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Transformation of Minority Identities in Post-Colonial Nigeria.

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Ethnic minority identities and their associated politics of disadvantage have been a central feature of post-colonial Nigerian politics. Tensions which became manifest in the 1950s have combined with new developments such as the militarization and personalization of state institutions and politics, demographic changes and the economics of structural adjustment to create a volatile situation which has affected the transformation of ethnic minority identities and the trajectory of minority politics.

Three case studies are considered which show transformations in minority identities and how these transformations are themselves part of a wider realignment of politics in ways which have profound consequences for the national and international politics of the Nigerian state. In this way, the salience of identity issues in the current African crises is highlighted.

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A. Introduction.

This paper attempts to explore the transformations that have taken place in minority identities in Nigeria since the post-colonial period. A comprehensive effort in this regard would involve the study of many hundred ethnic minorities. What is attempted in this paper is far less ambitious. A general socio-political overview will be followed by illustrations from three of the most problematic areas in the management of minority politics in Nigeria: Zangon Kataf in southern Kaduna State, Ogoni in the Niger Delta, and the Wukari/Takum area of Taraba State. The Kataf and Ogoni cases have received extensive attention elsewhere (cf. Saro-Wiwa 1995; Naanen 1995; Human Rights Watch/Africa 1995; Mustapha 1996). The issues involved in both cases will therefore be presented only in summary form, more attention being paid to the relatively obscure circumstances in Taraba State. Finally, against the background of developments within minority identities in Nigeria, the paper will explore the place of identities in the socio-political crises of the African state system.

B. Ethnic Minority Identities: An Overview.

Identities are constantly changing, particularly in periods of great socio-economic flux. Like most other people who came into contact with colonialism, those now referred to as minority ethnic groups in Nigeria crystallized an ethnic consciousness in the early colonial period. It was much later, in the 1950s, that a 'minority' identity emerged, overlapping with their extant ethnic identity. The very notion of ethnic minorities gained currency in Nigerian political discourse from the immediate pre-independence constitutional negotiations of the early 1950s. These negotiations created three regional governments and also expanded the scope for electoral politics and the gradual transfer of powers. There were a number of assumptions that underlay these developments: that the dominant parties represented ethnic interests; that these ethnic interests would be dominant in their respective regions; and that those outside these ethnic blocs, but subject nonetheless to the regional governments, would be at a serious political and economic disadvantage. The smaller ethnic groups in each of the regions tended to see themselves as confronting a situation akin to a majoritarian dictatorship in which majority interests held sway, and the minorities had no say (Willink Commission 1958). Ethnic minority identity developed, not necessarily as a question of numbers or cultural differences, but as a recognition of their 'powerlessness' in the face of ethnicized electoral politics.

The central deficit in this characterization was power. As Ekeh (1994) points out, numerical strength and political power did not necessarily coincide in pre-colonial Nigeria. He draws attention to the political domination of the Sokoto Caliphate by the Fulani minority, the exploitation of the more numerous Ibibios of the interior by the Efik of Old Calabar, a similar exploitation of the Igbo of the hinterland by the eastern Ijaw (Izon), and the exploitation of the Urhobo by the Itsekiri. In each of these cases, Ekeh points out that special circumstances arose which placed the minority group in a position to dominate or exploit the majority group, often with disastrous consequences for their

colonial and post-colonial relations. However, Ekeh's analysis makes no distinction between the Fulani aristocratic clans in power, and the vast majority of the nomadic and sedentary Fulani, who have no stake in power, and are themselves part of the governed. Secondly, he tends to conflate political domination, as in the sahelian Caliphate, with economic exploitation, as in Old Calabar. These qualifications notwithstanding, his central argument about power and numbers in pre-colonial Nigeria is quite valid.

In the constitutional/political dispensation that unfolded from 1951, numbers corresponded directly to political power. The minority ethnic groups that were so defined in post-1951 Nigeria are therefore largely political minorities, because in the unfolding electoral and regional politics, small numbers in one's constituency translated into powerlessness. In most, but not all cases, issues of culture, history or socio-political development played no part in the characterization.

The response of the minorities to their situation in the period 1951-1983 was basically three-pronged, each impacting on the elaboration of minority identities. In the first place, some minority groups ganged up to demand a regional government of their own. One such grouping was the COR (Calabar, Ogoja & Rivers) movement, which sought to extricate the minority groups in those provinces from the perceived clutches of the Igbo-dominated Eastern Regional government. Recognition of a common circumstance had forced a unity of purpose among some of the groups. Particularist identities now overlapped with the newly constructed identity of being minorities in a similar boat. An identity that was constructed and imposed by circumstances beyond their control was now appropriated in their response to the emerging political situation.

Secondly, failing to get new regions of their own, the ethnic minorities sought to limit the powers of regional governments over their affairs. They sought to do this by arguing for a stronger central government which would ameliorate regional excesses. In particular, the minorities agitated for a centralized police force (Willink Commission 1958). To a large extent, minority groups have tended to develop a more abiding faith in the Nigerian nation-state, relative to their compatriots from the majority groups of Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. In the centrifugal crises of 1966-7, minority groups virtually stood alone in consistently defending the integrity of the Nigerian nation-state. And the concentration of power at the centre after 1970 had the active support of many bureaucrats from minority backgrounds.

The third response of the minorities was to form political alliances with dominant political parties in other regions, in order to secure a modicum of protection from their 'own' regional governments and governing parties. Minority parties such as the Bornu Youth Movement, the Benin Delta Peoples Party, the Niger Delta Congress and Middle Belt Peoples Party emerged in this context (Okpu 1977). This strategy was to implicate the minorities in the struggle over power-sharing and ascendancy at the centre between the three dominant groups and their political parties. In many instances, minority politics, governed as it was by the search for access, became mere extensions of the politics of the

majority parties to which particular minorities were allied. Amongst the political class in the minority areas, there emerged the odd admixture of both oppositional and clientalistic strands.

Of course, the above tendencies were not the only ones at work in the development of minority identities in this period. The creation of states from 1967, ostensibly to meet minority demands, altered minority attitudes in two ways. Firstly, some minority groups now found themselves in control of new states, often with some other minorities subjected to the control of such state governments. This led to the emergence of statism or state consciousness in some cases, and in others, to the development of political squabbles between what are now 'majority minorities' on the one hand, and 'minority minorities' on the other. Some of the solidarity built up under such organisations as the COR State Movement and the Middle Belt Congress started to collapse.

