The Challenges of Nationhood and State-building in Nigeria's "Fourth" Republic

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Michael E. Nwokedi and Elias Chukwuemeka Ngwu

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Abstract

Nigeria's eighteen years of civilian rule has been dotted with incessant ethno-nationalist agitations which have often threatened the peace and tranquillity of the Nigerian state and the orderly conduct of public and private businesses. The Nigerian state has in turn often responded to these agitations through an admixture of appeasements and the application of force in what is commonly referred to as the carrot and stick approach. While the state has largely been successful in containing such agitations, and ultimately bringing them within the bounds of order, two of such on-going agitations – the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast and the Biafra separatist agitations in the Southeast – appear to have so far defied the military prowess and the strategic ingenuity of the Nigerian state. Both also standout, whereas earlier agitations were merely targeted at redressing certain identified grievances. These lay claim to the very soul of the Nigerian state; that is, the inviolability of Nigeria's unity and corporate existence. Whereas several explanations have been offered for the persistence of these conflicts, this paper seeks to further evaluate their rising intractability within the wider context of the overall tension between nationhood and state-building. The paper relies on primary and secondary data derived from documents and through interviews. They will be analysed using logical inferences.

Keywords: State-building, nationhood, separatism, nationalist agitations, insurgency

Introduction

A basic dialectic to understand in Africa is that while the greatest friend of African nationalism is race-consciousness, the greatest enemy of African nationhood is ethnic-consciousness (Mazrui, 1982). Whereas modem African nationalism was born and prospered under the stimulation of racial solidarity and shared blackness, the struggle for viable modern nations within Africa is considerably hampered by acute ethnic cleavages, often separating Bantu from Nilotes, Igbo from Hausa, and the like (Mazrui, 1982). Cumulatively, these have created some sort of identity crises in most African states.

Nigeria's national identity crisis is commonly referred to as the "national question"; that is, the problem of "becoming national" in an ethnically and religiously fragmented state (Eley & Suny, 1996). The national question has been explained differently by several authors such as Abutudu (2010) and Momoh (2002). As Abutudu (2010, pp. 29-30) puts it, "In Nigeria, the national question is an ongoing debate, fuelled by societal dynamics acting as constant reminders that at inception, the people that make up the country were not consulted and did not extend any mandate for the creation of an entity called Nigeria." Hence, for Abutudu (2010), "the national question in the Nigerian context is about 'nationhood and development' as every ethnic group continues to struggle for a definition of their place within the Nigerian public space" (quoted in Akinola, 2012, p. 7).

Abutudu further maintains that this struggle is reflected in the agitations, by different groups, for what they consider important to them as members of the Nigerian state. For instance, the debate

over the greater control of Nigeria's oil wealth by the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta has been advanced most forcefully by those from the region, while the issues of rotational presidency and true federalism have been the demands of the people of the southeast and southwest regions respectively even as some groups in the north remain reluctant in supporting any of these demands (Abutudu, 2010). However, as Momoh (2002, p. 2) explains from a theoretical stand point, "The national question in Nigeria is nothing but the (un)evenness in the distribution of, or access to power and economy in the context of *deliverables* and what advantage co-ethnics or a fraction of them take of one another in the process." Momoh, according to Akinola (2012, p. 7), holds that the phenomena have little to do with *ethnic domination-qua-ethnic domination*.

It has however been posited that while the elements of social class and structure introduced by Momoh (2002) may lead us to believe that the Nigerian national question and identity crises have more to do with the class structure of ethnic groups than ethnicity itself, it would be more accurate to say that "ethnicity and class co-exist overlap, and reinforce each other in the Nigerian context" (Anikpo, 2002, pp. 50-51). Akinola (2012) upholds the argument by Anikpo (2002) as evidence that the "allurement of ethno-nationalism in Nigerian politics" continues to reflect itself not only in ethnic terms but also along class lines, even as the enduring religious tensions in a secular state persist within and between a predominantly Muslim north and Christian south.

