

POWER SHARING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN
AFRICA: NIGERIA, SUDAN AND RWANDA

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"Il faut raccourcir les geants

Et rendre les petits plus grands.

Tout à la vraie hauteur

Voilà le vrai bonheur" (French Revolutionary Song, 1793).

Most of the conflicts on the African continent centre on disagreement over the sharing of power among the ethnic groups of the constituent states. While the civil war in Sudan has claimed thousands of lives since it started, the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda has attracted world-wide condemnation. In Nigeria, the fear of northern domination was heightened by the annulment of the presidential election of June 12, 1993, won by a southern politician. The reaction of the international community to this, and the Ogoni crisis, has turned Nigeria into a commonwealth outcast.

Unfortunately, the incidence of external intervention has been on the restoration of peace rather than the elimination of the source of the disagreement, namely the differential access of the groups to positions of power and privilege in the society. It is in consequence of this that this paper seeks to recommend zoning, a method of power sharing, as a strategy of crisis management in Africa, using Nigeria, Sudan and Rwanda as case studies.

Le Marchand (1970:83) has traced the genesis of the crisis in Rwanda to the paradox whereby the Tutsi who constitute only 15% of the country's population monopolise the top positions of government. The New York Times expressed the same situation in the neighbouring Burundi in anatomical shorthand. To substantiate its claim

that "In Burundi, Tall Are Ruling the Short," the paper noted that the President of Burundi, three quarters of his cabinet and the National Assembly, about 13 of 15 provincial governors and all the Army officers are Tutsi (AF press clips, Washington D.C. 5 June, 1987: 16). It becomes understandable why the conference of catholic Bishops in that country had argued that the crisis can only be resolved if there is "basis of equity and respect for the rights and duties of all groups" (Newswatch, 12 Sept. 1988: 27).

The root cause of the crisis in Sudan is glaring enough to a casual observer. While commenting on the Abuja Peace Talks on the Sudan, a correspondent wrote:

What began 6 years ago as a search by the minority south for a greater share of political power and economic development at the time of independence has now developed into deep religious and ethnic division (New Nigerian, 4 May 1993: 12).

The report from the foreign and commonwealth office in London shows that "the promotion of northerners to positions of influence within the administration of the southern provinces" was partly responsible for the turn of event (Daily Sketch, 24 Nov. 1992: 5). The recent pronouncements of Col. John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, indicate that the people of southern Sudan opted for secession because they have been excluded from the corridors of power and are being exploited for the benefit of the north.

The issue of power sharing is also central to the ethno-political crisis in Nigeria. It is beyond debate that the North has monopolised the leadership of the country since independence. Osaghae (1989: 128-136) has shown that northerners controlled the sensitive government posts between 1958 and 1984. The wide protests that accompanied the cabinet reshuffle of 29th December 1989 would appear to suggest that the situation had become unbearable. Although one of the Service Chiefs described the administrative re-organisation as a "routine military exercise" which does not call for "senseless outcry from intruding members of the public," the placards called for "a sense

of balance" in appointments to "key political and military positions" in the country (Vanguard, 18 Jan 1990; Vanguard 12 Jan. 1990: 1).

It was as a part of the reaction to the sectional domination of the country that Major Gideon Orkar staged the abortive coup of 22 April 1990. Orkar redefined the scope of the northern domination by announcing the suspension of the five states controlled by the Hausa -Fulani from the Federal union until their indigenes accepted to live on equal terms with the other ethnic groups. Generally speaking, Nigerians judge the degree of the satisfaction of their group aspiration by the number of their local notables in high positions off government. Hence, when General Abacha unceremoniously dropped Rear Admiral Allison Madueke as his Chief of Naval Staff, a group of Igbo elders did not only express "a great shock" on "the manner our son was removed," they urged the Head of State to make 'equity" and "justice" the hallmark of his government (Daily Sketch, 16 Sept. 1994: 1).

It is therefore, not accidental that when the opportunity presented itself for Nigerians to recommend a political framework that will ensure a 'salutary balance' in the power structure, the preference was for "a system of power-sharing which gives every Nigerian a chance to leadership of the country such that the continuous domination of any section of the country by another shall be abolished," (Sunday Punch, 6 March, 1994: A1). The principles of zoning and Rotational Presidency which emerged from the recommendation constitutes the subject of analysis in this paper.

Morton B. King (1956:83) has pointed out that "the defining characteristics without which the minority/dominant relationship does not exist is the imputation by the majority of the inherent superiority to themselves and of inherent inferiority to members of the minority group." What is even noticed in the countries under focus is that the dominant groups have invented the myth to justify their hold on power. The divide and rule policy of the colonial master may, therefore, be interpreted as an instrument to achieve a divinely ordained caste system. At the height of the June 12 crisis in Nigeria

Chief Adekunle Ajasin fell back on the well-known practice of heaping the blame on the British:

The British government had always preferred that power resides with the northerners because of their own selfish interest, at the exclusion of their southern counterparts. It was their ploy on the eve of independence and there are indications even now that they are still enamoured of that policy thinking (Razor, 19 Oct. 1993: 7)

But respectable northern elders like Sheik Gunmi, Alhaji Maitama Sule, Liman Ciroma, Ismaila Mamman and others have come out at different times to say that the northerners do not owe any gratitude to the British since it is their birth right to lead the country (Punch, 27 Feb. 1994 p19; Razor 19 Oct., 1993: 1). While Sheik Gunmi had publicly declared that a southerner can only rule the country over his dead body, Alhaji Maitama Sule argued that "Igbos are gifted for technology, the Yorubas endowed for commerce and Hausa-Fulani destined to rule" (the Guardian 13 March, 1994: A7). One newspaper disclosed that a group of northerners, acting under the banner of Northern Consultative Forum, urged General Abacha to topple the Interim National Government before December 1993 to make it impossible for Chief M.K.O Abiola to actualize the June 12 Mandate (Razor, 19 October, 1993: 3)

Similarly, official spokesman in Sudan may blame the current crisis in southern Sudan on the British who administered the territory as a separate entity. The fact remains that the southerners have not been able to overcome the stigma of slavery just like the Blacks in the United States. Lake and Rotchild (1996:57) observed that "In the Sudan, southerners with strong memories of slavery and perceptions of low status bridle at any new evidence of disrespect. Thus, they viewed the Sudanese government's decision to apply Islamic (Sharia) law to them as well as to the Muslims living in the country's north as a confirmation of their second-class status." The conquering race attitude of the northerners is a complicating factor in the crisis.

The Tutsi in Rwanda see themselves as the chosen race. The story of creation in Rwanda talks of Kigwa who descended from heaven and gave birth to three sons — Gatwa, Gatusi and Gahutu — the fathers of the three ethnic groups in Rwanda. To choose his successor, Kigwa gave each of them a pot of milk to watch over during the night. While Gatwa drank his own, Gahutu fell asleep and mistakenly spilled it on the floor. It was only Gatusi who successfully accomplished the task. And for that reason, Kigwa chose him as leader who is forever free from menial job. The Gahutu was to be his servant while Gatwa, for his gluttony, was to be a pariah forever. And, it was an accepted belief that whosoever attempts to overthrow the arrangement is revolting against God. The fear of divine sanction and the fact that the Tutsi could incorporate Hutus who had distinguished themselves into the Tutsi clan, like the French assimilation, helped to keep protest down. Rene Lemarchand (1970:33) stressed that this myth provided that moral justification for the maintenance of a system in which a tiny minority assumed the status of a leisure class through the exploitation of the masses. Malinowski (nd: 126) corroborated the view by saying that the myth for Rwandese is “neither a fictitious story, nor an account of a dead past, it was a statement of a bigger reality still partially alive... through its precedents, its laws, its morals e.t.c.”

Admittedly, the root of minority problem is present in every heterogeneous society. Marden and Meyer (1962:25) have revealed that minority demands for any given period is a reflection of both 'the forces generated within the group and its reaction to the treatment it receives from the dominant group.' This leads us to a review of past attempts to find a solution to the problem of power-sharing in the countries of study. We would also see why the efforts failed to allay the fears of ethnic domination. For, as experts in the field of inter-group relations are now increasingly aware, ethnic conflict is caused by what Vesna Pesic, a peace activist in former Yugoslavia calls the “fear of the future, lived through the past.” (Lake and Rotchild 1996:43).

There are many ways of avoiding inter-group conflicts particularly where the ethnic groups occupy identifiable geographical areas as in Africa. As the case of Rwanda-Burundi and Czechoslovakia suggests, the groups could agree on a "peaceful divorce" or non-violent agreed secession; they could settle for federation or confederation; regional or functional autonomy or cultural pluralism as the case of Switzerland indicates. The means of achieving any of these options include negotiation, mediation, arbitration, recognition and power-sharing. But more importantly, stable ethnic relations is based upon a 'contract' that specify among other things 'the rights and responsibilities, political privilege and access to resources of each group (Lake and Rotchild 1996:49). And as Lake and Rotchild added, the most important part of the contract is the safeguards it contains to render the agreement self-enforcing. Their analyses reveals that this could take a variety of forms; first, power-sharing arrangements, electoral rules, or group vetoes that prevent one ethnic group from setting government policy unilaterally; second, minority control over critical economic assets, as with the whites in South Africa or Chinese in Malaysia; and, third, as was found in Croatia before the breakup of Yugoslavia, maintenance of ethnic balance within the military or police forces to guarantee that one group will not be able to use overwhelming organised violence against the other. What is immediately obvious is that all these varieties of safeguards revolve around the issue of balance of power. This is why the power sharing arrangement is that most crucial aspect of the management of inter-group conflict in Africa today.

The three countries of study have experimented with federalism, which is widely accepted as the most efficacious instrument of conflict resolution in a multi-ethnic state. Yet, the outcome has been less than satisfactory. This itself can be attributed to the distortions in the operation of the federal arrangement. Nigeria, by conservative estimate, has about 250 ethnic or linguistic groups in a geographical area of 913,072 89 kilometers. But the irony of the situation, as Prof. E.A. Afigbo (1991:14) argued, is that

the federal structure adopted in 1954 did not reflect the cultural or geographical diversities of the country. It was reflective of the administrative systems of the colonial period.

One consequence of this was the structural imbalance in which the Northern Region was larger than the Western and Eastern Regions put together. Besides, each of the regions had a majority group whose population exceeded the rest put together. The Hausa-Fulani were in the majority in the North, the Igbo in the East and Yoruba in the West. Each of these used its in-built majority to its advantage in the competition for power and influence both in the region and at the centre. The instability this created confirmed the view of Arthur Lewis (1965:65) that plural societies can not function peaceably if politics is regarded as a zero-sum game which functions according to the "erroneous definition that the majority is entitled to rule over the minority." It was to arrest the trend that the army took over the government and divided the country into twelve states in 1967. Significantly too, each of the three major ethnic groups was fragmented into two or more states, or administrative units ostensibly to curb their domineering posture.

The territorial approach to minority problem has one major attraction. It is able to shield an ethnic group from the influence of its erstwhile dominant neighbour. As a minority spokesman explained before the Willink Minorities Commission in Nigeria in 1958, there is no better solution to the fear of the lamb that finds itself in a zoo with a lion than the iron cage.

But state creation had failed to resolve the Minority Question in Nigeria for a number of reasons. First, the relocation of the administrative boundary merely redistributed the majority/minority category; with its associated fears and grievances. Today, more minorities have emerged from the 36 states than in the days of the three regions. This itself points to the contextual character of minority/dominant relationship and the limitations of the territorial approach to it. More importantly, state creation has

Although, a member of the Sudanese Ruling Command Council (RCC) Colonel Mohammed Al-Min Khalifa had boasted in 1991 that "we have through federation created equal distribution of power and wealth" (See Sunday Guardian 18th, August 1991: A3) in Sudan, the federal arrangement which was adopted in Addis Ababa in 1972 was never satisfactorily implemented. Commenting on the autonomous rule in 1983, the African Research Bulletin had this to say:

The 10 years of autonomy have not been happy. The government in Khartoum had never handed out the money to which the South felt entitled, and the countryside remains pitifully backward.

Southern politicians have 'no respect for public finance,' as one northern politician tactfully put. The Khartoum government might have continued to leave the south as a squabbling African backwater if it had not been for the discovery of oil in the south, followed by more disturbance than usual (African Research Bulletin, May 1-13 1983: 5847.)

The Republican order No 1 of 1983, called Organisation of Regional Rule in the Southern Provinces, divided southern Sudan into three regions. These were Bahr El Ghazal, Equatorial and upper Nile along the lines of the colonial provinces of the same name. While some of the southern leaders agreed with the government explanation that the decentralisation will enhance the share of the South in the national budget and improve its representation in the central government, others interpreted the re-organisation as a ploy to weaken the South by a divide and rule policy. The irony of the situation is that it was president Gaa'far El- Nimeiry who had preached the gospel of political accommodation at the Addis Ababa peace Conference of 1972 who later revoked the concession of autonomy to please the northern hard-liners in his government. The current president, General El- Bashir has continued to tow the same line. All efforts to persuade him to relax the posture failed to receive a hearing at the Abuja Peace Talk in 1993. The meeting broke up in a deadlock on 17 May 1993 with

Khartoum accusing Nigeria of attempting to impose its own arrangement on Sudan. (The Guardian 1st June, 1993: 7; Sunday Times 30th May, 1993: 8).

The breakdown of the mediation is partly responsible for the continued warfare in Sudan, with El Bashir pointing accusing finger at Uganda and Eritrea. (See Tribune, 23 Jan. 1997: 4).

