Mechanisms for Conflict Management in Plural and Divided Societies: the Nigerian Experience

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Mechanisms for Conflict Management in Plural and Divided Societies: the Nigerian Experience

Emmanuel O. Ojo

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Note portant l’auteur¹

INTRODUCTION

One of the perennial problems which also seem intractable that Nigeria, like several other new states and segmented societies, has to contend with is that of successfully managing her numerous ethnic groups. Scholars put these ethnic groups at different figures. According to Kirk-Green, Nigeria have well over 400 ethnic groups.¹ For Suberu, “Nigeria is of course, one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, with over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa”.² At the beginning of the sixties, there were thousands of tribes or ethnic groups in the world, about 1,000 were represented in the geo-political space called Nigeria today. In his insightful work, Otite, has specifically identified 374 ethnic groups in the country.³

It is not astonishing therefore, that these ethnic groups are always in rabid conflict and competition for scarce resources. This is not unexpected especially between ‘ethnically defined constituencies’.⁴ The reason is that almost by definition, ethnic groups are in keen competition for the strategie resource of their respective societies. This is true in Nigeria as in other plural and divided societies which consider themselves biologically, culturally, linguistic or socially distinct from each other and most often view their relations in actual or potentially antagonistic terms.⁵ Barth however, defines an ethnic
group as a purely unit of people who perceive themselves as sharing common features, which are different from that of others and are accepted as being so different by others.  

Be that as it is, the problem of cohabitation among ethnic groups can be broken down into ethno-centrism and ethnicity. Ethnocentrism, in the words of Abu Bah, is the attitudinal dimension of ethnic relations. It is usually inward looking and promotes a sense of pride and positive image of the group’s beliefs, customs, and identity in relation to others. Ethnicity emerges during the process of interaction among ethnic groups inhabiting the same state. The interaction is frequently characterized by competition for resources, power and the assertion of cultural identity. Conflict arises out of the attempt to include one’s members and at the same time exclude people from other groups. The urge to include and exclude fosters a collective consciousness among group members, making them not only a “group in itself” but also a “group for itself.” Ethnicity has been viewed as either the result of innate tendencies to be loyal and support one’s group or the result of elite manipulation. While the former emphasizes the strength of primordial identities, the latter stresses social construction. Whether ethnicity is intrinsic or socially constructed, the fact still remains that ethnicity exists. We discriminate on the basis of ethnic identities and at the same time, we use ethnic identities to mobilize people. Irrespective of its origins, ethnicity is real and in many cases its politicization has led to tremendous human suffering, which is the thrust of this paper.  

It needs to be emphasized that in virtually all plural societies, there are at least three main types of conflicts which are intra-personal within a given component part of the larger system, inter-personal between; at least two component parts and supra-personal between and among groups in the polity. Since conflict is inherent in human societies, its mode of resolution equally deserves scholarly analysis. This is not unconnected with the fact that peace management and maintenance is as cumbersome as conflict resolution particularly in plural societies.  

It is against this background that the paper discusses mechanisms for conflict management in Nigeria. The paper is organized into three main sections. With the above introductory overview, the first major section is an explication of the contending paradigms to conflict management in divided societies. The second part is a brief survey of ethnic and religious conflicts with the attendant lose in Nigeria’s recent past. The third part is an appraisal of accommodative strategies put in place to effectively manage the polity. The paper however infers that a general overhaul of the institutional management strategies need to be carried out in Nigeria if the polity will not eventually disintegrate.

CONTENDING PARADIGMS TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT  

One of the leading theorists of conflict management in plural societies is Cynthia Enloe. In her profound and insightful work, she lists seven ethnic conflict management formulas. These formulas are: (1) Divide and Rule, which involves the deliberate efforts on the part of central political authorities not to isolate the several communities from one another, but to encourage them to perceive themselves as fundamentally different in values and goals when they do interact with one another. This was a popular colonial strategy in multiethnic colonies. (2) Displacement which involves the strategy employed by a ruling elite which happens to control superior resources and control the state apparatus against
the most vulnerable of ethnic groups. The best example of such formula is genocide. (3) Internal colonialism involves the domination of the groups in the polity by only one of them. South Africa stands out as the harshest example of such a formula combined there with divide and rule. (4) Submachine an offshoot of a larger political machine organization which, in turn, controls it, and use it to mobilize resources on occasions when they are needed usually at election times. (5) Consociational democracy, which is based on the assumption that the various ethnic groups are communal enough that they have internal consensus and internal mechanisms for generating leaders with sufficient intra-communal support that they can speak for the groups at large in state affairs. In its strict sense, this is an elite accommodation of diversities. (6) Vanguard assimilation, which aims at eliminating those inter-comag. Usually, one ethnic group is presented as the standard bearer the vanguard for all others to emulate and finally; (7) there is federalism traditionally federalism has been offered as an institutional solution to the disruptive tendencies of intra-societal ethnic pluralism.

