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Emmanuel Ikechi Onah


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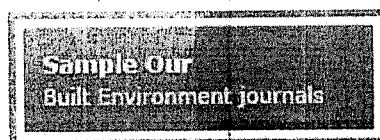
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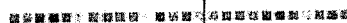
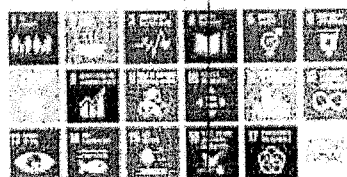
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The Role of Trans-Border Ethnic Groups in Intra-State and Inter-State Conflict in Africa

Emmanuel Ikechi Onah*

Abstract

Trans-border ethnic relations in Africa have led to intra-state conflicts, including those between the state and the fraction of the trans-border ethnic group falling within its borders, and, others between the fraction of the trans-border ethnic group and the other ethnic groups in the state. Trans-border ethnic relations have also led to inter-state conflict between the state and other neighboring states that also have fractions of the trans-border ethnic group. Making use of case studies, the paper found that fractions of trans-border groups are driven to conflict whenever they are deprived from meaningfully participating in the affairs of the state. These conflicts can thus be handled only when the state system and individual states ensure that all citizens, irrespective of ethnic grouping, can participate effectively in the affairs of the state.

Introduction

As the French-led interventionist troops in the West African country of Mali secured the last rebel-held towns in the north of the country, the government of Mali announced that it was ready to hold talks with only the Tuareg liberation movement, the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA), and no other organization ("President Traore welcomes dialogue", *The Nation* Feb. 1, 2013, 3). This statement was at once a rejection of the entry of an Islamist dimension into the Malian conflict, as well as an admission of the existence of a long-standing crisis in the Maghreb region of Africa, involving the Tuareg ethnic group, divided across the borders of Mali, Niger, Algeria and Burkina Faso. Members of the ethnic group have had well-formed insurgencies in at least two of these countries, namely, Mali and Niger. Over the years, members of this group in these two countries have fought variously for independence or unification in a common homeland. In April 2012, following a coup in Bamako and its chaotic aftermaths, the MNLA had seized northern Mali, which they then proclaimed as the Republic of Azawad. The MNLA apparently cooperated with the Islamist group, Ansar Dine, to seize the area, but by June, the MNLA had fallen out with their collaborators.

The Islamists, aided by fighters from the Al Qaeda-backed Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), then took the upper hand and dislodged the MNLA from occupied cities where they started implementing Sharia ("Islamists drive Tuareg rebels from northern Mali town", *The Guardian* Nov. 20, 2012, 9). It was this development that eventually gave the Malian situation a terrorist tag and enabled the French to intervene alongside Malian troops and others from West African countries.¹ The readiness of the Malian government therefore, to meet with the MNLA is to be seen as an acknowledgement of the Tuareg problem. The Tuareg problem is one of many such problems that dot the African continent, involving fractions of trans-border ethnic groups fighting for self-determination in the various countries where they live. Other conflicts involving similar groups in Africa include the Darfur conflict, involving the Zaghawa ethnic group of the Darfur region of Sudan and Chad, and the conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, involving fractions of the Tutsi ethnic group in the countries of Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. It is the role of these trans-border groups in intra and inter-state conflicts in Africa that this paper seeks to study.

The State System and Trans-Border Ethnic Groups in Africa

Although it is hardly ever captured as such in the literature, it is apparent that trans-border ethnic groups are often at the center of numerous African conflicts. Trans-border ethnic groups are those groups whose

* Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Lagos, Nigeria | conah@unilag.edu.ng; emma_onah@yahoo.com

fractions are indigenous to more than one state. Trans-border ethnic groups abound in Africa, and they arose as a result of the colonial partition of the continent. It is now an acknowledged fact that the colonial partition of Africa was arbitrary, with the frontiers of the new African territories neither reflecting the limits of natural regions, nor the regions of separate ethnic groups (Emerson 1966). Instead, according to Suret-Canale (1970, 13), "they were shaped in their detail by the chances of conquest or of compromise between colonial powers." As a result, many ethnic groups were divided in such a way that fractions of the same ethnic group fell into the territorial possessions of different colonizing powers, each part subsequently being administered separately from the other.