Whatever side of the argument one might be inclined to pitch tent with, what could be deduced from the above discussion on the national question in Nigeria is that the questions of ethnicity, religion, class, federalism revenue allocation, and constitutionalism, amongst other factors, have remained largely unresolved almost 100 years after the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 (Akinola, 2012). Also, the commonly held notion is that the Nigerian crises stem from the fact that the groups that now make up Nigeria were never consulted before they were incorporated into modern Nigeria (Abutu, 2010). Perhaps, the most often cited authorities in this regard are the statement credited to the first Premier of the Northern Region and the foremost Nigerian political leader of Northern extraction, late Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. According to Alhaji Bello, the amalgamation of the southern and northern Nigeria protectorates in 1914 was "the mistake of 1914" (Osaghae, 1998 quoted in Akinola, 2012, p. 8). Another statement credited to the political leader of the Yoruba race and leader of opposition in Nigeria's First Republic, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, refers to Nigeria as a "mere geographical expression" (Awolowo, 1947, p. 47). In Awolowo's words, "There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh' or 'French'. The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not." Levin (1997, p. 135) captures these sentiments thus:

> As is well known, Nigeria is an artificial creation. When Flora Shaw suggested the name in 1898, the word anticipated the thing; unfortunately, a clear identity did not follow directly from the naming. "Nigeria" was the name for a colonial project: to make a country out of a set of British territories; or, more accurately, to unite politically neighbouring but formerly autonomous states and peoples under imperial rule in one colonial state. Initially, Nigeria was imprecisely defined; territorially, British administration varied considerably, if it existed at all. The British presence was precarious as best since there was no public of citizens or member [sic]....Almost a century later the state is not in question, but what national allegiance, identity, and patriotism means in Nigeria is deeply in doubt.

Consequently, Nigeria has come to be perceived as "an African place created by Europeans" and "a telling reality of a country where 'nested identities' exist from the village to the national levels" (Akinola, 2012, p. 8). It is important to point out that rather than debunk these sarcastic appellations, the palpable tension between nationhood and state-building in Nigeria in the past eighteen years of democratic rule (if democracy could be equated to civilian rule) has merely helped to reinforce them. Remarkably, extant discussions of the subject failed to rise above the cacophonic ethnic-bound and have been tendentiously framed along these self-same ethnic lines. It is against this backdrop that this paper takes a pin-point view of the treacherous interplay between nationhood and state-building in Nigeria since 1999.

Some Conceptual Issues
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Nationhood
The idea of nationhood is one that has not been defined explicitly in international law. This is perhaps due to the inherent flexibility of the concept; it is multifaceted and loosely defined; nations are "self-defined", meaning that its perception and existence depend on what people make of it. "National identity involves some sense of political community. However tenuous, this allows for loosely defined bonds to be created, marked by affiliation to any number of qualities. Thus, nations are essentially "a self-constituted 'natural' category, a group of people who naturally form a unit with a common past, present and, often explicitly, future; a group of people who share things...that mark them off from other groups..." (Walker, n.d., p. 584).

At the most basic level, nation has been defined as a collective or large group of individuals that are bound together and therefore unified by commonalities like language, ethnicity, habits, behaviours and customs. However, national identities are highly complex and this raises significant questions of what may actually constitute a nation in practice rather than theory. For example, Smith (1999) argues that a nation is built upon myth and memory because these elements forge a collective purpose, hence inducing a sense of belonging that all too often inspires the 'nation' to defend its identity.

Stalin (1913, n. p.) asks what a nation was in his text *Marxism and the National Question*, noting that nationhood goes beyond tribal and racial origins. He, instead, advocates that a nation must be a "...historically constituted community of people", thus situating the idea firmly in historical, political and social discourses that extend into the past. It has however been observed that the term itself is not a modern one. Rather, it can be traced back to the 14th century where it referred to a series of concepts that extend from the idea of descendants, countries and births (Harper, 2001). In effect, the structure of the idea behind it has always been complex, but has evolved alongside understandings and attitudes towards what constitutes a nation. Despite this, the notion of unification has remained constant with Egypt essentially being identified as the first nation as a direct result of the shared ethnic background, cultural consensus and unification on which it was built (Gat, 2013). In effect, the concept of a nation existed for several millennia prior to the actual term.

