

FEDERAL SUCCESS IN NIGERIA

State-Building and Ethnic Conflict Management

SOPHIE THIBODEAU

OBSERVERS NOTE THAT INSTANCES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT SERVE AS AN OBVIOUS MANIFESTATION OF TENSION BETWEEN THE IDEA OF THE NATION AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE MODERN STATE. THE CURRENT GLOBAL RASH OF ALLEGEDLY UNIQUE ETHNIC DISPUTES MERITS A SERIOUS ASSESSMENT OF ITS PLACE WITHIN THE DECLINE OF THE NATION-STATE. ALONG WITH THE NOTION THAT THE NATION-STATE IS IN DECLINE, SCHOLARS HAVE ASSERTED THE PRESENCE OF ANOTHER GLOBAL TREND IN THE USE OF FEDERALIST APPROACHES TO NATION-BUILDING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT. AFTER EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNIC CONFLICT AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS IN FEDERAL THEORY, THIS ESSAY GROUNDS THESE CONJECTURES IN AN ANALYSIS OF THE NIGERIAN STATE. WHILE ISSUES HAVE CERTAINLY COMPLICATED THE PATH TO THE SUCCESS OF THE FEDERAL STATE IN NIGERIA, THE STATE SHOULD BE VIEWED AS GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING ITS END OF SURVIVAL AMIDST THREATENING CONFLICT.

INTRODUCTION

In observing recent global trends in political structure, Graham Smith notes that “there has never been such a time . . . in which the idea and practice of federalism has rendered old uncertainties about the geopolitical landscape so uncertain.”ⁱ In a world increasingly influenced by the forces of globalization, it has become clear that the Westphalian world order dominated by the nation-state is no longer an appropriate or effective system for maintaining peace and stability. Quite frequently, the causes and symptoms of this crisis of the nation-state are one in the same. Economic globalization, the apparent trend towards supranational integration, and the increased visibility of ethnic conflict are just a few pieces of evidence of this liminal moment for the international political system.

While the above examples of economic globalization and supranational integration are mutually reinforcing events in supporting the assertion that the nation-state is in decline, instances of ethnic conflict serve as one of the more obvious manifestations of the actual tension between the idea of the nation and the structure of the modern state. There is an obvious discrepancy between the 200 officially recognized states and the thousands of groups which identify themselves as nations that are not officially recognized. Despite the perhaps fictional belief that the homogenous nation-state is the most appropriate organizational unit of the world system, 95 percent of the world population resides in multi-ethnic states. This multi-ethnicity alone does not itself pose any threat to the state, but the presence of different nationalisms within a state certainly does. State nationalism, which is a defining feature of a true nation-state, refers to either ethnic nationalism—the belief in the ethnic homogeneity of a state—or civic nationalism—the

identification with all people in territory as a nation, regardless of cultural/ethnic identity. In instances of civic nationalism, the state is held together by universal political values and does not recognize any diversity among ethnic groups as politically relevant. Ethnic diversity is a threat to either genre of state nationalism, with acceptance of diversity weakening a civic state’s neutrality and authority, and causing fragmentation and exclusion of the minority in an ethnic-based nation-state. These conflicting nationalisms and sentiments of exclusion within a nation-state undermine the legitimacy that the modern (liberal) state derives from the theory of a social contract with its citizens. As there are thousands of peoples who choose to identify themselves as nations, and not just ethnic groups, conflicting nationalisms are certainly a reality and problem in a system that bases itself around the nation-state.

Although ethnic conflict has essentially been in existence since the origin of ethnic groups, there has been a notable increase in the occurrence of violent conflict in the post-Cold War world. Thirty explosions of violent conflict have been recognized since the end of the Cold War, most of which were ethnic or sectarian in nature. In the 1990s alone, more conflict occurred within states than between states.ⁱⁱ This global rash of allegedly unique ethnic disputes merits a serious assessment of its place within the decline of the nation-state. In the interest of maintaining global peace and stability it is imperative that the causes of ethnic conflict are assessed and managed.

