DIVERSITY FACTORS IN STATE CONSTRUCTION EFFORTS IN AFRICA: 
AN ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES, RESPONSES, AND OPTIONS

by

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Abstract

In recent years, the tendency among scholars and practitioners has been to reduce the challenge of diversity and state construction to that of managing the conflict attributable to a single dominant identity, particularly, ethnicity, religion, culture, or degree of access to resources. This focus on “fragments” of diversity overstates the importance of each identity cluster, distorts the total diversity picture, and grossly under-estimates the challenge of state construction in Sub-Saharan Africa. Until the partial view of diversity is replaced with a holistic one, the state’s capacity to predict, pre-empt, and resolve conflict – and to channel conflict towards constructive ends – will remain limited. As a concept, the identity value of citizenship suggests ways of exploring diversity in its holistic and complex form, prior to embarking on empirical studies aimed as capturing citizen responses to changing diversity situations and devising appropriate intervention strategies.

Introduction

The position taken in this paper is that the critical factor in state construction is neither diversity, per se, nor the conflict – economic, political, cultural, religious, linguistic - that is frequently associated with it (diversity). For one thing, diversity is the defining attribute of human societies, and what sometimes passes for homogeneity may be nothing but a mask for deep-rooted differences. What is united by geography, tribe and tongue splinter. At the same time, the misunderstanding that linguistic differences provoke may be resolved by an affinity of religious belief. Secondly, since it takes only one person – e.g., a demagogue, a deranged gun-man, a paranoid newspaper columnist, or a highly persuasive hate preacher – to set neighbours on a collision course, neither civil nor armed conflict could, on logical or empirical grounds, be attributed to diversity.

All the same, diversity does matter in the state construction process. While it is not a direct causative agent of construction or destruction, it can play a powerful “opportunistic” role. Whether it will be an aid or hindrance in state construction is a function of the prevailing circumstances and how they (the circumstances) are handled. Specifically, it is the identity value of citizenship, rather than any other factor, which explains the impact of diversity on state construction.

In tracing the linkages between diversity and nation building, the paper begins with a conceptual framework that, besides demarcating the boundaries among the critical variables, advances a number of hypotheses linking variants of diversity to conflict and state construction. In the second section, the paper discusses the challenge posed by conflict to Africa’s development in the short- to medium-term, and in the third section, traces the relationship between diversity and conflict, on the one hand, and state construction, on the other. The fourth section of the paper assesses the impact of the contemporary response to the diversity challenges highlighted in the previous section and the last section examines some of the options open to African countries in reconciling diversity challenges with the imperatives of state construction and development.
I. Diversity, State Construction and Identity Value of Citizenship: 
an Analytical Framework

State construction, even under normal circumstances, is a risky and problematic exercise. It entails applying methods - ranging from the tried and tested to the unorthodox - to persuade individuals to transfer to an artificial and unfamiliar entity the power to make authoritative and binding decisions. As the power so transferred might be exercised for good or evil, the individuals may sometimes feel the urge to resist the “external” force and to withdraw to fortresses defended by the persons they know and trust – members of nuclear and extended families, clans, tribes, “kith and kin”. Indeed, the enormity of the state construction challenge is such that success of the endeavour is most often perceived to be positively correlated with the absence of diversity – or more precisely, with ties of consanguinity. As the argument goes, the state edifice will stay resilient so long as the component units are compatible \textit{ab initio}, and will crumble where they (the parties to the arrangement) never see eye to eye on any question. This is the assumption underlying the argument that attempts at forging “nation-states” out of pre-colonial entities were “artificial”, and therefore, destined to fail.

The contrary view is that rather than being a direct causative agent, diversity (particularly, of the ethnic or religious type) merely plays an “opportunistic” role in state construction or dismantling efforts. It is neither ethnic nor religious cleavages but chronic “political and economic failures” that have been directly implicated in conflict (World Bank, 2000:57). The logic here is that we are likely to come face to face with the “cassus belli” once we are able to define “chronic political and economic failures”. Yet, this is not always the case. A state that fails on the political and economic front may still escape the devastating consequences of conflict.

Essence and meaning of diversity

Diversity is essentially a state of being varied - a condition in which heterogeneity defines interpersonal and/or inter-group relations. This is where lies the frequent misunderstanding of the practical and theoretical import of the term. To the ordinary person in the street, diversity conjures up an image of acrimony, violence, and devastation. And, strange as it may seem, serious analyses of the subject sometimes fall into the temptation of regurgitating the conventional view of diversity as a harbinger of conflict and destruction. The failure to grasp the essence of diversity can be attributed to at least three factors. These are the tendency to take a “unified” view of diversity (thus ruling out the possibility of “multiple identities”), the frequent recourse to reductionism, and the inadequate treatment of the sociology of knowledge of diversity.

Progress in the study of diversity is impossible until the concept is properly defined. This entails examining diversity from all possible angles. While viewing it narrowly and from specific angles – ethnicity, religion, gender, culture, economic class – has the advantage of insight and depth, a full understanding of the concept requires that it be treated holistically. Diversity rarely takes one single form, and behaviour in circumstances where it prevails never proceeds in one single, easily predictable direction. As rightly observed by Argyriades, there is “diversity in diversity” (Argyriades, 2001). Such an organic view of diversity suggests the likelihood of a single person or a group assuming multiple identities at one and the same time. When diversity prevails, individuals and groups will be able to “identify” or locate their – mostly diverse - places under the sun. Thus, it is possible for a single person to identify \textit{simultaneously} as a member of an ethnic group, adherent of a specific creed, male or female, prince or pauper, healthy or handicapped citizen, moderate or member of extremist groups, criminal or law-abiding citizen. A group may constitute the majority in one area, but find itself as a minority in another. An “ally” in one setting is a “foe” in another. Equation (1) captures the “diverse” character of diversity as follows:
SI = \sum P(x_1, x_2, ... x_m) \frac{Y_{1...n}}{Y_{1...n}} \quad ... (1)

Where:

SI = Identity with the state (theoretically put at 100 per cent);
P(x_1, ... x_m) stand for the whole range of probable identities an individuals in a particular society or community can assume (ethnic, religious, cultural, class, etc.) and the values that the individuals place on all the probable identities;

Y_{1...n} are the costs that the individuals incur under the various identity categories.

The second critical challenge in diversity research is how to proceed from the multiple identities that an individual is capable of assuming to explain or predict his response to a vast array of diversity situations. A few questions will illustrate the dilemma. Were the riots in Nigeria “caused” by ethnic or religious differences or by economic adversity, by agent provocateurs, or by plain xenophobia? If an individual’s declared reason for going to war is the “defence of his faith”, what assurance does he, or anybody for that matter, have that the underlying concern here - the real motive - is not ethnic hegemony or personal aggrandisement? When informed that members of his “tribe” are under armed attack, how will an individual respond? Is he likely to:

(a) run for his life?
(b) take up arms to fight the “invaders”?
(c) appeal for calm and to “reason”?
(d) hoist a white flag and hand out the olive branch? or
(e) do nothing but wait to die?

These are by no means easy questions and the choices are not always clear. However, many of the answers to diversity questions tend to be, at best, highly simplistic, at worst, too general to be perspicuous, meaningful and verifiable. Either way, the fault lies at the doorstep of the excessive reductionism in contemporary diversity analysis. In an attempt at narrowing down a vast and complex field to a manageable proportion, analysts have zeroed in on specific factors in diversity to the exclusion of other equally relevant ones. To some, diversity – particularly of the ethnic type – is a threat to state construction in Africa. If this is the case, a simple equation (as the second one below) will do:

\[ P(x_1) = k_1 \quad ... (2) \]

Where:
P(x_1) stands for the probability of the individuals being influenced by ethnic diversity considerations; \( Y_1 \) is the cost that the ethnic identity entails; and ‘\( k_1 \)’ stands for conflict.

However, since ethnicity is not the only form of diversity, it is possible, on pure logical grounds, to equate Africa’s conflict with “conflict over access to resources”, in other words, to trace armed and civil strife to another kind of diversity – diversity of an “economic” type! Equation (3) will then serve our purpose:

\[ P(x_2) = k_2 \quad ... (3) \]

Where \( P(x_2) \) stands for economic/class identity, \( Y_2 \), the cost of the identity, and ‘\( k_2 \)’ stands for conflict.
Realising that neither ethnic nor economic diversity, by itself, provides an adequate explanation for the raging conflict in parts of Africa, some analysts go for a combination of diversity attributes. To this class of analysts, it is a blend of diversity factors – particularly, religious fundamentalism, ethnic friction, economic deprivation, and governance failure - that undermines state construction efforts. Neither this, nor any of the preceding hypotheses rests on a sound theoretical foundation or lays claim to incontrovertible empirical evidence.

**State construction and diversity: observing the linkages**

The argument is not that diversity is of no consequence in conflict situations. However, its relevance lies in the capability of one form of diversity being manipulated to mask a latent but significant feeling and to push a hidden interest. As a highly emotive and combustible subject, diversity may, at one point, be no more than an “opportunistic” factor, while at another, emerge as a direct, causative agent. As argued in this paper, whether diversity will strengthen or undermine a “national” identity depends on the different parties’ comparative assessment of the costs and benefits of various categories of identities or “citizenship” – i.e., the “identity value of citizenship”. Where the situations are properly handled, conflict will be perceived as an edifying factor in nation building and capital formation. Conflict becomes a destructive agent only when diversity is so mismanaged that inter-personal and inter-group tension consistently rises beyond the acceptable (let us term it, “the Lewin” threshold (Lewin, 1935).