The very nature of the partition of Africa thus threw up ethnic groups who could rightly be called "peoples of two worlds," those ethnic groups partitioned across the borders of African countries and whose peoples live on the two sides of these borders (Phiri 1984, 117). In the years following partition and independence, these groups have continued to relate among their fractions. This has however, posed a problem to the state system in Africa: the problem of how to align the relations between these partitioned ethnic groups across state borders to the realities of the relations between the different states in which they live. Asiwaju (1984) in his study of partitioned Africans, has pointed out that these groups were often divided, with the boundaries cutting across well-established lines of communication involving a sense of community and shared legacies. The dividing authorities, the colonial powers, usually promoted the further division of these groups in ways intended to keep the fractions of the groups in the respective territories permanently apart. But despite all the divisive designs, which have extended to the post-colonial periods, partitioned Africans have tended to ignore the boundaries and carry on relations across borders as in the days before partition. As Davidson (1987, 19) has argued, "there may be few African frontiers today, across which, day by day or night by night, people do not take themselves and their goods in more or less complete defiance of the constitutional law."

This continued "trampling underfoot" of the inter-state boundaries of African countries (Davidson 1992, 13), has indeed been debilitating to the state system on the continent. For one, it has made it very difficult for the African state to perform its statutory border functions. For another, it has also been a great source of conflict within and between countries in Africa. In his study of partitioned groups and inter-state relations, Touval (1984, 223–230) points out that the partitioning of cultural groups confronted many independent African States with two major problems in the immediate post-independence period, namely; whether to accept the partition and the boundaries inherited from the colonial powers or to demand their revision; and, what attitude to adopt when the solidarity within a partitioned group leads to the involvement of those who live in one country in the affairs of a neighboring state. According to him, confronted with these problems, most African states, almost all multi-ethnic, have supported the status quo with regards to inherited boundaries, their pluralistic character creating among them, a reciprocal respect for the boundaries. He observes however, that in a few cases, some partitioned groups dominated a state or wielded so much influence within the state that the state identified with their ethos, thus becoming virtually a nation-state. When such a situation prevailed, and when in addition, some vital interests of the group were affected by the partition, the group harnessed the state to pursue an irredentist policy. Touval further observes that in some instances, partitioned groups have facilitated the spillover of domestic strife across boundaries, thus adding an international dimension to domestic conflict.

In other situations where such partitioned groups are in the opposition in one country, they have usually utilized their ethnic links on the other side of the international border to obtain sanctuary, base of operations, and even active support (Touval 1984; Sührke and Noble 1977). This tendency of the trans-border peoples in Africa to rely more on their larger ethnic group rather than their states can be further traced to the nature of the post-colonial state in Africa. According to Herbst (1992, 17–19), the boundaries of the post-colonial state were supposed to reflect how far leaders should extend their powers in the new countries, in terms of provision of goods and services for the people. But in reality, these leaders only extended power in any real, meaningful way to the "core" of their countries, which were always the regions of these leaders and/or the capitals of the states. Major parts of these countries—the

peripheries—practically remained in very little contact with the core. In most cases, the periphery was inhabited by the partitioned peoples. Left on their own and “to their own design,” the people living in these peripheries then constantly crisscrossed the borders to trade, to socialize, and to work.

The contacts between the state and its fraction of the trans-border ethnic group were minimal, and often, hostile. These contacts usually arose only when the state needed something from the trans-border peoples—conscription, taxation, enforcement of national laws and boundary mechanisms, including currencies, citizenship regulations, and anti-smuggling measures. As such, the border peoples often reacted in a hostile manner, usually in the form of active disobedience, including dodging of drafts, kidnapping and killing of state agents and officials, and crossing over to the other sides of the borders to avoid arrest (Herbst 2000). The hostility that has characterized the relations between the state and the trans-border peoples has been a major cause of political conflict in Africa. The hostile relations between the state and the trans-border peoples in Africa has in fact, led to two forms of political conflict on the continent, namely, intra-state and inter-state conflicts.

