



Exhuming Trends in Ethnic Conflict and Cooperation in Africa: Some selected states

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Abstract

The world-wide surge in the number and violence of open conflicts revolving around ethnic or religious identities towards the end of the 20th century is a powerful reminder that communal identities are not a remnant of the past but a potent force in contemporary politics. After three decades of independence, ethnicity is more central than ever to the political process of many African countries. Africa has had more than its fair share of ethnic dissent which has sometimes plummeted states into civil war as was experienced in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and reached frightening proportions in Rwanda and now Sudan. Political openings and multiparty elections have led to the formation of innumerable overtly or covertly ethnic political parties, which serve more often to increase civil strife of which the most recent addition to the long list in Africa is Kenya.

Africa's ethnic disturbances have occurred more within national borders, thus giving rise to unstable domestic systems. This paper attempts to address

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these ethnic issues by assessing certain conflict spots as opposed to areas of relative calm in Africa. The assessment of states on both sides of the divide (i.e. cooperation and conflict) is done in the hope that trends that lead to conflict as well as those that lead to cooperation can be identified. In order to establish these patterns of cooperation and conflict, it became pertinent to use a broad range of case studies, notably, Tanzania, Botswana, South Africa, Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire. The result of this study tells that the lack or presence of equity and justice (components of good governance), high literacy levels and an external threat, are factors which strengthen or diminish possibilities of ethnic conflict.

Introduction

From Thucydides to the Christian Fathers, David Hume and to the present day, man has tried to explain why men fight. In all these, there is no single unified theory capable of explaining why men fight. Thus the thrust of William James' argument – that men should be looking for causes of peace instead of causes of war, could not have been better imagined. This thrust serves as motivation for this study.

Scholars in the past two decades have occupied themselves with finding the causes of this drift with a bid to understand them and proffer solutions. Quaker-Dokubo (2001), for instance, attributes this trend in Africa to the gross neglect of her cultural basis. There is a negation of ethnic, regional and cultural diversities rather than their recognition as building blocks in the construction of a civil society. There is an arrogance of intellectual paradigms, such as Modernisation, Dependency and Neo-Marxist theories, that often relegates ethnicity to the realm of false consciousness or considers it the unfortunate remnants of a pre-modern Africa. So too, using Nigeria as case study, scholars like Nnoli (1978) contend that ethnicity in post-colonial Africa is largely due to the way and manner their politics evolved.

One thing remains certain, however, while positions and solutions vary, the problem of rising ethnic conflicts remains and worsens by the day, so that, as noted by Marshall (2008), 'there are currently about 15 million displaced,

mainly internally displaced' persons and 'about 3.5 million transnational refugees'. The relatively recent sharp increases in these numbers have increased the continent's humanitarian plight. The result, as noted by Ibaba (2006:2), has been a negative impact on the economy and society through undermining the development of local economies and thereby exacerbating poverty.

Understanding ethnic groupings and ethnic conflicts

Defining ethnic groups is quite a difficult task. To some, it refers to a subjective perception of common origins, historical memories, ties and aspirations. Quaker-Dokubo (2001:44) explains: 'Ethnic group pertains to organized activities by persons linked by a consciousness of a special identity, who jointly seek to maximize their corporate political, economic and social interest.' Heeger (in Willigenburg 1995:13) refers to ethnic groups as 'cultural nations which are bound together in the first place by a common culture and which lack the internationally recognized organization of a sovereign state.'

Gurr (1993:17) classifies ethnic affiliations into three, namely: 'Ethno-Nationals, Indigenous Peoples and Communal Contenders.'

Ethno-Nationals are historically autonomous, and often large and regionally concentrated groups that are committed to achieving or regaining independent statehood. Examples here include Eritreans and East Timorese formerly under Ethiopia and Indonesia respectively, the Kurds in Iraq and Western Saharans under Morocco.