There is no question that diversity breeds conflict, and the latter is most frequently associated with tension. This is by itself not too much of a disaster. As argued by Lewin (1935), human beings do not live in a tensionless world. As a matter of fact, a minimum degree of conflict and tension is essential to the survival and development of the human race. Development after all hinges on creative solutions to problems, and these (creative solutions) are conceivable only when the problem-solvers make conscious efforts to move out of conventional ethnic, racial, religious, gender, cultural, mental, and physical boxes to share knowledge and perceptions with “outsiders”. Getting individuals and groups to make that momentous move – i.e., to venture out of their “safe and familiar” surroundings in search of new experiences – is the crux of the diversity management problem. This, as we shall later discover, depends on at least three factors, i.e., the permeability of identity borders, the individual’s confidence in the borders’ permeability, and his attitudes before approaching the border, at the point of entry, and on admission.

Handling a complex subject like diversity frequently requires that it be examined simultaneously from all possible angles and as a first step towards assigning precise values to the broad range of diversity indices. This is an impossible mission. Establishing a one-to-one relationship between, on the one hand, a diversity indicator, and, on the other, individual or group behaviour, poses a serious dilemma – similar to that confronting Einstein as he tried to measure the precise position of particles in space. Much as he might detest the idea, Einstein realised that the act of measuring the position of a particle disturbs its momentum and conversely (White and Gribbin, 1997: 217-220). If in the quantum world, certainty is, like beauty, literally in the eye of the observer, it is more so in the social sciences where fluidity is the rule rather than the exception. If, with all its claim to objectivity, physics is unable to resolve the puzzle of “spooky action at a distance”, the social sciences face a mammoth challenge explaining or predicting human behaviour. We cannot determine a priori how a specific diversity indicator – e.g., ethnicity, religious belief, or economic class - will shape or “cause” a specific human response. Rather than allow ourselves to be diverted by a futile search for diversity “causes” and “effects”, we should settle for the second best – which is the isolation of different identity categories as well as the influences or factors to which they are amenable. This is where lies the relevance of the concept of “identity value of citizenship”.

As we proceed in our analysis, we are likely to note those benefits of citizenship that are purely psychic, e.g., the pride that comes with being identified with a specific diversity unit – e.g., the
state, a clan, an ethnic group, a religious order, the “working class”, or the elite. Other benefits are the goods and services “consumed” or enjoyed, especially, the economic, social and personal security provided by the state in competition or collaboration with civil society institutions, and the opportunities the individual has to live a healthy and meaningful life under the various identity regimes.

The “costs” include the tax, tributes, or levies payable to retain one’s “citizenship” status, the obligation to comply with statutory and/or customary law and to respect other citizens’ rights, as well as the readiness to be conscripted into national military service (as against service in ethnic militias). At times, some disaffected or criminally inclined citizens seek to accumulate “benefits” at the expense of the state and the people. Such unearned benefits (the loot from robbery operations, the damage done to national prestige by drug traffickers, the fuel supply disrupted by acts of vandalism and the life cut short by paid assassins) constitute additional “costs” to the average citizen, and are likely to lower the “identity value of citizenship”.

The identity value of all categories of citizenship (represented by the symbol “SI”) is the sum of an individual’s probable responses to situations based on his perceptions of the comparative worth of all competing identities. Since the summation of all probabilities cannot exceed the value of 1, each probable response will be a fraction of the whole number. This has been captured in the first equation as follows:

\[ SI = \sum_{1 \leq i \leq n} P(x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots, x_m) \]

To determine which identity is likely to influence an individual’s response to a specific situation, we have to estimate his/her evaluation of the costs and benefits of all identities that s/he can probably assume, remembering that the whole range of identity probabilities cannot exceed the value of 1. Let us take a purely hypothetical case of an individual who identifies, or is identified, as a middle class, Roman Catholic, Nigerian female, of the Itsekiri ethnic origin. The probable values that she places on each identity category \( P(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_m) \), will vary depending on the prevailing circumstances (or states of nature).

The whole range of probable identities may be indicated as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
  x_1 &= \text{(middle class)} \\
  x_2 &= \text{(Roman Catholic)} \\
  x_3 &= \text{(Nigerian)} \\
  x_4 &= \text{(Itsekiri origin)} \\
  x_5 &= \text{(feminine gender)} \\
  x_m &= \text{(residual identity options)}
\end{align*}
\]

We may further assume that the “prevailing circumstances” are represented by the letters \( t_1, t_2, \ldots, t_n \), with each letter standing for the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
  t_1 &\text{ (column A) = National economic prosperity ("oil boom") with shared national values;} \\
  t_2 &\text{ (column B) = Economic slow-down, with political calm;} \\
  t_3 &\text{ (column C) = Economic stagnation, with political unrest;} \\
  t_4 &\text{ (column D) = Economic down-turn, with political tension and ethnic discord;} \\
  t_5^{t/m} &\text{ (column E) = Economic recession, with widening social deficits, political friction, }
  \text{religious and cultural revivalism, as well as ethnic conflict; or other}
  \text{miscellaneous situations/states of nature.}
\end{align*}
\]
The responses of the hypothetical individual referred to above may be plotted on an identity decision matrix as in Fig. A below:

**Fig. A: Identity Decision Matrix (Probable Identity Choices in Changing Situations)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Options</th>
<th>States of Nature</th>
<th>(A) t₁</th>
<th>(B) t₂</th>
<th>(C) t₃</th>
<th>(D) t₄</th>
<th>(E) t₅/(x₅m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle class (x₁)</td>
<td>Σ P(x₁) = 1</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic (x₂)</td>
<td>Σ P(x₂) = 1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian (x₃)</td>
<td>Σ P(x₃) = 1</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itsekiri origin (x₄)</td>
<td>Σ P(x₄) = 1</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (x₅)</td>
<td>Σ P(x₅) = 1</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual identity</td>
<td>options (x₅m)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the “identity value of citizenship” enables us to generate easily verifiable hypotheses on the costs and benefits of competing identities, it leaves unresolved a crucial methodological issue – how to ensure that the observer’s judgement does not substitute for that of the observed. The costs and benefits as perceived or “calculated” by the researcher (and reproduced as probabilities in the preceding matrix) are likely to be at variance with the research subjects’ assessments – the latter representing an aggregation of the citizens’ objective and subjective interpretation of reality. If “reality” is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:13-17), the sociology of knowledge of diversity will have to accommodate what the citizen knows to be true, together with his all too frequent lapses into “false consciousness”, self-deception, and outright misrepresentation.

The need for a refined sociology of knowledge of diversity is predicated on the fact that the totality of the individual’s social conditions defines his “identity.” As presented in this paper, diversity is a three-way pattern of interactions. The “parties” to this triangular relationship are the nation-state together with the conflicts associated with its creation and maintenance, the individual personalities and their needs, and the cultural sub-systems, totems and signals. The international angle becomes relevant where it is capable of influencing the attitudes and behaviour of the three main parties (Azar, 1990; Solomon, 2001). Diversity remains manageable so long as each party feels that the association costs and benefits are equitably shared. In contrast, diversity gets out of hand where the signals coming from both culture and personality spell nothing but conflict and, therefore, trouble for the nation-state. In this latter case, parties to the state creation effort will perpetually complain about the huge “costs” and the paltry “benefits” attributable to their sundry identities. Understanding the role of diversity thus entails inquiring into the citizen’s own notion of the costs and benefits of competing identities – a notion that tends to be shaped by the citizen’s personality and innate character, as well as by the cues transmitted by his and outside groups. While an individual is, to some extent, free to “choose” his identity, he most frequently finds some identities “ascribed” to him, or “fastened” round his neck.

**Perception of the border and of border guards**

An identity based on “choice” allows a certain degree of individual discretion and flexibility in decision making. Identity borders are permeable when the value attached by an individual to x₁ does not pitch him/her against another, and does not pre-determine the values of x₂…xₘ. An example is when an individual makes deliberate moves to cross Nature-imposed barriers (say, from identity x₁ to x₂…xₘ) by learning an “alien” language, donning another ethnic group’s traditional apparel, and
siding with the “other tribe” on major issues. This notwithstanding, an identity that is permeable and seen to be so may still not hold any promise for an individual that is not particularly keen about life behind the “enemy border”. Indeed, rather than learn about new and conflicting identities, such an individual may waver from blissful ignorance, to outright misrepresentation and distortion, of outside experiences. Serious conflicts have been known to begin as an exchange of fabrications and diatribes, or as a result of insults hurled across the pages of newspapers and magazines. Religious groups have, as part of their proselytising (or membership recruitment and fund-raising) mission, deliberately misinterpreted the teachings of opposing groups, and, by so doing, touched off bloody religious confrontations. How such conflict-inclined and related attitudes play out and impact on state construction processes is the subject of the next section.

**Permeability of identity borders**

An identity that is “ascribed” (mostly by groups to which the citizen does not belong) leaves little room for personal manoeuvre. Such an identity confines the citizen to a ghetto – \( x_1 \) (ethnic), \( x_2 \) (religious), \( x_3 \) (linguistic), or \( x_m \) (any other). This is the case when an individual is “pigeon-holed” by members of rival ethnic groups, and when his motives are explained solely in terms of this involuntary categorisation. In other words, before the individual has a chance to choose, s/he is classified by “outsiders” as say, a Hausa-Fulani, Efik, Ngizim, Bolewa, Nupe, Bambara, Peuhl, Mandinka, Temne, Kikuyu, Luo, Karamojong, Maasai, Hutu, Tutsi, Shona, Ndebele, Nguni, Yao, Chewa, Bemba, Lozi, Zulu, Xhosa, Nubian, Nuer, Dinka, Arab or Berber.