Concept of the State

If states are the bedrock of the international system, they are surprisingly under-defined in international law. Despite the frequency with which the term "state" is used in international affairs – thirty-four times in the UN Charter alone – the formal definition of a state remains underspecified. The Montevideo Convention of 1933 provides the only definition under international law: statehood requires a permanent population, a specified territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states – a minimalist definition by any standard (Montevideo Convention, 1934).

Meanwhile, the lack of definition is not a historical accident. Coming to a shared view of what constitutes a state has proved difficult in negotiations and hence for the most part has not been attempted, even as the institution of statehood spread rapidly around the globe. Worthy of note is that the United Nations which was created by and for states has neither formal criterion for statehood other than recognition by other states, nor is there any provision for "decertification" of statehood in the event of failure to meet some set of standards, either of capability or performance (Herbst, 2000). In most of today's policy frameworks, peace agreements and human rights treaties, the existence of a functioning state is simply assumed; its intrinsic features are nowhere specified.

Of course, academics and philosophers have not been so shy and have spawned numerous definitions and counter-definitions. Furthermore, an entire body of serious scholars argues (not without merit) that the very concept of the state is a figment of enlightenment imagination, one that obscures rather than illuminates the realities of political and economic systems. The most widely accepted starting point for the explication of the state is still, therefore, the early definition provided by German theorist – Max Weber (1919). From Weber to Charles Tilly, the pre-eminent contemporary historian and theorist of state formation, to Ashraf Ghani, there lies a central intellectual thread built around Weber's oft-recited definition of the state as "…a human community that … claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory". Four essential concepts reside in this seemingly sparse definition: that of a human *community* (in modern form, usually a *national* community), the *monopoly of the use of force*, *legitimacy* and a bounded *territory*. Of these concepts, the most persistent has been the idea of a state as an entity that maintains a monopoly on the use of force. Tilly (1975) argues that "an organization which controls the population occupying a defined territory is a state *in so far as* (1) it is differentiated from other organizations operating in the same territory; (2) it is autonomous; (3) it is centralized; and (4) its divisions are formally coordinated with one another".

Both definitions stress the structural and organizational aspects of the state. They do not mention any state functions (apart from the monopoly of violence in Weber's definition). However, both focus very much on the importance of some kind of centralised form of authority. For Weber in particular, the ideal type of modern state is underpinned by a "rational-legal" bureaucracy.

Michael Mann (in Hall, 1994) adds another important dimension to the concept of the state in his elaboration on "infrastructural" power. Infrastructural power refers to the actual penetration of societies by state bureaucracies and state-sponsored programmes, such as public education, and the ability to enforce policy throughout the state's entire territory. A defining characteristic of the

"modern" state in the tradition of Weber, Tilly and Mann is that "political power becomes progressively depersonalized and formalized" (Chesterman, et al., 2005).

State-building

In its simplest formulation, state-building, especially as understood by the international community since the 1990s, refers to the set of actions undertaken by national and/or international actors to establish, reform and strengthen state institutions where these have seriously been eroded or are missing (Caplan, 2005). Key goals of state-building include provision of security, establishment of the rule of law, effective delivery of basic goods and services through functional formal state institutions, and generation of political legitimacy for the (new) set of state institutions being built (Brinkerhoff, 2007).

It could be inferred from the above definition that state-building and governance are closely related terms. They both share a concern about similar issues, especially on how to make institutions work better. However, in many ways, state-building is an antecedent task. It is a more all-encompassing/holistic endeavour, and the term can imply a more explicit awareness of the political nature of institution-building (Fritz & Menocal, 2007). Put differently, state-building is about constructing the foundations of the very (government) edifice within which governance ought to operate; without prior construction of this edifice, governance interventions are likely to have only limited impact. At the same time, ensuring the quality and integrity of government is an important dimension of the state-building process, including generation of the legitimacy of a new or re-emerging state.