Indigenous peoples are politically conquered, culturally isolated, ecologically endangered and economically vulnerable descendants of the original inhabitants of a region. The Khoi-San (bushmen) of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia are examples of indigenous peoples.

Communal Contenders are culturally distinct groups in heterogeneous societies in which no single group constitutes a demographic majority of the population. In societies dominated by communal contenders, there is a

general acceptance of the moral equivalence of all groups. Political power at the centre is based on fluid or unstable inter-ethnic coalitions. Most African countries including Nigeria are dominated by communal contenders.

If, as Mthethwa-Sommers (in Nnoli 1998:417) observes, 'ethnic conflicts in Africa are an everyday occurrence', it becomes necessary to understand the term 'ethnic conflict'. Peterson and others (1982:1) posit that the word 'ethnic' is derived via Latin from the Greek *ethnos* which means nation or race. Leith and Solomon (2001:32) affirm further that 'various definitions of ethnicity build upon this by adding the idea of a common denominator, so to speak, that underlies this conception'.

Thomson (2000:58) defines an ethnic group as 'a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship, ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language Ethnicity becomes more pronounced when it is used to distinguish one social group from another within a specific territory'. He posits further, 'all individuals have ethnic allegiances irrespective of whether they are from the minority of a state's population or the majority, with the result that ethnicity as a sentiment is expressed by both majority and minority populations. Obviously, this social pluralism will lead to differences of interests, and this is where the possibility of ethnic conflict starts to emerge'.

Our analysis of trends in ethnic conflicts in Africa will thus revolve around the fact that most African states are largely heterogeneous states comprised of communal contenders, with each group seeking power, control and importance over the other.

Theories of ethnic conflict

In Africa we have witnessed naked ethnic wars and backsliding democracies in many places such as the Western Darfur Region, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, just to name a few. Hence Smith (1992:436) submits that 'in most recent times Africa has become

the hot bed of ethnic conflicts and movements over the last three decades. Many states are wrecked by ethnic dissension' In the words of Nobert Gabiro (2006:1): 'Among the most significant and growing challenges to peace, freedom, democratic governance and the rule of law in Africa are ethnic, racial, communal and religious intolerance and conflicts'. These no doubt lead to flagrant abuses of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and to crime, violence, apathy and environmental irresponsibility. But when or how did ethnicity get to be an integral part of African politics?

Within the context of neo-colonial statehood, ethnicity is a colonial derivative based on matriarchal or patriarchal relations forged in the distant past and used by an ethnic group as a defensive or offensive weapon against other groups. The colonialists posit that they 'tried to make a nation-state out of a hotch-potch of antagonistic and uncivilized African peoples but failed in their pious mission. The various tribes had age-long hatred for one another and as soon as the colonial power went, the natives descended into barbarism, maiming and killing each other' (Avugma 2000:1).

The Nationalists, on the other hand, see things differently as they paint idyllic pictures of the African past and blame all tribal conflicts that have erupted after independence solely on the colonialists. This viewpoint is as historically incorrect as it is undialectical. A less extreme position is taken by Bailey (1994:4) when he posits that 'the political map of Africa is a western colonial creation, drawn by western powers with little regard to the boundaries of historic ethnic homelands or the ethnic compositions of the subject population, and today these artificial or multi-ethnic nations lack the internal political cohesion necessary for survival as nations'.

Facts abound on how the internal evolution of some African communities before colonialism had provided groups of people the opportunity to appropriate the labour of others and subjugate other communities. This scenario definitely generated ethnic animosity and discrimination. It was these differences that were carefully and deliberately nurtured by the colonialists and later exploited by the local political bourgeoisie. Supporting this claim, Nnoli (1998) points out that a contributory factor that has made

ethnic conflicts more severe in Africa than in other parts of the world is the incursion and exploitation by the colonialists which compounded already strained inter-ethnic relations. In countries like Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Zimbabwe, colonial powers utilised the segmentation of ethnic groups to their advantage. There is no denying that since the colonial era, African states have frequently been hampered by instability, corruption and ethnic violence. Great instability has mainly been the result of marginalisation of other ethnic groups. Many politicians have used their positions of power to ignite negative sentiments arising from such marginalisation. While affirming the position of Nnoli above, Suberu (2003) also contends that ethnic conflict arises from the discontent of groups toward the perceived domination by other groups who are unduly favoured by the government.

