them as they compete for resources, political and economic power and other goals, has spawned negative consequences of tremendous proportions, of which genocide, ethnic cleansing and civil war are but a few examples (Stremlau 1999-03-26:1).

In Africa in particular, the problem of ethnic conflict has been compounded by the colonial legacy of national states whose artificial boundaries cut across many ethnic divides. The challenge of ethnic conflict, therefore, is set out in the following question by Diamond (in Diamond & Plattner 1994:xiv): "How can particularistic and often antagonistic group identities be reconciled with the unifying mission of the modern state? More especially, how can this be done in a democratic state?"

In this paper it is attempted to discuss the concept of ethnic conflict by using Nigeria as a specific case study, while some practical suggestions will be offered to contribute to the process of finding solutions to this issue.

2. WHAT IS MEANT BY "ETHNIC CONFLICT"?

Since the earliest times, ethnicity has been viewed in terms of a group setting and associated with the idea of nationhood. Indeed, according to Peterson, Novak and Gleason (1982:1), the word "ethnic" is derived via Latin from the Greek ethnos, which means nation or race. Various definitions of ethnicity build upon this by adding the idea of a common denominator, so to speak, that underlies this conception.

Thomson (2000:58) defines an ethnic group as "ɔa community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship, ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language". Toland (1993:3) basically agrees with Thomson in her conception of an ethnic group, but takes it one step further by adding a sense of belonging on the individual level: "ɔ[ethnicity is] the sense of peoplehood held by members of a group sharing a common culture and history within a society". These two views are shared by Diamond and Plattner (1994:xvii), who regard ethnicity as a "ɔhighly inclusive (and relatively large-scale) group identity based on some notion of common origin, recruited primarily from kinship, and

typically manifesting some measure of cultural distinctiveness. So conceived, ethnicity easily embraces groups differentiated by colour, language and religion; it covers 'tribes', 'races', 'nationalities' and 'castes'". In this sense, ")an ethnic group is much like the 'imagined community' of the nation". Ethnicity, however, focuses more on sentiments of origin and decent, rather than the geographical considerations of a state," according to Thomson (2000:58).

Thomson (2000:58) further makes the important observation that ethnicity becomes more pronounced when it is used to distinguish one social group from another within a specific territory. Contrary to the popular view that an ethnic group is found within a larger society (and thus clashing with Toland's definition above), he posits that all individuals have ethnic allegiances irrespective of whether they are from the minority of a state's population or the majority, with the result that ethnicity as a sentiment is expressed by both majority and minority populations. Obviously, this social pluralism will lead to differences of interests, and this is where the possibility of ethnic conflict starts to emerge.

Toland (1993:1) states that the state has always been at risk of promoting and maintaining the degradation of the social environment because of the propensity of federal policymaking to focus on self-maintenance at the expense of those groups and individuals that are deemed peripheral to the state. Indeed, as she (1993:2) further notes, the idea of a "pure" nation state with one monolithic voice has never been a reality, and will probably never be. She continues by arguing: ")studies of statehood)have shown us that although the nature of state society has always been plural, the presence of pluralism, that exists as a form of rule only when there are policies and expectations that serve the interests of all ethnic groups, irrespective of their differences, has not yet been fully realised".

The ideal solution to this problem will, of course, be the achievement of social pluralism with equal respect for, and equal representation of, all ethnic groups within one state, but, as Diamond and Plattner (1994:xix) indicate, ")ethnicity is the most difficult type of cleavage)to manage. Because ethnicity taps cultural and symbolic issues   basic notions of identity and the self, of individual and group worth and entitlement   the conflicts it generates are intrinsically less amenable to compromise than those revolving around material issues. When the struggle is over money, taxes, wage levels, business regulations, social welfare, infrastructural investments, or similar issues, the gains and losses are divisible in a variety of ways". The point is thus being made that, although ethnic conflicts often involve material issues which can sometimes easily be resolved through conventional bargaining, they revolve around underlying exclusive symbols and conceptions of legitimacy and become characterised by competing demands that cannot easily be broken into "bargainable increments".

