

REVIEWS

Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: the Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria

John N Paden

Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press 2005, 303 pages

This book discusses the role of civic cultures in Nigeria. Aimed at showing how Muslim civic cultures respond to conflict mediation and resolution it explores these cultures, identities, and practices, in order to interrogate how they relate to the challenges of the country's democratic federalism.

To this end, the study is divided into four sections. Part one sets the background for understanding how ethno-religious violence in Nigeria has always had the potential to get out of control: Nigeria has a large Muslim population, the second largest in Africa after Egypt. The complex role of religion and ethnicity, the size of the country, and its immense natural resources, pose an enormous challenge not just to the nature and stability of Nigeria's federalism but also to the enduring geo-strategic role of the country in Africa.

Part two deals with variations in Muslim identities and values. Paden examines various sub-groups of the Nigerian Muslim community, their complex relationship with each other, their patterns of religious identity, and attitudes to other religions and other social identities. He also emphasises their leaders and the role they play in the political system at the local, regional and national levels.

Issues emerging from the transition from military to civilian rule, the introduction of Shari'a law in some northern states, and the allocation of power and resources are among the challenges to democratic federalism exposed in part three.

Part four closes the analysis with a focus on Muslim civic culture and conflict resolution. Conflict resolution peace committees which have emerged in the educational sector, the interfaith councils at state and local levels, the informal grassroots culture of conflict mediation, are important mechanisms for mediating disputes and creating an atmosphere of restraint to help conflicting parties avoid eruptions in situations of real threat.

Nigeria is a country in which the search for identity since independence has experienced a continuous overlap of sub-national regionalism, partition, federalism, civil war, military rule, and transition to multiparty democracy. The manipulation of religion and violent conflicts stemming from it has always threatened the prospect of Nigeria's ability to stay together as nation. For the author, federalism in Nigeria is based on historic patterns and a sense of

pragmatism rather than on an explicit encapsulation of religion or ethnicity. Cross-cutting ethnic and religious lines, as well as power-sharing mechanisms, contribute to conflict mediation and resolution. By relying on non-ethnic criteria to define the component states, the federal balance has kept religious conflict localised. The selection of the vice-president from a zone that balances that of the president is another means of accommodating ethnic pluralism and religious diversity. Finally, memories of the civil war and a sense of common destiny have engendered general public support for a united Nigeria.

The study goes beyond existing tensions between sub-groups (inter-brotherhood rivalries, brotherhood/non-brotherhood confrontations) over the role of traditional cultures in the definition of Islamic identity and the place of Islam as the central organising principle of their identity and value system. It highlights clearly the potential for innovation stemming from multiple interpretations of Islam and links them with efforts to promote tolerance within the Muslim community and between other religions in the country. The author shows that there is no uniform version of Islam in Nigeria. Muslim identity groups have distinct orientations in relation to authority, community, change, and conflict resolution. Models and approaches of religious identity are informed by the work of local tradition, history, the teaching of spiritual and intellectual leaders, and the diversity of local clerics. Even the application of Shari'a law is open to various interpretations, ranging from restriction to the civil domain to full implementation in the criminal and civil domains.

Paden's book challenges the notion that the clash of civilisations is inevitable in multi-religious countries. It also questions the authoritarian fatality that allegedly hinders freedom in plural societies because of cultural trends. Thus, it may contain some good news for readers interested in the causal connection between Islam and a political regime.

The author believes Muslims are not responsible for the 'democracy gap' in Nigeria because there is nothing anti-democratic in Nigerian Muslim cultures. Instead he shows that Nigeria, a diverse country with a significant Muslim population, is able to move towards a transition to a democratic society and develop mechanisms for resolving intractable conflicts. However, he tends to downplay the role of tradition in conflict, not just in relation to the issue of locally rooted Islam but also in shaping civic cultures in contemporary Nigeria. Traditional cultures remain strong in the country and the role of elders is valued because they can provide advice and play a symbolic role in the continuity of communities. However, the impact of civic cultures where offices are usually held for life and leaders are believed to provide continuity between generations is still to be investigated as those traditions could be invented, manipulated and formally instituted.