It has been highlighted that state formation and state-building are inherently dynamic and ongoing processes, and that both have emerged as long-term, non-linear, tumultuous, inherently violent and conflict-ridden processes that are also deeply political. It has however been suggested that current policy discussions of state-building refer to what may more precisely be termed either state-*re*building (in post-conflict situations) or state strengthening (i. e., increasing capacity in fragile and weak states), usually combined with efforts to make states more responsive and accountable. This is because since the 1970s, almost all the world's territory has been formally organized as states in some form. However, considering that initial state-building efforts ultimately failed in a number of places, the current usage of "state-building" can rightly refer to several types of situations.

It may be necessary to caution that when talking about state-building, there is a host of other terms that are closely related, and that this aggregation of concepts – including "governance", "nation-building", "peace-building", and "institutions", among others – may lead to confusion if the similarities and differences between them are not clearly delineated. Of particular note is that state-building is a process distinct from nation-building – despite a growing tendency in policy usage to equate the two. Nation-building refers to the process of constructing a shared sense of identity and common destiny, usually in order to overcome ethnic, sectarian or communal differences and to counter alternative sources of identity and loyalty. Historically, states have played an instrumental role in nation-building, usually in order to create nation-states or nations that coincide with state boundaries (Gellner, 1983; Weber, 1976).

Nationhood and Statehood

For emphasis, a nation refers to a group of people who identify with a particular ethnic identity. This ethnic identity can be based on any number of attributes, including language, ancestry, religion, or culture. It follows that anywhere that a distinction can be drawn between groups of people, the possibility exists that these differences will lead to a different nationhood between the two groups of people. This has happened, for example, in Somalia, as the difference between French, Italian, British, and Ethiopian imperialism has divided the Somali people into four different nations which can be distinguished by their different colonial experiences. One of the differences between Somalia and Somaliland consists largely of a clan division line that was superimposed with a colonial boundary that led to a different political culture springing up between one part of the larger Somali people and another, leading to a separate national identity between the groups.

It has been stated that as soon as a group develops sufficient cohesion to recognize itself as part of a larger whole, it is entirely natural and, perhaps proper, for that nation to desire its own space where it feels at home and feels that its own cultural identity is respected and honoured. At times, this space can be found as being a part of a larger nation that includes a definite space for local concerns, and a type of organization known as federalism. Whether one is looking at Swiss cantons or American states or French departments or even Nigerian states, federalism offers at least the potential for distinctive cultures that nonetheless share a common identity at some level. This identity aims at uniting together and providing the space for both their unity and their diversity, allowing room for common action where there is common agreement and room for separate space where there are different cultural ideals. The absence of private space tends to lead to a unitary state where minority groups feel disrespected and alienated, leading to separatist pressures. The absence of a common identity makes it impossible to have a well-functioning state. This leads to the situation of a failed state or tyrannical and oppressive rule by whatever group can summon the most cohesion to dominate broken institutions in the permanent threat of anarchy or rebellion on the part of marginalized and disenfranchised groups. It has, in fact, been said that most of the evils of this world, on a larger scale, emanate from the distance between nationhood and statehood in a variety of forms.

Meanwhile, in an address to the Raoul Wallenberg Seminar on Human Rights in Budapest on 7th May 2001, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Max van der Stoel, identified the relationship between nationhood and statehood as one of the main challenges that he had had to confront in his eight years as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (van der Stoel, 2001). According to van der Stoel, it is a dilemma that plagued the Twentieth Century, and it is an issue that we continue to grapple with today. He notes that even though the ideal of the nation-state still holds a powerful attraction, this is only a workable reality if the national community is homogeneous, territorially concentrated, and shares a common sense of destiny. However, this is far more difficult to achieve where national and state boundaries do not coincide or where States are multi-ethnic. In states with sizeable minority communities, attempts to create nation-states are usually divisive and almost always destabilizing. The majorities will not go quietly in the face of separatism; the minorities will not forever tolerate a situation where their national identities are considered

second rate. The task before the international community, according to van der Stoel, would therefore be to either find ways of facilitating the peaceful break-up of states, or try to keep multi-ethnic states together (van der Stoel, 2001).