What we have here, then, is that ethnicity is not simply the "quest for commonality", as Robert Nisbet (as quoted by Peterson, Novak and Gleason 1982:19) puts it, but is also based on the wider functions of the state, ")and thus the greater impetus to organise in order to get what the state is distributing   and to prevent others from getting it" (Peterson, Novak and Gleason 1982:19). One of the more influential and outspoken theoretical approaches characterising ethnicity as a political factor, builds upon this premise and links ethnicity with both the modern state and nationalism. Viewing elite competition as causing ethnic conflict, the approach by Paul R. Brass argues ")ethnicity and nationalism are not 'givens', but are social and political constructions. They are the creations of elites, who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their

groups as well as for themselves)this process invariably involves competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits, and social status between the political elite, class, and leadership groups both within and among different ethnic categories" (Kruger 1993:11).

In this context, Bostock (1997:94) defines ethnic conflict as a ")breakdown of accommodation of ethnic minorities within a state". We have a few reservations with this definition, however. Firstly, ethnic conflict can also result from a failure to accommodate ethnic majorities within the state, as illustrated by the case in South Africa under apartheid. Secondly, the definition is too vague. Ethnic conflict can, for instance, result from insufficient accommodation within the state, as perceived by ethnic groups, without a breakdown having to occur (although a breakdown will surely feed the conflict and exacerbate the situation). Lastly, the cause of ethnic conflict might not necessarily lie within the state, but can be the result of external influences, as the case in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) under the influence of the ethnic genocide in Rwanda and Burundi illustrates.

The question that now remains is what, then, is meant by "ethnic conflict"? In light of the discussion above, it is important to note that mere differences in values or regional development, or between ethnic groups for that matter, do not as such promote ethnicity and ethnic conflict, according to Kruger (1993:12). Quoting Brass, he states ")ethnic selfconsciousness, ethnically-based demands, and ethnic conflict can occur only if there is some conflict either between indigenous and external elites and authorities or between indigenous elites". Furthermore, as we are reminded by Cohen (as quoted by Toland 1993:13), ")ethnicity is first and foremost 'situational'. It is a dynamic process in which the interactive situation determines the level of inclusiveness used in setting-up the self/other relationship. In other words, how the identity is subjectively or objectively perceived relates to what is important to include in the identification criteria. What is important is going to relate to who the individuals or groups are within the interaction, what biological and cultural heritages are at stake, why the interaction is taking place, what the self-interests are that have to be satisfied and if it is a situation where both parties are equal".

3. CASE STUDY: ETHNIC CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is located in West Africa and is, with about 118,5 million inhabitants, the most populous nation on the continent. Rich in oil reserves, Nigeria is ranked as one of the most developed states in Africa, but ongoing conflicts of interest between various population groups have put a damper on further political and economic development. As Thomson (2000:65) notes, much of this has led to political mobilisation on ethnic lines.

As a result of boundary demarcations during the colonial period, Nigeria as a political entity was created in 1914 a multi-ethnic nation consisting of more than 200 ethnic groups speaking over 250 languages. The three main groups are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and the Igbo, who comprise roughly 28%, 20% and 17% of the population respectively (Falola 1999:5). These groups, however, can further be subdivided, such as the twenty-nine distinct divisions within the Hausa-Fulani that Thomson (2000:66) identifies. Although these groups interacted with one another before the colonial era, they were not primordial societies, and the artificiality of the British-drawn boundaries contributed to the 'social construction' of these ethnic groups, so much so that ")the creation of these 'tribes' are closely linked to the era of British colonial rule" (Thomson 2000:66).

Each of these groups mobilises in a distinct geographical region that closely resembles the administrative boundaries of the colonial period. The northern region is home to the Hausa-Fulani and, as the Northern Protectorate, was administered through indirect rule with the Fulani emirs as intermediaries. After previously being run as two separate administrative regions, the western region, dominated by the Yoruba, and the eastern region, mainly populated by the Igbo, were combined in 1906 to form the Southern Protectorate and eventually joined with the Northern protectorate to establish a single Nigeria (Falola 1999:68; Thomson 2000:66). Given this distinct regional administrative pattern, it was only natural, according to Thomson (2000:66) that ethnic groups would develop within, and identify with, these separate regions, as this was a rational way to lobby the colonial authorities for resources. Indeed, the uneven modernisation and differential administration of the protectorates under colonial rule (coupled with the artificial boundaries), engendered strong regionalist pressures for the introduction of full-fledged federalism to replace the unitary (albeit decentralised) colonial administration. In 1954, this transition finally occurred with the inauguration of a federal framework, which secured autonomy and hegemony for the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo in the northern, western and eastern regions respectively (Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:57).

When Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, the constitution entrenched this reality, to a large extent affirming regional differences and providing a strong institutional base for group sentiments, with the result that the First Republic was dominated by ethno-regional groupings. The federal system of three regions was established with the aims of recognising the needs, and balancing the aspirations, of the ethnic dominant groups   with each region having a strong and relatively autonomous government while the central government focused on national issues such as foreign policy, international trade and defence (Falola 1999:98; Thomson 2000:67). Coming as no surprise, Nigerians ")responded to this ethno-regional constitution by voting for their 'cultural brokers'. They charged their chosen candidates with capturing central federal resources, bringing these back to the regional community. Consequently, no powerful nationwide political party or constituency emerged. Local considerations, dominated, and issues of ethnicity became increasingly politicised. A political party that squarely identified with just one ethnic group governed each region. The Fulani-Hausa governed the north, the Yoruba the west, and the Ibo the east" (Thomson 2000:67-68).

The problem with the federal structure was that it not only inequitably incorporated minorities into ethnic-dominated regional bastions, but also created a disproportionately large northern region, which included nearly three-quarters of Nigeria's territory and over half its population. Ethno-regional polarisation increased as the Christian south feared the more populous and Muslim north, while the economically poorer north feared the better-educated south, and a more vicious struggle for political advantage among the regions ensued (Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:58). In the words of Falola (1999:10), ")the three regions and their ethnicities competed as enemies".

Thomson (2000:68) is adamant that the greatest constitutional danger lay in the fact that it was possible for two regions to join forces against the third, a possibility that turned into reality when the northern party formed a coalition with the eastern party soon after independence. Using their majority in the national assembly, they exploited a split in the isolated Yoruba party and created a fourth federal region, the Midwest region, in 1963 to disperse the political power of the Yoruba. While giving satisfaction to certain ethnic minority aspirations in the old western region, Nigeria's minority situation remained substantially unresolved and further intensified the overall imbalance in the federal structure.

Coupled with economic mismanagement and labour agitation, this instability paved the way for a military intervention in January 1966, ostensibly to restore order and discipline (Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:58; Thomson 2000:68).

The military coup, however, just marked the beginning of a deeper crisis. Ironsi, an Igbo, succeeded the head of the coup, Major Nzeogwu, as leader of the military, but as the coup was interpreted by other groups as Igbo-inspired, Ironsi was soon deposed by Gowon in a counter coup in July 1966. Gowon was from the north, and ")like the politicians, the soldiers too had their ethnic loyalties" (Falola 1999:11). The situation in Nigeria degenerated fast, leading to a general massacre of thousands of Igbo in the north, followed by the Igbo's declaration of the eastern region as the independent state of Biafra in 1967 (Falola 1999:11).

Thomson (2000:68) describes this event as the low point in Nigeria's aspirations of national unity, but a probable highpoint of political mobilisation along ethnic lines. In the civil war that ensued, Nigeria was brought to the world's attention, with the US and the USSR backing Nigeria, and Biafra receiving support from states like France, Portugal and South Africa. Re-unification only took place after the civil war was ended three years later in 1970, but by then almost two million "Biafrans" had died (Nel & McGowan 1999:155-156; Thomson 2000:68).

The first period of military rule lasted until 1979. The federal military government immediately embarked on a process of centralising state power, strengthening its control over the states and consolidating the influence of the federal civil servants. This process was aided by the increase in oil revenues, which was used to fund a post-war reconstruction programme. By installing nationalist institutions, it was attempted to tame mobilisation along ethnic lines, and as an extension of this approach, the number of regions in the federation were also increased to 12 and later to 19. This multi-state federalism aimed at loosening the stranglehold of the three dominant ethnic groups by opening up opportunities for the smaller ethnic groups in order to contain the disintegrative tendencies inherent in Nigeria's cultural diversity (Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:58; Thomson 2000:68-69). The extent to which the military was successful in maintaining Nigeria's national integrity, is illustrated by the fact that there have not been any serious attempts at secession after the Biafra civil war, but as Thomson (2000:69) correctly notes, it does not mean that the country enjoyed complete political stability. Corruption within the bureaucracy and poor economic management, coupled with the waning of Gowon's popularity after a reneging of his promise to hand over power to civilians, enticed officers to effect a palace coup in 1975, bringing Murtala Mohammed to power (Falola 1999:11; Thomson 2000:69).

It was Mohammed's successor, Lt-Gen Olusegun Obasanjo, who returned Nigeria to civilian rule in 1979. The Second Republic was founded on a highly centralised constitution, designed to reinforce the integrative effects of the multi-state structure. The northern-based National Party of Nigeria (NPN) won the elections, but due to support of the organisation in the south, it received some credibility in its pretensions as a national party. Although the federal government still looked after its own interests, it had to acknowledge ethno-regional power and distribute resources accordingly, and according to Thomson (2000:68) ")[apart from] material goods, and local budgets, political posts were also part of this arithmetic". The top federal posts, such as the posts of president, national chairman and vice-president, were rotated among party notables from all of the regions, while the inclusive federal cabinet also represented all of the major 'ethnic brokers' in Nigeria. All in all, the result of this system was that

no ethnic group could be perceived as being too dominant, with the flip-side of the coin that none of these groups could be excluded (Falola 1999:58; Thomson 2000:69).

As history went on to show, these attempts at ")'ensuring that the kind of ethnic and regional polarisation that savaged the First Republic did not emerge in the Second Republic'" (quoted by Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:58) just were not enough. The 'boomerang effects' of the structural and institutional changes were illustrated by the abuses and controversies that beset the attempts at implementing the federal principles at national level, as indicated by the vociferous campaigns for the creation of new states by communities in order to gain access to federal revenues and the high degree of antagonism that opposition-dominated state governments showed toward the centralising features of the 1979 constitution (Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:58). Some of these state governments did fall in the national elections of 1983, which established the hegemony of the NPN, but these elections were alleged to have been heavily rigged and the party system again lost its credibility (Falola 1999:11-12).

On New Year's Eve of the same year, Maj-Gen Muhammed Buhari came to power on the back of a military coup. This time around, the military did not reject the democratic federal government because of a failure of ethnic arithmetic or its nationalist sentiments. But instead, as Thomson (2000:69) indicates, the rejection was because of the alleged massive fraud of the 1983 elections, abuse of power by the police and the judiciary, failure by the federal government to stem the large-scale corruption among the political elite and the mismanagement of the economy (a situation compounded by a decline in oil revenues) (Falola 1999:12). Thomson (2000:70) further elaborates on the situation as follows: "In a system of government that relied on ethnic patronage for its survival, corruption was hard to control. Politics had become centred on the short-term winning of state resources, and gaining access to levers of power. Little long-term strategic political and economic planning could survive in this institutionalised system of political exchange. Resource capture and distribution had become more important to politicians and bureaucrats than the actual development of the economy that produced these resources. Nigeria had hit, head-on, the problems of inefficiency and legitimacy associated with [Donald Rothchild's] hegemonial exchange model". Telling, indeed, then, was the fact that the population welcomed the military after clamouring for democracy in the 1970's (Falola 1999:12).

Buhari's government failed to find any remedies to these continuing problems, especially where the economy was concerned, and became increasingly authoritarian in realising its goal of restoring discipline to public life. Paying little attention to public opinion and involving itself in human rights' abuses, the military government increasingly lost public support, while the ")public cooperated because of coercion rather than patriotism" (Falola 1999:12). This prompted Maj-Gen Ibrahim Babangida to overthrow the Buhari regime in yet another military coup, in 1985. In an attempt to gain immediate popular support, he released political prisoners and promised open government, while launching an economic structural adjustment programme to strengthen the ailing economy. Babangida also promised a return to civilian rule by 1992, and in this respect there was an attempt to formulate a new constitution that could manage Nigeria's social divisions more successfully than the 'democratic experiment' of the Second Republic (Thomson 2000:70).

Under the presidency of Babangida, the states were considerably weakened via fragmentation into smaller units (numbering about 30 states), the cutting of their shares of federal revenues, and the systematic erosion of their power over local authorities. In the political sphere, Babangida continued

his drive of centralisation by introducing a two-party system based on national, and not regional, political competition. In this step, aimed at bringing the institutionalised ethnic balancing of the past to an end, both parties now had to win support from across the country in order to win power. The fragility of the mandatory two-party system was exposed in the June 1993 elections, however, when a southerner, Moshood Abiola, won the elections for the first time in history. Under the pressure from the military, Babangida promptly annulled the elections and Abiola was thrown in jail (Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:59; Thomson 2000:70-71). Clearly, ")elements of the military enjoyed their taste of political power, and were not prepared to relinquish the reins of the state" (Thomson 2000:71).

Falola (1999: 13) is of the opinion that, although Babangida had a friendlier disposition than Buhari, his ambition to hang on to power became his undoing. Surviving two coup attempts in 1985 and 1991, Babangida was forced to transfer power to an Interim National Government (ING). In a peculiar arrangement, Gen Sani Abacha, the Chief of Defence Staff, was retained as the only senior military officer in the ING, and of course he quickly rose to dominate it. He disbanded the ING and proclaimed himself as president of Nigeria, launching a reign that manipulated ethnicity, the greed of civilian politicians and brutal violence to stay in power against the popular will, only ending with his death in 1998 (Falola 1999:13; Okojie 1997:11-13).

Multi-party democracy only returned to Nigeria in 1999, when Olusegun Obasanjo, the retired general that led Nigeria's military government in 1976-1979, was elected as the president of the Third Republic. According to Thomson (2000:71), Obasanjo's election clearly illustrated the 'veto' that the military still held over Nigerian politics. Democracy, however, did not bring an end to Nigeria's diverse troubles, and as McGreal (2000-02-08:1) notes, the end of military rule has unleashed a store of bitter resentments in Nigeria that have fuelled ethnic massacres, the rise of militant regional organisations and a rush to introduce sharia law in the Islamic north over the virulent protests of Christians.

One can obviously ask the question of why exactly this is the case. The UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (2000-01-06:1), reports that analysts in Lagos and Harcourt offer the explanation that ")the introduction of democracy has acted like the release of a pressure valve, enabling people to vent their pent-up anger and express themselves more freely". One of the analysts is of the opinion that the causes for the communal conflicts have been there all along, with another continuing and expounding on this line by arguing that ")under successive military governments, particularly the suppressive and brutal regime of Sani Abacha, not many of these conflict areas have been able to give vent to their anger as the fear of the military kept them in check". Yet another analyst contends on his part that "after Abacha's experience, people are now prepared to defend whatever they consider their interests to be, more forcefully" (UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs 2000-01-06:1).