The second way in which the creation of states affected minority consciousness was that it became apparent that state creation, very much like the constitutional provisions guaranteeing fundamental human rights in the 1951-1966 period, could not safeguard minority interests. Minority agitators for state creation had assumed that states would be created for minorities alone, given the fact that the majorities already had political control of some governments. In the event, states were created for both majorities and minorities, with majority interests still dominant in most states. And these states were created in an era of increased political and economic concentration of powers at the centre. The minorities realized that they had acquired access to and even control of state governments precisely when power had shifted elsewhere. The problems surrounding state creation not only split minority solidarity in many cases, it also introduced a heightened consciousness of the federal centre, intensified struggle for access to that centre, and an increasingly acrimonious relationship between that centre and some minority groups, particularly those from the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta.

Fiscal centralization meant federal control of revenue from oil, a resource found largely in southern minority areas. In pre centralization years, regions had fiscal control over their agrarian and mineral resources. The multiplication of demands for state creation arose partly because political entrepreneurs from both majority and minority groups saw the creation of a state under their control as the surest way to plug directly into the centralized national purse. Contractors, civil servants and local politicians collude to dredge up real or perceived differences in order to justify particular claims to new states and central patronage. Minority groups in the north continue to play along with this distributive logic. On the other hand, the southern minorities have become increasingly resentful, claiming that their God-given resources have been commandeered by others.

Another development which affected minority identities was the process of class formation. The political elite which spearheaded agitation in minority areas from the 1930s and against minority status from the 1950s was made up largely of priests, teachers and clerks. Education and familiarity with western modes of thought were the

determinant factors in elite status. By the 1980s, the elite in many minority areas had greatly expanded and now included young professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and a sprinkling of businessmen. Increasingly, elite status is determined not just by education, but also by wealth and life-style. These younger elements of the minority elite did not have the political connections of the older elite and were more prone to suffer the impact of competition for jobs, contracts and other resources at the national level. They were therefore less likely to be clientalist in their orientation; indeed, many became increasingly confrontational in their quest for a 'fairer' share of political and economic resources. Even by the mid-1960s, restive young men from the minority ethnic groups were beginning to side-step their political associations and embark on 'direct action' to agitate for their interests (Okpu 77,136).

On the whole, economic and political change, including economic crisis and the military centralization of power, have tended to alter the parameters of political and economic advantages. In turn, these changes have redefined perceptions of minority interests and identity, leading to the frantic reformulation of that identity and the repositioning of various groups in the political terrain to take advantage of particular shifts, or to shield themselves from potentially negative consequences. I argue that the result is hardly the realization of legitimate minority claims, but the fragmentation and destabilization of the entire political process.

C. Illustrations of Changing Identities: Zangon Kataf, Ogoni and Taraba.

Some of the general points made in the preceding section can be further elaborated in the illustrative cases discussed here. The central objective is not just to pin-point changes in minority identities, but to seek to explain such transformations. These explanations are against the background of the enormous transformations of the Nigerian state and economy since 1970. While these latter changes are not directly addressed, relevant developments are occasionally referred to.

C.1 Zangon-Kataf: The Historicity and Continuity in Minority Identity.

Zangon Kataf falls within a region in central Nigeria which has become prone to inter-communal clashes over land and other agricultural resources. There were the Kasuwan Magani riots in 1980/1, the Gure/Kahugu riots in Saminaka Local Government Area in 1984, the Lere riots in 1986, and the Kafanchan riots in 1987. The dynamic of communal blood-letting in this region has come to be epitomized in the national consciousness by the very bloody confrontations in Zangon Kataf in February and May 1992. The central problem here is not just the 'pure' expression of the proverbial majority/minority divide, but the manner in which notions of history, citizenship and justice are fiercely contested by neighbouring communities to a point where there is little common ground left for conciliation and compromise (Mustapha 1994).

Zangon Kataf is a Hausa settlement (***zango***) within a territory occupied by the Kataf, a minority ethnic group in north-central Nigeria. The original town was established as a trading post for Hausa merchants en route to the Niger Basin in the early part of the 16th century. While the Hausa of Zangon Kataf and the Kataf tribal polity established economic and commercial relations, they had little in the way of social relations, Zangon Kataf being a wholly Hausa settlement. The Hausa settlement was also politically autonomous. By the end of the 18th century, the settlement became subordinated to Kauru, a larger Hausa settlement within the territory of another ethnic minority in the same region, the Ruruma. Early in the 19th century, Kauru itself became subordinated to Zaria, one of the major Hausa states that constituted the Sokoto Caliphate.

For much of the 19th century, the minority ethnic groups south of Zaria, the Kataf included, were raided for slaves to supply the domestic needs of the Sokoto Caliphate, and for export on both the trans-Saharan and the trans-Atlantic slave routes. From the Kataf point of view, the Hausa community of Zangon Kataf were seen as distinct from the Hausa slave raiders from Zaria. With the imposition of British colonial rule at the turn of the 20th century, however, the Kataf polity was subordinated to the Emir of Zaria, under Lugard's policy of Indirect Rule. Kataf territory became Katuka District of Zaria Emirate. In 1902, 1904, 1905 and 1907 the Kataf attacked Zangon Kataf, allegedly for colluding with the British and the Hausa emirate of Zaria in their designs to subjugate the Kataf. The colonial army was called in to suppress the attacks. Subsequently, Zangon Kataf town was moved to its present location about 1915. For much of the 20th century, especially between 1920 and 1950, there has been a steady influx of Hausa people to Zangon Kataf, primarily from the Emirates of Zaria, Kano, Katsina and Bauchi.

The Zangon Kataf crises started over the construction of a new market by the Local Government Authority. Disagreement between some members of both Kataf and Hausa communities over the issue led to clashes early in February 1992, resulting in a number of fatalities. From the 15th to the 17th of May 1992, fresh rioting erupted in Zangon Kataf. The immediate unfolding of the May riot has become the subject of intense controversy as each community tries to justify its conduct. There are divergent positions as to who started the killings. There is no doubt, however, that most of the victims were the Hausa of Zangon Kataf. There is evidence to suggest that at least 1536 Hausas were killed in Zangon Kataf. Most of the houses in the town were razed to the ground and Hausa household property valued at ***N***29,173,850 destroyed. It has also been estimated that about 71 motor vehicles and 25 motor cycles and bicycles were also destroyed. These events precipitated rioting in other parts of Kaduna State; large-scale rioting broke out in Kaduna, Zaria, Ikara, and Kauru. Kaduna is the state capital, while Zaria and Ikara constitute the Hausa heartland of the State. In Kaduna and Zaria, hundreds of lives were lost, either in the rioting, or in police/military actions that followed. Seven peopled were reportedly shot dead by the police in Ikara (Mustapha 1994).