Tensions between Nationhood and State-building in Nigeria's "Fourth" Republic

Nigeria's chequered history has been strewn with incessant ethno-nationalist conflicts of varying proportions, including a thirty-month civil war, resource-induced militancy of various dimensions, ethno-religious insurgency, separatist agitations, etc. Counter-intuitively, ethnic tensions in Nigeria appear to have been accentuated since the return to civilian rule in 1999 following long years of military dictatorship. There is in fact a sense in which it could be argued that even the return to civilian rule in 1999 was forged on the furnace of ethno-nationalist agitations arising from the annulment of the June 12th, 1993 Presidential elections widely believed at the time and latter confirmed by the Chief Electoral umpire of that election to have been won by a business mogul of Yoruba extraction, Chief M. K. O. Abiola. It had widely been believed that the return to democracy and the ceding of state power to the Yoruba ethnic nationality in 1999 would go a long way in quelling or calming frayed nerves and in restoring peace to the much troubled "nation". However, rather than enthrone peace and tranquillity, several years of democratic rule appear to have exacerbated conflicts along Nigeria's ethno-nationalist fault lines.

Aluko and Ajani (2009) following Hofstede (1994) note that there is always a strong tendency for ethnic or linguistic groups to fight for recognition of their own identity, if not for national independence, and that this tendency has persistently been on the increase rather than decreasing in the latter part of the 20th century. Following from this, Hofstedian analysis therefore reckons that the Nigerian experience with pronounced ethnic nationalism is not particularly a strange phenomenon; that on the contrary, an ethnic nationalist identifies with and sees himself or herself first as a member of a particular ethnic nationality before identifying himself or herself with a nation. Stevenhagen (1994) concur that ethnic nationalism is common in all plural societies; he introduces two schools of thoughts on the meaning and nature of ethnic nationalism. In the opinion of Lijiphart (1984), however, all multi-ethnic nations are, "profoundly divided along religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic or racial lines". He also believes that they are "virtually made up of separate sub-societies each with its own political party, its own interest group and its own means of communication" and that in such societies, "flexibility necessary for a popular democracy would be lacking" (Lijiphart, 1984, pp. 22-23). Lijiphart (1984) further explains that under these conditions, the majority rule will not be only undemocratic, but also dangerous, because the minorities who are constantly denied access to power will feel excluded; they will also stop showing allegiance to the government.

Under the current democratic dispensation, aided in huge measure by the crises of rising expectations, the tensions between nationhood and state-building have become even more pronounced. This has resulted in the spate of ethno-nationalist conflagrations that have engulfed the country for the most part of this dispensation. In essence, the increasing neglect of several ethnic and minority groups and the failure to resolve the national question in which equality of power and resource distribution have been central to have been the cursor of ethnic conflicts since 1999. According to Salawu (2010, p. 348), "The primary reason for the increasing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has to do with the accusation and allegation of neglect, oppression,

domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization of the state against its people." Salawu explains that it is the increasing marginalization that resulted in the emergence of the Odua People's Congress (OPC), a socio-cultural militant group of the Yoruba people, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), among others (Obi, 2000). Similarly, and even more recently, the *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (aka Boko Haram) and the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) have been added to the fray with far more adverse consequences for the peace and stability of the Nigerian state than had hitherto been the case; both, for differing reasons, ostensibly target the corporate existence of the Nigerian state.

This tendency has further given rise to communal conflicts and ethno-religious strife (Mustapha, 2000) with many of these ethno-religious conflicts manifesting in the form of "political mobilization, sectarian social movement and increasing violence'. Some notable examples include: the Kafanchan-Kaduna religious strife, Sharia crises (2000), Beheading the infidel-Allah Akbar conflicts (1994), Jos-Plateau Carnage (2001) in support of Afghanistan ethno-religious killings, Ishagamu Hausa-Yoruba reprisal attack (1999) (Abdu, 2011; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Obi, 2000). These are some of the crises which mobilise sectarian identities in which civilian groups became militarized under religious plane. The most reprisal attacks "reawaken the age-long Muslim and Christian tension in the country especially in the Northern part of Nigeria" (Obi, 2000, p. 82).