As Enloe points out, the seven formulas of inter-ethnic accommodation are not mutually exclusive. With specific reference to federal states, any one or more of the other formulas can be effectively applied. For example, federalism can be upheld or made more effective by adopting the formula of consociational democracy, vanguard assimilation or internal colonialism. Thus, many federations have sought to balance the diverse interests in their politics through various measures of ethnic balancing in government. Another plural accommodation and management strategy that is applicable to plural societies is that of Rupesinghe, he summarises the broad spectrum principles in his assertion that democracy, devolution and power sharing are important for accommodation and management of segmented societies. Within this spectrum are the instrumental ities of human rights, including minority and groups' rights, local political autonomy, affirmative action or quota system and other elements of consociationalism, secularism and so on. They also include the five types of devolutionary arrangements identified by Gurr such as confederalism, federalism, regional autonomy, regional administrative decentralization and community autonomy.

Given the pervasive, convulsive and destructive nature of ethnic conflicts, it is hardly surprising that much of the literature on ethnicity has been devoted to the investigation, classification or evaluation of actual or potential strategies or policies for containing divisive ethnic conflicts and promoting national, inter-ethnic unity. For instance, John McGarry and Brendan O'Leavy have classified policies or methods of ethnic conflict by eliminating ethnic differences, while the remaining four seek to regulate ethnic conflict by managing such differences. The four methods for eliminating ethnic differences are: (i) genocide, (ii) forced mass-population transfer, (iii) partition and/or secession (self-determination), (iv) integration and/or assimilation. The four methods for managing ethnic differences are: (i) hegemonic control, (ii) arbitration (third-party intervention), (iii) cantonization and/or federalization, (iv) consociationalism or power-sharing.

In the same vein, Donald Horowitz examines approaches to conflict reduction by a number of countries and draws out a number of successful strategies that could be adopted by countries having similar ethnic configuration. The prescriptions are:

Mechanisms for conflict management in plural and divided societies

(a) the creation of lower level political units (i.e. proliferation of points of power) with a view to directing struggles away from, and taking the heart off, the centre;
(b) putting in place arrangements which activate intra-ethnic conflict and reduce
energies available for inter-ethnic conflict. The arrangements include the creation of lower-level political units and reservation of offices for members of particular groups;
(c) adoption of policies that create incentives for inter-group cooperation e.g. electoral inducement for coalition purposes;
(d) adopting policies that encourage alignments based on interest other than ethnicity; and
(e) preferential programmes to reduce disparities between groups.  

Horowitz presents the last three as a follow-up to, or as resulting from, the first two, and all five prescriptions as having the potential of producing both politics of bargaining and representation of minority groups in national institutions. The prescriptions happened to have been drawn from Nigeria, which is our case study for this paper. In his words, Horowitz stated “if one is looking for African democracy in a divided society, the place to look is... Nigeria that is where many of the African lessons are...”  

For Larry Diamond,23 there are four principal mechanisms for managing ethnicity politically within a democratic framework: federalism, proportionality in the distribution of resources and power, minority rights to cultural integrity and non-discrimination, and sharing or rotation of power, particularly through coalition arrangements at the centre. In a similar classification, Crawford Young outlines ‘four major policy spheres’ for the management of ethnic diversity. These are:

(i) constitutional formulas, particularly federal decentralized alternatives to the centralized unitary state;
(ii) cultural policies, especially in the fields of education and language;
(iii) remedies for marginalized population categories (indigenous peoples, immigrants, peripheral minorities); and
(iv) resources distribution issues (including “affirmative action questions”).  

