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Should identity groups' claims be taken seriously? What principles are required to resolve competing group-claims to political equality and fairness? And what political/institutional arrangements are required to produce a just and stable union where identities have political salience? These are the questions my works have tried to address over the years.

In my PhD dissertation, which was later revised and published as *Competing Claims to Recognition in the Nigerian Public Sphere: A Liberal Argument about Justice in Plural Societies* (Lexington Books, 2001), I examined the theoretical arguments about justice in plural societies and about democratic and institutional arrangements for accommodating groups. The main theme of the theories is that a commitment to liberal equality would require principles that treat identity groups as equal political partners and, would also require, as a consequence, institutional arrangements that accommodate them. Second, I used the theoretical arguments to normatively evaluate practical claims to political equality and the institutional arrangements that were put in place in an effort to achieve this equality. Third, I used the empirical experience regarding group accommodation to evaluate the theoretical arguments. My country focus was Nigeria, and the choice was for good reasons: it is multiethnic; it has not been able to work out a basic political framework that is agreeable to its diverse groups; and, intense ethno-religious conflicts have continued to dog the country despite the bitter civil war experiences of 1967-70.

My argument was that the theoretical arguments for group recognition and for inclusive political arrangements were meaningful for the Nigerian political context and would support claims for political expression of identity. The work argued that institutional devices such as quota systems, proportional representation of groups in national institutions, and territorial autonomy, are defensible in themselves but generate undesirable outcomes. For example, it was shown that the quota system of appointment to national institutions generated tensions that resulted in the attempted Biafra secession and the consequent civil war, while territorial autonomy through states and local government creations gave rise to proliferation of more states and local governments. The consociational principle of group representation (what Nigerians call 'federal character') was found to have given rise to ethnicity as the basis for the exercise of citizenship rights. In "Political Recognition of Ethnic Pluralism: Lessons from Nigeria," (*Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4 (3) 2000) I argued that the project of institutionalizing identities carries enormous cost, but an alternative approach that entails denying institutional recognition promises immediate doom for a deeply divided society like Nigeria. My conclusion, which was also made in *Competing Claims*, was that the theoretical literature has to be updated to address the shortcomings associated with institutional recognition of groups.

In "Liberal Multiculturalism and the Problem of Institutional Instability" (in *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh and Will Kymlicka, 2004), I returned to the above theme by discussing the possible application of the theories of group recognition to African states in which ethnicity is politically salient. The chapter acknowledged that constitutional arrangements consistent with the theoretical prescriptions of the liberal multiculturalists might do justice to marginalized groups and make for peaceful coexistence. But it also argued, with empirical illustrations, that such arrangements could generate institutional instability, give rise to ethnic based patron-client networks that elevate personal ties over standard rules in the conduct of public affairs (what the Lebanese call 'wasta'), and could generate conflict over right to rich natural resources (as in the case of Nigeria). The chapter tried to

reconcile the tension between institutional recognition of groups, and individual rights, by providing a range of possible best alternative solutions to each specific problem.

Donald Horowitz has made prescriptive arguments for an electoral system that makes it possible to transcend ethnicity. He recommended the alternative vote system (later adopted by Fiji) or the plurality plus wide geographic distribution of votes system (most associated with Nigeria) as levers that induce pre-election cross-ethnic coalitions and generate a pan ethnic leader. These electoral systems work by inducing political elites to reach across ethnic fault lines to hammer out pre-election deals with their rivals with a view to pooling votes. In my book-chapter, "Constitutionalism and Political Inclusion in Nigeria," (in *Constitutionalism and Society in Africa*, edited by Okon Akiba, 2004) I examined Nigeria's use of the electoral system to produce a leader who enjoyed cross-ethnic support. My chapter argued, in the manner done by Arend Lijphart, that the cross-ethnic coalition-inducing electoral system is not different from the winner take-all system that delivers power to the majority group elite. It not only works to the advantage of majority group elites but also hardens differences and intensifies conflict. The chapter showed that where groups are numerically unequal in size and, in a world of ethnic politics where parties and their candidates have secured home domains, minority ethnic elites will always be junior partners in cross-ethnic coalitions. Horowitz' much recommended electoral law, my article argued, perpetually locks out minority elites from political leadership, makes the number one national office (the presidency) an exclusive preserve of the numerically strong, and creates a sense of political exclusion among the numerically weak. The chapter noted that the fundamental problem threatening Nigeria's corporate existence is the monopoly of power and that a path to long term peace would require rotating power among the different geo-ethnic zones of the country.

A few years ago my research turned to examining the viability of federal institutions for multiethnic states. The academic and policy communities have often recommended federalism for states in which ethnicity is politically salient. Yet, in the entire African continent only Ethiopia and Nigeria are formally federal. Even then, these two countries have difficulties sustaining that system of government. My research tried to investigate ways in which federalism can endure. The literature that is well received in the social science and policy communities has presented conditions that make for system self-preservation. The literature emphasized hard budget constraint on the borrowing habits of, and minimal intergovernmental transfers to, subnational governments. Hard budget constraint, it was argued, commits subnational governments to efficient allocation of resources and to jurisdictional competition which, in turn, compel public officials at all tiers of government to respect local autonomy. In my article, "The New Political Economy of Federal Preservation: Insights from Nigerian Federal Practice," (*Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 43 (2), 2005), I interrogated the public choice argument by drawing on the Nigerian federal experience. The article confirmed the view that local autonomy is necessary for federal sustenance, and where such autonomy does not exist the claim to federalism is empty at best and fraudulent at worst. However, the case information also showed that federal governance is not merely a matter of market efficiency. Where a federation has deep-rooted identities, territorial cleavages and poor-versus-prosperous units, the central government will not be able to commit to a policy of market economics that forbids intergovernmental transfer to jurisdictions in need of bailout — especially if the jurisdictions are many, and in a position to threaten national stability. An insistence on such policy, the paper argued, would bring about the perdition rather than the preservation of federalism. The paper concluded by noting that territorial autonomy is desirable but the road that subnational governments have to travel to re-appropriate their powers is not quite clear.

During the summer of 2005, I made a field trip to Nigeria with a view to obtaining data that would enable me develop the idea about federal sustenance. The country that I saw was fundamentally different from what used to be 10-15 years ago. I saw a country defined by demographic pressures, institutional and infrastructural decay, armed vigilante groups and hoodlums controlling city blocks, and ethnic militias vying with governmental authorities for territorial control. The observation caused me to think that issues of federal sustenance were too grandiose and out of order for a country that was gravitating towards state disappearance. Instead, I turned to the question of what happened. Finding answers to the question led my research to causes of state failure.

Writers on failed states give explanatory accounts that emphasize neopatrimonialism, resource curse, corruption etc. My current research acknowledges these interpretations but goes beyond to determine if there is a linkage between institutions poorly designed for accommodating groups and state failure. It is a paradox that institutions that are designed to ameliorate conflict would achieve opposite goals. Indeed, some have argued that the Lebanese consociationalism created a whole lot of mess that made for the collapse of the Middle Eastern country in 1975. Others have expressed the contrary view that a variety of factors, including the numerical ascendance of Muslim sects over Christians, the presence of armed Palestinians in Lebanon, Arab nationalism, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, combined to implode the country. My current research accepts that institutional arrangements for political inclusion could be effective, but it also tries to determine if there are situations in which such arrangements could lead to sustained and generalized violence that limit the ability of the state to control its territory. In "Institutional Design for Conflict Reduction and State Failure in Nigeria," (a work in progress) I believe I have proved just that.