Many of the demands that give rise to ethnic conflict are related to a desire for self-determination or autonomy. Thus, global fragmentation along various ethnic, religious, or sectarian lines presents itself as a natural solution to the insuf-

“Thirty explosions of violent conflict have been recognized since the end of the Cold War. . . .In the 1990s alone, more conflict occurred within states than between states.”

iciency of the nation-state. If the territorial fragmentation approach to managing conflict is taken, the result would be the creation of many small sovereign entities. This, however, is a recipe for an even more anarchic and therefore dangerous world, as cooperation and regulation would be significantly harder to achieve with this great increase in the number of international political actors. An extremely multi-polar world is a defining example of the dilemmas of collective action and the difficulty of cooperation. Solutions to other pressing global issues, such as environmental protection, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the global AIDS epidemic, would be nearly impossible to reach in this climate of fragmentation. The true solution to the violent manifestations of the decline of the nation-state that ethnic conflict represents lies somewhere between this extreme fragmentary approach and the triumph of the nation-state system's hegemonic approach of non-recognition of ethnic nationalisms.

Along with the notion that the nation-state is in decline, scholars have asserted the presence of another global trend in the use of federalist approaches to nation-building and conflict management. According to federal scholar Daniel Elazar, “a federal revolution is sweeping the world.”ⁱⁱⁱ Defined broadly as a term referring to advocacy of multi-tiered government elements of shared and self-rule, federalism has many intrinsic aspects that make it a theoretically-sound method of regulating conflicts between ethnic groups. It is quite simply a model that makes the simultaneous desire for large and small political units possible. Federal political systems could be the method of bridging the state system's two unattractive alternatives of centralization and small states acting as an antidote to the impending demise of the nation-state.

In theory, federal systems should be an effective management strategy for conflict in multi-ethnic states. Federalist advocacy of principles of shared sovereignty, degrees of constituent autonomy, and the federalist motto of “unity in diversity” appear to be made to deal with the tensions of ethnically diverse states that the traditional nation-state is

less equipped to manage. Federalism entails a division of power between the central government and constituent units, deeply entrenched in a constitution which cannot be abrogated by the central government and is often used as a method of accommodation for territorial ethnic diversity.^{iv} However, any theoretical solution is in need of case-based testing, and federalism is no exception. To understand if federal political systems are in fact a valid management strategy for ethnic conflict, it is important to research how they have fared in specific cases where tensions or conflict are either preexisting or expected. Superimposing federalist rhetoric into different situations could prove to be futile without having tested its efficacy in these specific cases.

In studying the classic federal political systems such as the United States, Canada, and especially Switzerland, one can gain some evidence for federal success in multi-ethnic states. The constitutions of these three states are among the oldest surviving constitutions worldwide; the United States Constitution dates from the late 18th century, and those of Canada and Switzerland date from the 19th century. The political success of these states in not only survival but economic prestige, international influence, and internal stability could possibly demonstrate the success of federal political systems in general. As an experiment in federalism, the United States is often regarded as the first and is also a convincing case for success. The United States has been almost entirely at peace under its federal system excepting its Civil War, in which the Union nonetheless survived and avoided the threat of permanent secession. The United States does, however, have one important factor that keeps it from making a completely convincing case for federalism and ethnic conflict: it is relatively homogeneous, and despite the presence of different immigrant nationalities at founding, ethnic diversity was not truly a source of tension.

In both Canada and Switzerland, however, “federalism has developed in response to the need for the accommodation of basic territorial ethno-linguistic or religious diversity,”^v and may thus represent a slightly better case for ethnic ten-

sion and federal political structures. Canada contains two linguistic groups and has historically dealt with threats of secession from Québécois. The Canadian case is also one of political success, having dealt with tensions between Francophone Québec and the remaining Anglophone Canada peacefully and through federal institutions, as well as avoiding internal violent conflict with other minority groups. The state has also developed policies for dealing with the presence of various indigenous groups. Because of this, it may be closer to a valid example of federal management of ethnic diversity and tension.