Whether an individual will venture in search of new experiences depends on how porous the borders he seeks to penetrate are. Caste identities tend to be fixed and, in the absence of affirmative action policies, taken as predestined and unchangeable. Everything being equal, therefore, the probability is high that individual members of the upper caste will identify with it and place high value on caste “purity” vis-à-vis the members of the disadvantaged groups. An identity based on race or an individual’s ethnic origin is sometimes viewed in the same way, although the individual concerned may surmount birth-imposed barriers by learning a new language, acquiring new knowledge and skills, immibing new cultures, and taking steps to fulfil other critical conditions for “assimilation”. Overall, where race or “tribe” offers the passport to power, fame and riches, the tendency will be for members of the privileged race or of the “ruling tribe” to erect barriers to inter-group contact or upward mobility. Conversely, the under-privileged groups will tend to find themselves in the mutually contradictory position of rejecting the high costs of, and the low benefits from, their identity, while using the same loss-incurring (“minority”) status as a rallying point for action. It is a combination of the privileged group’s advocacy of the *status quo* and the underclass’s clamour for change that keeps the identity borders closed and impregnable.

Religious and sectarian barriers ought, in theory, to be easily permeable. The three monotheistic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) are united in the injunction that their adherents live by the same tenets of love, honesty, fairness and compassion. What the Old and the New Testaments enjoin as The Ten Commandments are to be found repeated in the different Surats and Ayats of the Holy Qur’an. In Islam, it is “haram” to be contemptuous of God or of His tokens, to steal, to commit murder, to indulge in extra-marital relations, to consume alcoholic beverages, to betray confidence, and to skim off contract prices while leaving public facilities in total decay. With the possible exception of the liquor ban, the main prohibitions in the Holy Qur’an are restated in other holy books and reflected in the traditional religions’ moral codes.

Nonetheless, the increasing *secularisation of faith* constitutes a serious threat to inter-faith dialogue. Secularisation, as used here, means the tendency to view religion as an *instrument* of earthly struggles rather than a preparation for life after death. When faith becomes secularised, religious orders will compete for the purses, rather than the souls, of men - just as entrepreneurs compete for market share, and politicians, for votes. It is only when faiths become secularised that the religious elite and their followers place high value on the construction of expensive structures (cathedrals,
synagogues and mosques) while doing little about society’s spiritual, moral, and physical
decay. When viewed as a “business” pursuit, religion cannot but pit one identity against another.
This is when diversity (of the religious kind) ignites and stokes conflict.

“ Immigrant’s” confidence in borders’ permeability

An identity is said to be “fastened” round the citizen’s neck when the group to which s/he belongs
lays total claim on his thought, his response to stimuli, his allegiance, indeed, his entire personality.
Ethnic identities lend themselves to this kind of application or manipulation. An ethnic group or
“nationality” is by definition one that sees itself as being different from outsiders. The closed group
capitalises on the subsistence of a number of conditions – common ancestry, goals and aspirations,
symbols, language, culture, religion, and geographical boundary - to promote internal unity and
fend off “outsiders” and “stranger elements.” It also employs overt and covert techniques to
strengthen group solidarity. Besides stressing the obvious, such as the difference in language,
culture, and possibly, physical features, the ethnic group encodes assumptions about the physical
and the subterranean worlds – assumptions that are ingrained in its members, and expected to be
transmitted across generations as unquestionable “facts” (Schopflin, 2001:9). Until recently, it was
the practice in a number of communities to brand the faces of newly born babies to ensure the
infants’ permanent identification and solidarity with the tribe. The Hutu moderates in Rwanda
might have been spared the ordeal of “tribal marks”, but those of them who might have wished to
deal with the Tutsis as equals were still prevented from doing so by group ideology.

A history of inter-group hostility, ignorance of what goes on behind the “alien” border, an off-hand
but disagreeable remark or deed by a member of the “stranger” community – these and other factors
may reinforce an individual’s prejudices and confirm his worst, but, perhaps, unfounded fears. In
any case, when diversity is discussed within the context of state creation and public sector
management, the analyst cannot but trace the link to the phobias and insecurities that are now so
characteristic of inter-personal and inter-group relations as to be deemed mutually inter-changeable.
For example, the novel recruitment practices adopted in the wake of the enactment of inclusive
policies tend to fan real or imagined fears – among them, of undue favouritism, of unwarranted
exclusion, of reverse discrimination, of cultural or group “contamination” and of alienation. If the
culpable identity is of the ethnic type, the individual’s reaction would have been adequately
summed up by the second equation above, i.e.,

\[ p (x_{i}) = k_{1} \quad \ldots (4) \]

II. Conflict in SSA: Scope and Magnitude

Conflict and violence are among the leading threats to state construction in contemporary Africa.
The question is whether both has anything to do with diversity. This section examines the nature,
intensity, and impact of conflict occurring in different parts of the continent, and traces the
relationship between various forms of diversity and the success or failure of state construction
efforts.

An overview of conflict and its impact

Conflict is clearly the greatest menace to the state construction endeavour in Sub-Saharan Africa.
Between the 1960s and the 1990s, Sub-Saharan Africa witnessed at least 80 violent changes of
government (Adedeji, 2000:3). In the first quarter of 1996, 50 per cent of SSA countries enjoyed
stable political conditions and good governance, while the remaining 50 per cent were embroiled in
either prolonged political crises or armed conflict and civil strife. By the end of 1998, the situation
had changed dramatically, with only 39 per cent (i.e. 19 countries) enjoying stable political
conditions, 23 percent (11 countries) facing political crisis and turbulence, and 38 per cent (18 countries) engaging in armed conflict or civil strife.

The past one and a half decades, in particular, have been marked by a rapid escalation in conflict and bloody confrontations. Among the countries affected by conflict are Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. The human cost is staggering – with several persons killed, countless others wounded, and an increasing number driven into refugee camps where they most frequently live under sub-human conditions. Since the return to civilian rule in Nigeria in May 1999, more than 3,000 lives have been lost as a result of ethnic and religious conflict (www.cnn.com2002/WORLD/africa/01/02/nigeria.election.reut/index.html).

In 1994, conflicts in different parts of the continent claimed a total of 3.5 million lives, turned approximately 7 million citizens of African countries into refugees, and another 18 million into internally displaced persons. Six years later (in the first quarter of 2000), the number of refugees and internally displaced persons rose to 12 million and 25 million respectively. UNHCR (1997) estimates that armed conflicts impacted negatively on human capital development in different parts of the continent, claiming over 2 million lives within a five-year period. Most of the victims were women and children. Africa’s refugee population is currently estimated at more than 12 million people – well over 40 per cent of the world total.

More than 100,000 children bear arms and participate in combat operations in Africa (Business Africa, July/August 2001:52). Those who are not on the front line serve as porters, guards, spies, minesweepers, or sex slaves. The children engaged in full-time combat – the so-called child soldiers - face a bleak future, having been exposed to unspeakable traumas and deprived of opportunities to learn and grow under normal conditions.

Establishing a causal link between economic growth and conflict is not a difficult exercise. Economic growth after all hinges on the generation and investment of surpluses, which, in turn, depend on the prevailing socio-political circumstances. Conflicts not only destroy productive assets but also prevent the creation of wealth. Conflicts divert resources from investment in economic growth and human development, while accelerating capital flight from, and brain drain in the continent. When a nation is at war, resources will more often than not be diverted away from productive endeavours to military ends – especially, the procurement of arms and ammunitions. The chances are also good that production facilities will be exposed to the destructive impact of war.

The experience of countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Lesotho and Sierra Leone underscores the correlation between social conflict and development. While the costs of social strife are difficult to quantify, actual and surrogate figures on the impact of conflict are readily available. Genocide in Rwanda and the spill-over effect in Burundi contributed to the vast reduction in the human resources needed for sustained development. In the DRC, years of mismanagement and corruption conspired with widening conflict to reduce one of the potentially richest countries in the world into a basket case. Angola has neither fully reaped the benefits of its huge resource endowments nor realised its development potential because of the frequent threats to peace and stability.

Conflicts have not only undermined domestic growth capacities, but have also threatened regional stability and emasculated the gains of regional co-operation. According to the ADB (1999), widening conflict accounted for the lack-lustre economic performance in most of the countries in the Central Africa region. As a result of mismanagement, civil strife and military conflict, the region is one of the poorest in the world with per capita GNP ranging from a low of $110 for the DRC to a high of over $4230 for Gabon, and median GNP not exceeding $660.
An ECA study on the Mano River Union secretariat (ECA, 2000:5-9) further highlights the relationship between conflict and development. Of the three member States of the Union, only one, the Republic of Guinea, was a haven of peace and stability when Liberia and Sierra Leone were in turmoil. It was also the only country in the Mano River basin to record positive GDP growth (an average annual rate of 4 per cent) between 1995 and 1999. In contrast, economic performance in Liberia and Sierra Leone suffered as a result of internal conflict and cross-border raids.

The conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone did not stop at internal destruction. They directly undermined sub-regional integration efforts (ECA, 2000). A number of projects built at huge cost and designed to strengthen the bonds among the MRU member States were either completely destroyed (e.g., the Union Glass Factory in Liberia), or badly interrupted by military operations (e.g. the network of inter-state roads). The cross-border raids associated with internal conflicts have also generated tension among member States and put the protocols on free movement of persons and goods to the severest test.

Besides inflicting huge damage on the infrastructure as well as on industrial, mining, agricultural and fishery operations, the Liberian and the Sierra Leone wars exacted a heavy toll on human resources. The case of Sierra Leone is highly illustrative. After 6 years of civil conflict, an estimated 80 per cent of the recruits (or conscripts) into the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forces were children of school-going age – that is, children between the ages of 7 and 14. Of those that did not take part in the fighting, at least 5,000 were killed, and an unknown number had their hands and/or feet amputated. RUF’s (and subsequently, the “Western Boys”) terrorist acts (in the form of kidnapping, looting, rape, and wanton destruction of life and property) drove thousands into refugee camps across the border in Guinea.

Needless to add that the forced migrations from one community to another generally put an unbearable pressure on the resources of the latter, (that is, the “host” community). Without adequate preparation, and almost invariably on a tenuous resource base, a country flooded with refugees tends to be faced with the challenge of catering for the new arrivals’ health, sanitation, and welfare needs, besides the environmental and internal security concerns.