In the arguments which the Kataf put forward to justify their conduct during the crises, we begin to see elements of continuity and transformation in their identity. They argue

that the Kataf have historically welcomed strangers into their midst. These strangers were given clan/communal lands to cultivate but there was no alienation of the land from the original household, lineage or clan, as the case may be. Individual ownership was not part of the tribal land tenure. Strangers were often absorbed into Kataf society, especially the ***Netzit*** (Our People) who are the other minority ethnic groups of the region, particularly from southern Kaduna state and parts of Plateau State. The Kataf argument goes on to suggest that when the Hausa merchants came to the Kataf polity in the 16th century, they were given land to build their settlement but the rights of ownership over the land remained with the Kataf clans. A mark of this continued ownership, consistent with their traditional tenure system, was their abiding right to harvest the tree crops on the land which they had given to strangers to cultivate. Since most of the Hausa immigrants were traders or craftsmen, they rarely had need of farmland.

Though both communities remained politically and culturally distinct, there was little conflict between them, even when slave raiders from Zaria Emirate launched attacks on the Kataf. The problem started, the Kataf claim, from the imposition of British colonial rule in the early 20th century. While the Emir of Zaria, for regional geo-political reasons succumbed to colonial imposition without a fight, the Kataf forcefully resisted colonial domination. Against this background, the Kataf were regarded by the British as 'ungovernable'. Given their lack of a centralized state structure and their traditional religion, they were regarded as 'uncivilized pagans' who were incapable of self-governance. Furthermore, racist colonial anthropology characterized the Kataf as inferior to the lighter-skinned Fulani elite of the Emirates, who were not only monotheists but had also built up a large empire, the Sokoto Caliphate. The Kataf claim that the British were therefore favourably disposed to accept the Zaria claim that the Kataf polity had been 'conquered' by Zaria in pre-colonial times. As far as they were concerned, Zaria, through Kauru, may lay claim to the political allegiance of the Hausa community of Zangon Kataf but that had nothing to do with the political autonomy of the Kataf or their ownership of the land on which the town stood.

With the loss of their traditional political system based on clans and their subjugation to an 'alien' authority, the Kataf claim that they became victims of a series of injustices. They were excluded from the District administration, which became a wholly Hausa affair, right down to the messengers. They were also subjected to various indignities by the 'alien' local administration: cultural denigration by being derogatorily referred to as ***arna*** (non-Moslems or pagans) and ***kabila*** (non-Hausa), tyrannical excesses by the Emir's Native Police (***dogarai***), and subjugation to the unsympathetic arbitrariness of the Emir's Alkali courts, which dispensed a form of law based on Islamic principles which were alien to the Kataf. They also complained of excessive taxation, confiscation of their goods for failure to pay, and exclusion from the markets built with Kataf forced labour. They claimed that the ordeal of forced labour was not extended to the Hausas of Zangon Kataf.

Above all else, the Kataf complained that the colonial and local administrations encouraged the influx of Hausa settlers to the area, leading to the forcible transfer of Kataf farmlands to new Hausa immigrants. The emergence of large-scale farming in the 1970s intensified this process through the agency of various State administrations. At the same time, the intensification of development projects in the country from the 1970s, fuelled by oil-boom petro-dollars also increased contestation over land rights, as individuals and groups sought to receive the compensation paid by the state for land acquired.

The Kataf claim that they protested their situation through numerous petitions to the colonial administration, often with the assistance of Christian missionaries who had gained a foothold in the area. After a riot by the Kataf in 1933, and again in 1946, they agitated for the formation of an Independent Tribal Council composed of 'indigenous' - that is Kataf - representatives. These demands were not met, even though they had the support of some colonial administrators. After another episode of rioting in 1953, the principle of including some Kataf in the District Council was accepted but it was made clear that the district still remained under the Emir. As a result, a few Kataf got into the administration, especially at the Village Head level. The agitation for an Independent Tribal Council continued. Kataf agitation for an 'indigenous' District Head subsequently led, in 1967, to the transfer of the ***Sarkin Yakin Zazzau*** from the District and his replacement by the first 'indigenous' (Kataf) District Head, Bala Dauke Gora. He was also conferred with the traditional Zaria title of ***Kuyambannan Zazzau***. Considering that the emirate officials from Zaria defined 'indigeneity' in the districts of southern Kaduna to include the Hausa and Fulani communities of the area and continued to appoint same as 'indigenous' officials, the Kataf, along with other minority ethnic groups in the area, reverted to their old demand for their own independent, 'traditional', chiefdoms in 1974.

The 1976 Local Government Reform created the possibility for the minority ethnic groups of southern Kaduna State, who nevertheless constituted a huge majority over the Hausa/Fulani communities in the area, to vote in their own people as chairmen of the local government councils. However, in their view, this development did not address their problem as the elected local government chairmen were incorporated into the Zaria Emirate Council as subordinates of the Emir. Furthermore, all District and Village Heads, though employees of, and paid by, the local government, continued to be appointed by, and reported directly to, the Emir of Zaria. Though Kataf men were now both Local Government Chairman and District Head, Kataf disaffection continued to simmer, fuelled by what they regard as their continued subordination to Zaria, and the alleged nepotistic appointment of the minority, but now 'allegedly indigenous', Hausa/Fulani elements from the southern Kaduna area to political and other offices in the State and Federal governments as 'representatives' of the people of the area. They formed the view that elements of the local Hausa/Fulani communities were using their wider connections within the Nigerian state system and the society in general to continue their effective domination of the southern Kaduna minority groups. A Kataf Chiefdom was

created in 1996. However, tensions rose again in late 1996, when some Kataf Christians protested the building of a mosque by the Hausa community.

This Kataf version of events is hotly disputed by the Hausa community of Zangon Kataf (Mustapha 1994). Nevertheless, it illustrates how exclusivity in inter-group relations during the pre-colonial era can be carried on into the post-colonial period. Though identities are constantly changing, some elements of it can actually remain constant over a long period of time. Secondly, the colonial impact was to turn exclusivity into open hostility. Thirdly, the series of crises in southern Kaduna State from about 1980 reflect, not just the history of animosity between these minority communities and their guest Hausa communities, but also socio-economic pressures deriving from land alienation and the extension of 'development'. At the cross-roads of these historical and contemporary tensions lie a bitter conflict over notions of citizenship, group and individual rights, and justice (Mustapha 1994).