Switzerland, another case that represents a classic federal political system, is potentially the best historical example of dealing with true ethnic conflict and diversity of more than two communities. Switzerland has existed in various confederate and federate forms since 1291, making it one of the oldest, lasting federal political systems.^{vi} Since 1848, Switzerland has officially been the federation that is still in existence today.^{vii} While Switzerland is a small country of only seven million people, it represents remarkable diversity, especially in the linguistic area. The state recognizes three official languages—French, German, and Italian—with Romansh, a fourth language spoken within the state, recognized as a “national language.”^{viii} Switzerland is divided into 26 constituent units called cantons, which attempt to cross-cut these linguistic as well as religious differences between Protestantism and Catholicism. The state

“In spite of emerging federal experiments in both Ethiopia and South Africa, Nigeria is considered the ‘only well-established federation in Africa.’”

has been very successful in economic terms, having very low unemployment and a high GDP compared to larger Western European states. Switzerland also has an extremely peaceful internal history and has succeeded in maintaining its neutrality in spite of two world wars.

Despite the excellent track record of these archetypal federal states, the degree of ethnic conflict existing in these states is debatable, and thus a case study of a state with proven degrees of ethnic strife is necessary. In Nigeria, for instance, one finds an excellent representation of both a high degree of ethnic tension and conflict and a noted success in the application of a federal political system. As a region rife with ethnic conflicts and other challenges of great ethnic diversity, as well as many leftover issues of colonial years, African states pose an interesting case study in federal solutions. In spite of emerging federal experiments in both Ethiopia and South Africa, Nigeria is considered the “only well-established federation in Africa.”^{ix} In demonstrating relative success in managing conflict, Nigeria makes an excellent study in federal management strategies for ethnic conflict.

BACKGROUND STUDY OF NIGERIA

Nigeria is recognized as Africa’s most populous country and one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world. While there is much conjecture as to the exact number of ethnic communities existing in Nigeria, estimates range from 200 to 400 ethnic minority groups.^x In spite of the fluid nature of many of these ethnic minority groups, there is a general consensus on the existence of three major ethnic groups which comprise roughly two-thirds of Nigeria’s population. The North is home to the Hausa-Fulani Muslim group, which represents about 29 percent of the population; the East to the mostly Christian Igbo, making up 18 percent of the population; the West to the Yorubas, which comprise 21 percent of the population; ethnic minority groups make up the remaining 32 percent. The state is religiously comprised of roughly 50 percent Muslims, 40 percent Christians, and 10 percent of various indigenous beliefs.^{xi} Under British colonial rule, the North and South



STREET VENDORS PASSING A MOSQUE IN ABUJA, NIGERIA

regions of Nigeria, which were previously governed under separate British administrations, were amalgamated into a unified state. The North and South rivalry between these administrations was transferred to Nigerians themselves and still represents one of the biggest rivalries in the state. In 1939, the South region was divided into East and West under the British, and after the Second World War, acknowledging increasing demands for independence, the British passed several laws moving towards self-governance. In 1960, independence was officially granted, leaving Nigeria with the leftovers of a federal-based administration and three existing units: North, East, and West. Nigerian history depicts a great degree of ethno-regional struggle and political change following its independence. The state has remained federal since soon after its founding, yet has seen four republics, military rule for roughly 30 years, and a devastating civil war. Still, Nigeria remains committed to federal principles and a unified state.

THE HISTORY OF ETHNO-REGIONAL CONFLICT

Even before its independence, regional rivalry characterized internal Nigerian politics. The independence movements of the 1950s were characterized by enmity between the North and South regions.^{xiii} These tensions, both ethnic and religious in nature, were exacerbated from the outset by disparities in economic and educational develop-

ment between the North and South.^{xiv} The January 1966 military coup was a liminal moment in the progression towards violent manifestations of the existing tensions. After the introduction of General Ironsi, a member of the Ibo community, as the head of state and a brief attempt at unitary government, a second coup in July 1966 led to the massacre of thousands of Ibo in the North. The ensuing exodus of many Ibo to the southeast added to the emergence of secessionist sentiments there. This was soon followed by the Biafran secession and civil war only six weeks later, resulting in estimated casualties between 30,000 and 1,000,000. Though Biafra was defeated, tensions between the Ibo group and other majority groups remained a source of competition and conflict.