III. Diversity, Conflict and State Construction: exploring the linkages

That diversity prevails in Africa is beyond dispute. Whether this diversity translates into conflict and violence is another matter. From the Cape to Cairo, a tourist can fly from the arid zone to swampy creeks, touch down on widely different altitudes, listen to conversations rendered in almost all imaginable languages, watch performances in an endless pageant of cultures and art forms, and make fruitless attempts to interpret or reconcile conflicting images (Balogun, 1986:196-8). Geographically, there is a wide variation between the flat plains of the north and the mountainous ranges of the east and the south. The vast sweep of sandy dunes of the Sahara is in sharp contrast to the undulations and depressions of east Africa. The lush, green forests of the Equator and mangrove creeks of west Africa stand out alongside the dry stubs of the Sahel, and the forbidding terrain of the Kalahari Desert.

Africa’s diversity is most striking at the demographic level. The continent is peopled by different racial and nationality groups – ranging from the Arabs and Berbers of north Africa to the Nilotic and Bantu categories of the African race. Variations in language and culture within and across countries further reinforce the continent’s diversity. Nigeria, with a population of 110 million is made up of approximately 280 ethnic groups and boasts a greater number of local dialects. Zambia, with a population of less than 9 million (2000 estimate) has 73 (officially recognised) ethnic groups and 84 dialects. The thinly populated Botswana is predominantly Setswana-speaking, but this does not change the fact that other language groups exist (See Table 1 for comparative data on the population and language profiles of various African countries).
Table 1: The Population and Language Profiles of Sub-Saharan African Countries, June 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (in millions, except for figures in brackets)</th>
<th>Language profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Portuguese, Ovumbundu, Chokwe, and local dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Fon, Yoruba, and other local languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Setswana (with Kwen, Ngwato, Ngwaketse, Tawana, Tlokwa, Kgatla, Rolong and Malete sub-groups), and non-Setswana languages such as Kalanga, San/Sarwa, Kgagaladi, Kaa, Tswapong, Yei, Koba, Mbkushu, Subiya, Damara, and Herero.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>Mossi, Fula,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Kirundi, Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>Approximately 250 languages and dialects (among them, Ewondo, Boulou, Babimbi, Bakoko, Douala, Ewodi, Batanga, Mabea, Bamoun, Agbo, Fulbe, Fulfulde, Bakweri, Banyangi, Keaka, Bafia/Bafaw, Bakundu, Mundani, Mendakwe, Bali, and the Bamileke group of languages such as Bafoussam, Schang, Bafang, Bagaute, and Bambourous).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Rep.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Sangho, Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Colloquial Arabic, Sara, Sangho and over 100 other languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comoros</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Arabic, Comoran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo (Brazzaville)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo (DRC)</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>Lingala, Swahili, Kikongo, Tshiluba with other languages and regional dialects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>(451,442)</td>
<td>Arabic, Somali, Afar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatorial Guinea</td>
<td>(465,746)</td>
<td>Spanish, Pidgin English, Fang, Bubi, Ibo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Afar, Amharic, Arabic, Tigringna, Kunama, and other minor languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>Amharic, Tigringa, Oromingga, Guragaringna, Somali, Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Fang, Myene, Bateke, Bapounou, Eschira, Bandjai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, and a few others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>Akaan (Ashanti, Fanti), Twi, Ewe, Mossi, Dagomba, Hausa, and other languages and dialects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea (Conakry)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Manika, Pulaar, Soussou, Kissi, Kpeleo, Toma, and a few others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea Bissau</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Portuguese, Criolo, and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>60 indigenous languages and dialects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>Swahili, Gikuyu, Luo, Luhyia, Kalenjin, Karamojong, Masaa, and numerous languages and dialects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Sesotho, Zulu, Xhosa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Krahn, Krio, and 20 other languages of Niger-Congo group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>French, Malagasy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Chichewa, Tonga, other regional languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>Bambara, Peuhl, and numerous other languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Oshивамбо, Нама/Дамара, Рукаванго, Отхиероро, Капри, and local dialects, together with Afrikaans, and German.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>Hausa, Djerma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>113.0</td>
<td>Hausa, Yoruba, lbo and over 280 other languages and dialects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Kinyarwanda, Swahili.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sao Tome &amp; Principe</td>
<td>(159,883)</td>
<td>Portuguese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Wolof, Pulaar, Diola, Mandingo/Mandinka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Mende, Temne, Krio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Somali, Arabic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>SiSwati.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>Swahili, Kiunguju, Arabic and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Ewe, Mina, Dagomba, Kabye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>Luganda, Lusoga, Lunyoro, Lunankole, Lutoro, Lango, Lugubara, Acholi, Swahili, and a few other Nilotic and Bantu languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>11.3 million</td>
<td>Shona, Sindebele, and numerous dialects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>9.6 million</td>
<td>Nyanja, Bemba, Kaonda, Lozi, Lunda, Luval, Tonga And 75 other languages/dialects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: various sources, including CNN.com – Country Watch, data from country studies and reports, and responses to author’s follow-up enquiries.

Religious and cultural cleavages pose additional diversity management challenges. A sizeable number of the people are either Muslims or Christians, while the others are animists or adherents of the indigenous religions. Within each of the established religions there are sectarian denominations with conflicting devotional rites and practices. For instance, Sunni Muslims may be in the majority across African countries, but the Shi’ites and other sects are becoming increasingly active. The Christian denominations include the Protestants, the Catholics, the Baptists, the Methodists, and, in recent years, independent, “prosperity gospel” churches – including the television evangelists.

Diversity prevails not only between or among, but also within, African countries. With the exception of a few countries, it is possible to encounter marked differences in language, culture, religious belief, and traditional systems of government. The last point (the diversity in pre-colonial governmental models and practices) is significant for our understanding of the dynamics of politics and administration in contemporary Africa. While some communities (e.g., the Hausa-Fulani emirates of northern Nigeria, the Bunyoro and the Baganda of Uganda, the Zande of the former Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and the Amhara of Ethiopia) were under the control of centralised and well-organised systems of government, others could be classified as “classless” societies. The latter category includes the Tiv of Nigeria’s middle belt, the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, the Pakot and Massai of Kenya, the Bakiga of western Uganda, and the Tallensi of northern Ghana.

**Impact of diversity on conflict**

It has been established in the preceding paragraphs that violence and diversity co-exist in contemporary Africa. It is legitimate to ask whether there is any correlation between the two. Depending on the measure or indicator applied, the tendency among analysts has been to assume a certain degree of causality between diversity and civil or military conflict. The hypotheses
presenting diversity as a threat to effective state construction equates it (i.e., diversity) with conflict, and the latter with violence and destruction. In support of these hypotheses, the experience is frequently cited of societies in which factors such as ethnic separatism, religious fundamentalism, deep-rooted cultural and historical differences and struggle for control over natural resources have, individually or collectively accounted for the instability and/or the outright dismantling of state structures. A contrary view is that diversity is a natural and inescapable attribute of societies – that wishing it away is fraught with greater danger than letting it be.

This paper tests a range of hypotheses linking conflict to various forms of diversity. It reveals the pitfalls in contemporary analyses of diversity and conflict. Specifically, it shows that rather than take a holistic view of diversity, the analyses tend to focus on the linkages between specific diversity attributes (e.g., ethnicity, religion, economic/class interest) on the one hand, and conflict, on the other. The paper also highlights the danger in prejudging the observed populations’ opinions on the weight to attach to each diversity attribute under changing conditions. In other words, rather than rely on the views of the various population segments on the comparative worth of different identity types – i.e., the “identity value of citizenship” – contemporary studies of diversity are content with grossly misleading projections of the impact of diversity on social relations.

**Ethnic diversity and conflict**

According to the ethnic advocacy school, diversity of the ethnic kind is an aid rather than an impediment to state construction efforts. To put it another way, \( \frac{P(x)}{Y} \) is not equal to \( k \). Diversity, the school continues, becomes a threat and a self-fulfilling prophesy only when the state – deluded by its powers and driven by ambitions - sees its constituent parts as a threat to be crushed rather than as strengths to be capitalised upon. As argued by this school, the equality of the partners in a heterogeneous polity could only be guaranteed if that heterogeneity is reflected (or to use a familiar terminology, “mainstreamed”) in government structures, policies, and programmes. To “manufacture” a consensus under such circumstances it to strike at the heart of equality, and in the process, invite stiff, sometimes, armed, resistance from the victims of what is perceived as a hegemonic (nay, internal colonialist) practice (Walzer, 1983). In simple language, identifying with a primary group is a natural inclination, and it is futile to “outlaw” it (Ekeh, 1975; Horowitz, 1985; and Amoo, 1997:21-27).

The snag with a purely ethnic focus is its exclusion of other (equally natural) human inclinations. Besides identifying with an ethnic group, individuals have other choices – ranging from the “devaluation” ethnicity in interpersonal or inter-group relations to outright ethnic boundary crossing. This is what liberal-minded Hutus did when, in defiance of their group’s ethnic solidarity directives, decided to treat the Tutsis as equals. The liberal-minded Hutus in effect placed greater value on their Rwandan citizenship than their ethnic origin (Adejumobi, 2001). This identity choice may be expressed by the following equation:

\[
SI > P(x) \quad \ldots (5)
\]

Where ‘SI’ = the aggregate value/worth placed on the whole range of identities (i.e. the entire identities making up the Rwandan citizenship); 
\( P(x) \) = value placed on (Hutu) ethnic identity.