Trans-Border Ethnic Groups and Intra-State Conflict in Africa

Intra-state conflicts arising from the hostile relations between the state and the trans-border peoples in Africa take a number of forms. First, it has led to conflict between the state and the fraction of the trans-border ethnic group falling within its borders. This form of conflict could emanate from the state, or it could emanate from the ethnic group. It emanates from the trans-border ethnic group when its fraction in a state feels that the state has shut the members out from participating in the benefits of citizenship, such as infrastructural and economic development for their region, or that the members have been largely excluded from the heights of government. The present conflict in Mali is an example of the above situation. The Tuareg problem in the Maghreb is a long-standing one, dating to shortly after the take-off of formal colonialism in Africa. The Tuaregs had perceived that the French would give them their own country, but this did not materialize. Instead, they were partitioned across borders (International Crisis Group [ICG] 2012). As a result, members of the ethnic group revolted between 1911 and 1917 across the region. The French violently crushed the rebellion (Lecocq 2002).

Shortly after independence was granted to some of the countries, however, the Tuareg rose again in rebellion. The first Tuareg revolt in Mali occurred in 1962. By this time, it was already clear that the Malian government was not interested in the welfare of its northern region. In response, the Tuaregs revolted between 1962 and 1964, with the aim of securing a fair share of the dividends of government. They were not successful, and the rebellion ended with peace agreements signed by the two sides. The terms of the peace agreement which promised that government will give special attention to northern Mali did not materialize as the government only went ahead to militarize the area and rule it as an occupied zone. As a result, another rebellion occurred in 1990. The Tuaregs still demanded a fair share in government and of infrastructure. This rebellion lasted until 1996 when the peace agreement, called the National Pact, signed by the sides to the conflict in 1992, became effective (McCoy 2008). Ironically, at this same period, another Tuareg rebellion was taking place in Niger, which also ended in 1996 with the conflicting sides also signing peace agreements between 1996 and 1998 (ICG 2013). Notwithstanding the peace agreements, conditions remained bad in the two countries.

By the 2000s therefore, the Tuareg rebellion degenerated into full-blown insurgencies. In May 2006, the Malian Tuaregs again revolted, but the Malian government only deployed a large offensive force to tackle the insurgency. In July 2006, the parties signed yet another peace agreement, although peace did not completely return to the country as some rebel groups continued to fight. In Niger at this time, another Tuareg rebellion was also going on. By 2007, there were reports even, of coordinated attacks by Malian and Nigerian Tuaregs (Morgan 2013). Nevertheless, the fate of the Tuareg region of Mali did not improve and conditions even worsened. As a result, many able bodied Tuaregs left Mali in search of a better life abroad. Most went to Libya where oil wealth was in abundance. Libya welcomed many of these Tuaregs

into the army, where their numbers continued to swell until the outbreak of the Libyan civil war in 2011. However, once the war turned against their chief benefactor—Gaddafi—Tuareg soldiers started retreating back into northern Mali with weapons and materials. It was former insurgents and these ex-Libyan combatants who formed the MNLA, and started this latest rebellion in 2012. Significantly, the Tuaregs this time were asking for independence for northern Mali. Between January and April 2012, the MNLA fought a swift war with Mali, and on 6 April, after securing all territory it desired, proceeded to proclaim the independent state of Azawad.

Conflicts between the state and its fraction of a trans-border ethnic group could emanate from the state, when a state, believing that its sovereignty is challenged by the trans-border people, tries to impose its authority throughout its territory—tax evaders are arrested, killers are shot, smugglers are jailed, and those without papers are disfranchized or even expelled. The trans-border people in turn, viewing the actions of the state as oppressive, have often fought back. The war that started in 2002 in Cote d'Ivoire is a typical example. Here, the Dioula trans-border ethnic group was at the center of the war. Dioula people are from the north of the country, with kin across the borders in Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The problem started when, following other events in Cote d'Ivoire,² Ivorians of the Dioula ethnic stock were accused of not being Ivorian. Some were then refused Ivorian identity papers. The situation at the time was compounded by a new concept of "Ivoirite," or Ivorianness, which was drummed up to discredit Alassane Ouattara, a northern politician and a Dioula, who was going to win Cote d'Ivoire's 1998 elections but was stopped from running on the grounds that "both his parents were not Ivorian" (Copnall 2007, 14). In frustration at this assault on their citizenship, the New Forces, a rebel group comprising elements of Dioula origin took up arms in 2002. Ivory Coast's 10-year civil war was thus closely connected with this crisis of identity that faced the trans-border Dioula people.