Aside from strictly ethnic tensions, religious diversity has been another basis for internal conflict. The almost even split between Christian and Muslim religions in Nigeria amplifies regional rivalry, as the North is largely Muslim and the South mostly Christian. The characteristic debate between these two groups has been regarding the use of Muslim Sharia law in both local and central government. Sharia law is a framework for penal codes based on religious teachings of the Qu'ran and is intended to guide a Muslim way of life. States that are largely theocratic and Muslim often use Sharia as the basis for civil and criminal law. By modern standards, regulations are relatively strict and punishments severe, and some are disputed as violating human rights, especially those of women. The Muslim population in the North has long inveighed against the common-law based system in Nigeria that was largely inherited from the British during colonization. Christian defense of common law as a response to Muslim pushes for Sharia have led to clashes between the two groups in the North. These conflicts are ongoing and responsible for thousands of deaths, including the recent Yelwa massacre in 2004, in which hundreds of Muslims were killed in a clash over control of a disputed territory.

In addition to these conflicts between majority ethnic and religious groups, there is considerable evidence of disquiet

among minority ethnic groups in the early years of Nigerian independence, as many groups were grossly underrepresented by the early incarnation of Nigerian federal government.

FEDERALISM AS A RESPONSE

As the presence of these multiple and conflicting ethnicities and religions would suggest, Nigerian pluralism is not something to be ignored.

In response, Nigerians have historically relied on the institutionally sanctioned plural character of federalism to accommodate the “irrepressible pluralism” of the state.^{xv} Nigeria is often considered a model African case in the use of federal principles to accommodate ethnically and religiously diverse constituencies.^{xvi} Nigeria has a relatively lengthy history of federalism, beginning almost immediately after its independence from British colonial rule. This history, while complex and encompassing various stages of development, reform, and regression, can basically be divided into two distinct phases of federalism: regional and multi-state.



DR. NNAMDI AZIKIWE

REGIONAL FEDERALISM 1954-1967

In October 1963, Nigeria proclaimed itself a Federal Republic and named former Governor General Nnamdi Azikiwe as its first President. The three leftover administrative units from British rule—North, East, and West—served as the original federal constituent units. Each

region was dominated by a majority ethnic group—the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Ibo in the East. These regions had existed in a federal context since 1954, due in part to a British attempt to slowly integrate self-government after World War II. The regions were largely derived from a preponderance in each of a certain majority ethnic group as listed above, much to the chagrin of minority ethnic groups in those regions. All three

regions were large and posed a considerable threat to the power of the center. However, the immensity of the North region was an immediate cause for concern, as it comprised 55 percent of the entire population and was thus an over-mighty region in comparison. General discontent led to two coups in 1966; the first, in January, resulted in the installation of an Ibo, General Ironsi, as the head of state. Ironsi is infamous for issuing Decree 34, wiping away Nigeria’s federal structure in favor of a unitary state that was largely Ibo controlled. Ironsi’s rule was brief as the January coup which put him in power was soon fol-

lowed by a counter-coup in

July staged by the Northern region, and instating Lieutenant Yakubu Gowon. The subsequent incidence of violence against the Ibo population in the North led to their exodus towards the East and pressures for secession under the leadership of Colonel Ojukwu. In response, Gowon divided Nigeria into twelve states, attempting to change the balance between majority and minority groups within con-

stituent states. Six states were created out of the North and three in the East, along with the Mid-West and Lagos. The immediate objective of the twelve-state system was not achieved, however, and the Biafran secession and Civil War followed in 1967, resulting in a much-debated number of casualties, as was aforementioned.

The tripartite system of regional federalism made the grave mistake of institutionalizing ethnic polarization, threatening the unity of the state, and endangering the safety of minorities living under majority ethnic state rule. The division into three states allowed for a majority ethnic self-government within each constituent unit and also gave the states the privilege of ethnic loyalty, leading to pretensions towards sovereignty and secession. This clearly made the center quite vulnerable to the regional constituencies. The system included contradictions that would fatally polarize and destabilize the unity of the state eventually leading to civil war.^{xvii} Political domination by only three groups and denial of subunits to the minority ethnic groups—at 32 percent of the population—was the root of defects in the system of regional federalism that ultimately led to its demise. The Nigerian civil war is an apt illustration of the role that flawed institutions of federalism can play in destabilizing the unity of the state,^{xviii} especially with respect to the manner in which constituent states should be divided. The basic flaw of the tripartite regional federal system was that it converted a manageable multiple ethnic balance of power into a federal imbalance and tri-polar structure that fostered ethno-regional chauvinism and secessionism.^{xix}