Admittedly, ethnicity is a powerful mobilisation tool in the hand of a group that is intent on consolidating its power or wresting it from historically dominant “stranger elements”. Ethnicity thus emerges as a relative, and therefore, dialogue-inhibiting, factor. However, the relative character of this identity form is what limits its applicability in attempts at establishing an individual’s “identity value of citizenship”. Starting from the premise that no two persons are identical, Ahmed (1999:63) cites empirical studies indicating that the Hutu refugees in Tanzania identified themselves differently depending on whether they lived in ‘refugee camps’ or in affluent neighbourhoods.
outside. This finding is confirmed by a survey of residence patterns in a number of African urban communities (Balogun, 2000:159-160).

It should further be noted that ethnicity alone cannot serve as a viable basis for state construction in the modern world. Cameroon with a population of less than 16 million is divided into several ethnic groups speaking close to 250 languages. Meeting the challenges of development requires that the myriad groups coalesce into larger political and administrative units called nation-states. Where ethnicity is the dominant force – the force driving inter-group relations – the nation-state runs the risk of fragmentation and the consequent impairment of goal-achievement capacity (Linn, 2001:1-2). One explanation for Nigeria’s retarded development is the triumph of a mindset usually associated with ethnically divided societies, or what an observer characterises as “a culture of self-interest, fragmentation, exploitation, cynicism, dishonesty, and distrust” (Diamond, 1995).

In any case, a presumably homogeneous ethnic group may be any thing but. Homogeneity – the opposite of diversity - does not always translate into intra-group solidarity, much less, unanimity on every issue touching on the life and welfare of members. A few examples are in order. In terms of history, culture, language, and religion, Somalia is less diverse than Ghana. Yet, when driven by the urge to fight, the Somalia warlords put aside what united their people and appealed instead to “clan” differences to rationalise intra-group or inter-clan belligerence. The Hutus and the Tustis of Rwanda speak more or less the same language, and worship in the same Catholic Church. However, when they took up arms against each other, they played down their similarities and, instead, harped on the differences in ancestry, in the shape and size of noses, and in the “ascribed” mannerisms and moralities of their opponents.

The Yoruba of south western Nigeria provides an interesting case study in identity construction. Although they view themselves as a homogeneous “race”, their ancestor was, in all probability, an Arabic-speaking Al’du’a (meaning, “the prayer”) who, according to legend, had been lowered down from heaven (the Arabian peninsula, to be precise) by Olorun, “the Owner of the Sky.” Ife, where he landed and became known as “Oduduwa”, was not a virgin territory, but one already inhabited by peoples whose origin(s) are yet to be ascertained (Ajayi, 1998:10). The groups making up the Yoruba race (e.g., Oyo, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ijebu, Egba) existed in the pre-colonial era as separate political entities, with each jealously guarding its autonomy. Yoruba “identity” may exclude the Edo and the Itsekiri, but history indicates that the rulers of the two communities - the Oba of Benin and the Olu of Warri - are direct descendants of Oduduwa. The Ibolo and Igbinjima communities of Nigeria’s Kwara State are often grouped with the Yoruba, but they also have Nupe (or “Tapa”) links (Obayemi, 2000:158). The identity lines will need to be redrawn if historians trace the link between the old Gobir state and Gogobiri (one of Oduduwa’s cousins). Conversely, the Ife-Modakeke conflict that has raged for years and claimed thousands of lives (despite the fact that the two Yoruba communities traced their origin to a common ancestor) is an “identity” puzzle that needs unravelling.

The Yoruba’s experience is not unique. The Bamileke ethnic group in Cameroon is split into language groups – e.g., Bafoussam, Schang, Bafang, Bagarute, and Bambourous - with each group identifying with specific a department or district. The Batswana may be united by language, but Setswana is itself made up of a number of distinct dialects (Kwena, Ngwato, Ngwaketse, Tswana, Tlokwa, Kgatla, Rolong, and Malete). The Idoma, Igbirra and Igalan of Niger-Benue confluence are related to the Jukun, and are sometimes referred to as ‘Apa people’ (Obayemi, 2000:160), but they are not similar in every respect, and have not deemed it politically expedient to organise under the banner of the Jukun “race” or nationality.

The preceding observations should not be construed as discounting the relevance of ethnicity in state construction. However, the value attached to ethnicity will to a large extent depend on where it stands in an individual’s (and ultimately, the entire population’s) scale of identity preferences, i.e., on the identity value of citizenship. Everything being equal, ethnic identity will rank high where it
is the one that, in the estimation of the individual, confers maximum benefits and carries minimum negative consequences. An Olympic gold medal or a Nobel prize may shore up the identity value of, or pride in, the recipient country’s citizenship. In contrast, when a country’s nationals are frequently associated with a particularly disagreeable conduct – e.g., credit card forgery, drug trafficking, and assassinations – the “costs” of the country’s citizenship would rise relative to the benefits.

Where the nation-state fails to meet the basic needs, particularly, security and survival needs, the tendency will be for the individual to turn to his/her group for protection. In such circumstances, the individual will likely identity with his tribe or religion, and equation (6) below will more or less capture his mood:

\[ P(\mathbf{x}_1, \mathbf{x}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{x}_n) > SI \quad \cdots \quad (6) \]

Thus, in time of hostilities, the Hutu and the Tutsi almost invariably look up to their respective ethnic communities as the only safe havens worth retreating to. It is only when conditions return to normal that members will consider crossing identity borders or casting off the ethnic labels tied round their necks by their and the opposing groups. Similarly, the miscellaneous threats to life and property in northern Nigeria following the military coup of January 1966 heightened among the victims of mob attacks (the Igbo) a sense of group solidarity. The threats raised the “costs” of Nigerian citizenship relative to Igbo nationality, and, as long as the Igbo were under siege, increased the appeal (the potential benefits) of ethnic identity.

Identification with the Nigerian nation was at its highest level in the post-war period of the early 1970s – the period when the “oil boom” not only opened up immense economic possibilities but also enhanced the external image of the country. The policy of national reconciliation pursued by the Gowon Administration brought the hitherto excluded Igbo back into the political mainstream, and, combined with the country’s new economic clout, fostered the average Nigerian’s pride in the country’s citizenship. During this period, it was fashionable to identify more with the nation-state than the ethnic group. More or less the same situation prevails in Botswana where good governance practices join up with sound economic management to enhance the identity value of Botswana citizenship and enhance the country’s international prestige.

In contrast to the 1970s when, thanks to economic prosperity and wise statesmanship, national identity prevailed over primordial loyalties, ethnic and religious revivalism was the outcome of the economic decline and political tension that were Nigeria’s lot in the 1980s up to the present period. The first danger signal came in the form of the controversy over the results of the presidential elections held in 1979 to herald the termination of military, and the return to, civilian, rule. The constitutional interpretation given to the results of the election scuttled the presidential ambition of the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The Chief, it must be recalled, had been formally declared as the “Leader of the Yoruba” in 1966 when the cloud of war was gathering across the Nigerian sky. The declaration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as winner of the 1979 presidential election was taken by the politically active members of the Yoruba ethnic group as a conspiracy against their “race”. Depending on the audience, a political harangue delivered by a Yoruba political leader is not adjudged complete unless it is laced with references to “northern”, “Muslim”, or “Hausa-Fulani” domination. The Igbo, and the so-called minorities from the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt have since taken the cue from the Yoruba by voicing their own concerns of “marginalisation.” With the swearing-in in May 1999 of a new civilian government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba but who would prefer to be referred to as a Nigerian, it is the turn of the “core North” to cry of “marginalisation.

The polarisation and inter-group tension that became pronounced after the return to civilian rule in 1999 have raised questions about the impact of diversity on the federal structure. Ethnic advocacy
groups have sprung up in different parts of the country voicing dissatisfaction with the existing arrangement. These groups include the Odu’a People’s Congress (OPC), the Afenifere, the Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the South-South group, the Middle Belt Forum, and, not to be left behind, the Northern Elders Forum, and the Arewa People’s Congress. In the last two years, violence has erupted in different parts of the country, claiming thousands of life and resulting in whole scale destruction of property. Although the conflict tends to be blamed on ethnic or religious diversity, other factors yet to be ascertained must be at play. Indeed, failure to ascertain the real motives may itself trigger and aggravate conflict – as equation 7 suggests:

\[ P (x_m) = k_1, k_2, k_n \ldots (7) \]

In many other cases, it was the act of a few individuals, rather than spontaneous group action, that sparked inter-group confrontations. The agent provocateurs might have been propelled by xenophobia or personal grudges into “ascribing” certain negative attributes to members of another ethnic group and “fastening” presumably positive qualities round members of their own tribe. Let us examine a few random examples. The Yoruba-Hausa clashes in Shagamu of July 1999 (two months after the swearing in of a new civilian government) started when a few Hausa women were alleged to have broken the curfew that was imposed by the “indigenes” of the town as part of the traditional “oro” ritual. The follow-up Hausa-Yoruba confrontation in Kano in July-August was essentially a reprisal for the Shagamu attacks on Hausas – in other words, an event that was foreseeable, considering the prominence given by the media to the careless utterances of “oro” protagonists and the blackout imposed on the role of a few Yorubas who shielded Hausas from attackers in Shagamu.

The manifest causes of the civil unrest are ethnic and/or religious diversities \((x_1\) and/or \(x_2\)). The remote causes \((x_m)\) are far more important. The civil disturbances are essentially symptoms of a deeper malaise – i.e., an accretion of long-standing socio-economic and political problems and the increasing loss of confidence in the problem-solving capacity of existing institutions. For instance, the political system is just emerging from years of military rule and wrestling with the challenges of pluralism and democracy. The economy, devastated by years of mismanagement and corruption, shows no sign of immediate recovery. Related to the economic down turn is the worsening social situation. More than one-third of the population live below the internationally recognised poverty line – that is, on less than a dollar a day. With the employment freeze in the public service, and the retrenchment in the private sector, products of the educational system are finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs. The limited opportunities in the job market have shifted the attention of literate and able-bodied citizens to the under-ground economy. Recent years have witnessed an upsurge in the incidence of such petty crimes as stealing, house breaking, arson and assault on persons and property. More alarming is the phenomenal increase in organised crime. Without regard to the external image of Nigeria or the Nigerians’ craving for peace and quiet in their neighbourhoods, crime syndicates have provided solace to drug traffickers, armed robbers, hired assassins, and terrorists.

