

**ETHNICITY**

**&**

**NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

**IN**

**NIGERIA**

**Recurrent Themes**

*edited by*

**D. A. Guobadia**

**A. O. Adekunle**



**Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies**

**Ethnicity  
and  
National Integration  
in  
Nigeria  
Recurrent Themes**

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**Ethnicity  
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*edited by*

**Professor D.A. Guobadia**  
*(Director-General,  
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and

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## Contents

Page

<i>Preface</i> - - - - -	vii
<i>Table of Cases</i> - - - - -	ix
<i>Table of Statutes</i> - - - - -	x
<i>List of Contributors</i> - - - - -	xiii

### *Chapter One*

Ethno-Politics (in Nigeria): A Conceptual Framework

- <i>Eghosa E. Osaghae</i> - - - - -	1
--------------------------------------	---

### *Chapter Two*

Ethnicity and National Integration

- <i>D. A. Guobadia</i> - - - - -	20
-----------------------------------	----

### *Chapter Three*

Ethnicity and the Politics of National Development in Nigeria

- <i>Ogoh Alubo</i> - - - - -	41
-------------------------------	----

### *Chapter Four*

Ethnic Violence, The Latest Phase of Ethnic Politics

- <i>Okwudiba Nnoli</i> - - - - -	58
-----------------------------------	----

### *Chapter Five*

Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

- <i>Etannibi E.O. Alemika</i> - - - - -	87
------------------------------------------	----

### *Chapter Six*

Nationalism, Ethnic Identity and Conflict Management

- <i>I.A. Ayua</i> - - - - -	109
------------------------------	-----

### *Chapter Seven*

Ethnic Conflicts and National Security

- <i>Ademola Popoola</i> - - - - -	128
------------------------------------	-----



<b>Chapter Eight</b>	
Ethnicity and the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria	
- <i>Akase P. Sorkaa</i> - - - - -	154
<b>Chapter Nine</b>	
Environmental Scarcity and Ethnic Conflict	
- <i>Deji Adekunle</i> - - - - -	166
<b>Chapter Ten</b>	
Ethnic Conflict and Internally Displaced Persons: Remedial Measures	
- <i>Epiphany Azinge</i> - - - - -	178
<b>Chapter Eleven</b>	
Ethnic Tension: The Way Out	
- <i>Sam Oyovbaire</i> - - - - -	194
<b>Chapter Twelve</b>	
Ethnic Tension in Nigeria: The Way Out	
- <i>Attahiru M. Jega</i> - - - - -	205
<b>Chapter Thirteen</b>	
The Nigerian Constitution and Minority Rights Guarantees	
- <i>Allswell Osini Muzan</i> - - - - -	213
<b>Chapter Fourteen</b>	
Minority Rights Guarantee Under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution	
- <i>Maxwell M. Gidado</i> - - - - -	229
<b>General Index</b> - - - - -	245

## Preface

This is the first of a series of publications to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS). In keeping with the mandate and tradition of the Institute, the book is an attempt to raise the level of discussion on a current and topical theme.

The seemingly intractable problems of ethnic tension and violence which have since assumed alarming proportions in Nigeria have become major obstacles to nation building, national integration and development. Bringing together academics in law and the social sciences at a National Conference on the Ethnic Question in 2002, NIALS attempted to interrogate these issues from a multidisciplinary stand point. Most of their contributions are to be found in the fourteen chapters of this book, *Ethnicity and National Integration in Nigeria – Recurrent Themes*.

In an analysis of the patterns of ethnic politics and the pervasiveness of ethnicity in Nigeria, chapter 1 locates the issues in a contextual framework for the discourse. It observes that ethnic mobilisation of the disruptive type is usually an indication that something is wrong in the system that needs to be addressed. Ethnicity becomes a threat to peace and security when the problem is either ignored or is not addressed to the satisfaction of the aggrieved groups.