Second, the hostility between the state and its fraction of trans-border ethnic groups has led to conflict between the fraction of the trans-border ethnic group and the other ethnic groups in that state. Distrusted by the state and the other ethnic groups and also distrusting of these groups, these other groups have always "ganged up" to prevent the members of the trans-border ethnic fraction from gaining access to the resources and opportunities of the state, from attaining power in the state, or to remove such access or power from them whenever they attain it. So marginalized, the fraction has often fought back. It is in this light that the long-running instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) can be understood. The troubles here are largely connected with the travails of the Tutsi ethnic group, whose fractions are found in a majority of the states of the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. In the DRC, there is a small number of indigenous Tutsi, known there as the Banyamulenge. These have, however been joined by a large number of immigrant kin over the years, mainly from Rwanda. In 1992, a Tutsi was appointed Prime Minister of the country, an action that did not go down well with most of the people. Trouble eventually flared up in the country in which many Tutsi lost their lives. The trouble continued, albeit in subdued forms, till 1996 when the government of the country (then known as Zaire), dancing to populist opinion, finally expelled the Tutsi from the country, claiming that they were more Rwandan than Zairian (Meredith 2005). The Tutsi however, did not accept the expulsion order, and acted before the effective date of the expulsion.

By this time, Tutsi forces had become part of a rebel grouping—the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL-CZ). It was under this rebel group that the Tutsis finally confronted the then Zairian army. Between October 1996 and March 1997, this Tutsi-led force seized control of eastern Congo (the area where the Banyamulenge live) and then, were soon making for Kinshasa, which they finally captured on May 18, 1997. The Alliance immediately installed a new government under Laurent Kabila to replace the regime of President Mobutu, who was seen as being anti-Tutsi (Thom 1999). However, less than a year later, Tutsi leaders, feeling that the government of Kabila was not doing enough to protect their interest in the country ignited another military campaign against the new Congolese government. A new, largely Tutsi, Force of the Rally for Democracy (RCD), was formed in 1997 to fight the government. Fighting reached a stalemate in 1999, and by the middle of that year, the

DRC was effectively cut into two. The RCD (and other Tutsi-led forces afterwards) significantly continued to hold on to control of the eastern part of the country.

In 2002, a peace agreement was signed by all Congolese belligerents, civil society groups and unarmed opposition movements, and the government took control of the whole country. Just when things looked to normalize however, a new group known as the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) arose under a dissident General Laurent Nkunda, and took control of a swathe of territory in eastern Congo. General Nkunda claimed to be protecting his fellow ethnic Tutsis from Rwandan Hutu militias operating from eastern DRC (*New African* June 1997, 353). Another peace deal was signed between the CNDP and the government in 2009, leading to a cessation of hostilities and the reintegration of CNDP elements into the Congolese army. But in April 2012, a group from among these elements, calling themselves the March 23 Movement (M23), defected from the Congolese army under the leadership of another dissident General Sultani Makenga, alleging mistreatment. Since then, this group has been fighting in eastern Congo. A peace deal between the group and the government which took effect in December 2012 broke down in April 2013. Fighting then resumed, until early November 2013, when the combined forces of the D. R. Congo army and the UN Peacekeeping Force mandated to engage in combat with enemy forces, finally drove the rebels out of Congolese territory.