The globalisation theory contends that the upsurge of ethnic conflicts in Africa in the 1980s and 1990s was a reaction to events in East Europe. The collapse of the old order in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s had a tremendous impact on the fragile nation states of Africa. Some of them have reacted, in the words of Bekker (1993:81), 'by increasingly articulating similar demands for human and cultural rights and for equity in access to resources'.

The hegemony theory of conflict argues that ethnic conflicts have been on the increase with the era of rapid democratisation of African states. This position holds that one-party (hegemonic) states have better control of ethnic conflict. As Rothchild (in Nkwi 2001:5) points out: 'In such hegemonic situations, the state uses its coercive power to freeze inter-ethnic conflicts.... Hegemonic strategies of conflict management include subjugation, avoidance, isolation, assimilation and displacement, all of which tend to display relatively low levels of political interaction and reciprocity'.

I actually started this study with a bias for this theory as the most effective means for the control of ethnic conflicts. But a close study of politics in Côte d'Ivoire, the former Soviet Union, the DRC and a host of others, as well as reports from the Chinese Academy of Sciences (1993) that China had disintegrated along regional lines after Mao's death, certainly gave cause

for a rethink. In my study, it became apparent that the flaw of this theory is that every hegemony ends. The end of every hegemony often brings chaos as different persons or groups try to fill the vacuum created or acquire the authority once possessed by the hegemony. A picture of Côte d'Ivoire after Boigny's hegemony makes one uncomfortable about the prospects of relatively prosperous one-party states such as Libya and Egypt with dominant dictators in Muammar al-Gaddafi and Hosni Mubarak respectively.

Ethnic conflict in Africa: Selected cases

Uganda

Independence in 1962 ended a period of colonisation that began in 1885. Through the period of colonisation and at independence, there was little indication that the country was headed for social and political upheaval. Uganda appeared to be a model of stability and progress. During colonisation, the British established their authority in Uganda and kept the peace among the Nilotic and Bantu groups by negotiations and the application of force where necessary. The British had even devised a timetable for withdrawal before local groups organised nationalist movements, which were unfortunately separated by ethnic and religious lines as well as historical enmities and rivalries (Buganda, Banyoro and Acholi peoples). This state of affairs was further worsened by the struggle between Milton Obote, a Lango leader elected prime minister in 1962 and Mutesa, the Buganda King (Kabaka) elected president in 1963 who sought autonomy for his people. In 1966, Obote sacked the Kabaka, thereby ending Buganda's autonomy, and forced the Kabaka to flee the country. In 1971, Obote was overthrown by Idi Amin who had good relations with the Buganda and thus pursued retribution against the Lango and Acholi groups. From 1963 to 1981, Ugandan politics was plagued by ethnicity and thus progress made under colonial rule was stunted or lost entirely.

Several African states, such as Nigeria, possess a similar history of elites fostering ethnic reprisals and plunging the country into ethnic chaos. This scenario of elite competition causing ethnic conflict is aptly expressed by

Kruger (1993:11) when he states: 'ethnicity and nationalism ... are the creations of elites who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves'. Today, though still noticeable, ethnicity is not central to Ugandan politics as the country has had to cope with conflicts with its neighbours Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC on a regular basis. One of such conflicts, as noted by Kristine Drake (2006), is the Ituri conflict in the northeastern corner of the DRC which involves the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda.

It should be noted that ethnic loyalty in politics as well as the existence of a political divide, set the stage for an unstable Uganda. Unity across ethnic divisions has only been temporarily achieved due to the external threat or problems (coping with refugees) presented by her unstable neighbours.