The general perception that the existing institutions (particularly, the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary) are too weak and too corrupt to stem the rot has emboldened non-state actors to take the law into their hands. In what look like parallel governmental arrangements, institutions such as the OPC, the Bakassi Boys and local vigilante groups have pursued criminals to their hideouts, and administered instant justice. Naturally, the paramilitary nature of these non-state bodies and their disregard for normal police or judicial procedure, have pitched them against the state. The OPC and the Bakassi Boys have proved particularly troublesome for the authorities. Invoking the aid of supernatural forces, these highly mobile groups have sacked police posts, summarily tried and instantly punished criminals, and engaged heavily armed troops in battles for supremacy. While their methods are unorthodox, their image as effective crime busters enhances their popularity at the local level (TELL, 2000:40-41). It is when their overzealous acts threatened the liberties of sections
of civil society that the need for organised government becomes most pressing. This raises the issue, not necessarily of diversity, but of decentralisation, and specifically, of devolution of internal security powers to authorities best placed to exercise such powers.

At any rate, if the probability of identifying with the nation-state is correlated with the state’s capacity to meet the citizen’s pressing needs, attention would have to be given to measures aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and productivity of, as well as ethical standards in, the public service institutions. Yet, in the drive for efficiency and productivity, the nation-state almost invariably encounters resistance from groups that perceive themselves to be “disadvantaged”, and therefore, sidelined. This, as pointed out later, is the dilemma facing the African states as they seek to balance the claims of merit with the demand for representation in public bodies. It further underscores the need to address the issue of decentralisation.

**Religion and conflict**

The conclusion thus far is that ethnic diversity is not by itself the cause of conflict and state collapse unless and until individuals and groups capitalise on it to fulfil some pressing needs. The same can be said of diversity of the religious kind. An attribute of religion (that distinguishes it from ethnicity) is its ability to render identity boundaries permeable on one front while putting up and reinforcing new barriers on another. The challenge is in establishing the conditions under which it serves as a unifying, as against a divisive, force.

Contemporary analyses of the impact of religion on state construction tend to present a picture of conflict – that is, conflict between the spiritual thrusts of the former, and the secular orientation of the latter. Conflict is inevitable where religion has truly succumbed to the forces of secularisation. In other words, when religion is viewed as a “weapon” of political or economic struggle, it not only deviates from its original purpose (of soul purification), but it becomes an agent of instability. Although the solution would appear to lie in the separation of church and the state, analysts (in much the same way as politicians) sometimes find it difficult resisting the temptation to enlist one in the service of the other. The temptation is strong where multiple (e.g., x₁/ethnic, x₂/religious, x₃/class, and xₘ) identities appear simultaneously to drive inter-group relations. This, in fact, is the dilemma facing the observers of Nigeria’s “religious” conflict – that is, isolating the various identities before determining the impact of each on attitudes and behaviour. For example, in his analysis of the role of faith in the politics of northern Nigeria, Rev. Fr. Kukah is at a loss tracing the exact impact of religious vis-à-vis other competing identities. According to him (Kukah, 1993:x):

> “… the ascendancy of Hausa-Fulani hegemony has coincided with the alienation and marginalisation of the non-Muslims, Christians and adherents of traditional religions in the region….Many Christians would seem to have come to the conclusion that since religion has been a major factor in determining the staying power of the Muslims, it has become imperative for Christians now to use religion for achieving their socio-political activity….”

What is not clear here is the object or level of analysis. Is the focus on the Hausa-Fulani (ethnicity), or on the hegemonic group (socio-economic class), or on Muslims (religion)? Let us begin with the assumption that the reference is to the Hausa-Fulani. Even if the Hausa-Fulani is, as a group, united under the banner of Islam, it cannot by any stretch of imagination be taken as an economically homogeneous group. The Hausa-Fulani is made up of “sarakuna” (the nobility), the “talakawa” (the commoners), and the growing middle class. To assume that the sarakuna have a hold on the minds and soul of the rest of the Hausa-Fulani population may be to underestimate the reasoning capacity of the average human being. If the reference is to Muslims, the analysis has to account for the empirical fact that one does not have to be “Hausa-Fulani”, or a member of a ruling class, to be a Muslim. Unless the analytic issues are carefully handled, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to
comprehend the actual nature of conflict that has raged for decades in different parts of country. As Table 2 indicates, a number of the disturbances that were attributed to inter-religious discord had other underlying motives, some of these, internal sectarian differences, ethnic rivalry, and plain xenophobia.

Table 2: Year, Location, and Apparent Causes of Religious Disturbances in Nigeria, 1980-90

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location of Disturbance</th>
<th>Principal Actors, Possible Motives, and consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1980</td>
<td>Zaria (Kaduna State)</td>
<td>Disturbances leading to the destruction of property belonging mainly to Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 18-29, 1980</td>
<td>Yan-Awaki Ward, Kano (Kano State)</td>
<td>Riots by Maitatsine sect in which 4,177 people died and property extensively destroyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29-30, 1982</td>
<td>Bullumkutu, Maiduguri, Borno State</td>
<td>Kalakato and Maitastsine sects went on the rampage (118 deaths, and extensive damage to property)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29-30, 1982</td>
<td>Kano, Kano State</td>
<td>Muslim demonstrations and burning of churches (possibly, a spill-over from Bullumkutu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 27-March 5, 1984</td>
<td>Dobeli Ward, Jimeta-Yola, Gongola State</td>
<td>Riots by Maitatsine sect; 568 deaths, extensive destruction of property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26-28, 1985</td>
<td>Pantami Ward, Gombe, Bauchi State</td>
<td>Maitatsine riots; 105 deaths, extensive destruction of property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1986</td>
<td>Ilorin, Kwara State</td>
<td>Muslim-Christian clashed during Christian Easter procession; no death reported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1986</td>
<td>Ibadan, University of Ibadan, Oyo State</td>
<td>Demonstrations by Muslim students, leading to the incineration of the Risen Christ in the University’s Chapel of Resurrection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1987</td>
<td>(a) Kafanchan, Kaduna State</td>
<td>Christian-Muslim clashes, leading to loss of life, and setting of mosques on fire by Christians and native Kajes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>(b) Katsina, Funtua, Zaria, and Gusau (all in Kaduna State)</td>
<td>Wave of religious riots in which Muslims, possibly in response to events in Kafanchan, set church buildings and property belonging to Christians on fire. Many lives lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1988</td>
<td>Kaduna, Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna State</td>
<td>Riots in which students destroyed the foundation walls of the Christian chapel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1991</td>
<td>(a) Katsina, Katsina State</td>
<td>Religious violence spearheaded by Malam Yahaya Yakubu, leader of the Shi’ite sect in Katsina, in protest over a blasphemous publication in Fun-Times. Several lives lost, and valuable property destroyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>(b) Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi State</td>
<td>Started as a quarrel between a Fulani man and a Sayawa meat seller in Tafawa Balewa. Later escalated into a full-blown riot, and then took the character of a religious war in Bauchi. Several lives lost, and property valued at hundreds of millions of Naira was destroyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1991</td>
<td>Kano, Kano State</td>
<td>A peaceful procession initiated by the Izzala sect to halt Rev. Reinherd Bonnke’s planned crusade in Kano. Later degenerated into bloody violence with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
thousands of lives lost, and property estimated at millions of Naira destroyed.

May 1992

Zango Kataf, Zaria, Kaduna, Ikara (all in Kaduna State)

A communal feud between the Katafs and the Hausas soon took the character of a religious (Christian vs. Muslim) war. Several lives lost, and valuable property destroyed.

January 1993

Funtua, Katsina State

The Kalakato religious sect assaulted the village head and burnt down police vehicles. Lives and property were destroyed.

Note: Official casualty figures (where cited).


The preceding observations reveal the need for the analyst to suspend judgement on the impact of diversity until the views of the populations have been empirically ascertained. Rather than be led by stereotypes into erroneous assumptions, it is advisable to rely on the research subjects’ opinions on the relative importance of the various identity types. It is this pragmatic and empirical approach that another observer (Elaigwu, 1993) adopts with a certain degree of success. He cites examples of Christians and non-Hausa-Fulanis who occupied prominent positions in government headed by the late Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto. Among them are Michael Audu Buba, Jolly Tanko Yusufu, Solomon Lar, Sunday Awoniyi, and Edwin Ogbu. He could have added the names of George Ohikere, S A Ajayi and others who were neither members of the “sarakuna” nor Muslims but who served in the then north regional government. This runs counter to the image of the Sardauna of Sokoto as a Hausa-Fulani ethnic supremacist and Islamic fundamentalist who could not imagine himself in the company of, let alone, greet “those chiefs who were not Muslims” (Kukah, 1993: 22-23). Elaigwu further notes that religion was in fact not an issue in the immediate post-independence period. This is because when matched against other competing identities, religion ranked lowest in the priorities of political parties and interest groups. When faced with choices in the 1960s, the political parties and interest groups, according to him (Elaigwu, 1993:8):

“…often submerged or pushed to a lower level, the religious issue.”