Trans-Border Ethnic Groups and Inter-State Conflict in Africa

The hostile relations between the state and its fraction of the trans-border ethnic group have also led to conflict between the state and other neighboring states with fractions of the trans-border ethnic group. This has resulted from the attempts by kin (and states) to assist the fractions of their groups in other states in times of trouble even in defiance of the borders. These other states have often either fought back or have reciprocally become involved in conflicts in the neighboring states. Throughout the period of the second Liberian civil war, for instance, the Liberian government continued threatening to take the war back to Guinea, which it accused of sponsoring the rebels. The Liberian government at one time even claimed that the Guinean support for the LURD rebels was tantamount to a declaration of war against Liberia, and then threatened to expel the terrorists from Liberian soil and possibly "pursue them from where they came" (Paye-Layleh 2003, 14–15). In the same vein, the situation in the DRC has often produced conflict between that country and Rwanda and Uganda respectively, which the former has always accused of sponsoring the rebels on its territory. Thus, in July 1996, Rwanda and Uganda had invaded the then Zaire, ostensibly in pursuit of Rwandan Hutu army and militia elements who were alleged to be sheltered by the Mobutu regime. It was under this atmosphere that the rebel alliance that eventually toppled Mobutu was forged. This rebel alliance took off from eastern Congo in October 1996. Following the war that broke out again when new president, Laurent Kabila attempted to purge Rwandan elements from his government in August 1998, Rwanda and Uganda re-invaded Congo in support of rebel proxies. Both countries remained in Congo until 2002. Even when they withdrew at the end of that year, the countries have continued to assist rebels in Congo ever afterwards (Ki-moon 2013). In fact, it was only in October 2013 that the last of these Congolese rebels were finally pushed into, curiously, Uganda.

In fact, this type of situation can best be explained by the recurring problems between Sudan and Chad, which have blamed each other for the several attempts by rebels of either country to overthrow the respective governments. The trouble between Sudan and Chad can be directly traced to the machinations of the Zaghawa trans-border ethnic group. The Zaghawa people are found in the three countries of Sudan, Chad and Central African Republic that share a common border in the Darfur Region. Although not numerous (they constitute only 1.5% of the population in Chad), the Zaghawa have over the years been involved in very complex political intrigues that have led to conflict within and between these countries (Debos 2008). In December 1990, a Zaghawa, Idris Deby, utilizing the active support of his kin in Sudan and the other sides of the borders, had marched on to power in Chad. President Deby had been backed in his march to power by President Bashir of Sudan. Once in power in Chad, the Zaghawa proceeded to dominate the facets of government of that country. Deby even sought to create a greater Zaghawaland, an

ambition that is believed to have spurred him into aiding Francois Bozize to power in the Central African Republic in 2002 (Manley 2006). In 2003 also, when the Zaghawa and other peoples of the Darfur Region of Sudan, on the allegations that they were not being treated as full citizens in Sudan, rose in rebellion, demanding "equality and justice" in that country, President Deby is believed to have extended active support to them (King 2006, 25). There are indications even that the invasion of the Central African Republic (CAR) in May 2013 was carried out by Zaghawa rebel elements from CAR and Chad.

This active support to the rebels who were fighting the Sudanese government soon caused a break between Presidents Deby and Bashir. The latter then started sponsoring discontents in the Chadian government and army, who then mounted their own rebellion against the Chadian government. Many Zaghawa in Chad now condemned Deby for not doing more for their kin who were leading the rebellion against the Khartoum government in Darfur. As a result, elements of the Zaghawa dominated Chadian military turned on the president and many soldiers started deserting in droves and crossing over to Chadian rebel ranks based in Darfur (Manley and Hancock 2007). The situation eventually degenerated and the two countries were soon in a state of war. Between 2006 and 2008, Chadian rebels, believed to be sponsored by Sudan, made at least two concerted efforts to overthrow Deby, even seizing sections of the Chadian capital briefly in February 2008, before being repelled, with the support of French forces ("Chad quashes rebellion, indicts Sudan," *The Guardian* 5 Feb. 5, 2008, 10; "Deby regains control as France puts troops on stand-by," *The Guardian* Feb. 7, 2008, 12; McDoom 2006). In retaliation, Deby is believed to have also sponsored Sudanese rebels to invade Sudan, on one occasion in May 2008, also entering the capital, Khartoum, before they were eventually repelled ("Sudan and Chad: A bloody tit-for-tat," *The Economist* 17-23 May 2008, 47).

Trans-Border Ethnic Groups, Political Conflict and the State System in Africa

This study has shown clearly that fractions of trans-border groups are effectively prevented from involvement in the commanding heights of the economy and politics of any one of the countries in which they live, the tendency is always for them to see the larger ethnic group as the alternative, hence their increased attachment to the group and solidarity with other fractions in the other countries. If the exclusion is more pervasive and formal, the fractions soon become attracted to seeking for power in their respective countries and possibly instituting hegemony over the whole countries where they live (Onah 2012), as shown by the Tutsi in Central Africa. The conflict in Mali can also be seen in this light. The latest Tuareg attempt to break away from Mali has been crushed however, but only with the help of French and West African troops who were ostensibly acting to prevent Islamist opportunists from cashing in on the situation. Presidential and parliamentary elections have since been conducted in the country, as part of a process of consolidation. As the government of Mali consolidates its rule after the Islamist scare, negotiations are expected to hold between it and members of the Tuareg rebellion.