For the Kataf, citizenship is defined by autochtony, not only to emphasis Kataf 'traditional' qualities such as membership of clans but also to exclude the Hausa/Fulani immigrant. On their part, the Hausa of Zangon Kataf emphasise residency as a criteria for citizenship. This is not just a matter of expediency, for it also conforms to Hausa values and historical practices. Similarly, Kataf notions of rights emphasise the group rights of the land-holding lineages, to the total exclusion of the individual rights of the immigrants. On the other hand, and consistent with their land tenure practices, the Hausa tend to emphasise individual rights. Justice for the Kataf is the correction of **historical** injustices; for the Hausa it is **criminal** justice, aimed at punishing those who have broken the laws during the riots. It is not clear to what extent these issues are fought over **within** the Kataf community but, on the whole, Kataf identity has evolved largely as a negative reaction to the continued presence of the Hausa community in its midst.

But the evolution of Kataf identity is not entirely negative. As noted earlier, there is the concept of **Netzit** (Our People), through which the Kataf seek to make common cause with other groups in southern Kaduna and Plateau States. These groups have very similar historical, cultural, political and demographic characteristics but the concept of 'our people' is almost certainly a development of the colonial era and expresses not just the similarities in the circumstances of these peoples but also their common opposition to being subjugated to the Hausa/Fulani Emirates. The evolution of Kataf identity expresses not just long-standing animosities, but also fits neatly into the regionally based 'majority/minority' divide that emerged in the terminal colonial period. Despite latter transformations in Kataf identity such as the increasing identification with Christianity, the basic elements of Kataf identity suggest that the late colonial construction of majority/minority is of continuing relevance.

C.2 Ogoni: Changing State/Minority Relations.

With the imposition of formal colonial rule, the economic exploitation of the Igbo in the hinterland by the eastern Ijaw and the Efik of Old Calabar came to an end. This exploitation had been based on an advantageous position on the trade routes, and better access to firearms. With formal colonization, ethnic identities crystallized. With the constitutional and electoral developments of the 1950s, the smaller ethnic groups were transformed into 'minorities'; a point dramatically made by the replacement of Eyo Ita, of Efik 'minority' background, by Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo, as head of the regional government. Thenceforth, the eastern minorities protested real or imagined domination (Willink Commission 1958) and sought to protect themselves through alliance with the ruling parties of the other regions. During the Civil War, 1967-1970, the eastern minorities were firmly on the federal side. The favourable disposition of many eastern minorities towards the central government persisted till the mid-1980s.

The causes of the collapse in confidence are traceable not to direct state/minority relations **per se** but to the wider dynamics of Nigerian politics and economy which gradually, but radically, altered state/minority relations, particularly in the Niger Delta. Firstly, state creation, a crucial panacea in minority eyes right up to 1967, did not solve the problem of minority marginalization. The 'majority' three groups continued to control more states and to benefit enormously from the distributional logic of federal governance. The more the minorities agitated for state creation, the more the status quo was maintained by the creation of states in both majority and minority areas. Consequently, minority groups started making radical demands for the restructuring of the entire federation along confederate ethnic lines.

Secondly, minority groups, particularly from the Niger Delta agitated against the revenue allocation formula which lay at the heart of distributional politics. Prior to the creation of states, the principal criterion for revenue allocation was the principle of derivation. In the process of concentrating economic powers on the centre, the principle of derivation was dropped. This change occurred precisely at the point when oil, found largely in southern minority areas, became the mainstay of the national economy. The minorities complained that they got only 3% of the wealth from their area, the bulk going to the political constituencies of the majority groups. Minority agitation led to the increase of their share to 13%, but this is a far cry from the 50% many minority organizations were agitating for. Minority demands have therefore been widening to include demands for 'self-determination' so that they could control their land and resources. Coupled to this particular demand was the minority complaint that while their resources were being used to develop other parts of the country, their own areas were left without basic social amenities and subjected to environmental pollution.

Thirdly, the minorities clamoured for power sharing, complaining that political and administrative offices were monopolized by the majority groups, particularly the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba. Many minority organizations, such as the Ika Group, the Akwa Ibom Emancipation Group, the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality Rights Protection Organization, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), and the

Ukwani Forum agitated for the rotation of political offices between ethnically defined zones, and a radical restructuring of the central government and army along confederate lines (Okwuosa **et al** 1994).

The central government which had been seen as an ally up to the early 1980s was now seen as the major blockage of the realization of minority interests. The numerous anti-Hausa agitation of the northern minorities in the Middle Belt, pointed out in the Zangon Kataf case, were matched, amongst the southern minorities, by a broad anti central government agitation. Also attacked were multinational oil companies like Shell, and the elites of the majority groups, particularly the Hausa/Fulani and, to a lesser extent, the Yoruba. We can see therefore that minority agitation increased amongst both the northern and southern minorities in the 1980s, but their respective targets and demands were different.

By the early 1990s, many southern minority groups were thoroughly disaffected, with the consequent radicalization of their organizations. Separatist confederate demands, coupled with direct action against the multinational companies became more pronounced. The first major confrontation took place in Umuechem in October 1990, and involved a confrontation between the youth of the community and staff of Shell. The Nigerian army was called in on Shell's behalf, leading to the sacking of the Umuechem community with many fatalities, including the community leader. A seething resentment against the federal government gradually broke into the open. Also in October 1990, MOSOP was formed, and adopted the Ogoni Bill of Rights which called for a halt to environmental degradation and the control of Ogoni resources by the Ogoni. When the government did not respond to the Bill of Rights, the Ogoni internationalized their struggle through the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), and made direct demands on the oil companies for compensation. In 1993, mass demonstrations were carried out and a section of the MOSOP leadership demanded that the Ogoni boycott the 1993 Presidential elections. This amounted to a repudiation of the legitimacy of the centre (Mustapha 1996).

At this point, differences within the MOSOP leadership emerged around the structure and strategies of the organization. The conservative faction, representing an older generation used to bargaining for political offices at the centre 'on behalf of their people', disagreed with the proposition that MOSOP should be an umbrella organization for other Ogoni organizations: National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Federation of Ogoni Women Association (FOWA), Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA), Ogoni Teachers Union (OTU), and Council of Ogoni Churches (COC). The logic behind this organizational restructuring was the claim that the conservative faction of MOSOP leadership often took decisions without follow-up action aimed at implementation (Saro-Wiwa 1995). This re-organization was therefore aimed at challenging ineffective leadership by instilling 'organizational discipline'. As far as the conservative faction was concerned, the suggested reorganization was a ploy to strengthen the hands of the radical faction under the leadership led by Ken Saro-Wiwa.