TABLE: Strategies of Ethnic Conflict Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donald Rothchild &amp; Victor A. Ogbueme</th>
<th>Theodore Lowi</th>
<th>Edmund J. Keeler</th>
<th>Samuel P. Huntington</th>
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<td>2. Blockchain:</td>
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<td>Restriction of political</td>
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<td>6. Increasing:</td>
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<td>2. Revolutionary:</td>
<td>2. Exclusionary:</td>
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<td>7. Declining:</td>
<td>Strategy:</td>
<td>The deliberate reallocation</td>
<td>Genocide of minority,</td>
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<td>8. Increasing:</td>
<td>The allocation of</td>
<td>of opportunities to satisfy</td>
<td>e.g., Nazi Germany’s</td>
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<td>9. Declining:</td>
<td>opportunities to satisfy</td>
<td>one group at the expense</td>
<td>“Final Solution”.</td>
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<td>11. Declining:</td>
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<td>23. Declining:</td>
<td>It may entail the</td>
<td>political system.</td>
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<td>24. Increasing:</td>
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<th>C. Redistribution:</th>
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<td>The reallocation of inter-ethnic opportunities by means of redistribution programs.</td>
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<th>D. Sharing:</th>
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<td>Formalised reciprocity through coordinated participation in the decision-making process</td>
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<th>Policy:</th>
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<td>Policies that lack substance but elicit voluntary popular reactions of one form or another.</td>
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### SOURCE: DONALD ROTHCHILD AND VICTOR A. OLORUNSOLO, “AFRICAN PUBLIC POLICIES ON ETHNIC AUTONOMY AND STATE CONTROL”, IN DONALD ROTHCHILD AND VICTOR A.

13 Finally, the table below encompasses the works of five scholars vis-à-vis different strategies of ethnic conflict management as presented by Ayoade.25

14 Glaringly, all the aforementioned typologies do overlap closely. Although, ‘no two lists are identical... the resemblances are striking’.26 Our concern however, is with the suggestion that they have magical solutions that can be uniformly applied to all minority situations is something of an over-statement in the light of the complexities referred to in the introductory section of this paper. This is true especially of a situation of multiple ethnicities such as Nigeria, which calls for multiple solutions.27

15 Indeed, Stavenghagen has observed that most states fare poorly in such cases where ethnic conglomerates are divided on the basis of uncommon problems, multiple solutions sometimes work at cross purposes.28 The management of multiple minority problems is therefore a difficult task indeed. We now proceed to a brief survey of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria between 1999 and 2003 before we appraise Nigeria’s conflict management strategies.

### SURVEY OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CRISES

16 Nigeria has demonstrated a very high propensity for ethnic and religious violence even before independence. In 1953, thirty-six people were killed in the North in communal clashes prompted by the visit of NCNC and AG leaders. This was seen as retaliation against southerners, the Yoruba in particular, who rebuked northern leaders in Lagos for refusing to support the self-rule motion tabled by Anthony Enahoro. In 1967, Nigeria degenerated into a civil war after the Igbo-dominated Eastern region tried to secede from the Nigerian federation. However, other Nigerians were not ready to let the oil rich east go away. The secessionists were fiercely attacked and by the end of the war in 1970, more than a million Igbo had either been killed or displaced.

17 In more recent times, however, there has been a dramatic surge in xenophobia expressions, the hardening of ethno-regional positions and the proliferation of ethnic militias that have unleashed varying degrees of violence and terror on the polity.29 In spite of concerted efforts being made to curtail tribal wars in Nigeria, the problem has
been on the increase, especially since the return of democracy in May 1999. Earlier, Ikengah-Metuh, identified three broad types of religious violence in Nigeria viz: (i) intra-religious disturbances which occur between different denominations or sects; (ii) inter-religious conflicts prevalent between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimension; and (iii) inter-religious conflicts which, though, have socio-economic origin, end up in the form of religious conflicts. He noted further in respect of Nigeria that “most inter-religious disturbances usually develop into inter-ethnic conflicts even where they began as purely religious disagreements. The reverse is also often the case; namely, some socio-ethnic conflicts are deflected and fought out under inter-religious banner”. This is hardly surprising because as will be demonstrated later with empirical data, there is a very strong correlation or overlap between ethnic and religious boundaries in Nigeria’s plural setting. The tendency for the boundary between the two forms of identity to collapse during moments of conflicts and violence has been captured in the phrase, “ethno-religious” violence.

A survey of ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 till date shows that they are worrisome development which threaten harmonious co-existence and jeopardize the unity of the Nigerian nation-state and its fledging democratic experiment far more than any other challenges of democratic sustenance. But the state seems to lack proper perspective on the handling of the reality of religion in Nigeria. Nigeria is a complex society with a multiplicity of religious and cultural allegiances and sensibilities. The least the government could do is to come to terms with the reality of Nigeria’s multi-religious status, recognize religious rights and ensure that religious rights of all Nigerians are equally protected.

From data gathered, ethnic conflicts have persisted in all geo-political zones of the country. Commencing from the south-west zone of the country in Ondo State, the Ijaje and Ijaw Arogbo have been fighting tribal war since September 1998 until August 5, 1999 when ceasefire was achieved. Ondo State government had to set up a 24-man committee to work out the process of resolving the crisis permanently. Within one week of conflicts, which involved the use of sophisticated weapons, they eventually succeeded in destroying 45 communities with more than 1,000 people killed while 18,000 people were displaced! According to Olusola Oke, spokesman of Ijaje, he said the Ijaws razed down more than 13,000 residential buildings when the conflict started in 1998, September 19. Oke said no fewer than 180,000 people from 68 communities were chased out of their domains.