MULTI-STATE FEDERALISM SINCE 1967

In 1970, Biafra surrendered, returning to the twelve-state system under Gowon. In spite of the tragedy of the Civil War, Gowon's division of states had laid the foundations for multi-state federalism, which contributed greatly to both the defeat of secessionists and post-Civil War stability. From this point, the twelve states were subdivided into nineteen states in 1976, 21 in 1987, 30 in 1991, and most recently 36 in 1996. This rapid subdivision of units is in fact

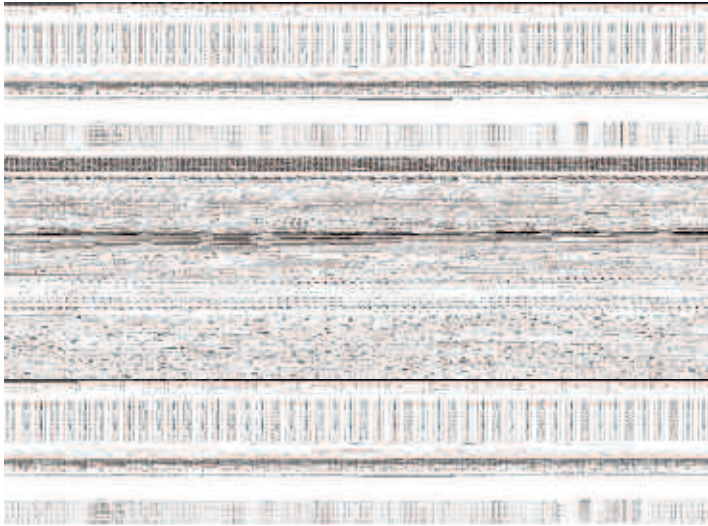
one of the peculiarities of Nigerian federalism, and the creation of each state from pre-existing states is also relatively unique among federal states. The multi-state system of federalism has several features that have resulted in a significantly more stable Nigeria. The genius of the multi-state federalism in maintaining unity and avoiding secession lies in this aspect of the system. By creating and encouraging the development of multiple small states, not only are the three majority ethnic groups divided, but minorities have gained voice. The hegemonic North has been diluted, and conflict has been moved from within the central government to regional and state centers. In consequence, state-based identities are developing, and economic resources can be effectively spread among ethnic groups.

Foremost, multi-state federalism is responsible for dividing and reducing the control of the three majority ethnic groups—the Hausa-Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba.^{xx} The state as a whole is considerably less vulnerable to secessionist conflict as a result of the nature of multiple states in cross-cutting ethnic majorities and thereby decreasing their ability to unify and secede. The three ethnic majorities are each divided amongst no less than five states.^{xxi} In addition to the reduction of majority power to unite, the small size of each state makes them too weak to pose any real challenge to a central government.^{xxii} Though ethnic solidarity still exists, it has become significantly less combustible through group separation among multiple states.^{xxiii}

Secondly, this same majority cross-cutting has had the effect of encouraging the development of state-based identities which can compete with existing ethnic identities.^{xxiv} The constituent states are beginning to function as the “imagined community”^{xxv} for its residents rather than the larger ethnic units. In fact, the ethnic identities that exist in modern Nigeria were arguably created by British regional divisions and post-colonial leftovers, and are thus not primordial. In many ways, the fact that group identities are created could be a factor in making them more mutable. The boundaries of many states are not strictly coterminous

MAP 1: NIGERIA IN 1954

SOURCE: WILBERFORCE CONFERENCE ON NIGERIAN FEDERALISM (1997)



MAP 2: NIGERIA IN 1997

SOURCE: WILBERFORCE CONFERENCE ON NIGERIAN FEDERALISM (1997)



“In place of the monolithic former North state, 19 smaller northern states now exist. These states represent a vast number of ethnicities and religions, which have been given greater voice in subdivision.”

with ethnic or religious divisions, abetting the development of separate state-based identity and perhaps unity. It is said that “successful multi-ethnic federal systems are those in which there is at least a certain level of divergence between the constituent units and ethnic divisions;”^{xxvi} the presence of this type of system in Nigeria may be responsible for the success of the system in managing its conflicts.