The ethno-religion conflicts were followed by series of communal and land conflicts in which the issue of boundary and land acquisition becomes a bone of contention. These conflicts also claimed thousands of lives and property and displacement (Isomounah, 2003; Mustapha, 2000). For example, the Ife-Modakeke, Urhobo-Itsekiri, Jukum-Chambas and the Zangon-Kataf communal clashes recorded close to about 10 thousand displacements (Isomounah, 2003). The reality of the communal conflicts was that the consequences of arbitrary colonial construction and boundary adjustment in which settlers and migrants have been at logger head. The friction emanating from this has been the major reason why communal clashes have been on the rise in Nigeria (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). For example, the enduring ethno-religion strife in Jos, Plateau state, reinforces the question of indigene and settlers in the context of citizenship and identity crisis in Africa (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013).

With respect to Nigeria, scholars have explained the proliferation of ethnic nationalism right from independence in various ways. Perhaps, one of the best known such explanations in existing literature is the legacy of colonialism thesis. Dare (1986), Aluko (1998), Ake (2000), Nnoli (1980) and Young 1993), amongst several others, explain that the problem of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria came with the advent of colonialism. This, they contend, arose due to the merger of disparate, autonomous, and heterogeneous sub-national groups into a nation. According to this position, the colonialists created structural imbalances within the nation in terms of socio-economic projects, social development and establishment of administrative centres. These imbalances deepened the antipathies between the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. The scholars fore mentioned explain that political actors motivated mainly by selfish interest readily play on these ethnic fault lines in pursuit of personal political ends.

Meanwhile, Ekeh (1975), in his famous theory of two publics, explains why a typical African nation usually has problems of the loyalty, commitment and patriotism of its citizens. According to him, the historical root of the crisis in Africa lies in the fact that the present (nation) state in Africa evolved not from within the society as was the case in most parts of Western Europe. Rather, they are creations engineered from outside; they are impositions of the colonial authorities. The process of establishing this alien structure on largely artificial political formations which brought together formerly separate sub-nationalities led to the development of the public realm as two publics rather than one. First, was the civic public, which was basically the government and consisted of modern institutions such as the military, bureaucracy, courts, and political parties. It is apparent that all of these were imported wholesomely from the West. Second, there was the primordial public. As an emergent social formation, and because it evolved out of the dynamics of the colonial process, the primordial public grew up to satisfy some of the personal and group demands that could not be met by both the colonial and post-colonial governments. This public is what Joseph (1987) thinks is best described in communal terms as ethnic nationalism and the origin of "prebendal" politics in Nigeria; i. e., the process of using government positions to pursue personal and parochial or group interests.

According to this position, in the civil public in Nigeria, it is perfectly in order to use one's position in the public realm to pursue private, parochial or sub national interests. The real problem is that the same sets of individuals operate in the two publics being altruistic in one and very instrumental in the other. This duality, which has subsisted since colonial times, helps to explain the problems of ethnic nationalism, corruption and of course political instability in Nigeria. Extending the conversation, Nnoli (1980) identified the existence of "ethnic watchers" in Nigeria who monitor what each ethnic group gets from the federation account, and when they think that what their ethnic group is getting is not favourable they raise "ethnic alarm'.

Resolving the Conflict between Nationhood and State-building in Nigeria

Following from the unremitting ethno-nationalist conflicts that have become the albatross of Nigeria's democratic experiment, several scholars, policy makers, and sundry commentators have proffered different solutions to the problem. Some of the more prominent proposals include: constitutional review, devolution of powers, fiscal federalism with revenue sharing, resource control and sharing formula, reforms of the public service, inclusive and participatory democracy, accountability and transparency, political parties and electoral systems reforms, coercive measures in the form of peacekeeping operations, the use of the judicial system in the prosecution and sentencing of perpetrators of violence, political will to fight terrorism and rehabilitation of the victims of terrorist attacks (Final Draft of Nigeria National Conference Report, 2014, pp. 47- 59 quoted in Ugorji, 2016, p. 38).