In Eastern part of the country, protracted fratricidal conflict among the three contiguous communities of Aguleri, Umuleri and Umuoba Anam of Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State, had left the area sordidly devastated, as several hundreds of lives, houses and economic valuables including motor vehicles were lost. Following the fragile peace currently holding in the area, pockets of sporadic attacks are still witnessed in spite of heavy presence of mobile policemen drafted to ensure peace there. The protracted ethnic conflict started as far back as the 19th century. Before April 1999 incident, two major conflicts have taken place ever since. One of the conflicts occurred in 1993 leading to the setting up of a commission of enquiry headed by Moses O. Nweje, a retired judge. The recommendations of the commission were yet to be implemented before war broke out years later in April 1999. Ohaneze Ndigbo the pan-Igbo association -, which has been assisting to broker peace in the area said over 1,000 people, have so far been killed. In a communique issued in April when a peace committee set up by the group met with
leaders of the three warring communities, they said that “a conflict that has claimed over 1,000 lives and reduced over 500,000 citizens of Nigeria to refuge status in their fatherland is grave enough to attract a rapid intervention by a sensitive and responsive government”. The present government in the State (Anambra) has been involved in a number of measures aimed at bringing lasting peace in the state. Apart from holding series of meetings with representatives of the people, Chinwoke Mbadinuju, the State Governor, visited the scenes of war and promised scholarship to students from the area in exchange for peace. He told a reporter:

“I am saying that for the three communities without houses, without residence, without whatever civilized means, they are all destroyed... I pronounced compulsory free education for these three communities and scholarship as a way of inducement for these people to come back”.77 One can then imagine the extent of damage as a result of civil strives in that community.

21 In Warri, Delta State, in the Mid-western part of the country, the war that the 1997 creation of Warri south-west local government sparked off, is yet to subside. When the regime of late Gen. Sani Abacha created the local government, serious fighting erupted between the Ijaw and the Itsekiri after the local government headquarters said to have been initially located at Ogbe-Ijoh, a riverine Ijaw community which was later moved to the Itsekiri town of Ogidigben. Ever since the war started, it has remained a ding-dong affair, current estimate of people so far killed since 1997 stands at over 3,000 lives, which included soldiers, policemen and oil company personnel in addition to residents in the area. More than 30 billion naira both in oil revenue and valuable property were said to have been lost too. The crisis in the area at one time became so expanded that the Urhobo were forced to join the war. That was July 1999 when Itskiri youths stormed the palace of Oresuen of Okere-Urhobo, newly installed traditional ruler of the Urhobo of Okere, Warri, and burnt it to ashes. Five people were killed in the attack, among them an old man of 76. The State government had to impose curfew on three occasions in the area before peace could return. Now, there is full but fresh indications point to the possibility of another round of fighting in the area.78

22 Furthermore, it is important to note that the ethnic war in Taraba State of the Northern region of the country is perhaps the most complex and sophisticated in Nigeria. It is centred on efforts at the control of Takum by three ethnic groups, the Jukun, Chamba and Kutep which dates back to the colonial days. In wars which the groups have fought, the Jukun and Chamba communities usually fought against the Kutep group. The first leg of the crisis is centred on conflict of interest between the Jukun/Chamba and the Kutep over who ascends the Jukun monarchy. Historical sources revealed that prior to 19H, Jukun and Zumperi had existed as separate districts with the Jukun and Chamba inhabiting Jukun while Zumperi (now Ussa was inhabited by the Kuteb). By the amalgamation of 1914, the two groups were merged. The clamour now is for a separate chiefdom for each of the two communities. This deep rooted animosity resulted into war in 1997 with over 200 people killed, several hundreds maimed and property worth 300 million naira destroyed. On June 18,1999 fresh hostilities erupted in the area resulting into what is now known as Chachanji war with casualties on both sides, with more than 10 villages burnt down in the fracas. The old wound reopened and took a dramatic turn in October, 2001 when ethnic militia group suspected to be Tivs in Vaaser which falls into Benue State captured 22 Nigerian soldiers on peace mission in the area and slaughtered them.79 This gruesome murder of soldiers provoked the federal government. Few hours after burying the soldiers killed in Zaki-Biam, Benue State, and the military invaded Tiv land and killed
at least 70 people in the revenge mission at the first instance. At the end of the final onslaught hundreds of Tiv people were killed and the house of former Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Victor Malu was burnt down. However, rather than resolving the crisis, the military invasion has compounded the problems.30