South Africa

South Africa has a multiracial and multiethnic population. Blacks constitute 77% of which the Zulu make up 22.4% of the overall population. Whites account for 11%, Coloured people for 9% and Asians (mainly Indians) 2%. The largest concentration of Asians and Coloured people is found in KwaZulu-Natal and the three Cape provinces.

The liberation struggle during the years of white minority rule cemented the Blacks, Asians and Coloured people together. With the end of apartheid, however, most Asians and Coloured people, conscious of their minority position turned to vote for the ruling National Party along with most whites. Blacks gave overwhelming support to the African National Congress (ANC) except in KwaZulu-Natal, where the ethnically based Inkatha Freedom Party won more than half the Zulu votes. The violent incidents following immediately (1994) were not between blacks and whites, but between the Zulu who supported the ANC and those who supported Inkatha led by Buthelezi. This becomes a classic case of intra-communal conflict spurred by elite competition (cf Kruger 1993).

It should be noticed here that as in Uganda where ethnic dissent was kept at bay in the pre-independence era due to the presence of the white colonial masters, South Africa tells the same story. The unity forged by the Blacks, Asians and Coloured people under white oppression collapsed when state power was to be competed for by all groups. The Asians and Coloured people inadvertently became suspicious of the Blacks and felt unsafe coming under Black rule. On the other hand, this quest for state power (by groups/elites) coupled with the absence of an overarching or common enemy, set South African blacks against each other.

These two examples raise a serious question. Must there always be the presence of the *aggressive/dominant other*, before ethnic groups within African states can forget their differences and work together? In most African states where the fight for independence was intense, most ethnic groups worked together to secure independence. But with independence secured, the quest for state power and a mutual suspicion between these same groups arose, thus leading to the disintegration of the unity forged. This pattern applies to many ethnic conflict situations in Africa.

Côte d'Ivoire

The population of Côte d'Ivoire is diverse, comprising more than 60 ethnic groups. The country enjoyed political stability and great economic growth during the 1960s and 70s despite occasional challenges by students and members of the armed forces to the generally conservative, business oriented outlook of Houphouet-Boigny. Sommerville (2006) notes that in 1990, President Felix Houphouet-Boigny extended his thirty-year rule through the ballot box. He died in office in 1993. What also died with him was his iron grip over politics and his conscious efforts to balance the appointment of senior ministers to avoid a build up of ethnic, regional and religious tensions among a diverse population. Felix Houphouet-Boigny had succeeded in keeping a lid on these divisive factors. His successors, lacking the respect or fear accorded him by Ivorians, used these divisive factors to establish their power. Today, one of West Africa's most promising

and peaceful states is struggling to recover from an ethnic conflict that tore it apart and laid it in ruins.

Houphouet-Boigny's overarching authority coupled with a blossoming economy and common sense diplomacy which ensured that most (if not all) groups were adequately represented in government, elicited respect from his people. This established ethnic cohesion during his thirty three years at the helm of affairs. However, as has been observed, the danger here is, when such overarching authority leaves the scene, chaos reigns as some groups, distrusting the new regime, try to break away, while others get ambitious to want to fill this vacuum. The violence that took over Eastern Europe with the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and Iraq with the expulsion of Saddam Hussein, are good cases in point. And with regard to countries like Libya, Egypt and Cuba, it is an open-ended guess what will happen when their charismatic or larger than life dictators quit the stage before they can prepare their people for proper democratic transitions or groom an acceptable successor. Cuba so far seems to have succeeded in this with the handover of power by Fidel Castro to his brother Raul Castro.

While this research tries to identify existing trends in the above treated cases of states ridden with ethnic conflict, attention will be focused at this point on African states that have been seemingly peaceful to see if in them, we can find the key to peaceful ethnic co-existence.