They accused Saro-Wiwa of seeking to gain total control of the organization and of instigating his youthful supporters to undertake 'militant action' against those members of the MOSOP leadership and the entire Ogoni elite who posed a challenge to his ambitions. The division came to a head over the question of boycotting the 1993 elections and the conservative faction withdrew from MOSOP. In subsequent developments, four Ogoni chiefs were murdered, allegedly by NYCOP militants instigated by Saro-Wiwa. Saro-Wiwa and eight others were subsequently 'tried' and executed under questionable circumstances (Mustapha forthcoming). Despite state repression, the situation in Ogoni is far from resolved. About 50,000 Ogoni were estimated to have fled continued repression in Nigeria through the neighbouring Benin Republic. In mid-1997, the refugee camp still had 2500 persons.

In the Ogoni case, we can discern a number of strands in the evolution of southern minority identity. Unlike in the case of the northern minorities, where agitation was largely directed against a majority group, the Hausa/Fulani, the southern minorities directed their agitation against a central government that was once seen as an ally. Secondly, while northern minorities tended to demand for 'traditional' issues, such as the restoration or creation of their own autonomous chiefdoms, southern minorities tended to call the very foundation of the centralized military state into question by demanding for confederalism and the rotation of state offices. Southern minority identity was being shaped, not so much by the demand for cultural autonomy as is the case with the northern minorities, but by the demand for political, economic and administrative autonomy. They were not so much as asserting their distinctness, but demanding political recognition and expression of that distinctness. Their demands therefore related directly to what it meant to be a 'Nigerian'. By changing the current definition of what it meant to be a Nigerian, loaded as that definition is with inequalities and iniquities, they hoped to eradicate their 'minority' status. The subsequent confrontation with the centralized state is producing a radicalized, seperatist identity amongst the southern minorities. The ideal, far from realized, of a common citizenship is increasingly called into question and challenged.

At stake is not just the notion of 'Nigerianness', but also that of 'Ogoniness'. In the course of the agitation for Ogoni rights the MOSOP leadership was divided over three crucial issues. The first conflict was over the Ogoni strategy within national politics. While the conservative faction was indeed committed to the cause, many of its members were evidently wedded to the clientalist politics of the Nigerian state. On the other hand, the radical faction adopted a stance of non-cooperation, bordering on confrontation, with the state. The second conflict, closely related to the first, was the question of who would lead the movement and in what direction? Here, ideological and political disagreements were mingled with personal ambitions and personality conflicts (Mustapha forthcoming). Thirdly, generational rivalries and differential experiences tended to pit the clientalists against the younger professionals. These conflicts became reflected in the construction of Ogoni identity as the clientalists were dubbed 'vultures' parasiting on the Ogoni plight, while the radicals were in turn attacked as 'violence-prone thugs' intent on promoting their political carriers even if it meant the physical elimination of their opponents. A

leading conservative likened Saro-Wiwa to 'Stalin who eliminated all his colleagues as soon as he took over' (FGN nd). Each side presented itself as the 'authentic' voice of the Ogoni and the rival faction as 'illegitimate'. The conservatives were accused of opportunism in their relations with the central government. On the other hand, Saro-Wiwa was portrayed as being in a diabolical alliance with international financiers intent on using the Ogoni case as a pretext for destabilize Nigeria. These conflicting perspectives and definitions were often fought out in newspaper advertorials and press releases.

The federal government has become to the Ogoni, what Europe is to the contemporary Tory Party in Britain. Consequently, Ogoni identity became bifurcated and contested, creating a fertile ground for state intervention. Interestingly, the Ogoni have about four dialects or languages and five kingdoms - Babbe, Gokana, Tai, Nyo-Khana and Ken-Khana. But the overtly politicized nature of contemporary 'Ogoniness' dictated that these linguistic and historical political divergence within the Ogoni had little relevance to the struggle between the warring factions. Nevertheless, the Ogoni struggle had the impact of emphasising their distinctiveness, making it possible for the state to stir up anti-Ogoni sentiments within other neighbouring minority groups.

C.3 Taraba: Minority against Minority.

In the 1950s, after the minority groups woke up to the potential and real consequences of their minority status, there was a sense of common purpose amongst the minority groups of each region, expressed in romanticized notions of the Middle Belt movement in the north, the COR movement in the east, and the Midwest state movement in the west. Opinions were not always united across the board, but sufficient numbers of minority groups were committed to these movements to give them credibility. In the late 1970s, these pan-minority sentiments continued to find expression in Club 19, a political grouping formed with the purpose of bringing a 'majority of minorities' into power at the federal level. Even as late as 1993, a pro-Babangida group was formed, calling itself the Fourth Force, and claiming to represent the minorities across the country. It claimed that the minorities put together were more than the three majority groups and therefore had a duty to unite and dictate the political fortunes of the country. However, much of the common ground built around a shared minority identity has been destroyed over the years, partly by the creation of states and the emergence of statism and also by minority competition in some states. General political and economic developments in the country have tended to exacerbate these divisive trends. As a result, divisive issues have gained prominence, pitting minority group against minority group. We must therefore add the minority/minority divide to the prior majority/minority divide. The ways in which these developments evolved in the transformation of identities is examined in the bloody three-cornered fight in Taraba State between the Jukun, the Tiv, the Kuteb and the Chamba.

In 1991, what amounted to a civil war broke out in the Wukari/Takum areas of Taraba State. For clarity, these conflicts should be disaggregated into the Wukari crisis which

raged between 1991-2, and the Takum crisis which took place between 1992-3. At the root of both crises were pre-colonial and colonial animosities tightly linked to contemporary conflicts over political and administrative offices and agricultural resources. The Zangon Kataf case can be seen to represent the continued resilience of historical animosities, shrouded in competing contemporary claims to political, commercial and agricultural resources. And the Ogoni case can be seen as a reaction to centralizing and monopolistic developments within the nation-state. The Taraba case represents a mixture of both tendencies. The 'Hausa factor' was also present in Taraba.

C.3.1 The Wukari Crisis.