Whatever the case may be, the situation in Nigeria clearly needs to be resolved, but before some practical suggestions are offered in this regard, it is a good idea to briefly expand upon and clarify the main issues at stake.

From the above discussion, and in line with the purpose of this paper, it is clear that the question of ethnicity and ethnic conflict underlies the problems that Nigeria has faced and currently continues to face. Ethnic conflict in Nigeria mainly revolves around the following four specific legacies of the past:

Geographic and demographic characteristics:

In addition to forging over 200 ethnic groups together into one state, the colonial legacy of the three separate administrative regions (closely resembling the three dominant regions today) has proved to be a major stumbling block in attempts to establish unity in Nigeria. Mobilisation has taken place along ethno-regional lines in order to lobby the colonial authorities for resources   a practice that continued after Nigeria became independent. The result was constant regional rivalries, and the more each group became focused on realising its own interests, the further their ethnic consciousness grew. In the process the idea of 'being Nigerian' was thrown to the wind.

· Resources and the economy:
As noted above, the economy played a large role in the fuelling of conflict in Nigeria. The south is more resource-rich, particularly richly endowed with oil reserves, while the north is more agriculturally orientated. Since oil accounted for more than 80% of the federal government's revenues, and as a result of the competition between states for shares in this revenue, the north tried to increase its political influence and maintain its dominance in Nigerian politics to gain access to these resources. At the same time, the groups of the south counter-reacted to these attempts of the north in order to maximise their own slices of the cake. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that oil is located in specific ethnic areas, with the result that the groups in these areas tend to feel that the oil is '100% theirs'. Obasanjo's proposals that 30% of the oil revenues be ploughed back into the local areas from which oil is pumped, has also conflicted with the interests of the local elites who want to strengthen their own positions by erecting infrastructure. In the process ethnic rivalries have further increased, fuelled by the economic mismanagement of the various governments since independence.

· Religion
It is noted above that the Christian south feared the larger-populated Muslim north, while the 'underdeveloped' north feared the better-educated south. Religion has indeed been a major divisive factor in Nigeria for decades and religious contention has been sharpened by the fact that the two previous republics were led by northern Muslims on top of the dominance of the federal government by Muslim northerners for more than thirty years since independence. The religious turbulence has resonated sharply in regional struggles for power in Nigeria, the most recent being the clashes between Christians and Muslims over the introduction of the Islamic sharia law in the northern state of Zamfara, and possibly other states as well (Cunliffe-Jones 2000-03-06:2). The UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (1999-08-04:1), for example, gives an account of the violence in the south-western town of Shagamu that erupted between the three major ethnic groups after a Hausa woman was killed by a Yoruba group for watching forbidden religious rites.

· The military:
Nigeria has spent only about ten years under a democratic government since gaining independence in 1960   the rest of the time a military government was in power. Although all of the Nigerian governments have looked after their own interests first, the military took it one step further. The authoritarian military governments followed a kind of a 'divide and rule' approach in order to stay in power, and flamed ethnic tensions to draw attention away from themselves. An example of this can be found in Babangida's move of enrolling Nigeria in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986 (Suberu in Diamond & Plattner 1994:60). In protest against the military regimes, many ethnic-based militant groups have emerged. One such group   a group that is widely regarded as one of the

fuelling factors behind recent ethnic violence in Nigeria is the pro-Yoruba Odudua People's Congress (OPC), but obviously the formation of such groups has led to similar groups being formed, such as the pro-Hausa-Fulani Arewa People's Congress (APC) (UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs 2000-01-06:2).

4. ETHNIC CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

When trying to offer practical solutions for the resolution and/or management of ethnic conflict, it has to be borne in mind that one is almost always faced with a multi-faceted issue containing numerous complexities the case of Nigeria being no exception. Not being intimately familiar with all these intricacies certainly detracts from any suggestions offered, but every attempt is a step closer to realising the ultimate goal, just as every drop fills the bucket.