Ugorji (2016) rightly observes that ethnic and religious identities now blamed for much of the unrest in Nigeria could actually be tapped as valuable assets in support of stabilization and peaceful co-existence. He further noted that those who are responsible for such bloodshed and those suffering at their hands, including all the members of society, need a safe space within which to hear one another's stories and to learn, with guidance, to see each other as human once again. He also observes that a unique form of such "safe space" was provided in 2014 during the National Conference. He notes that, that brought together 498 delegates representing the

different ethno-national, religious and tribal groups in Nigeria. These delegates, in order "to encourage inclusiveness and the need to build a fully integrated nation, drafted and recommended, among other proposals, the adoption of The Nigerian Charter for National Reconciliation and Integration" (Final Draft of Nigeria National Conference Report 2014, pp. 288-294). Ugorji (2016) concedes that whereas drafting and adopting a charter for national reconciliation and integration is necessary, it is not sufficient for the restoration of peace in Nigeria. He therefore identified the need for a "systematic, engaging, sustainable and result-oriented set of models" for tackling the problem of ethno-nationalist agitations, which would take the form of the adoption of responsible peacekeeping, peacemaking, and continuous peacebuilding.

It would however appear that such recommendation flies in the face of the current demands by a strand of the ethno-nationalist agitators who insist that a "two-state solution" is an irreducible minimal for the resolution of the nationhood-statehood conundrum in Nigeria. For the agitators, the solution can only be arrived at via internationally supervised referendum, the outcome of which they harbour no doubt whatsoever, or through the path of "iron and blood" if the first option fails.

Though understandable, considering the genuine grievances expressed by the agitators, the solutions they propose appear like administering old prescription on new ailments. Recalling the address of the then High Commissioner on National Minorities in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Max van der Stoel, it bears restating that even though there have been some examples of the peaceful break-up of States in the recent past, it is more often the case that such schisms cause violent conflict. This, according to him, is all the more reason to concentrate on the multi-ethnic vision, the ebbs and tides of which we often cannot foretell. van der Stoel (2001, p. 2) further notes that mono-ethnicity breeds mono-ethnicity, and that "if we were to have a Europe where every nation lives in 'its own' State, we would have an endless redrawing of boundaries, a steady stream of population transfers, and peoples living in culturally exclusive environments".

The alternative then will be to learn to live with and cherish multi-ethnic societies. That means first and foremost changing our assumptions about what states should look like. Ensuring that human rights are legally enshrined and protected by the rule of law is a sound basis for stable and prosperous multi-ethnic states. A constitution that reflects the true character of society and includes guarantees for the rights of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, therefore, is a cornerstone, according to van der Stoel (2001). There is of course also the issue of political leadership for setting the tone and creating an environment that can both stimulate and maintain inter-ethnic understanding. So often, the ethnic card is played to stir up populism or to score political points. Issues that have very little to do with ethnicity suddenly become politicized. This must be avoided for it poisons relations, not only among political class, but also among the electorate. It is on record that people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and even people of different races, can live peacefully side-by- side.

On how this could be achieved, the OSCE had set up a group of internationally recognized experts in 1999 on "Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life". The report of

the committee, which came to be commonly referred to as the Lund Recommendation, was based on the following general principles:

> i) Effective participation of national minorities in public life is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society.

> ii) Territorial self-governance is a second option. It may be appropriate in certain situations to decentralize power to regions, or at the local level in order to improve the opportunities for territorially concentrated minorities to exercise authority over matters that affect them.

Both forms of self-governance can be referred to as "internal" self-determination.

The Lund Recommendations are designed to encourage States to be creative and pragmatic with regard to issues which are sometimes regarded as intractable or not negotiable since avoiding discussions on decentralization or minority participation will not make the problem go away. Indeed, it may harden minority opposition and re-enforce the view that the status quo is inadequate for accommodating cultural diversity. For all intents and purposes, we agree that these recommendations speak to Nigeria's situation at the moment. The lesson arising there from should, therefore, not be lost on Nigeria's current political leaders. All said, and considering the lessons of the past, it might well be more useful to spend less time trying to change territorial boundaries, and more time at expanding conceptual ones.

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