Botswana

Since independence in 1966, Botswana has had a flourishing multiparty democracy. Each of the elections since independence has been free and fair. The country's minorities participate freely in the political process. Botswana is a country rich in diamonds and cattle and it possesses a population of just 1.6 million. But as an ethnic minority, the San experience both poverty and allegedly discrimination. The San have pressed for better standards of living but have never been violent as they acknowledge both the government's efforts to improve their lot as well as the factors militating against them. For example, the IRIN report (2004:1) on the 'San' Bushmen states: 'The government of Botswana provides free education but the San have problems accessing it.

Teaching is done in Tswana and English, which many San children do not speak.' Under the Remote Area Dwellers (R.A.D.) programme, of which the San are a majority, the government has made many accomplishments. It has based the programme's assistance on the distance of a people or group from existing social services, as well as on economic marginalisation, rather than on ethnicity. This has enabled the government to reach settlements in the most distant parts, bringing in roads, potable water, primary schools, hostels and health posts. All these have been possible due to the fact that the government has stuck – or at least tried to stick – to its principle of non-differentiation and non-discrimination which it adopted at independence in 1966. Several studies have observed that the Tswana make up over 50% of Botswana population and most of the remaining peoples have been heavily absorbed into the Tswana culture. This may be one of the main reasons for Botswana's cultural and social stability over the last two centuries.

It is my position here that in its policy of inclusion, the Botswana government has endeavoured to carry all peoples along, thus dousing the need for any group to want to project its interests above those of others. The December 12th 2006 court ruling which gave the San Bushmen (about 1,000 in number) the right to remain on their land instead of being moved to enable diamond mining, attests to this. In respecting this court order the Botswana government showed that despite the meagre population of the San Bushmen, which accounts for less than 0.1 per cent of the entire population, they had every right to the good things of life and the preservation of their ancestry. Only very few African countries can boast of such respect for minorities within their borders. In observing the aforementioned court ruling, the Botswana government thus repudiates the notion of Tolanda (1993:1) that:

the state has always been at the risk of promoting and maintaining the degradation of the social environment because of the propensity of federal policy making to focus on self-sustenance at the expense of those groups and individuals that are deemed peripheral to the state.... Studies of statehood have shown us that... policies and expectations that

serve the interests of all ethnic groups, irrespective of their differences, has not yet been fully realized.

Within the context of such transparency and respect for group rights, Botswana's flourishing democracy sets the standard and serves as an example for most African states.

Tanzania

If poor economic performance is believed to be one of the causes of ethnic unrest, then the case of Tanzania is bound to nullify this claim. From the beginning, Tanzania was a poor state with few minerals suitable for export, little industry, and an agricultural system dominated by ideas of local self-sufficiency. Though since the mid 1990s, Tanzania's economy has performed fairly well, it still remains one of the world's poorest countries. So, what spell has kept Tanzania's over 120 ethnic groups from tearing at each other in the midst of very scarce resources and in their quest for domination and control – as has been witnessed in most multi-ethnic states in Africa?

Other than an anti-colonial rebellion in 1905 known as the Maji Maji revolt, Tanganyika was fairly quiet. It became independent in December 1961. The appeal of the major party, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), led by Julius Nyerere, cut across ethnic and national lines. Thus Nyerere became Tanganyika's first president, and later Tanzania (after Tanganyika's amalgamation with Zanzibar) served as an adhesive for the people. This factor, coupled with the level of literacy facilitated by the Tanzanian government, has helped maintain ethnic cooperation within the polity. The country boasts of a 90% literacy rate.

Though economic policies such as Ujaama operated by Nyerere failed largely due to external factors (the increase in world oil prices) and the corruption of the middle men and local chiefs, the transparency of his government and the will for progress (as exhibited by other reform policies) assured his legitimacy standing. An illiterate populace most likely would have found it difficult keeping the peace in the face of such policy failures, a factor most political opponents would have taken advantage of to spur the 'illiterate'

people to violent protests which would most likely have degenerated into ethnic conflict.

