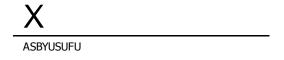
State Building and Constitutional Politics in a Multi-Ethnic Society: The Nigerian Experience

Submitted by Ali Simon Bagaji Yusufu to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Ethno-Political Studies in July 2012.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been previously submitted for the award of a degree by this or any other University.



Abstract

In response to competing group claims and the challenge to achieve pre-set triple national goals - recognising and accommodating ethnic diversity, achieving national unity and political stability, successive Nigerian governments from the colonial era to the present, have at various periods negotiated, constitutionalised and/or decreed state building strategies. This thesis offers detailed discussion and evaluation of some of these competing group claims and strategies using principles derived from the theoretical arguments of Michal Walzer, Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, and prescriptions based on the empirical arguments of Crawford Young, Eric Nordlinger, Donald Horowitz and Donald Rothchild. The thesis argues that some of the strategies adopted in response to the competing group claims were defensible in the very circumstances in which they were introduced, but were either not deep enough to offer an adequate political inclusion, or lacked the appropriate instruments that would have minimised recurrence of ethno-political conflicts and institutional instabilities. There were some strategies that either generated tension among groups, or were purely driven by strategic considerations for national unity, but were defensible. There were other strategies that were pragmatic at the very period they were adopted, but not defensible. The core theoretical finding of the thesis is that, the normative and empirical prescriptions validate the country's various strategies for coping with diversity. However, application of some elements of the prescriptions in the Nigerian multicultural society has the potential to generate tensions leading to ethno-political conflicts and institutional instabilities. The important empirical finding of the thesis is regarding the role the inherent tensions between the triple national goals and the state building strategies play in the generation and recurrence of ethno-political conflict and institutional instabilities. The thesis argues that the underlying factors responsible for the prevalence of ethno-political conflict and institutional instabilities in the country include among others, the ascension of the military to power and its costly dominance of the political scene for about thirty five years, the immediate post-civil war period which coincided with the era of petroleum boom that created a deepening crisis of corruption, the perpetuation of large scale electoral and financial corruption, and manipulation of ethnic loyalties. Given the above underlying factors, this work observes that state building and Constitutional politics in Nigeria's multi-ethnic society is a difficult task, especially taking into account the ethno-political conflicts and institutional instabilities associated with the Armed Forces over the years. On the basis of a detailed and interdisciplinary analysis, the thesis recommends constitutional and institutional safeguards for mitigating ethno-political conflicts and institutional instabilities in the course of future political development of Nigeria.

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