By reducing majority dominance, the alternative effect of increasing the role that ethnic minorities play in politics has developed in Nigeria. By spreading the majority groups among multiple states, some national ethnic minorities have become majorities within their own state, or at the very least have become large enough relative to the majority group to have some voice within state politics, which then evolve to federal politics. In fact, 14 out of 36 states are definitively controlled by a minority ethnic group. The minority groups are now protected from the hegemony of majority groups that existed in the regional system, as the new system has enabled a “variety of minority ethnic states to play an increasingly active role in a more fluid . . . polity.”^{xxvii}

The subdivision in the North has had the effect of ensuring that the Hausa-Fulani can never again control the entirety of this large region.^{xxviii} In place of the monolithic former North state, 19 smaller northern states now exist. These states represent a vast number of ethnicities and religions, which have been given greater voice in subdivision, and are no longer solely controlled by a majority Hausa-Fulani Muslim group. This has been important in dealing with the issue of expanding Sharia law not only in the North, but in Nigeria as a whole. This is yet another form of minority protection owed to the subdivision into smaller states. On a related note, ethnic and regional conflicts are devolved to state and regional centers in the presence of multiple states, and they are thus less likely to engulf the country as a whole. The conflict over Sharia law is again representative of this aspect of multi-state federalism, as the conflict has mainly been relegated to the North.

A final benefit of the multi-state subdivision of constituent

units is the creation of a more effective system of resource control and redistribution.^{xxix} The benefits of Nigerian natural resources may be better shared and serve to foster development better than in other third-world states.^{xxx} As Elazar notes,

The Nigerian experience points to one of the real benefits of federalism in the developing world—the increased opportunity potentially provided by federal arrangements for the spread of development beyond the capital region, thus avoiding the common phenomenon of confining so-called national development to a single metropolis at the expense of the rest of the country.

In the Nigerian case, the resource is oil; the oil sector providing 20 percent of the Nigerian gross domestic product, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and about 65 percent of budget revenues. The state’s GDP rose strongly in 2006, based largely on increased oil exports and high global crude prices. While the Niger Delta region is responsible for virtually the entire oil sector, oil revenues are consolidated into a federal account, which is shared vertically between the center and subunits and horizontally among subunits. In redistribution among subunits, the Nigerian principle of “federal character” plays a large role, with inter-unit equality and relative population as main factors. In theory, the distributive function is designed to ensure not only equality among regions, but to prevent conflicts stemming from a desire of multiple ethnic groups to control the resource rich regions of Nigeria.

A WORD ON THE PRINCIPLE OF FEDERAL CHARACTER

The principle of “federal character” in Nigeria refers to the doctrine that requires states to be of nearly equal size.^{xxxi} This is partly responsible for the almost uniquely Nigerian sub-division of states. Nigeria’s 1979 and 1989 constitutions make reference to “federal character,” which has come to mean this equal division between states.^{xxxii} This principle includes an equal division of federal posts between states, as well as a concept of “fair shares” between

them. Most importantly, this doctrine has encouraged the founding of centers of development in various states and geographical regions rather than a central concentration of them in any one area.^{xxxiii} In some cases, the doctrine of federal character has been interpreted in an arguably strict manner by most states in demanding state-run universities, newspapers, a broadcasting service, several commercial enterprises, and even in financing the extravagant needs of state governors.^{xxxiv} This principle has become characteristic of practices in Nigerian politics and continues to define much of the centralized character of federalism there.