When the negotiations open however, it is hoped that the negotiators and mediators will do well to look beyond the immediate rebellion and open their minds to all possibilities. For instance, if Islamists did not intrude, could France have been so swift in intervening? If France had not so intervened, what would have been the fate of Mali, and for that matter, "Azawad"? In fact, what would have been the fate of the very state system in Africa, following the situation in Mali? The attitude of the international system to the Malian affair became a little clearer in the last days of the intervention. After taking the lead in the liberation of the two northern cities of Timbuktu and Gao, the French deliberately kept out the Malian army from Kidal, a predominantly Tuareg town and the last to be rid of the Islamist occupiers. Instead, French forces apparently allowed fighters of the MNLA to move in and establish control before finally sending in French forces alongside their Chadian counterparts. Even the MNLA claimed that, "for the moment, there is a coordination with the French troops" ("French forces take over Kidal airport," *The Nation* Feb. 1, 2013, 64). The United States, which backed the French intervention, equally advocated for a political solution in the end. All these have been concrete pointers that it may not be a story of the "victor and the vanquished."

It need not be. If anything, the Malian conflict has concretely shown that perhaps the African state system needs revisiting. The Malian state may be the victor, but with Tuareg nationalist feelings still aglow so many years after the independence of Mali, then Azawad and indeed others like it, cannot just be dismissed without regard. Whatever issues that have sustained these irredentist feelings over all these years must be concrete enough to warrant being looked into. It is noteworthy that despite all actions taken by Mali and even the international system all this while, the people of northern Mali have continued to see themselves as one and a distinct people from the rest of the Malian peoples. This is certainly a serious matter that warrants serious attention. This position actually tallies with the European experience. It is generally agreed that the strength of the state system in Europe stems from the fact that the European state is the product of its peoples' experience. Europeans have thus, generally come to grips with their past as well as being on top of their present, and as a result, they can confront their future.

This is the dilemma of Africa. The past for Africa essentially refers to colonialism and the post-colonial experience. The state in Africa remains the one that was imposed by Europe. If this is the case, and it is very obvious that the state in Africa continues to be dysfunctional, then, in the manner of Europe, it may be time to forge new arrangements on the basis of the people's experience. In the many years of colonialism and post-colonialism, patterns of relations and associations have emerged among the peoples of the various African states. Some people have become compatible and others have shown that they are incompatible. This reality obtains both within the borders of African states and outside of these borders. This is like Europe under the Roman system. It was largely the experience of European peoples under the Roman arrangement that coalesced them into nations, these nations eventually becoming states (Perry et al. 2007). Even well after the Roman system had withered away, new experiences necessitated several and continuing rearrangements, some such rearrangements leading to adjustments of borders and others even leading to entirely new states. Considering this experience of Europe, it is then hard to understand, very hard indeed to understand, why it is the same Europe that is trying to prevent Africa from benefitting from her own experience. For instance, at the end of the Malian crisis in January 2013, France allowed Mali to insist that the MNLA dropped its demand for independence as a condition for dialogue ("President Traore welcomes dialogue", *The Nation* Feb. 1, 2013, 3). Perhaps because it had no option anyway, the MNLA complied.

But what does that achieve really? A cessation of hostilities or just its suspension? And what happens to the long-standing feelings of the Tuareg and other northern groups in the country? The European creators and the African inheritors of the state system in Africa have always adopted an attitude to every such issue bordering on the sanctity of the African state. This could even have been understandable if the very state system was working in Africa. But it is not working. In fact, for about the 50 years that Mali has been independent and its territorial sanctity guaranteed by Europe, the country has just been wobbling and fumbling with the feelings and interest of her northern citizens. European thinking seems to be that the problem of Africa is governance. It is assumed that once good governance is in place in a country like Mali, then everything will fall into place. But this thinking is very unfortunate as it fails to take into cognizance some very salient realities of the African situation. Even in Mali, there has been all manners of governments, including some that came specifically either because of or for the Tuareg Issue. That the Issue has defied solution in spite of all the regimes only shows that the African situation is beyond governance. As the experience of Europe continues to show, ethnic solidarity and nationalist feelings is not really as much a physical matter as it is psychological. The Scottish quest for independence which is currently on the front burner, is certainly not because Britain is not offering good governance.