Between 1991 and 1992, large-scale fighting involving the use of sophisticated weapons took place around the Jukun paramount town of Wukari. The principal protagonists were the Jukun and the Tiv. Others such as the Kuteb, Chamba and 'Hausa' were subsequently dragged in to a lesser degree. The 'Hausa' of Wukari deserve a brief comment: their lingua franca is Hausa though a large number of them actually come from non-Hausa areas such as Borno. Unconfirmed, but realistic, estimates suggest that about 5000 Jukun and 15000 Tiv lost their lives in the course of the crisis. In all, about 53 villages with an estimated population of 250,000 inhabitants were razed to the ground and the population dispersed. Farm stock and farms were burnt.

The historical setting for the crisis started in the 1910s, when the colonial administration allowed or encouraged the Tiv to migrate in large numbers into areas that are regarded as Jukun territory. Colonial policy, reflecting the idiosyncratic attitudes of various officials on the ground, had quite contradictory effects. Right at the beginning of Indirect Rule, Palmer formed the opinion that the Tiv, who did not have a centralized state system, should be brought under the **Aku Uka** of Wukari, the paramount head of the Jukun. He argued that Jukun influence extended into Tiv territory under the Kwararafa Empire which was noted for its military exploits. The Tiv were clearly cast as an 'inferior' group to the Jukun. Consequently, Tiv areas such as Katsina Ala, Zaki Biam and parts of Kwande were administered under Wukari Division. It was only in 1926 that a Tiv Division was created bringing most of the Tiv areas under a common administration. Even then, some areas remained under Wukari. These colonial boundary adjustments have continued to create confusion as to who belongs or belonged to where and the nature of their rights in such areas.

A second strand in colonial policy was to encourage the Tiv to migrate into Wukari Division itself. The Tiv were not only a large group, their population also expanded much faster than those of their neighbours. In some areas in Tiv territory, particularly in Kwande and Vandekya to the south, population pressure was acute, rising about 1937 to 190 persons per square mile. By 1952, some areas in Shangev were reported to have over 600 persons per square mile (NAK/Makprof 4545). This pressure on the land was accentuated by the Tiv farming system of slash and burn and shifting cultivation. The combination of population pressure and farming system led the Tiv to expand into the

territory of their neighbours in search of fresh, fertile land. Moves to introduce more sustainable farming methods failed and by 1948, some colonial officials were claiming that:

> Tiv expansion is not due to land hunger or to the results of uneconomic methods of farming but to a 'traditional code demanding expansive advance in a predetermined direction'. Such a demand for 'lebensraum' and the population movements in which it results are difficult to control... .(NAK/Makprof 4545).

The expansion of the Tiv into Idoma territory to the southwest and Ogoja territory to the south were particularly resisted, leading the colonial administration to encourage Tiv migration 'in the Northerly and Easterly directions' (NAK/SNP 17/9). Indeed by 1914, a 'Munshi Wall' (Munshi was the colonial name for the Tiv) had been erected to the south and west. The decision to encourage Tiv migration into Jukun territory reflected a reversal of colonial perceptions of both groups. The 'superior' Jukun, with their history of a centralized state, were not expanding, economically and demographically, as the 'inferior' Tiv. Since this had a direct bearing on the capacity of the colonial state to raise tax revenue, official perceptions of both groups changed. Wukari was now described as having a 'decaying population', while the Tiv were:

> superior in every way to all the peoples by which it is surrounded, - totals now about 500,000 souls, - and has a percentage of about 40 children per 100 of the population. The food producing capacity of the tribe is perhaps the greatest per head of population of any tribe in Nigeria - but it is clear that unless provision is made for their expansion, the land available for them now will not continue to support them...(NAK/Makprof 2403).

The 'hard-working' Tiv were therefore encouraged to move into the territory of the 'lazy' Jukun and the other groups to the east and north. Tiv settlements were established in such areas as Wukari, Muri, Shendam, Lafia and Wamba Divisions. By the 1990s, the Tiv formed an absolute majority of the entire population of Wukari Local Government. Not only were the 'strangers' more wealthy than their 'hosts', they now had the population base, in a one-person-one-vote ethnicized electoral setting, to gain political ascendancy.

The conflict over Tiv expansionism and over agricultural resources simmered for many decades, reaching a new level in 1979, when Tiv candidates started winning elections in the area. In that year, Tiv candidates from Wukari Local Government were voted into the Gongola State House of Assembly; Dr Agbide, a Tiv, even became a Commissioner in the Gongola State government. With the creation of Taraba State from Gongola and the consequent narrowing of the electoral base, the political stakes were raised. The first skirmish occurred in 1987 when the Babangida administration initiated local government elections on a non-party basis. Danladi Yakubu, a Hausa 'stranger' was elected chairman of Wukari Local Government to the chagrin of the Jukun who were clearly in an electoral

minority, albeit in what they regarded as 'their' home territory. The Jukun blamed the Tiv for supporting the Hausa candidate. The whole affair was put down to a Tiv/Hausa conspiracy against the Jukun. The Jukun and the Hausa had been political allies in the First Republic (in the NPC) and the Second Republic (in the NPN). But the fragmentation of established political networks since the military intervention of 1983 saw the collapse of the Jukun/Hausa alliance and the emergence of a Tiv/Hausa alliance.

With the approach of gubernatorial elections in the newly created Taraba State in 1991, matters came to a head. Fearing a Tiv 'take-over' of the new state, the Jukun resorted to 'ethnic cleansing'. The Jukun elite was however careful to state its case in more 'civilized' terms. They accused the Tiv of lawlessness in occupying Jukun lands and establishing bogus chieftaincies over same. Secondly, they accused the Tiv of 'disloyalty' to a place where many of them had lived for generations. They claimed that the Tiv preferred to pay their tax in the predominantly Tiv Benue State, whilst living in Taraba. Tiv attachments to their natal home base - for burials and weddings etc. - were held up as justifying the assertion that they were not really 'Tarabans'. On their part, the Tiv denied that they were recent migrants, claiming that they had been in Muri Province since the early colonial period. They asserted their rights to the land, both as early members of the previous administrative unit, and as 'Nigerians'.

It is clear, however, that Tiv nationalism had a hand in the whole affair, particularly after the Tiv elite in Benue mobilized men and materials to come to the aid of their brethren in Taraba. It is suggested in some quarters that the Tiv elite wanted to present their group as the 'largest minority group in Nigeria', with political presence - and clout - in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kogi and Cross River States. As for the 'Hausa', they accused the Jukun of belligerence towards 'outsiders' as witnessed in the attack on the Igbos in Wukari in the 1980s. Some 'Hausa' were also killed in 1991.