Firstly, let us have a look at the challenges facing Nigeria under Obasanjo challenges that ethnic conflict management will obviously have to take into account. According to Solomon (2000:17), these challenges include the following:

To forge a united Nigeria out of 250 fractious ethnic groups;

To limit the power of the military, while ensuring its maintenance as a source of stability in West Africa;

To inculcate a culture respectful of human rights and the rule of law;

To increase economic performance while simultaneously developing an understanding of the need for a more equitable distribution of the country's wealth; and

To put an end to spiralling levels of crime and corruption through effective, good governance.

Three models on ethnic conflict management have been identified in the literature on ethnic conflict: the control model, the shared homeland model, and the consociational model (Rabie 1994:60-61). The control model was developed by Ian Lustick, based on the Israeli political system in dealing with the Arab minority in Israel, and is a model to achieve political stability by allowing the majority to have a near total control over the minority "a system of majority dictatorship to enhance the interests of the controlling majority at the expense of the controlled minority, reducing it to a position of subordination and submission" (Rabie 1994:61-62). It should be clear that this model could not be applied to Nigeria, as there is no clear distinction between a 'majority' and a 'minority' in the country. Besides, attempts of one group to control another, have often elicited negative counter-reactions by other groups in Nigeria (e.g. the emergence of militant groups such as the OIC and the APC). The shared homeland model has been developed by Mohamed Rabie to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict, and recognises the political reality of nationalism and ethnicity. It therefore calls for the political separation of groups unwilling or unable to peacefully co-exist under one political system. Again, it should be clear that this model should not be applied to Nigeria. More than 200 ethnic groups have been sharing the Nigerian territory for at least many decades, and even centuries, with the result that there are no distinct boundaries to be drawn between them. Any attempts to do this will literally open Pandora's box, not only in the context of Nigeria, but in the African context as well, and will further be against the explicit international understanding of the OAU that colonial borders will be honoured an understanding aimed exactly at keeping the box closed.

The consociational model is not perfect either, but is certainly more applicable to Nigeria than the previous two. Developed by Arend Lijphart and based on the Netherlands' political experience, it is a power-sharing model that views different ethnic or cultural groups as partners interested in overcoming their differences to make the system work and therefore willing to negotiate and make compromises. This model does not only assume the existence of a legitimate leadership to represent each group, but also that intergroup negotiations are done by these leaders who have the ability to avoid the dangers

of intergroup conflict through negotiation (Rabie 1994:61). This model should further be applied by using the integrative approach. The integrative approach aims at integrating the interests of adversaries through solutions that meet their mutual needs without sacrificing their basic demands. This may be accomplished through building new cooperative relationships that facilitate the fulfilment of seemingly contradictory goals (Rabie 1994:73). How can this be applied to Nigeria, however?

In Nigeria, there are three main levels of leadership that can potentially participate in the negotiations process, namely the federal government under Obasanjo, the state governments and the leaders of the various ethnic groups outside of these structures. Under the initiative of the federal government, determining the various leaderships to participate in the negotiations process can take place both horizontally (e.g. Obasanjo and his cabinet with National Assembly or between groups on grassroots level etc.) and vertically (e.g. federal government with state governments). During these preliminary talks (as well as later on) issues such as ideology and religion should be downplayed to a minimum, as only a basis for future talks and negotiations are being formed. These talks can then be gradually intensified and broadened to encompass other issues as well. It should be stressed that this process must be as inclusive and representative as possible.