On the other hand, the problem in Nigeria may lie in the very lack of consensus about the place of religion in relation to the state. The state has primary responsibilities in the domain of Muslim religious affairs in the emirate, in contrast to other states, like the Yoruba, where the local civic culture encourages both the separation of church or mosque and the state and religious pluralism. This may be the result of the non-exclusivity of religious identity and the situational use of religion among the Yoruba, but the full range of orientations found in Nigerian Muslim society and within the Christian community further complicates interfaith dialogue and stirs a number of unintended consequences, including violent conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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Making Democracy Work In Nigeria: A review of Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria *

Emmanuel O Ojo (ed)

John Archers Publisher, 389 pages

Eight years after the return of democratic rule in Nigeria, what is the future of this system of government? This is the question at the heart of the discussion in *Making Democracy Work in Nigeria*.

In the six sections and 21 chapters of this book academics engage the question critically and offer their views on how the current democratic experiment in Nigeria can be sustained.

The first section contains five essays under the broad title 'Governance and Economic Development'. Here Emmanuel Ojo, the book's editor, underscores why Nigerians have to consolidate democracy and the conditions necessary for democracy to thrive. In the essay entitled 'Imperative of Sustaining Democratic Values' Ojo holds that observance of human rights, fiscal federalism, and a vibrant economy are some of the ingredients needed to achieve this aim.

Also in this section, A G Abiola and R O Olaopa examine the relationship between democracy and the economy, holding that for a viable democratic culture to exist there must be a vibrant economy. G T Arosanyin appraises the country's transport sector and concludes that it is all motion and no movement.

The origin, performance, and prospects of Nigeria's political parties, which, unlike political parties in other countries, are ideologically deficient but power loving, are X-rayed by P F Adebayo in chapter four, while the last chapter of the section, by Akhakpe Ighodalo, examines local government, which, sadly, has failed to make an impact at grassroots level.

The second section, a short one, consists of two essays: 'Bureaucracy and Democracy' and 'Census in Nigeria: The Politics and the Imperative of Depoliticisation for Sustainable Democracy'. The first essay explores the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy, while the second explains why censuses in Nigeria will continue to be a sham until the political, logistic, and cultural problems bedeviling them are addressed.

Section three, the longest in the book, comprises seven essays, each focusing on a specific organ of government and its link with democracy. Using the Oyo State Universal Basic Education Board (OYO SUBEB) as an example Ronke Ojo examines the Universal Basic Education policy as a tool for sustainable democracy.

* The review is adapted from one published in the 'Arts and Review' column of the *Nigerian Tribune*, Ibadan, 16 October, 2007, pp 25&26.

Celestine Bassey considers 'Legislature – Executive Relations and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria' while Emmanuel Aiyede goes a step further. Essays in this section by Okon Eminue, Shola Omotola, Wahab Egbewole and Mojeed Alabi focus on the judiciary and on the links between all the organs of government and democracy.

The fourth section, titled 'Struggle Against Corruption and the Mass Media', contains three competent essays: 'Mass Media and Democracy', 'Democracy and Corruption in Nigeria' and 'Democracy and Corruption: Executive-Legislature Relations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic'. Sadeeq contends that in any democratic setting communication must be two-way, that is, from government to citizens, and vice-versa. He notes, however, that this is not the case in Nigeria and that, until very recently, freedom of the press has largely been curtailed. Ajibewa and Oladeji's views are no different and not salutary. Ajibewa cites examples of corruption in the political system, party formation, leadership/governance, the judiciary, and the electoral process to back his claim that democracy will not thrive in Nigeria until these fundamental problems are addressed.

The contentious issues of resources control, marginalisation, and true federalism, with which the last administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo contended, are appraised in the fifth section of the book, while the final section focuses on the imperatives of national security and democracy.

Osisioma Nwoliase shares his views on national security and sustainable democracy, highlighting, in the process, what the nation needs to be truly secure, and stressing that Nigeria's security policy must be people-based rather than military-based. He further submits that national security and sustainable democracy are mutually self-reinforcing, and face common threats.

Ojo's essay, titled 'Nurturing Nigeria's Democracy: Democratisation and Demilitarisation', examines the dangers posed by the military to the country's fledgling democracy. Ojo also discusses Kaduna-based activist Shehu Sani's appraisal (in *The Killing Fields*) of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria and their consequences for democracy.

The concluding chapter, which ponders the survival of democracy in Nigeria, highlights such problems as federalism, unscrupulous politics, the menace of the military, and the corruption Nigeria must address to prevent it relapsing into military dictatorship.

There is no gainsaying the fact that democracy is facing a test in Nigeria. During the locust years of the military, everybody yearned for it; now that the country has it is it striving vigorously to make it work? In highlighting the challenges of sustaining democracy in Nigeria and the role we all have to play, this book is commendable. However, there is more to be done to get the message across to all Nigerians that the task of making democracy thrive is a collective one.