Religion became an issue only after the 1980s, and even then other factors were always at play. The primary role of faith, it must be remembered, is to shield the adherents from evil, nay, earthly, temptations, and keep them focused on afterlife rewards. The close link between religion and morality make both particularly appropriate for a decaying society – a society that is desperately hankering for the gains, but doing everything possible to avoid paying the costs, of modernisation. There is no doubt that some religious injunctions are more demanding on the devotees than others, and inter-faith tolerance requires that one group be sensitive to the other’s prohibitions. Yet, after making the necessary allowances for differences in devotional practices, a careful observer cannot but be struck by the similarities in the precepts. Muslims, Christians and adherents of the traditional religions, for instance, are supposed to be guided by essentially similar moral injunctions. In the Holy Qur’an, neither nationality nor membership of a religious denomination counts as much as one’s conduct. Surat Hujurat, Ayat 13, puts it as follows:

“O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female; and We have made you into nations and clans so that you may recognise (not oppress) one another. Verily the most honourable among you, in the sight of Allah, is the most righteous among you. Surely, Allah is All-knowing, All-Aware.”
However, under the influence of socio-economic and political change, religion has come under secular assault. At least three levels of secularisation can be identified. The first is the level of the clergy itself – the mosque and church leaders who see their role essentially as one of membership recruitment and resource mobilisation. If the revelations coming in the wake of internal disputes are anything to go by, it would appear that the religious establishment has to reform itself before addressing society’s ills (The New Treasure, 2001:15-18). Men and women of God are involved in open squabbles, the bone of contention being the disputants’ positions in church hierarchy, access to resources and power over the congregation. At religious revivals and crusades, attention focuses more on pulling the crowd than on spreading the Word. Notorious criminals have found places of honour (as “chief launchers”) at foundation laying ceremonies of churches and, possibly, mosques. Places of worship that the prophets and the saints would have shunned – those constructed with monies from dubious sources or in which the Devil competes with the Almighty for the supplicants’ love – are today the pride of the modern, upwardly mobile congregation. Religious denominations seek to outshine one another with imposing structures constructed with illicit funds. Naturally, any development that threatens this arrangement will be viewed as a declaration of war.

Taking the cue from the clergy, the laity have lost sight of the distinction between earthly demands and spiritual injunctions. At the level of the individual and the group, religion is increasingly becoming another means of improving one’s daily lot. The so-called riots that threatened Kenya’s acknowledged religious harmony in February 2001 are a case in point. The riots started on Friday, February 9, 2001, in the outskirts of Nairobi as a land dispute, but soon assumed the religious identities of the principal antagonists. The response of the leaders of the two religious communities (the Muslims and the Christians) provides a case study in conflict prevention and contrasts sharply with the failure in other communities to resolve conflict “upstream”, that is, before it becomes unmanageable. Immediately news of the clashes reached the Muslim leaders, they carried out their own investigations that revealed the real motives of the combatants. They wasted no time in dissociating the Muslim community from the actions of their brethren in faith, and in tendering an open apology to the Christians. Despite the fact that a number of churches had been razed to the ground by irate Muslim youths, the Christian leaders appealed for calm. They agreed with their Muslim counterparts that this was not a religious conflict, but a quarrel over bread and butter issues. This is how calm and the traditional Christian-Muslim harmony were restored. In effect, the two communities cast off the collar of prejudice fastened round their necks before it was used in dragging them to war.

It is, however, not every time that the fires lit by religious misunderstanding are so quickly and easily doused. Where the underlying motive of a religious confrontation is political, attempts at bringing the adversaries together often prove difficult. The experience of Cote d’Ivoire after the conduct of the 2001 presidential elections reveals the challenge in disconnecting religion from politics when the issue at stake is power. Although church leaders in Cote d’Ivoire openly condemned the slaughter of innocent lives in the name of religion, the disturbances claimed several lives and resulted in large scale destruction – the victims being Muslims from the northern part of the country. The government has since moved to place national reconciliation high on its agenda and has taken steps to safeguard the life and property of every Ivorian citizen. Still, the chances cannot be ruled out that politicians elsewhere desperate for support, posts, or attention will find in religion a weapon to use against their opponents. To establish whether religion, or for that matter, ethnicity, is the motivation or a cover for a deeper motive, it is necessary to undertake studies comparing the research subjects’ evaluation of a whole range of probabilities open to them as citizens. This entails acknowledging the observed population’s rankings of competing identities within the framework of the identity value of citizenship.

**Conflict over access to resources**

The need for a holistic approach to the study of diversity is predicated not only on the inadequacy of single-factor analyses, but on the impact of social change on inter-group relations. As noted earlier,
civil strife in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot be attributed solely to ethnic or religious diversity. To explain the dynamics of social relations, it is important to accommodate one other variable in our analysis – that is, socio-economic change. In so far as it explains the citizen’s interpretation of “reality”, socio-economic change is likely to condition the citizen’s identity choices and his readiness to accommodate diversity. For instance, increasing rates of population growth, urbanisation, and literacy may, on the one hand, expose individuals to new experiences and break the stranglehold of traditional values and loyalties. On the other hand, an increasing tempo of change may prove so threatening to some cherished traditional values that the adherents of such values feel the need to retreat to ancestral lands and mount a rear-guard action against “foreign” influences.

Changes in the population’s economic conditions, in particular, may redraw identity lines and spin off new politics of identity. Rather than proceed from natural differences, identity politics tends to follow ‘transactional’ and opportunistic lines. This is indeed the assumption underlying the view that Africa’s raging conflict is neither ethnic nor religious, but one that is inextricably linked to conflict over resources and symbols (Mohapatra, 1999; Collier and Biswinger, 1999). Appealing as this argument is, it suffers from gross over-simplification, and under-rates the challenge of diversity in governance and state construction processes. By definition, governance is closely intertwined with “contests” and conflicts of various kinds – e.g., contest for power, for how it is exercised, for the share of the benefits and costs, for access to resources, and for the hearts and soul of the citizenry and the different sub-cultures.

The experience of two countries, Botswana and Sierra Leone, debunks the argument that Africa’s civil wars are traceable directly to “contests for control of natural resources”. These are two countries that are equally endowed with natural resources (diamonds) and were faced with basically similar challenges of development and nation-building. However, while diamonds earnings were ploughed back into development projects in Botswana, they brought death and destruction to Sierra Leone.

This is not the end of the paradox. Sierra Leone started at independence as a vibrant democracy – in fact, as the first African country in which an opposition party, Siaka Stevens’ All Peoples’ Congress, unseated the incumbent Albert Margai’s regime in a free election. Despite – or perhaps because of - the goodwill that civil society actors lavished on the APC, the former opposition party moved quickly to legitimise what it once stoically resisted, i.e., one-party rule. It did not take Sierra Leone too long to succumb to political and institutional decay and the after-effects of military incursion into governance. As the governance of Sierra Leone changed hands under cloudy circumstances (from Siaka Stevens to General Joseph Momoh, and from Momoh to the military adventurists) faith in the integrity of government institutions declined, and with, the identity value of citizenship. In any case, a system whose legitimacy is founded on personalities – rather on rules and autonomous institutions - cannot but collapse when the “strong man” holding it together disappears from the scene.

In contrast to Sierra Leone, Botswana has over the years nurtured its governance institutions thus preparing the system for environmental turbulence and enabling it to survive the periodic changes at leadership levels. It began in 1966 from practically nothing (besides cattle kraals, an impoverished rural population, and a high dependence on foreign aid). With the opening up of diamond mines and the judicious investment of the returns on socio-economic and infrastructure development projects, and the strengthening of institutions, it began from the 1980s to register impressive growth rates (an average of 6 per cent per annum). Botswana is far from being a perfect, tension-less, corruption-free society, but at least, it has a governance infrastructure that enjoys the confidence and sustains the pride of its citizens.
IV. Diversity Management in Sub-Saharan African: Approaches and Impact

In responding to the challenge of diversity, various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have instituted measures aimed at acknowledging the identities, and guaranteeing the rights of parties to the state creation endeavour. The “one-party” formula having failed to “integrate” intrinsically plural societies, various countries shifted their attention to governance and popular participation strategies (Amoo, 1997). The adoption of the federal constitutional formula by countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and, to some extent, South Africa, is one type of response to the challenge of diversity. Another is the “entrenchment” of the principle of representation not only in constitutions, but also in public service laws. Devolution of powers to local representative bodies is yet another measure that has been embarked upon in the effort at equitable sharing of the costs and benefits of state construction among the constituent parts. How successful some countries have been in implementing these diversity management measures is the focus of the subsequent paragraphs.

Nigeria: the quest for unity in diversity

Ever since 1954 when the federal constitution was adopted, “unity in diversity” has been Nigeria’s main goal. As provided for in section 15 (2) of the 1999 constitution, the corner-stone of state policy is national integration. Accordingly, “discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.”

Despite the elaborate constitutional and statutory provisions on merit and the professionalism of the civil service, recruitment into the service takes cognisance of the country’s diversity. The “federal character” policy, for instance, was introduced in response to the educational imbalance between the south and the north. It was felt that the merit system, by stressing the possession of formal qualifications, would be “identity blind”, and, in that state, would tend to exclude candidates from the “educationally disadvantaged” parts of the country. As it was politically unacceptable for a powerful institution such as the civil service to be “dominated” by a specific ethnic or geographical group, framers of the constitution began from 1979 to-date to entrench the following clause in the nation’s fundamental law:

“The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.”

The scope and intent of this “federal character” provision have generated heated debate. Its critics regard it as a smoke screen for ethnic favouritism. Its advocates see it differently – as the only safeguard against nepotism (Balogun, 1982). In any case, as reported earlier, Section 39 (1) of the 1999 constitution specifically forbids discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, gender, religion, or political affiliation. The only instance whereby the chief executive (the federal president or the state governor) could apply preferential treatment in appointments is in relation to “posts of confidence” – essentially, political, or quasi-political positions like those of minister, permanent secretary, inspector-general of police, and advisers.