ISSUES IN NIGERIAN FEDERALISM

As previously mentioned, the expansion of Sharia law in Nigeria has become a major issue in both central and regional politics. Northern Muslims have long been opposed to the legal system based on common law that was mostly inherited from colonialism. Beginning in 1959, the Northern penal code incorporated some elements of Sharia law, albeit modified and excluding several sanctions. However, demands have become more expansive and politically explosive since independence. In 1999, the state of Zamfara approved legislation extending Sharia fully to criminal matters, and while this was condemned by the federal government, it was more or less copied by other states. In the Kaduna state, plans to extend Sharia degenerated into horrific violence during the spring of 2000. Ethno-religious rioting was a symptom of long-standing tension between the two groups which frequently resulted in bloodshed. Kaduna was already violently polarized along ethnic lines: a Hausa-Fulani Muslim majority stood against several non-Muslim groups, and the extension of Sharia served as a catalyst for conflict between the groups there. Some argue for the further subdivision of Kaduna into two states based on ethno-religious divides.^{xxxv}

Another volatile issue within Nigerian federalism is the constant debate over the Niger Delta region and oil revenue redistribution. Despite, and maybe as a result of, resource redistribution, the Niger Delta “region as a whole remains

“Compared to the former regional system, the multi-state system has functioned relatively well to provide some measure of autonomy, hold Nigeria together, and contain divisiveness within manageable limits.”

poorer than the national average,” and the great majority of its people remain impoverished.^{xxxvi} Groups controlling the region argue for full control over resources within the region. However, this has been denounced by the federal government because it challenges the fundamental basis of centralized distributive federalism. Economic dispossession has possibly occurred due to over-centralization, the revenues being redistributed with advantage to ethnic groups outside of the region. The derivation principle, which was an important feature of resource redistribution in regional federalism, has been progressively deemphasized as oil revenues have expanded, taking revenue away from the region, even as it produces more.^{xxxvii} In addition to the complaints of groups living in the Niger Delta region, the general idea of revenue redistribution has created a perverse focus on the “cake-sharing process” and getting into the central government to give advantage to one’s home region in redistribution.^{xxxviii}

A COMMITMENT TO FEDERALISM

An important feature of Nigerian federalism is the general commitment among elites and the public to federal structure. There exists a general belief that current political problems are not inherent in federalism, but a departure

from true federalism.^{xxxix} There are ongoing reform movements to create “true federalism,”^{xl} including attempts to restore vertical distribution of powers under the old regional system, without that system’s egregious horizontal (interregional/interethnic) imbalances. This is a southern-based reform movement, opposed by the North, which depends more heavily on centralized distributive federalism.^{xli} The concept of federal character has recently been greater emphasized in the area of rotation of political offices at federal and sub-federal levels. There is an expectation that these offices rotate among regions, ethnicities, and geopolitical zones from one election to another,^{xlii} in attempts to resolve the aforementioned “perverse focus” on the cake-sharing process and regional nepotism. As these reform movements make obvious, there remains a strong commitment to federalism in spite of its failures. The preference for maintenance of federal structure is something that is openly expressed by disparate and conflicting groups, along with a voluntary will to federate, a promising fact for the survival of the Nigerian federation in spite of ethnic diversity. It is said that “not one zone . . . did not believe in a strong and united Nigeria.”^{xliv}

Outside of reform movements and the apparent commitment to improving federalism in Nigeria, one must admit a certain degree of success in the current incarnation of federalism there:

For all its tribulations and failures, Nigeria must be acknowledged as a relative political success in avoiding the tragedy of state collapse or large-scale internal insurgency that has recently convulsed other African states like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire.^{xlv}

Alternative options to federalism, such as unitary government, confederacies, and partition, have been tried with disastrous consequences, and it is mostly accepted that the country’s complex ethnic configurations make federal compromise more feasible and peaceable than unitarianism and separatism. Compared to the former regional sys-

tem, the multi-state system has functioned relatively well to provide some measure of autonomy, hold Nigeria together, and contain divisiveness within manageable limits.^{xlvi} The issue of Sharia law extension may illustrate efficacy of multi-state federal system, as the accommodation of territorial diversity is demonstrated in legal pluralism arising from constitutional provisions, which allow states to establish or not establish Sharia law. This is again underscored by the flexibility states have in enacting Sharia in a manner specific to their particular situations. It is also hopeful that the Sharia movement is spearheaded by moderate Muslim political leaders who are apparently committed to Nigerian federalism rather than extremists. Nigeria has also been relatively successful in promoting inter-group accommodation and preventing the domination of majority groups that existed in the regional system and threatened to unravel the nation. For all of its flaws, Nigeria remains an “intensely living thing,”^{xlvii} thanks in large part to the success of its multi-state federal system.