23 The Yoruba western part of the country has equally not been spared from the orgy of ethnic violence. In August 1999, ‘Area Boys’ hijacked the annual ‘Oro’ festival in Sagamu, Ogun State, which triggered off avoidable clashes between Yoruba and Hausa. At the end of the clash which started on the night of July 17, Moses Ogunlaja, the Lisa of Sagamu and Chairman, press briefing committee on the clash had reported the killing of 100 Sagamu indigenes and burning of over 120 vehicles belonging to them by the Hausas at Sabo, a part of Sagamu with Hausa concentration. He said over 130 indigenes were on danger list in various hospitals in the town.41 The Hausas lost no fewer than 50 lives in the clash. Ogunlaja said over 2,000 Sagamu indigenes have also left the town.42 In August 1999, serious ethnic clash erupted in Kano, between Hausa and the Yoruba. It was a rebound of the earlier clash between the two ethnic groups in Sagamu, July 15. The Sagamu clash witnessed the exodus of Hausa to their various homes in the northern part of the country. It was gathered that two trailer loads of corpses and survivors of the clash arrived Kano July 25 and were put on display at Kanti Kwari, a densely populated commercial area of Kano municipality. The survivors who included pregnant women and children were said to have told tales of horror and suffering in the hands of the Yoruba in Sagamu. This was said to have infuriated the young men in the city. That night young Hausa men went on a rampage, attacking Yoruba residents of the city. At the end of the fracas over 50 houses and shops and about 30 vehicles belonging to the Yoruba were razed before the Police could quell the anger.

24 The irony about ethnic conflicts in Nigeria is definitely that of the Yoruba speaking Ife and Modakeke communities. The conflict had been on for several years back. However, after a long truce, the Ife and Modakeke communities of Osun State began another round of blood letting in March 2000. The old war rages on for days that had to necessitate imposing a dusk-to-dawn curfew for well over a week because of the massive destruction of lives and properties. The bone of contention is rooted in their history. To the Ifes, the Modakekes are squatters on their land. This kind of colonial, domineering and hegemonic traits is deeply resented by the Modakakes, who believe that a separate local government should be created for them to get them detached from the historical appendage of the Ifes. But their population size is far below satisfying the condition for the creation of a local government area, which is another dimension to the dilemma of the two warring communities. The most unfortunate thing however, is that politicians have been playing politics with the issue. It will be recalled that the defunct National Party of Nigeria (NPN) used the Modakekes to rig the gubernatorial election in old Oyo State in the second republic. In the current democratic dispensation too, the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is equally cashing-in on the crisis to spite the Alliance for Democracy (AD) that is presently Osun State. If communities that share the same culture, language and religion could not stay together, the extent of the disintegrative potentials of the polity can be understood. The Ife/Modakeke war had been on since 1997. The aforementioned are just a few cases out of the numerous instances of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.

25 If ethnic conflicts are worrisome, religious conflicts have been dastard too. After the transition from the long years of military rule to civil rule in May, 1999, by 27th October that year, Zamfara State government elevated the Sharia to the status of the English
common law that has formed the bedrock of Nigerian judicature. With the adoption and application of Sharia law coupled with the promise of its extension to other northern states, the whole country was polarized into two opposing camps of Moslems in support and Christians in opposition camp. In March 2000, Kaduna State government another northern state introduced Sharia law. This sparked off an orgy of violence unprecedented in the history of that state. It was so bad that “the senseless destruction of lives and property would not ordinarily abate” despite a till-further-notice restriction was placed on Kano metropolis. At the end of the day, well over 200 lives and properties worth about N1 billion naira had been destroyed. When the Nigeria Police became helpless, soldiers were called in to quell the crisis with unquantifiable casualties. The Kaduna religious conflict instigated a reprisal move by the Igbos in the Eastern parts of the country who equally attacked Hausas for inflicting injury on their kits and kins in the Northern parts of the country.

Other than the troubling ethno-religious conflicts, to many Nigerians, a more worrying development has been the emergence of ethnic militias whose goal is to protect the identities and interests of the groups they represent within the federation. These include the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), the Igbo People's Congress (IPC), the Arewa People’s Congress (APC), the Egbesu Society of the Niger Delta, and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Others include the Ijaw National Congress and the Urhobo National Union among others.

Similarly other than the civil society becoming catalyst for democratic sustenance they have been bastardized in view of unusual democratic liberty they now enjoy thus, transforming them from civil society to 'civil riot'. The above graphic illustration of the state of anomic is indeed far from being a cheering one for the nascent democracy.

**NIGERIA’S ACCOMMODATIVE STRATEGIES: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

Nigeria is often regarded as a pioneer and exemplar in Africa in the use of accommodative mechanisms and practices to promote inter-ethnic inclusiveness, or discourage sectional imbalance and bias, in decision-making processes. The “federal character” principle, the allocation and rotation of political party positions among geo-ethnic zones (zoning) and the establishment of inter-party coalition governments, represent some of the ways by which Nigeria’s political elites have sought to institutionalize conflict management in the Nigerian context. We now take some of the strategies for appraisal one after the other.

After the civil war, policy makers came up with the idea of an enhanced interaction among the nascent elites. The assumption of the policy was that if the emergent elites are forced to interact with the environment outside their natural milieu, they are likely to have better understanding of Nigerian state and the ethnic mix. That was the rationale behind the setting up of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme via Decree No. 24 of May 22, 1973. The purpose of the scheme according to the Decree is primarily to imbue Nigerian youths with the spirit of selfless service to the community and to emphasise the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of cultural or social background. The history of Nigeria since independence and before has clearly indicated the need for unity amongst all segments of the country, and demonstrates the fact that no
cultural or geographical entity exist in isolation. The objectives of the scheme which conscripts all young graduates for a year mandatory national service are indeed laudable and gallant. But the implementation of the policy had succeeded in truncating its achievements. Two salient problems of the scheme are first, favouritism in posting, in which corps members do serve within their localities thereby defeating the essence of the programme. Secondly, the scheme has become a bastion of corruption. The greatest hindrance to the success of the policy is the problematic nature of citizenship in Nigeria. Corps members cannot easily secure jobs outside their place of birth for being “non-indigenes”, for few lucky ones; at best they can only secure contract appointments.

Another accommodative strategy adopted in Nigeria is the one relating to political participation and rulership in Nigeria, otherwise known as the “federal character” principle. It is defined as “fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country’s position of power, status and influence”. This accommodative strategy was known as Quota System before 1979 when it was entrenched in the Constitution. Section 277 of the Constitution highlighted the rationales for Federal Character principle thus: “(a) to promote national unity; (b) to foster national loyalty; (c) to give every citizen a sense of belonging to the nation as expressed in the constitution, sections 135(3), 14(3), and (4). In 1987, the Political Bureau commended the principle and recommended that it should be continued in the politics and governance of the country. It is against that background that the principle was entrenched in the 1999 Constitution too. It however, cautioned that its practice should however be carried out without prejudice to the criteria of merit, excellence and achievement. In operation and actual practice, a number of pitfalls have been identified too with this policy. It potentially invades the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and such other government bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of party politics. Another problem is that the policy has been used to achieve unintended purposes of ethnic cleansing sort-of, when people from some sections of the country are sacked, purged or removed all in the name of federal character. The result in this regard has not been promotion of national loyalty, but inertia and alienation as those who hall from states and communities which have suffered from federal character discrimination become resentful and also alienated from the overall body politic, while those who gain through federal government manouvres in the name of federal character scheme are grateful and presumably loyal to the federal character scheme.

In a recent appraisal of the policy, Ayoade observes that the policy suffers from a faulty philosophical premise. First, it is a policy that should have been designed for the benefit of the under-privileged. But it was designed for the benefit of the ruling class, thus, resulting in the further disempowerment of the powerless. The consequence is that it removed the checks and balances in the informal arrangement that existed before. Since the emphasis was on nonascriptive considerations, it resulted in a geometric diffusion of mediocrity, public service ineptitude, and manifest decline in public morale. Of course, it has also made the further distortion of the federal arrangement possible. That is the paradox of federal character principle in Nigeria. Despite its congenital and operational flaws, however, the “federal character” principle “has become a cornerstone of ethnic justice and fair government in Nigeria”.

Be that as it is, the character of political parties can go a long way too in managing ethnic conflicts. In a plural society like Nigeria, political parties may have well strong ideological class which may impose inter-ethnic relationships since without such ideological class,
the tendency is for the parties to see themselves as forces competing in a multi-ethnic civil-society. There is also the tendency for the parties to interpret competition in terms of ethnic entities, in which case, political parties may have institutional ethnic solidarities. A brief overview of party formation in both the pre-independence and post-independence Nigeria suffices to buttress this point.