Though the Wukari crisis was presented as a clash over land resources, the real stakes - hardly commented upon in the open - were political. At issue was the question of who was 'indigenous' to the area and therefore had prior political rights in the new Taraba State. New political and administrative changes gave new meaning to demographic trends, forcing the issue of identity high on the political agenda. This was an issue which pit minority against minority. This did not mean, however, that minority/majority issues were absent even in Taraba. Federal government response to the mayhem in Taraba was so slow in coming, suggesting that the area being a 'minority' area, no real stakes were involved. Secondly, in Zangon Kataf where Hausa interests were directly involved, government resources were poured in to rehabilitate the area and prison sentences were handed out to alleged instigators and perpetrators of the killings, mostly Kataf. In Wukari and Takum, however, no trials were held despite virtual three years of carnage. And no government resources were made available for reconstruction. The minorities may be fighting for political supremacy in circumscribed political spaces, but they have yet to dent the suffocating dominance of majority interests. When the Federal government finally stepped in, it sent in troops to restore law and order, and brokered a deal requiring

the Tiv to register their land interests with the local government authority. The underlying demographic and political issues remain unresolved.

C.3.2. The Takum Crisis.

In the Takum crisis, there is the total fragmentation of minority identity for reasons related to the Wukari crisis. This crisis resulted in killings and the destruction of property in 1992 and 1993, but the scale and casualties were much less compared to the Wukari crisis. In 1992, a Chamba/Jukun group opened fire with automatic rifles on the Kuteb annual cultural festival, the **kuchicheb**, killing about six people. In the rash of fighting that took place afterwards, two Kuteb and five Chamba villages were destroyed with the loss of many lives. In the 1993 version of the same ceremony, more killings took place, but these were largely restricted to outlying rural areas. During the mayhem, the crisis was presented as an extension of the Wukari crisis. The Kuteb were seen as allies of the Tiv/Hausa, while the Jukun were seen as allies of the Chamba. No doubt, there was some element of justification for these perceptions, but the reality was more complex. The main fight was between the Chamba and the Kuteb, with passive or active alliances being struck with other groups; the Kuteb refused to side the Jukun attack on the Tiv, forcing the Jukun to sympathize with the Chamba. Meanwhile, Kuteb/Tiv relations remained cool, with potential for open conflict over Tiv expansion onto Kuteb land.

The issue at stake was also political, instigated by the fragmentation of Jukun identity and the emergence of conflicting political claims arising therefrom. Here, pre-colonial animosities mingled with identity constructions in the colonial and post-colonial period to produce tensions in inter-group relations. The tensions were then fought out in the political realm.

In the course of colonial occupation at the turn of the century, the British first made contact with the Jukun at Ibi on the Benue. This gave the Jukun an early start in the acquisition of western education and advancement in the colonial and post-colonial bureaucracies. Furthermore, colonial officials tended to favour the Jukun over all other groups in the region because of their centralized state system and pre-colonial history in the Kwararafa Empire,. The other ethnic groups were included in Wukari Division on the understanding that they had been part of the pre-colonial Jukun empire. This privileging of Jukun identity around Wukari/Takum forced many members of the other ethnic groups in the area to adopt Jukun identity.

Closely allied to the Jukun are the Chamba, who had migrated into the area from the region of present-day Cameroon Republic. A group of the Chamba settled in Ganye, while another group moved on to Donga and Takum. The Chamba were able to impose their domination over the majority Ichen in Donga. Even though the Ichen have the larger population, Donga district remains a Chamba preserve. They also raided the Kuteb for slaves, and moved into the Takum area. With the privileging of Jukun identity in the colonial period, the Chamba of the Wukari/Takum region, but excluding those of Ganye,

adopted Jukun language and identity. Most of the other ethnic groups also assumed Jukun identity to varying degrees. Being 'Jukun' then meant a 'core' Jukun group plus a host of other associated ethnic groups, the most important of which were the Chamba, the Kuteb and the Ichen.

This broader 'Jukun' identity started to collapse in the 1950s, with the looming prospect of electoral politics. Secondly, increased educational opportunities had heightened awareness of ethnic differences and generated a pool of ideologues and political entrepreneurs eager to 'rediscover' their 'true' identity. This process of self-assertion was particularly noticeable amongst groups like the Kuteb who retained some cultural/linguistic distinction from the Jukun. In the face of this challenge, the ruling **Aku Uka** of Wukari, Atoshi Agbumanu, embarked on a forceful campaign to consolidate 'Jukun' identity around the 'core' Jukun by promoting the formation of the Kwararafa Congress in the 1950s. In response, the Kuteb formed the **Kuteb Yatso**, a cultural self-help movement. Kuteb grievance was basically economic. They claimed that of the three Districts that made up Wukari Division - Wukari, Takum and Donga -, most of the taxes came from Takum but the Kuteb who formed the vast majority of that district got the least in terms of social amenities, scholarships and bureaucratic appointments. On the other hand, Wukari district was said to have contributed the least, but monopolized all resources in Wukari. The Kuteb had not only began a process of self-assertion, they had also started a conflictual relationship with the Jukun.

The strained relationship worsened as the electoral system got underway in 1954. It is claimed that in that year, a tripartite understanding was reached to share political offices in the area between the three major groups - Jukun, Chamba and Kuteb - under the banner of the dominant regional party, the NPC. Ibrahim Sangari, a Wukari Jukun was voted into the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos and Jolly Tanko Yusuf, a Takum Chamba, was sent to the regional House of Assembly in Kaduna. When new elections were called in 1959, the Kuteb felt it was now their turn to nominate a candidate to the regional assembly. The accord collapsed, leading to the defection of the Kuteb to the Tiv-led UMBC. Though Tanko Yusuf retained his seat, Sangari was defeated by a UMBC candidate.

By the 1990s, this process of the fragmentation of a broader 'Jukun' identity had accelerated as the Kuteb challenged what they saw as a Jukun/Chamba hegemony. Furthermore, the Chamba, even though they remain Jukun speaking, became more assertive of a separate identity of their own. This assertiveness was evident in the invitation to the Chief of Ganye to present the staff of office to the current **Gara** of Donga. From a common 'Jukun' identity in the early colonial period, there was the development of three identity conglomerations built around the Jukun, Chamba and Kuteb. Indeed, the process of fragmentation continues even within the conglomerations. The Jukun conglomeration is facing increasing self-assertion from its sub-groups, the Tigun, Ndoro, Nama, Jibu, Ichen and Kpanzun. Meanwhile, the Ayikuben, Mamu, Ohomeghi and the Bete are increasingly asserting their separate identity of the Kuteb

conglomerate. The Chamba conglomeration faces similar pressures from the Tikari, Lufum, Daka Jidu and Paati. But the Chamba conglomerate seems to be more homogenous and coherent than the other two.