ENDNOTES

- i. Smith (1995)
- ii. Crawford (1998)
- iii. Elazar (1991)
- iv. Suberu (2001)
- v. Suberu (2001)
- vi. Watts (1996)
- vii. Watts (1996)
- viii. Watts (1996)
- ix. Dent (1995)
- x. Dent (1995)
- xi. Suberu (2004)
- xii. Smith (1995)
- xiii. Suberu (2004)
- xiv. Suberu (2004)
- xv. Suberu (2001)
- xvi. Suberu (2001)
- xvii. Suberu (2004)
- xviii. Suberu (2004)
- xix. Suberu (2004)
- xx. Suberu (2004)
- xxi. Suberu (2004)
- xxii. Suberu (2001)
- xxiii. Suberu (2001)
- xxiv. Suberu (2004)
- xxv. Anderson (2000)
- xxvi. Elazar (1993)
- xxvii. Suberu (2004)

- xxviii. Suberu (2004)
 xxvix. Suberu (2004)
 xxx. Suberu (2001)
 xxxi. Dent (1995)
 xxxii. Dent (1995)
 xxxiii. Dent (1995)
 xxxiv. Dent (1995)
 xxxv. Suberu (2004)
 xxxvi. Suberu (2004)
 xxxvii. Suberu (2004)
 xxxviii. Suberu (2004)
 xxxix. Suberu (2004)
 xl. Suberu (2004)
 xli. Amoretti (2004)
 xlii. Amoretti (2004)
 xliii. Suberu (2004)
 xliv. Suberu (2004)
 xlv. Suberu (1988)
 xlvi. Suberu (2004)
 xlvii. Suberu (2001)

REFERENCES

- Amoretti, Ugo M. 2004. "Federalism and Territorial Cleavages" in *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages*, ed. Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Amuwo, Kunle, et al. 1998. *Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books: IFRA.
- Anderson, Benedict. 2000. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso.
- Awa, Eme O. 1964. *Federal government in Nigeria*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Bachtiger, Andre and Jurg Steiner. 2004. "Switzerland: Territorial Cleavage Management as Paragon and Paradox" in *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages*, ed. Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 28-54.
- Brown, David. 1998. "Why is the nation-state so vulnerable to ethnic nationalism?" *Nations and Nationalism*. 4 (No.1), pp. 1-15.
- Burnham, Gilbert, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy and Les Roberts. "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey."
- Crawford, Beverly. "The Causes of Cultural Conflict: An Institutional Approach." Research Series—Institute of International Studies University of California.
- Dent, Martin. 1995. "Ethnicity and Territorial Politics in Nigeria" in *Federalism: The Multi-Ethnic Challenge*, ed. Graham Smith. New York: Longman.
- Elazar, Daniel. 1991. "Federal Democracy in a World Beyond Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism." In A. McAuley (ed.), "Soviet Federalism, Nationalism and Economic Decentralisation." Leicester, U. K.: Leicester University Press.
- Gana, Aaron T. and Samuel G. Egwu. 2003. *Federalism in Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Ohmae, Kenichi. 2004. "The End of the Nation-State," in *The Globalization Reader*, ed. Frank J. Lechner and John Boli. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 214-18.
- Oyovbaire, S. Egite. 1984. *Federalism in Nigeria: a study in the development of the Nigerian State*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Simeon, Richard. 2004. "Canada: Federalism, Language, and Regional Conflict" in *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages*, ed. Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 93-122.
- Smith, Graham. 1995. *Federalism: The Multi-Ethnic Challenge*. New York: Longman.
- Suberu, Rotimi. 1988. "Federalism and Nigeria's Political Future: A Comment," *African Affairs*, Vol. 87 (No. 348), pp. 431-439.
- Suberu, Rotimi. 2004. "Nigeria: Dilemmas of Federalism," in *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages*, ed. Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Suberu, Rotimi. 2001. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Watts, Ronald. 1996. *Comparing Federal Systems in the 1990s*. Ontario: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations.