
Ode Ojuwo

The Lessons To Be Learned from Nigeria

Professor Ojuwo is from the Center for Development Studies, Jos University, Nigeria. Subheads have been added.

The first two speakers focussed on issues relating to Sudan, the war in Sudan and the processes of peace. I would love to hear the reasons for war, which was not stated, and what the other party is saying, not only the government position. The third speaker has given us the philosophical foundations for peace. Maybe I can come in between, that is to say, for every problem that has been mentioned with regard to Sudan, there is always a parallel from Nigeria, either in the past or concurrently.

But let me also point to the concluding remark, that about describing a glass as half full or half empty. I always tell my students that that is not a problem. Because whether you describe a glass as half empty or half full, depends on the initial condition of the glass. If it was empty initially and you put in half, then it is half full; if it was full initially and you take away half, then it is half empty. So it depends on the initial condition.

The parallel I want to relate to you, which may be of help, is that you realize that Nigeria went through a civil war from 1967 to 1970, three bloody years of civil war. One of the causes of that war is that a segment of Nigeria felt that it was marginalized in the political and economic processes in Nigeria, and yet it was providing a substantial portion of Nigeria's revenue. Following the political crisis of 1966, in which a number of Nigerian leaders were killed, it led to a war, from 1967 to 1970. Now, regarding reconciliation, what was helpful to us was that in that war, the West had not at that time perfected the strategy of tension. The West had this passive intervention, in which they allowed NGOs [non-governmental organizations], most prominently Caritas, which was in the east, and there was a lot of propanganda against Nigeria. I think Tanzania was the first country to recognize the secessionist group at that time.

By January 1970, the war had ended. It is important to note, that throughout that war, Nigeria never borrowed a dollar or a dinar; by the time the war ended, Nigeria didn't owe anybody anything on account of the civil war. Under the leadership of General Gowon, Nigeria embarked on the three Rs: reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation. As Mrs. LaRouche has said, when the war ended, no one was investi-

gated. The policy statement was that there was no victor, no vanquished. Although the Nigerian government actually defeated the secessionist groups, and they formally surrendered to the present President, [Olusegun] Obasanjo. But we embarked on a policy of reconciliation.

How did they do it? For all of the property that the secessionist group abandoned, a committee was set up to return all assets to those people who were defeated in the war, in every part of the country — houses, property, everything. Only those who took their money and put it in Biafran banks, the government refused to convert it from the Biafran currency to Nigerian currency, and instead gave each one of them about \$20 each, at that time. Otherwise, every Nigerian who was affected by the war and had to flee, and came back and provided evidence that he owned the property, had it given back. If there were dead in the war and family members could prove ownership, these properties were returned to them. That is one way this issue of love was applied, and not tracing who did what, because in the war everybody did what was wrong. In the West, they are still pursuing people in their eighties who took part in the Second World War, but they never find out, what the victorious side did to the Germans. It is only the people on the other side, to this very day.

The point is, that the tensions in Nigeria have not ended because of the reconciliation. You recall that soon after the war, three years after the war, and as a result of the Middle East crisis, oil became not only an economic resource, but a political weapon as well. And so, through no particular fault of Nigeria, the price of oil skyrocketed in 1973 from about \$3 a barrel to about \$14 a barrel. So, Nigeria found itself with a lot of revenue that was supposed to help to execute its three Rs: reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation.

Continuing Instability

Reconciliation was achieved relatively faster than reconstruction and rehabilitation, for the reason that much of the revenue was misapplied, and because, while the country remained one, there was constant political revolution or revolt, through a series of military coups. There was the desire of each and every soldier to be a head of state, without reference to the Nigerian people. In a way, we are guilty, because we supported them, we didn't resist them. Each time there was a coup d'état, and the coup leader announced that the government had been toppled because of corruption, mismanagement, ethnic bias, we clapped. Soon after, the new leader descended into depths of immorality and corruption lower than the preceding one.

And the result today, is that there is disaffection in Nigeria. Although we are not really fighting a civil war, there is a lot of threat of instability, threat to sovereignty in Nigeria, from those who have perfected the strategy of tension. A certain segment of Nigeria is now calling for a confederation, just as others are calling for a review of revenue allocation based on the principle of derivation. That is, from wherever



A mosque in the Nigerian capital of Abuja.

the revenue comes, let it be retained there. Others are calling for some form of value-based religious state, a form of *Sharia* [Islamic law]. Whatever instrument is used, depends on its potency in Nigeria. In the middle states, ethnicity is used. You move a little, they use religion. But the strategy of keeping Nigeria divided is the same, whether it is in religion, or state, or tribe.

Now, the Nigerian government is struggling to keep the country together. But, some people are actually calling for what they call a national sovereign conference, in which the over 250 ethnic groups are supposed to send their representatives, and the decisions of that conference will be binding on the government and will supersede the Nigerian Constitution. The question is, who is going to organize the national sovereign conference? Is it a government which is running on the basis of the Constitution, to undermine its own legitimacy? Or will each of these tribes become a nation? Because each of the tribes now are calling themselves a race, so it is no longer a black race; we have a Hausa race, we have a Yoruba race—250 races in Nigeria. So, the tension is there, and the government is doing everything it can to try to dampen tensions.

Efforts by the Government

A number of measures have been taken. The oil-producing areas in particular feel very bitter, that after so many years of extracting oil from their area, they feel that they are the most backward in terms of infrastructure, in terms of education, and in terms of human development. During the military rule, a commission was set up to deal with it. That has failed. Since then, a new commission has been set up, called the Niger

Delta Development Commission. Niger Delta is the area of Nigeria where the Niger River flows into the Atlantic Ocean. That is the area in which most of the oil is found, and the ethnic groups there, the Fiedad, Wutasha, and others, are agitating for a review of the revenue-allocation formula. In Nigeria, we have a revenue-allocation formula, which shares the revenue which goes into an account, which goes to all the states, local government, and the federal government. They are emphasizing that this revenue formula should be altered in order to benefit the areas from which the oil has come. That is the principle of derivation.

And there is a third attempt: We have 36 states, with the federal government, 37. The country has been split into six geopolitical zones, and each of these zones expects, over time, to have the Presidency rotated to it. That is still in the works. But the assumption of office by President Obasanjo is connected with the desire to take leadership in Nigeria. For many years, whether it was civilian or military, the north has always, at least on the face of it, held political office. The southwest of Nigeria is the more educated part, it controls education and largely controls business, in terms of ownership of factories and companies. In eastern Nigeria, which sought secession in the civil war, they are more or less very mobile traders, all over the country. So, we have this segment. And the north had resisted for a long time the idea of shifting leadership, because they claim, that if they don't control political leadership, the southwest controls business and education, the east controls trade—what is their own? So this has been the kind of tussle, and it is creating a lot of tension in Nigerian society.

So, the attempt for reconciliation is in process, and the democratic process has given room to the ability to express

oneself, but unfortunately, that expression had turned inwards to mutual suspicion, and each segment tries to, if possible, take itself out of Nigeria.

Tension Tied to IMF Economic Policies

The problems that you have here are replicated in Nigeria as well, and the political role of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund [IMF] cannot escape mention. The present tension we have now, is not unconnected to the kind of economic policies that have been put in place since the mid-1980s. The Structural Adjustment Program [SAP], has alienated virtually every segment of Nigerian society, except a very few. The entire middle-income group, the middle class, has been wiped out. In Nigeria, you are either rich, or you are poor. There's nothing in between now. So, you have a whole set of educated Nigerians who are taking to the streets. If you are met on the road by a robber, he speaks fluent English. A good number of them are graduates with no employment. And the World Bank has advised the Nigerian government not to employ any more persons, because, according to the World Bank, the Nigerian government should downsize, because it is bloated in its labor force. At last count, with 120 million people, Nigeria's public-sector labor force was 100,000 people. The World Bank is insisting on downsizing.

All of the industries, virtually, have collapsed. The only ones that are functioning are the outposts of multinational corporations. Since 1986, no new investment has taken place. Two months ago, the President announced they were going to employ 2,000 people in the public sector, and that every potential employee should go back to his place of origin to have an interview. For 2,000 openings announced, nearly a million people turned out for the interviews, and to date, nobody has been employed. I was at an interview, just to see what was happening. In the state I went to, the man doing the interview confided to me that of the 25 spaces allocated to that state, 8 had been given to party leaders. So, the interview was just for public show.

These kinds of things create a lot of tension. Now the World Bank is promoting the idea of poverty alleviation. At one time, a number of colleagues and I tried to provide an alternative to the SAPs. In two years of our work, the entire establishment in which we were working was scrapped by the government, and we were sent packing, because it was said that that program was alternative to the SAP. Now the World Bank is providing loans to alleviate poverty. In 1991, it provided over \$20 million to develop primary schools. What did they do with the money? The money was used to purchase textbooks from abroad, and a good percentage of that money was used to buy pickup vans from abroad. If you go to Nigeria today, you will see a number of pickups on the streets, and they are labelled "World Bank-Assisted Primary Education Program." Those pickups were bought for the purpose of distributing the textbooks, Unfortunately, the pickups were held up, because of a question of taxes, and by the time the

pickups came, the textbooks had already been distributed. When the pickups came, they were said to be used to monitor and supervise primary schools all over the country. But, they were used to carry things. As a result, so much money is going down the drain.

In Nigeria, repayment of a World Bank loan is not connected with the project. The repayment is connected with export performance of the country. So, whether the program functions or not, is irrelevant to the repayment scheme. That is why it is possible for Nigeria to collect World Bank loans all the time. The result is, a lot of tension is created in the society, but at the same time, the people are not able to see where the problem is, and so now we focus on religion, on tribe, on ethnicity, on state. The crisis is expanding. Considering what Mr. Friesecke¹ said, about projections of what the continent will look like in 2015, it has nothing whatsoever to do with the resource base of the continent. The fate of Nigeria and the rest of the continent, is projected purely on the basis of conflict, not on the basis of how to resolve it. That is the state of mind, and orientation, of the World Bank.

And as I said earlier, the World Bank controls all the institutions in Nigeria. The only places they have not been able to enter, are the universities. Since they cannot enter, there is a stand-still between us and the government, because the government is leaning more to the World Bank and IMF than to the universities and the country.

I want to conclude by saying that you can reconcile yourselves, and the reconciliation must come through consistent dialogue, fair and free discussion. I have listened to your summary of what the government is doing, every step sounds correct to me, except we don't know what the other side is thinking. Maybe you can help us understand that. Thank you.

Mogus T. Michael

Cut Down the Number Of Outside Actors

Mr. Michael is vice president of the Ethiopia International Institute for Peace and Development.

I want to make one or two points, because while we are talking about resolving the conflict in southern Sudan, we cannot escape referring to other conflicts in the region: the conflict in Ethiopia, with Eritrea; the conflict we had with Somalia;

1. Uwe Friesecke's speech, at an earlier panel of the conference, will be published in a forthcoming issue.