While Military dictatorship has tilted the Federal - State relations in favour of the central government in Sudan and Nigeria, it did not give the federal structure a chance to succeed in Rwanda. The army in Rwanda is Tutsi led and Tutsi dominated. Hence, the Tutsi could rely on this to implement policies exclusively to their favour. The only option opened to the Hutu who constitute 85% of their country's population is to seek a reversal of status, through violence. The reprisal attack explains why that country has been a theatre of ethnic cleansing. And, as inevitable, the problem has spilled into the Great Lakes region. All efforts to contain the situation in the past by imposing embargo on the Tutsi led government has not produced any tangible result. Recently, Britain admitted that a British company, Mil-Tech, successfully flouted the arms embargo imposed on Rwanda by the United Nations by supplying part of the arms used in the genocide of 1994. (Vanguard, 23 Jan. 1997: 5).

In a swift reaction to recent development, the neighbouring countries have also imposed an embargo on Rwanda in an attempt to force the head of the military junta to hand over to a democratically elected government. It is doubtful whether this will succeed.

It is quite evident that the minority and ethnic problems in the countries of study can not be resolved by iron and blood but by a power sharing formula that will give every section or group a sense of belonging. A similar awareness had led Lebanon and Guyana to experiment with proportional representation while the use of the weighted vote was once contemplated for the Asians in Kenya. Stability is maintained in India by reserving a fixed number of parliamentary seats and jobs for the scheduled castes. The inclusion of power sharing provision in the interim constitution of South Africa

encouraged the white National Party of W.F. De Klerk to cooperate with President Nelson Mandela to dismantle apartheid. This is why the inclusion of rotational power sharing at federal and state levels in the constitution to be adopted in Nigeria as from 1998 is of particular significance.

At the Federal level, six key executive and legislative offices will be rotated among six newly created geo-political zones. The offices are those of the President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives. The geo-political zones are northwest, northeast, northcentral, southwest, southeast, and southsouth. The arrangement is for an experimental period of 30 years. To demonstrate his commitment to the new arrangement, General Sani Abacha created six new states in October 1996; one from each of the zones. A huge sum of the Petroleum Trust Fund was also recently shared out on the zonal basis (The Guardian, 9 Dec. 1996: 1). But beyond this, the modalities for the implementation have not been spelt out even though the transition programme is already at an advanced stage.

It will, therefore, be profitable to specify the mode of implementation to avoid the distortions that had made the goals of the Federal Character unattainable. It is also appreciated that any of the groups could exploit an ambiguous clause to its advantage, thus provoking grave insecurity. A clearly formulated rule is also essential if Rwanda, Sudan and other African states are to benefit from the Nigeria model. At the moment, there is anxiety and suspicion over the order of rotation. Four of the five chairmen of the political parties are from the North. Some people interpret this as a good development that will pave way for the emergence of a southern president to compensate the South for the injustice of June 12, 1993. Others argue that it illustrates the hold of the northerners on the party machinery; and their determination to hold on to power at the centre since the party chairman could metamorphose into a presidential candidate judging from the experience of the Second Republic (The Guardian, 13 Jan. 1997: 1).

Besides, many Nigerians can still recollect that the National Party of Nigeria had implemented the principle of zoning in a manner that emphasised the political primacy of the North. In November 1978, the party divided the country into four zones - North, West, East and Minorities. While promising to rotate the important party offices among the zones, all the presidential aspirants were from the North and the "minorities" eventually became subsumed under the East. As Richard Joseph (1991:148) argued, the arrangement also allowed politicians who acquired their posts on the basis of "personal tenacity" and "capital investments" to pass for representative of their blocks. The party jettisoned the zoning arrangement by allowing President Shehu Shagari to run for a second term in office.

To ensure that the other of rotation does not generate controversy in the future, I propose that accredited representatives of the six zones should meet to work out an acceptable arrangement. They may concede the presidency to the South West to correct the wrong of the past while selecting the other posts through the ballot. The procedure should be duly televised to clear all doubts.

To ensure that the president and prime minister do not come from the same geographical or cultural zone, the following pairing may be considered. First we may label the zones as follows, for ease of reference.

1. The South West comprising Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun and Oyo States with a combined population of 17,600,641 and fifteen senatorial districts.
2. The South East comprising Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Imo and Ebonyi states with a combined population of 10,712,675 with 15 senatorial districts.
3. The South South comprising 6 states: Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers and Bayelsa. The total population is 12,939,226 with 18 senatorial districts.

4. The North Central zone comprising Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Niger, Plateau and Nasarawa states with a combined population of 12, 211,984 with ~~16~~ senatorial districts.

5. The North East zone has six states: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Taraba, Yobe and Gombe. The total population is 11, 907,122. The senatorial districts is ~~15~~ 18.

6. The Northern West zone has seven states: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. The combined population is 22, 764,192. The number of senatorial districts is ~~18~~ 21.

Since the arrangement is expected to last for 30 years, it means that the president and other key officials can only have one term of 5 years only. The following order of rotation can then be considered:

First Term: President zone 1,

Prime Minister zone 6;

Second Term: President zone 5

Prime Minister zone 2;

Third term: President zone 2

Prime Minister zone 4;

Fourth term; President zone 6

Prime Minister: zone 2;

Fifth Term: President zone 3,

Prime Minister zone 5;

Sixth Term; President zone 4,

Prime Minister, zone 1.

The above pairings have the following advantages:

- (A.) It will pacify the Southwest (Yoruba) over the annulment of the election of June 12, 1993.
- (B.) It will ensure that the President and Prime Minister are made to come from one of the two geographical sections (North and south) of the country at any given time.
- (C.) It will ensure that the President or the Prime Minister does not come from the same geographical section on two consecutive terms.
- (D.) It will ensure that no two zones are paired together.

It is proposed that only the zone that will produce the president should organise the primaries to select the presidential candidates. The candidates must necessarily pick their running mates from the zone to which the post has been allotted. The election proper will be nation wide. While the functions of the Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives are glaring enough, it is proposed that each of the four executive officers should have control over specified government functions and agencies. For instance, if the President presides over the Council of State, the Prime Minister should be responsible for the control of the parastatals. The Vice-President may be placed in charge of the police, while the Deputy Prime Minister may oversee the affairs of the Ministries. The sharing of responsibility will discourage the ganging up of the zones and the use of state power to the exclusive advantage of any zone.

may not go far enough, it is nevertheless an improvement on the existing arrangement.

It has also been argued that rotational presidency is undemocratic. A committee of Elders in a position paper argued this point eloquently:

It is the view of the committee that such an arrangement will also be undemocratic as it will alienate and disenfranchise millions of Nigerian citizens whose areas are not zones to produce the president. In addition, it will deny the country the opportunity of producing the best material for the exalted office of the president (The Guardian, 9 June, 1993: 34).

Prof. Ango Abdullahi, a vocal spokesman of the North, even consider the arrangement as a plot to weaken the North whose only asset is its large population (National Concord, 15 Feb. 1994: 3).

To start with, the arrangement still permits voting at the national level, even though the presidential candidates are restricted to a particular zone. And, if we consider the total number of years in which candidates from one section of the country have monopolised power at the centre, we would readily concede that rotational presidency creates better chance for the best candidates to emerge. If majorities continue to rule by interpreting democracy simply as a game of number, the minorities would be frustrated to the point of opting out of the federal union. The political experience in Nigeria, Sudan and Rwanda shows that only consociational democracy can guarantee political stability in deeply divided African countries.

Lastly, some people may interpret the rotation of power as shadow chasing or ploy by the elite to hold on to power. Alhaji Liman Ciroma (Sunday Guardian, 13, Feb. 1994: A18) had this to say:

The central issue we have to confront in our present circumstances can not be solved by rotation or multiple vice presidency. What we need is to device a system which ensures that whoever becomes president has a

truly national constituency, agreeable disposition, and total commitment to the Nigerian state. Even more important, we have to forge a system that ensures that whoever occupies public office at whatever level performs his duties in a way that promotes national unity and equitable development of all our body politic. No amount of rotation or zoning will solve our fundamental problems.

Alhaji Balarabe Musa, a Second Republic governor, also argued, "what has always happened in Nigeria is class rather than ethnic dominance but the northern clique seem to be more experienced, so ruthless that it can easily secure, align states in the north more successfully than its Southern counterpart." (Weekend Concord, 16 April, 1994).

While it is to be admitted that ethnicity serves the interest of the elite, it is equally true the ethnic groups look up to their sons in government as emissaries. It is this linkage that recommends the equitable distribution of important government post among the ethnic groups of the country. Share the view of Alhaji Liman Ciroma that Nigeria and Africa should begin to produce leaders who are ready to place service above rewards or communal interest. As at now, those contesting political offices have always claimed to be in politics in deference to the "wishes of their people." This is the reality we must face. On the whole, rotational presidency and zoning will reassure everybody that he can attain the highest political office in his country and reduce the fear of sectional domination that is responsible for many of the conflicts in Africa.

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