Analysis of trends

In the cases treated, I believe patterns can be deduced such that, irrespective of the peculiarity of any case of ethnic conflict, each case could be analysed against the backdrop of such trends.

Some of the cases treated bring to mind the story of two feuding brothers, who on sighting a wild beast, set aside their grievances and joined forces to battle for their lives, but resumed their feuding as soon as the beast was killed. The period of colonial rule saw all of Africa in solidarity for one another. There was a common enemy and African brotherhood was needed to defeat it. Now that the enemy is gone, with no common goal to unite them, the brotherhood is broken and survival of the fittest takes precedence. From the volatile cases in Rwanda, Burundi and now Sudan to the less violent ethnic tension in Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal, this trend applies. Reduction of ethnic hostilities in Uganda has been mainly because of perceived threats from her neighbours. Need there always be an external threat or fear of reprisal from an overbearing force for ethnic groups to sheath swords and work together? Ensuring the existence of an external threat to maintain internal peace or cooperation among groups is certainly no solution as the external threat may one day act out its anticipated aggression and thus exacerbate local tension into a cross-border or regional one. Certainly, suspicion of one group against the other has been the bedrock of ethnic conflicts, so the problem remains: How best can suspicion be curbed?

Taking a close look at cases treated here, we can deduce the following trends.

There is seldom any country in the world today where the economy is good, the literacy level is high and the government desirous of progress that experiences violent ethnic upheavals. Using Botswana as a starting point for African states, the expanse of land needed by the San for hunting runs

contrary to land needed for the rearing of livestock which is the mainstay of the Tswana majority, since social affluence is still largely determined by the number of cattle owned. Rather than disregard the San who are an almost insignificant minority, the government has strived to maintain a balance between both cultures. The government has been able to achieve public awareness of its efforts through its commitment to literacy. This is not surprising when 'primary school enrolment is around 98/99% for boys/girls, and secondary school enrolment is around 61/68%. Literacy is 74/80% for men/women' (Pearson Education 2006:2). The same applies to Tanzania where, despite a poor economy, violent confrontations among ethnic groups have been kept at the barest minimum. Tanzania has laid great emphasis on education since independence and has invested considerable resources in providing services for adults as well as children. As a result, the country has one of the highest literacy rates in the developing world, around 90%, which is almost on a par with that of the United States.

The presence or absence of visionary and charismatic leaders, greatly affects the escalation or erosion of ethnic conflict. Unfortunately, African states south of the Sahara can boast of just a few such leaders, and this I believe is largely responsible for the high number of ethnic conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa as opposed to North Africa. Côte d'Ivoire's history during and after Felix Houphouët-Boigny is a tale of both sides of the coin. It can also be argued here that the one-party structure of most North African states and states south of the equator helped their leaders keep a lid on divisive factors, ethnicity inclusive. Bearing in mind the observation of Quaker-Dokubo that most African states are made up of communal contenders, having just one party with which all members of the political community identify, the presence of a firm and respected leader within such a party helps cement differences. This also accounts for the rarity of ethnic upheavals and military coups in these states, unlike states such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda and Burundi where ethnic tensions climaxed into military coups. As noted by Ali Mazrui (in Raph Uwechue 1991:244), 'A remarkable fact about the distribution of military coups in post colonial Africa is that they are overwhelmingly north of the equator One relevant factor would bring

us back to the single party hypothesis.' If recent happenings in Kenya are anything to go by, ethnic tensions are now at their worst under the present rule of democracy compared to the relatively stable era of dictatorship and the one-party system under Daniel arap Moi. This argument is still plausible when cordial ethnic relations are considered in Zambia under Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere's Tanzania, Muammar Ghaddafi's Libya, Hosni Mubarak's Egypt, Leopold Senghor and Abdou Diouf's Senegal.