It is simply because every similar people want to be together and every dissimilar peoples want to be apart. The African experience is that the states continue to be dysfunctional essentially because they contain different peoples, whereas similar peoples continue to be kept apart. Everywhere across Africa, the state system is in crisis, essentially and ultimately for this reason. Beyond the Great Lakes region and the Mano River region, as well as the current situation in Mali, Africa is littered with conflicts that are traceable to ethnicity or more specifically, trans-border ethnicity. Large entities as well as smaller ones are all involved in this debilitating situation. Look at a country as big as Nigeria and with all its resources—it continues to

wobble terribly essentially because it is an unsustainable amalgamation of different peoples. But because of the insistence of the West that the country must survive, Nigeria has become practically a den for all manner of thieves. Or another big country like the DRC. It is simply a carcass that has enabled scavengers to grow fat. It is because of situations like these that such issues as elections do not throw up any possibilities or alternatives for economic development in virtually all African states, as just when some people are rejoicing that one of their own has won the presidency for instance, many more others will be sorrowing that their fate has been sealed following their kin's loss at the polls.

It therefore follows that if anything, the African experience is proof that the state system is not working on the continent. This experience has actually been captured in different ways by writers on the African state (Osaghae 2010), essentially by those who talk about the fragility of the African state, especially in terms of not being able to wield its peoples together for progress, and others who talk about the African state being too strong, especially on account of its overwhelming arsenal for keeping its peoples in place even forcefully, which again cannot foster progress. Curiously, most of these writers only come up with suggestions as to how to "correct" the African state, such that it can then serve the purposes of progress and development. But this is just the point. For as long as the African state exists in its present form, no such correction is possible and it can never be a tool for progress. The truth is that the African state at present contains contradictory elements that will not enable it to gain the momentum for progress and development. The African experience actually shows that for the state to work on the continent, the state system needs to be re-created. This re-creation must be on the basis of the African experience, such that in the new state system that is advocated, all those conditions and situations that created lethargy in the past and which made the African state not able to fulfill the aspirations of its people must be avoided and removed. The African experience now is long enough to be the basis for re-creating the African state for the development of its peoples.

This is why the demand that the MNLA dropped its demand for independence as a condition for dialogue is not sustainable. The state must be for the people and not the people for the state as is the current situation in Africa. If events in Europe continue to show that the state system is not sacrosanct—in Spain as in Britain ("The news from Scotland," *The Nation* Oct. 23, 2012, 64), then why can't the state system in Africa come under discussion? The state is supposed to be for its peoples, and that must be why the Scots now want "their own" state. Or is this only a European reality? Perhaps, it is only the European state that is supposed to serve its European peoples. Maybe, the African state is even supposed to serve the European interest. Even if this was true during colonialism, and perhaps even after, must it continue to be so, especially in the light of so much suffering among the ordinary people of Africa, engendered by the collapse or non-workability of their states due to the incompatibility of their peoples? When therefore, France allows that the Tuaregs drop their demand for a state out of a Mali that cannot work, whose interests is France protecting? Her own, or that of Mali that so obviously cannot take care of its citizens? And what happens to the interests of the Tuaregs who have wasted their time all these years since independence in a Mali that was never going to work?

In other words, why is France (and this goes for all other Western powers) insisting that Mali (and this goes for almost all other African countries) must continue to survive as it was created, when it is obvious that it can only spread injustice and underdevelopment for as long as it survives in its present form? Simply put, there must be something that is not clear to the naked eye that is making the Western powers act as they have over the years on the issue of the state system in Africa. Is it their ego—in other words, that they will lose face if the state system they created in Africa is seen to be collapsing? Or is their economic interests—in other words, can they only milk Africa completely if African states continue to wobble? Whichever, Europe and the West need not worry—it is already obvious that their states in Africa are not working and cannot work, just as it is obvious that they have continued to "make a kill" in "their" various states in Africa on account of those states not working. But it need not be so—the West will take even more credit for re-creating the African state in a way that can work, and they will also benefit more sustainably from the states in Africa if these states are working.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This research has been able to show clearly that trans-border ethnic groups in Africa have been much involved in many of the conflicts that afflict Africa. This involvement is often inevitable—the nature of these trans-border ethnic groups necessarily draws their fractions into many of these conflicts. Their involvements in the conflicts however, more than anything else, shows a failure of the state system in Africa—a state system that, notwithstanding the many years of its existence, is yet to come to terms with the phenomenon of the trans-border ethnic group. It is therefore the state system, more than even the trans-border groups, that must change—to one that takes care of the interests of all the citizens of the state and even others who live within its borders. The state must thus necessarily provide those services and facilities necessary for the good life to its trans-border peoples. To do this the states would have to liberalize their political and economic systems and structures, such that all its citizens, irrespective of the ethnic grouping, could participate effectively. The connection between the economy and the state must be remodeled such that investors from wherever will be given the favorable conditions to engage in business, and the state will no longer be the major if not the sole determinant of who stays and who folds up. This way, the violent contest for power would be minimized, as the state would cease to be the “gateway to wealth.”

Political liberalization in the situation of trans-border ethnicity must involve a multi-party system such that every group that so feels could form parties to represent their interests in the political arena. This multi-party democracy must also involve periodic elections, such that the possibility of changes of government is guaranteed. Other provisions such as rotation and zoning of offices are also necessary to reassure all and sundry that every office in the land is attainable. Arrangements must also be deliberately built into the political system that provides for alliances between parties as the basis for the formation of governments, and then for some types of decisions to be arrived at only by consensus. Importantly also, democracy must be characterized by good governance and justice. Good governance will ensure that efficiency is brought to the management of the affairs of state such that available resources are used for the greatest good of the greatest number of the people. In this regard, the constitution and political system must contain other necessary consociational arrangements. This must include proportional representation in the country's decision-making institutions such as the parliament, civil service, army etc, such that every group is at least assured of relative presence in those bodies. This will be without prejudice to application of merit as a criterion for recruitment into a country's institutions for those who ordinarily have excellent credentials.

The consociational arrangements must also involve the decentralization of government and the devolution of powers between central or higher level governments and local or lower level governments. This would mean the division of the country into entities and tiers according to population. Here, deliberate efforts will be made to ensure that a proportional number of such entities are created in areas where the trans-border ethnic groups are concentrated, especially the dispersed ones like the Tutsi and the Fulani, such that their members will predominate in those areas where they live. This way, these trans-border peoples can mobilize the structures of such entities for participation in the issues of the day at national levels. States hosting the fractions of the trans-border ethnic group must also co-operate to simplify the boundary function of their common borders to allow relatively easy contact among trans-border kin. It has been proved that when boundaries are made to serve strictly as lines of division and exclusion, they become more prone to subversion by members of trans-border ethnic groups.

These states could also co-operate by allowing members of the trans-border ethnic groups access to services and facilities like education, health-care and agricultural services on their sides of the border without discrimination based on country of origin. Furthermore, the states must cooperate in the formulation of policies that have a direct impact on their trans-border peoples and their border regions. Such policies must ensure that issues such as grazing rights for nomadic and pastoral groups are harmonized throughout a region to the benefit of the partitioned peoples. This way, it will essentially not matter to the member of the trans-border group on which side of the border he finds himself since he is as well-off as any other kin

even on a different side of the border. Finally, the international system must explore the potentials of the trans-border ethnic group for regional co-operation and integration, trade and cultural exchanges among states and exploit these with the aim of peace on the continent. This last point is actually a topic for further research.

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Endnotes

¹ About 10 African countries eventually sent troops to the Malian operation. In addition, apart from France, a number of Western countries also provided material and logistic support ("Nigeria goes to war in Mali", *The Nation*, January 18, 2013, 1).

² Those events were connected with the death of Cote d'Ivoire's first president in 1993 and the subsequent attempts between that time and 2010 to conduct acceptable presidential elections in the country. See, Nwolise (2011).

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