Prefacing an examination of ethnic violence as the latest phase of ethnic politics, chapter 4 gives an interesting historical background to current developments. Five phases of ethnic politics in Nigeria are identified. The chapter observes that the second phase, characterised by the minorities' struggle, built upon the activities of the colonialists and the manipulation and "divide and rule" tactics which they employed to ensure that the different ethnic groups would remain politically divided and at loggerheads.

An often overlooked issue lies in the contradiction within the Constitution which creates what is described in chapter 2 as an "exclusionist and divisive system of citizenship." The Constitution in one breath proclaims one Nigerian citizenship and in another, actually creates three classes of citizens by the tacit recognition of rights/privileges accorded to citizens who are indigenes of the particular states in which they reside. Many of the contributors touch on this issue as a causative factor in the heightening of ethnic tension.

Analysing the links between ethnicity and the survival of democracy in Nigeria in chapter 8, the writer observes that the peaceful inter ethnic relationships of the pre-colonial era were due, largely to the subordination of profit maximisation to values like kinship ties etc. In contrast, colonisation



with its capitalist system had no such inhibitions. The chapter demonstrates that the dominant role of the state in the economy and the "the winner take all" phenomenon has fuelled violent competition among the different ethnic groups for control of political power.

Chapter 10 examines a practical consequence of ethnic conflict – the problem of internally displaced persons. Identifying a lacuna in the current legal regime that provides for the protection of refugees (i.e.) those who have had to cross national boundaries as a result of conflict and does nothing for internally displaced persons who have to leave their home lands without crossing national boundaries, the chapter calls for a review of the law.

Emphasising the need for the neutrality of the state in the matter of ethnic tension, chapter 11 makes the following among other proposals: a restructuring of the federal system to diffuse power and decentralize government; reinvigoration of the concept of unity schools and the National Youth Service Scheme to achieve their original objectives of unity and reduction of ethnic tension.

What becomes clear from all the contributions is that ethnicity can be both a positive and negative construct. The tendency or desire of a people or group to identify with their kin in celebration of those features that mark them out and give them a sense of identity and achievement is not negative. The tendency of communities, buoyed up by their component ethnic groups to resort to self help in the face of the actual or perceived failure of government to act on specific issues as well as the grinding poverty and serious deprivation in the land tend, however, to give impetus to the negative aspects of ethnicity. These include the vicious struggle for control of political and economic power as well as the search for refuge and safety of solidarity groups based on language and culture. For most of the writers therefore, the panacea to the various problems identified lies in good governance and evolving a democracy that is truly committed to the social welfare of its people. It is in this sense that the ideas expressed in the book, pose challenges and contribute to the discourse on nation building and national integration.

**Professor D. A. Guobadia**

*Director-General*

*May 2004*

## Table of Cases

	Page
<i>Amachree v. Kalio &amp; Ors.</i> (1914) 2 NLR 105 - - - - -	172
<i>Attorney-General of the Federation v. Attorney-General of Abia State and 35 Ors.</i> (2002) 4 S.C. (Part I) - - - - -	29
<i>Ojukwu v. Governor of Lagos State</i> (1986) 1 NWLR pp. 621-719 -	242

## Table of Statutes

	Page
African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights - - - - -	180
Allocation of Revenue (Federation Account etc.) of 1982	
s. 1 - - - - -	227
Bill of Rights - Nigeria - - - - -	221
Constitution (Distributable Pool Account) Decree 13 of 1970 - -	226
Constitution (Financial Provisions, etc.) Decree 6 of 1975 - -	226
Constitution of Nigeria 1922- - - - -	218, 225
Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979 -	113, 114, 116
Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 -	164, 168, 181, 195, 199, 202, 223, 230, <i>et. seq.</i>
s. 10 - - - - -	240
s. 14(3) - - - - -	30, 37, 181
s. 14(4) - - - - -	30, 182
ss. 14(3) and (4) - - - - -	240
ss. 14 and 15 - - - - -	242
s. 15(2) - - - - -	240
s. 24 - - - - -	122
ss. 29-39 - - - - -	241
s. 38 - - - - -	240
s. 42 - - - - -	240
s. 42(1) (a)(b) - - - - -	229
s. 43 - - - - -	242
s. 45(1) (a) & (b) - - - - -	242
s. 46 - - - - -	242
s. 46(4) (b) & (I) - - - - -	242
s. 162(2) - - - - -	226
s. c(1) - - - - -	240
Chap. IV - - - - -	241, 242
Chap. II - - - - -	242
Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1963 - - - -	221
s. 159(7) - - - - -	222
Constitution of the Federation of Nigeria 1960 - - - -	221, 240
s. 134 - - - - -	222

Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979 -	76, 148, 199
s. 14(3) & (4) - - - - -	76
s. 135(3) - - - - -	76
s. 149 - - - - -	227
s. 203(1) (b) & (2) - - - - -	76
Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1989 - - - - -	223
Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Enactment)	
Act 1990 - - - - -	76
Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 - - - - -	30, 117
s. 14(3) - - - - -	30, 37
s. 14(4) - - - - -	30
s. 24 - - - - -	122
Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree 107	
of 1993 - - - - -	239
Draft Constitution 1995 - - - - -	238
European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights	
and Fundamental Freedoms - - - - -	220
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms	
of Racial Discrimination	
art. 1 - - - - -	180
Land Use Act. Cap. 202 (LFN) 1990 - - - - -	173, 176, 191, 224
Lyttletons Constitution 1954- - - - -	225
Macpherson Constitution 1951 - - - - -	219
National Commission for Refugees Act. Cap. 244 (LFN) 1990	
s. 20 - - - - -	187
Nigerian Constitution Order-in-Council 1960 - - - - -	221
Petroleum Act 1969 Cap. 350 (LFN) 1990 - - - - -	224
Richards Constitution 1946 - - - - -	65, 218, 225
United Nations Charter - - - - -	180
United Nations Convention - - - - -	19, 51
United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the	
Human Rights of Individuals - - - - -	189, 190
United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the	
Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and	
Armed Conflict 1974 - - - - -	190
United Nations General Assembly Resolutions	
40/144 of 1985 - - - - -	190
3318/xxix of 1974 - - - - -	190



<b>United Nations General Assembly Resolutions</b>	
37/171 - - - - -	188
38/91 - - - - -	188
39/105 - - - - -	188
40/133 - - - - -	188
39/106 - - - - -	188
40/136 - - - - -	188
<b>United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 428(v)</b>	
1950 - - - - -	188



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## Chapter One

### ETHNO-POLITICS (IN NIGERIA): A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

by

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#### Introduction

One of the distinguishing elements of Nigeria's recent political history is the intensification of ethno-politics, which may be simply defined as forms of political participation that are ethnic in nature. In popular perception, the rise of strong ethnic movements and militant organisations represents the most conspicuous face of this trajectory, but the ramifications and implications of ethnic politics are much more engaging and fundamental. One strand of this is the way ethnic organisations have taken over the roles and functions normally associated with political parties and states in a federation. Candidates for elections are selected by ethnic associations rather than by political parties; it is these associations and not the parties (or even the electorate) that determine whether an elected official is performing well or not; and inter-party and intra-party conflicts are mediated and resolved by these groups rather than party structures.

Anomalies like these might be symptomatic of the artificiality and organisational weaknesses of the political parties that exist in Nigeria today, but the evidence from previous experiences with party politics, specifically the fact that political parties have either been political arms of ethnic associations or, in the case of those that appear more 'national,' coalitions of ethnic interests, suggests that these tendencies are well entrenched and paradigmatic. The ethnic associations have also taken over the functions of representing the interests of states and geopolitical zones and mediating in the conflicts among them, in many cases relegating state governments, local governments and elected state representatives. Given the fact that most of these powerful associations do not have elected office