Clearly a higher degree of government centralisation should be introduced in order to circumvent many problems of the past. As an example, the number of states should be kept to a minimum, as their proliferation intensified competition for federal resources in the past, and so contributed to ethnic conflict and fragmentation. A higher degree of state centralisation will obviously be conducive to uniting Nigeria, but will not succeed in bringing this about on its own. It should be accompanied by nation-building and the forging of a common Nigerian identity based on symbolism and the spirit of ubuntu. These symbols should incorporate as many of the symbols cherished by the various population groups as possible, while combined with totally new ones. The alternative is that an entirely new set of symbols be introduced. In the negotiation process, the details of these and other important issues such as the division of power can be worked out, but we do think that a limited party system, similar to the two party system under Babangida, will be more effective than a multi-party system, as it will force political parties to gain support nationally instead of relying on traditional bases of support, and contribute to a unified nationhood in which each person will see him/herself as a Nigerian first of all. Indeed, the powerful effects of a national pride should not be underrated.

In addition, the results of the negotiations should be contained in a constitution that clearly specifies all aspects of the political and other systems as agreed between the negotiating parties. A charter of human rights should form a main part of this document, while the constitution should clearly make provisions for establishing the rule of law principle. It is further important that the provisions of the constitution remain rooted in reality, while the judiciary should be sufficiently strengthened to uphold it.

In our estimation the economic factors should be viewed as the key to the effective management of ethnic conflict in Nigeria. Revenues from oil especially, should be managed in such a way, that each community sees substantial benefits emanating from their peaceful participation in both the political and economic processes, instead of competing with one another for federal resources. The federal government should still be the primary administrator of these revenues, and allocate at least 30% of the revenues, whether from oil or other economic activities, to the area in which it is generated. Conversely, communities can be provided with different benefits, for instance in the form of housing or infrastructure. Instead of antagonising local leaders, or the communities themselves, the federal

government should involve them as much as possible in the decision-making process of how resources should be allocated. In this process, both the positions of the federal government and these leaders can be strengthened based on the principle of interdependence.

Special attention should be paid to the economic situation in poorer northern Nigeria, especially by focusing on issues such as illiteracy, development of trade and industry, better agricultural methods and the development of infrastructure. Perhaps this can be done in forging partnership programmes between the north and the south. As the north presently fears the better-educated south, southerners might even be encouraged to participate in federally and privately funded education programmes in the north, for example. One of the most important things to bear in mind, though, is that it is absolutely crucial to bring about positive changes and improvements in the living standards of the population and to eradicate inequality among them   in other words, just like with every issue tackled in managing ethnic conflict in Nigeria, there should be tangible benefits to persuade the people to actively participate in the process, including concrete signs that the government is doing its best to root out corruption and to deliver maximum benefits to its citizens.

Regarding religious issues, it is more difficult to suggest any solutions. Solutions may be forthcoming from the negotiating process, but to our mind, these negotiations should take part between the religious groups themselves, rather than as part of the formal negotiations. As religious matters are highly contentious in the Nigerian society, we think that there should be a total division between the secular state and the religious institutions. In other words, the state should not involve itself in purely religious affairs and vice versa.

The military should also be restructured to reflect the values of a transforming Nigeria. Changes in leadership of the armed forces will already be a positive step forward (as Obasanjo has already done), but a sufficient system of checks and balances should be implemented in order to ensure that the Nigerian executive maintains control over them. It might also be a good idea to include members of the armed forces in the negotiation process, and afterwards to persuade them that, by serving the interests of the democracy, they are serving the interests of Nigeria and its people.

5. CONCLUSION

Ethnic conflicts are some of the major challenges facing the world, and Africa in particular, today. These conflicts also have a compounding influence on other issues such as political, economic and social stability. The case of ethnic conflict in Nigeria is illustrative of this point, and indeed multi-faceted and extremely complex. Although many positive steps have already been taken by the present democratic government of Obasanjo in the direction of addressing this conflict and other problems facing Nigeria, it is clear that much more still has to be done   especially in the light of the recent heightening of ethnic tensions. In this context, it is hoped that the modest practical suggestions made above may contribute to the process of finding a solution to this pressing problem.

Notes

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