32 The first political party was formed in 1923 when the Nigeria Legislative Council was established and franchise extended to Lagos and Calabar under Clifford Constitution. The party was named Nigeria National Democratie Party (NNDP). In 1938, the colonial administration had frustrated the first generation of professionals and intelligentsia sufficiently for them to cope with their predicament. Thus, in that year they formed the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). Though, both parties had aspirations which covered the whole country, but their operations territorial-wise did not go beyond Lagos and Ibadan. In 1944, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), was formed. It was the first party that aspired covering the whole country. It was a mass party with membership opened to everybody. But the party did not advocate consistent ideological position except occasional 'Fabian' rhetoric. In 1948, Action Group (AG) was formed to counter NCNC. This party was an offshoot of Egbe Omo Oduduwa (lit. Association of the Children of Oduduwa, the mythical ancestor of the Yoruba speaking peoples). Explaining the rationale for the formation of this party, its leader Chief Obafemi Awolowo said that he was concerned with stability in a multi-ethnic polity like Nigeria, and that such stability can come if ethnic conglomerates were formed. Therefore, AG epitomized Yoruba cultural fashion. The third and perhaps the most influential party of the first republic was the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), which could be said to have been formed in 1951 and somewhat like the AQ was an offshoot of a cultural association, the Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA), (lit. the association of peoples of the North). Unlike the first two parties, membership of NPC was restricted to people of Northern Nigeria descent, especially the intelligensia. In this respect, the party carried its ethno-regional character far beyond that of the other parties. In practical reality, the NPC was the modern party of the Hausa/ Fulani that dates back to the Uthman Dan Fodio Jihad. Aside from these three dominant parties, there were a number of small ones. But the dominant parties were far from being agents of national integration. Saburi Biobaku recalled that cut-throat competition for political power by the big three thus:

The dominant parties in the North and South-East formed the government with that in the South-West in the opposition. Each party represented the predominant ethnic group in its Region and each, incidentally, controlled the government in its Region.42

33 Thus, political parties in the first republic generally could not be regarded as agents of national integration, providing the bridge of unity for a people of diverse backgrounds. In some of the countries of the West, party identification has (more or less) played down the significance of cleavages such as ethnicity, religion and language. Being Conservative or Labour in the United Kingdom, Democrat or Republican in the United States can sometimes be more important than the natural ideologies which an individual in those two western nations may have inherited through the accident of birth. But in Nigeria it has hitherto been extremely difficult for political parties to hold such sway. It is against this background that the 1979 Constitution, Section 202(b), provided that “the membership of the association (i.e. political party), is open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, sex, religion or ethnic grouping”. Similar provision was entrenched in 1989 Constitution in its Section 220(b).
Nevertheless, despite all constitutional dictates, all the five political parties in the Second Republic could be linked with the past. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was to all intents and purposes a re-incarnation of the Action Group (AG). It was the same founder, the same centre of power, almost identical ideology and organizational structure. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was almost a replica of the NPC except that the membership was not of Northern descent only. But it was dominated by the Northern aristocracy and the Southern bourgeoisie. The Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) was NCNC reincarnation with Ibo heartland as its base but extended beyond Ibo enclave by capturing Plateau state. The Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) was the aftermath of the quarrel of the Kanuris who were in the first Republic resented hegemony by the Hausa/Fulani ruling class, hence, second republic afforded them the opportunity to demonstrate their desire for autonomy. The fifth political party, Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), was Northern Element Peoples Party (NEPU) sort-of. It is pretentious to note that each party was headed by their respective leaders in the first republic except where a given leader had been killed in the coup d’etat that terminated the First Republic. Party formation in the aborted third republic was nothing to write home about too, for the military decreed them into existence and administered like government parastatals. Same blunder was repeated during Gen. Sani Abacha transition programme down to Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar that handed over to President Obasanjo in 1999.

A brief comment on Nigeria’s federal arrangement shows that it has been convoluting and its performance dismal. From 1954 when the country went all hog to embrace federalism, the hope of national integration has become a mirage for quite a number of reasons which perhaps bothers on the mismanagement of the system. Unlike the United States of America and Switzerland, both federal countries, Nigeria’s federal system is highly centralized in all its ramifications. James Coleman noted long time ago that “excessive centralization and station of most developing countries... not only means greater vulnerability as a result of non-fulfillment of populist expectations, it also means heightened inefficiency”.

Nonetheless as earlier mentioned, the problematic nature of Nigeria’s citizenship, at least, sociologically is one other travail of Nigeria’s federalism, which has in no small measure whittle-down the efficacy of Nigeria’s federal structure. Unlike India where there is no duality of citizenship in which case there is only one Indian citizenship, Indian federalism is like that of Canada too, where the concept of state of origin does not really matters.

As if to compound the travails of federalism in Nigeria, the system is structurally imbalance. If Mill’s law of federal instability is anything to go by, that “a federation is morbid if one part of the federation is bigger than the sum of the other parts”, then one can easily explain the stress on the system. Though, there is no federal arrangement in the world in which the constituent states or regions are even or nearly equal in size, population, political power, administrative skills, economic development or relative geographical location, but where such disparity is as great as to make one constituent state/region permanently dominating collective decisions, it results into unitary centralism rather than federalism which is the case in Nigeria. This feeling that the federation is tilted to the advantage of one of its component units tends to transform a federation into an imperial structure. It is this kind of arrangement in Nigeria that brew the problem of hegemonic traits by the major ethnic groups in the federation. It is also for these reasons among others that ethnic minorities who tend not to be reckoned with are restless too. The unpalatable consequential effects of the mismanaged federal
system are political instability ethnic disharmony and threats of secession. With this ‘lack of federal culture of associative democracy to generate a sense of coexistence and well-being,’ Nigerians need to find a solution in fiscal federalism, political restructuring, derivative revenue sharing or whether except the present warped union where there is too much power and resources concentrated at the centre.

The accommodative strategies discussed in this paper are far from being exhaustive of all known ones in Nigeria. For space constraint, others that have been used are: National Language Policy, the movement of federal capital territory from Lagos to Abuja, States and Local governments’ creation at fairly regular intervals, revenue allocation formula, and creation of federal character commission and OMPADEC among others.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Like virtually all other multi-ethnic societies, in all regions and climes, Nigeria has exhibited very high propensity of conflict for quite a long time. Thus, managers of the system have been trying too to prevent the polity from crumbling. But considering all the conflict management strategies put in place by various civilian and military regimes, both prior and after independence, there is the under-lining conceptualization which informs them all. This conceptualization derives from the employment of Western bourgeois theory of social stability and elite stability. Two outstanding contributors to this perspective are worthy of mentioning. They are Martin D.G and Morrison Stevenson. They argued that stability in any political system depends on the elite which they identified as the middle class. In this wise, the stability of any plural society is a function of the state of development of the middle class. If the stratum called the middle class is well developed and fairly thick in terms of population and in terms of strength the more cohesive, the more stable the polity is. Also, if there is cordiality of ideas, or put differently, if there is ideological consciousness among the middle class, this is likely to engender stability that will affect the political system positively. They argued further that instability within any polity is elite instability or communal instability. Elite instability for them occurs when the competition among the elite is too keen on resources that are too few. Communal instability however, is grassroots one and it is usually caused by elite instability, carried to the grassroots level.

What successive regimes have been doing is to try to integrate the elite or the middle class to the neglect of the grassroots and this has not achieved much as clearly shown while appraising the NYSC scheme and the federal character principle. Whereas, the masses of the people needs to be targeted for conflict resolution if lasting peace will be attained. This is because they are the ready tools in the hands of the political class to foment communal instability. The greatest recommendation of this paper therefore is that the grassroots must be mobilized by appropriate strategies to orientate the masses of the people on the need for communal stability in the interest of development, peace and tranquility. This can be done by educating the masses of the people on the need to live in peace and tranquility with their neighbours without which development becomes a mirage.
NOTES

10. Abu Bakarr Bah, op. cit., p. 7.

22. Ibid.


32. Ibid.

33. Samuel G Egwu, op. cit., p. 4


37. Ibid.

38. Ibid


42. Ibid.


44. See, ‘Kaduna Massacre: Sharia Will Split Nigeria’, The News, 6 March, 2000. According to the News Magazine, a BBC reporter was reported to have said that “I have never seen a slaughtering Of human beings like this”. Prof. Soyinka a Noble Laureat too was reported to have told the magazine that “...this is a serious state of anomie and the prelude to war...”.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.


56. Ibid.


59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.


73. Ibid.
ABSTRACTS

Nigeria like several other new and segmented societies is undoubtedly facing a number of challenges that have to do with how to successfully manage her numerous ethnic groups. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is an appraisal of the institutional and public policy mechanisms put in place to integrate the convoluting federal system. The paper is divided into a number of sections. With an introductory overview, the paper proceeds to dwell on the contending paradigms to conflict management in the extant literature on plural and deeply divided societies. The second major part surveys a number of ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 when the nascent democracy was inaugurated till 2003 to attest to the fact that the polity is beleaguered. Having done that, part three is a critique of the integrative/accommodative strategies of the managers of the Nigerian system for it not to go the way of the former Soviet Union (USSR) which disintegrated in the early 90s. The paper infers with the observation that all the accommodative strategies have been directed mainly at the elite, ignoring the masses of the people simply because the strategies are Western bourgeois theory of social stability and elite stability. Whereas, the masses of the people too need to be targeted for conflict resolution. This is because they are the ready tools in the hands of the political class to foment communal instability. The strongest recommendation of this paper therefore is that the masses of the people should be re-orientated and mobilized on the needs for communal stability in the interest of development, peace and tranquility.

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