The Civil Service (Reorganisation) Decree 43 of 1988 sought to fine-tune the constitutional provisions on “federal character.” While reaffirming commitment to the principle of representative bureaucracy, the Decree limited the application of “federal character” to entry-level, junior management positions (then ranging from GL07 to GL 10). Thenceforth, recruitment into higher-level vacancies would be strictly on merit – defined as, “experience, performance on the job, length of service, good conduct, relevant qualifications, training, interview performance, and relevant
examination, where appropriate” (Civil Service Reorganisation Decree, No 43, 1988). The 1988 Decree has since been amended leaving the “federal character” clause intact. It should also be noted that one of the Federal Executive Bodies listed under the 1999 constitution is the “Federal Character Commission” whose role consists essentially in ensuring that the principle of representative bureaucracy is maintained in public service appointments.

Whether Nigeria has succeeded in promoting national integration through the enforcement of the “federal character” clause of the constitution is open to debate. A senior police official, Hamman Misau, was quoted as attributing police inefficiency in part to the application of the federal character principle in staff recruitment (The Guardian Online – [http://ngrguardiannews.com](http://ngrguardiannews.com), Monday, April 30, 2001, p.7).

In the meantime, the Nigerian federation has to grapple with a number of fundamental issues. Among these are the issues of “rotational presidency” (or “power shift”, as it is known in some quarters), revenue allocation or resource sharing among the federating units, the apportionment of responsibilities among the three “tiers” of government (federal, state, and local government), and “the national question”. It goes without saying that inter-group dialogue on each of the issues has been inhibited by the failure of the parties to specify, prior to reconciling, the identities that they loosely employ in staking or defending their claims. The tendency of the opinion leaders to shift from one identity to another not only confuses their followers, but also accounts for the growing instability.

**Ethiopia: state creation through empowerment of nationalities**

Ethiopia is one of the countries in which the government confronted the issue of ethnicity head on. Unlike Uganda where ethnicity and religion were perceived as threats to the survival of the nation-state, Ethiopia sees nothing wrong in acknowledging, and in fact, celebrating, differences in language, culture, and nationality. In deference to the perceived will of the constituent regions and nationalities, Chapter 3, article 39, paragraphs 1 to 3 of the 1994 Constitution underscores the unconditional right of every nation, nationality, and people in the country:

“To self-determination, including the right to secession…to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express and to promote its culture and to preserve its history…to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits, and equitable representation in regional and national governments”.

The 1994 constitution goes beyond “mainstreaming” cultural diversity in central government structures and policies. It provides for the establishment of regional and local government institutions staffed with persons indigenous to the local communities, and accountable to citizens of these communities. Citizen preferences are, as a matter of policy, reflected in the formulation and execution of local infrastructure projects, the staffing and discipline of regional police forces, and the composition of local legislative and executive organs. The “recall” procedure enshrined in the 1994 constitution has also gone a long way in ensuring the accountability of officeholders to local electors (Balogun, 2000:165; Beyene, 2000). The right to secession has not been put to the test, but it is highly unlikely that acts leading to the dismemberment of the entity known as Ethiopia would have an easy ride.

**Namibia: balancing diversity with racial harmony**

For historical reasons, the focus of diversity management in the Namibian civil service is not on ethnic balancing – important as this may be in some other African countries. The primary concern in Namibia is how to improve the conditions of the disadvantaged black population, and enhance the status of women, while at the same time, assuaging the fears of the non-black population. As in
the Nigerian case reported below, discrimination of any kind is forbidden. Article 10(2) of the Namibian constitution states as follows:

“No persons may be discriminated against on grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed, or social or economic status.”

Against the background of the system of inequality inherited on the country’s independence, the government had to give high priority to the recruitment of black personnel. A lot of progress has been achieved since independence. As part of the rationalisation process initiated by the Prime Minister of Namibia in 1992, 97 per cent of public service posts have been filled with members of the formerly disadvantaged groups (Republic of Namibia, 2000:38). In order to defuse the crisis triggered by rapid demobilisation, the government further launched the Peace Project under which over 9000 ex-combatants were placed in various offices, ministries and agencies (Republic of Namibia, 2000:38).

There is no doubt that the infusion of new blood into the Namibian civil service would generate tension. At the initial stage, the civil service was faced with the challenge of translating texts from Afrikaans (the language of the departing colonial administration) into English. There was also the problem of getting officials from different backgrounds to subscribe to a common administrative ethos. The country’s colonial history was not of much help, particularly, insofar as it fuelled interracial distrust and tension.

The gender angle

Ethnic diversity and the tension accompanying it have received a lot of attention in the literature. Still, and in a quiet way, women’s role in development is becoming a major item on the public policy agenda in Africa. All countries forbid discrimination based on gender. In addition, gender ministries and focal points have been established to ensure equal opportunities for women and men. Today, there are women legislators, ministers, university presidents, permanent secretaries, and managing directors of key state enterprises. Women parliamentarians constituted “only 10.4 per cent” of the total parliamentarians across Africa by January 1997 (Africa Leadership Forum, 1998). This is an improvement over the 1994 when women occupied only 8 per cent of parliamentary seats across African countries, and a mere 6 per cent of ministerial-level posts (Bekele, 2000: 255-7).

Nonetheless, and despite the fact that the traditional barriers to women competition in socio-economic fields are rapidly coming down, it will take some time before an equitable parity could be worked out between men and women. A number of factors account for this. For one thing, and except in a few countries, women may be twice, or even thrice, as likely to be illiterate relative to men. Admittedly, school enrolment pattern varies from one African country to another. All the same, a few countries need to institute measures aimed at closing the education gap between men and women. With 1997 as a base year, the net enrolment ratio of female/male in secondary schools for Lesotho was 122, for Namibia 108, Botswana and Mauritius, 106. This is in contrast to 31:100 for Guinea, 37 for Chad, 53 for Niger, 48 for Benin, 37 for Chad, and 31 for Guinea (UNIFEM, 2000: 68).

Up to now, the recruitment of women into the public service has not generated any negative reactions from their male counterparts. This is probably because the influx of women has not reached a level deemed threatening to men. If there are cases of sexual harassment, they are either few or under-reported. And with the possible exception of a few places, men have come to terms with the idea of answering to women bosses and the reality of working with female colleagues.
V. Diversity, conflict, and the state construction process: a summation and a proposal

Ever since 1648 when the Treaty of Westphalia legitimised the doctrine of national sovereignty, the “state” became not only the entity whose rights and obligations are recognised in international law, but one directly accountable in domestic law for the rights and obligations of groups located within its borders. Besides guaranteeing order and a minimum degree of stability in international relations, holding the state responsible for individual and group welfare confers several benefits on the citizen. First, it enables the citizen to have access to goods and services which s/he, as an individual or a member of a closed community, cannot produce except at high cost. Secondly, it puts the government in each state under constant pressure to look out for the citizen’s interest – economic, security, psychic, and other interests too numerous to mention. Thirdly, and by the share fact of proximity, it is easy to hold the state responsible for the timely delivery of essential services – at least, easier than placing the service delivery burden on a distant, supranational or global, body.

Its obvious strengths and “benefits” notwithstanding, the nation-state is under intense pressure to share its powers with the constituent parts. In confronting the former, the latter enlists the support of competing, but sometimes overlapping, identities (e.g., ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic). Yet, by failing to reconcile the conflict, or build on the overlap, among the identities, the parties to the state construction compact have not only compromised their positions vis-à-vis the state but have also, wittingly or unwittingly, promoted the cause of conflict and instability. By playing on the emotions and insecurities of members, the various identity groups frequently weaken the state, and unwittingly, their own bargaining positions vis-à-vis one another. The winner in this complicated transaction is thus neither the centre whose dominance is being challenged, nor the groups at periphery that are locked in an eternal struggle for supremacy. The beneficiaries of the divisive arrangement are a tiny minority that is capable of selling its prejudices to the majority and, by so doing, imposing the consequential costs. This tiny minority is made up of corrupt officials, active members of assassination squads and criminal syndicates, as well as the self-seeking shepherd and the flock.

One thing is clear: a citizenship devalued is an unreliable ally in the state construction endeavour. The disaffection that goes with the lowering of the value of citizenship pushes individuals and groups to unleash aggression on vaguely defined adversaries and to vent their grievances in ways that are hardly supportive of nation building efforts. The way forward in the management of diversity lies in creating a healthy and predictable environment for inter-personal and inter-group competition. This entails transforming the multiple identities into a structure serving as an incentive to reciprocal exchange of ideas, perceptions, and experiences, and eliminating rigidities in inter-group positions. In multi-cultural environments, meeting this challenge requires that parties to the state construction compact (particularly, the organized political parties and civil society groups) convene a summit at which a consensus on national strategic objectives (and on the underlying ethos and obligations) could be reached.

The identity value of citizenship represents a modest effort at the establishment of an incentive framework – a framework that brings transparency to the murky field of diversity. At the very least, the identity value of citizenship suggests a systematic way of “measuring” the importance that the various segments of the population attach to competing identities, and by, implication, to their membership of the contraption called the state. It serves other practical purposes. First, its insistence on the separation of appearance from reality in diversity situations helps pin down the real “causes” of conflict. Secondly, by tracing the linkages between an individual’s identity leanings and his probable responses to diversity situations, the concept enables us to insulate (or “contain”) low-intensity conflicts and settle them up-stream before they escalate into full-blown civil or military confrontations. Examples of minor conflicts that were allowed to fester and to take on an “opportunistic” (e.g. ethnic or religious) snow-ball effect are those between an Ibo tenant and a Yoruba landlord (over rent payment), and between a Yoruba man and his non-Yoruba neighbour.
over each other’s sanitary habits. Thirdly, the identity value concept holds state and civil society actors simultaneously accountable for the enhancement of the “benefits” as well as for the reduction of the “costs” of citizenship. Fourthly, it places state agencies (especially law adjudication and enforcement as well as service-delivery agencies) under constant pressure to enhance their capacities, and to promote citizen welfare. Above all, it provides a framework for the design and implementation of community-based decentralisation programmes.

REFERENCES


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TELL, No. 31, July 31, 2000 (See the article captioned “War Without End”, by Mikail Mumuni and Janet Mba-Afolabi).