Also, experiences in Ghana, Tanzania and Botswana have shown that fair and peaceful democratic transitions have aided ethnic cooperation. Once again, experiences in Kenya as well as events that led to Nigeria's civil war among others tell how improper and violent elections/transitions can exacerbate ethnic crises. Ali Mazrui (1991:244) once again observes:

Countries like Botswana, Mauritius, Lesotho and Swaziland have been more open societies in the liberal sense than have most others in Africa. Mauritius has even shown the ability to defeat an incumbent government at the polls – and have it hand over power peacefully to a successor regime. Such political culture is less 'conflict' prone than average on the continent.

Ghana has also been a beneficiary of this. Rwanda, with the end of the genocidal killings on 4th July 1994, has made great strides with political parties cutting across ethnic divides. Rwanda today is showing signs of development with peaceful elections held in 2003 along with the adoption by referendum of a new constitution that forbids any political activity or discrimination based on race, ethnicity (with emphasis on Hutu/Tutsi identity) or religion. A World Bank 2006 report (cf Atojoko 2008:99) rated *government's effectiveness* in Rwanda at 39.8%, which is twice that of Nigeria's 16.6%, her *political stability* at 27.4%, eight times better than Nigeria's 3.8%, her *anticorruption* at 55.8% as compared to Nigeria's 5.8% and her observance of the *rule of law* four times higher (34.3%) than Nigeria's (8.1%). Bearing in mind that Rwanda emerged from a civil war boasting one of Africa's worst

cases of genocide just a little over a decade ago, the gains of peaceful and fair elections cannot be better imagined or estimated.

But peaceful elections do not appear from nowhere. They are worked at. Throughout history, leaders have spurred their people to achieve the almost impossible and our time is no different. As observed by Offe (in Morgan 2002:3-4), 'Progress toward a unity of intention and action will materialize only when national publics are presented with convincing grounds for political integration.' Siedentop reaffirms this position when he says 'it is the duty of a democratic political class to give a lead' (Siedentop 2000:218).

Conclusion

Bassey and Oshita (2007) opine that ethnic conflicts are not a new phenomenon. They have been for as long as states have been in existence. This study was therefore conducted with the belief that since ethnic conflicts are not new, so also are their causes. And if these causes can be generally identified, then a reduction in ethnic conflicts can be achieved if these causes are avoided.

So far, the examination of selected states done herein reveals that countries with high levels of literacy suffer little or none of such conflicts as opposed to countries with low literacy levels. Secondly, firm, fair and progressive leadership, which are pre-requisites for stable multiparty democracies, have been shown to foster ethnic cooperation. So far, Paul Kagame's transformation of Rwanda is but a clear example of how such leadership can shift a society from bitter resentment to effective cooperation.

It is generally held that had the botched 1994 elections in Nigeria, which were considered her freest and fairest, been allowed to prevail, ethnic dissent in the country would have been a thing of the past, most especially if the perceived winner (Moshood Abiola) had endeavoured to be fair to all groups within the country. African scholars agree that smooth transitions in South Africa, Ghana and Senegal have helped the stability in these states. Fair elections therefore, are a third factor that helps in curbing ethnic conflicts.

Rwanda and Burundi arguably pose Africa's worst case scenarios of ethnic discord planted by colonialism. If Rwanda, after the most gruesome of happenings, can work to curb ethnic discord within its borders, then the rest of Africa really has no excuse after almost half a century of independence. Colonialism ought not to be blamed for Burundi's refusal to emulate present day Rwanda or for the refusal of ethnic groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to sheath their machetes. Nor should neo-colonialism be accused of being responsible for the desire of most African governments to stay corrupt and partisan, thereby intensifying suspicion and tension among their people.

Africa should look inward to find the causes of ethnic tension rather than blame colonialists who left fifty years ago. This study, while not pretending to have all the answers, has taken these steps of inward examination. It is therefore my summation that, while establishing that the presence of the above variables leads to ethnic cooperation and communality, lacking them leads to ethnic discord and violence. Achieving or lacking these tenets is an internal issue.

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