It was within this process of the fragmentation of 'Jukun' identity that each of the three major groups started staking out its territorial and political space. And this process ultimately brought the Chamba and the Kuteb into conflict over the chieftainship of Takum. The Kuteb claim that under the colonial system, the chieftainship of Takum - chief and kingmakers - was an all-Kuteb affair. Then under the first post-colonial regional government, the law was changed in 1963. Kuteb kingmakers were reduced from five to four, and three non-Kuteb members were brought in; the leaders or clan heads of the Jukun, Chamba and 'Hausa' in Takum. The Kuteb claim that this change was instigated by Jolly Tanko Yusuf, over whose candidacy, the tripartite electoral pact had broken down. In 1975, the Benue-Plateau State Government made further changes to the law. Kuteb kingmakers were reduced from four to two, Chamba representation was increased from one to two, and 'Hausa' representation was abolished. The Jukun clan head was made Chairman of the committee of kingmakers and deputy to the chief. Effectively, a Chamba/Jukun alliance on the committee would most likely lead to a three-against-two majority in favour of a non-Kuteb chief. The Kuteb claim that the 1975 changes were instigated by Ibrahim Sangari who lost his Lagos seat in 1959, but in 1975 was a Commissioner in the Benue-Plateau government.

On their part, the Takum Chamba argue that the federal government recently divided Takum Local Government Area into two, Ussa and Takum, with all the Kuteb in Ussa and the Jukun and Chamba in Takum. There is the hint that the Kuteb should 'move over' to their own local government area. The argument goes further that Takum was originally Jukun, the Jukun name for Takum being **Yoka** or 'inside the walls'. The argument continues that Takum had previously had both Jukun and Chamba chiefs, and that it was only in the 1930s that Kuteb chiefs were appointed. Since then, the Kuteb are said to have had four chiefs, but under no circumstances would they be allowed to monopolize the chieftainship to the exclusion of both Chamba and Jukun. The Kuteb counter by arguing that since the Jukun have the **Aku Uka** of Wukari, and the Chamba have the **Gara** of Donga, the Kuteb must retain the **Ukwe** of Takum.

It was the tension deriving from this political contestation which fed into the Wukari Crisis, leading to the killings of 1992 and 1993. Here again, the central issues remain unresolved. The **Ukwe** stool is now vacant, and it is possible that jockeying for it may lead to further crisis.

D. Conclusion: Identity Issues and the African Crises.

Much work has been done since the early 1980s on identity issues in Africa. There is however a clear difference in the orientation of studies emanating from academics in the West and those from academics in African. In the West, the central focus is on the

cultural impact of colonialism, particularly on the 'invention' or 'imagination' of African ethnicity and 'tradition' (Ranger 1994,1995). These studies have deepened our understanding of the precise nature of the colonial impact and the resulting transformations in identity. Unfortunately, much of this scholarship from the West is historical in nature, lacking any obvious connection to the contemporary crises in Africa. The main debates between 'social constructionists' who emphasize the imagined and invented nature of ethnicity, and 'primordialists' who emphasize age-old primordial qualities, often come across as quibbling over interpretative nuances, completely unconnected with the urgency of contemporary African life. On the other hand, scholars in African have tended to pay only limited attention to the historical dimensions of identity in Africa, concentrating instead on its structural manifestations in the African crises.

For example (Mamdani 1996) has explained the genesis of the recent Rwandese civil war and genocide in terms of the changing notions of citizenship and identity in Uganda. He argues that the shift from citizenship based on blood-line and ethnicity to one based on residency made it possible for the Rwandese refugees in Uganda to enlist in the Museveni-led NRA. With the end of the war, there was a reverse shift in the definition of citizenship, with ethnicity and indigeneity returning to prominence. He argues that it was this shifting identity of the Rwandese refugee/citizens/refugees in Uganda which precipitated the RPF armed return to Rwanda. In another context, Mamdani examines the conflicting ways long-term migrants from Mali and Burkina Faso in the Ivory Coast are regarded as migrants and citizens by the opposition and the government respectively. These conflicting perceptions had consequences for the electoral politics of the transition from one-party rule in Ivory Coast.

Another example is Mafeje's (1991) study of agricultural production in sub-saharan Africa. He argues that in most of these societies, land is held by lineages. Women continue to belong to their natal lineages even after they get married and re-locate to their husbands' lineage. In their lineage of residence, women are responsible for the reproduction of the lineage and also for agricultural production. Yet their access to land is constrained and mediated in these lineages of residence precisely because they are considered to be members of their natal lineages. He poses a challenge to African jurisprudence to address this gendered disjuncture between residence/identity/resources.

Both the Western and the African strands in the study of identity issues have enriched our understanding of African society and politics. However, it would seem that much could be gained by linking the study of identities to the crises in Africa. From this perspective, we can begin to highlight some central connections between the tendencies within minority identity transformation and the crises of the Nigerian state. To begin with, it must be restated that even under 'normal' circumstances, identities are in constant transformation. They would have still been transformed, with or without the crises in the state. Indeed as I have tried to show, many of the transformations, both positive and negative, started almost as soon as 'minority' identity emerged in the 1950s. The unique

thing about the crises of the state is that it generates the institutions, personalities, processes and dynamics which condition and give meaning and context to the transformations in identity. It accelerates some tendencies while discouraging others; often, it imbues 'neutral' developments with added meanings.

In the Nigerian context, two related crises are of particular relevance; the rise of a centralized military authoritarian state, and the economic crisis. By the time the military took-over power in December 1983, the Nigerian state was already highly centralized and the democratic ideal was highly contested at different levels of the state and the society. With the return of military rule, a militaristic authoritarianism was grafted onto the centralized structures of the state. Though this military authoritarianism started as a collective leadership under the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, it soon degenerated into a one-man autocratic rule under Babangida and Abacha. Related to this political development is the economic crisis which became pronounced from about 1982, leading to the adoption of a structural adjustment programme in 1986. Structural adjustment has since become just another aspect of this economic crisis, deepening the crisis of a common social citizenship (Olukoshi 1996). Combined together, economic crisis and military authoritarianism created an atmosphere of diminishing resources, and a personalized and idiosyncratic distribution of the little that was left.

The stage was therefore set for political entrepreneurs to seek to maximise access to economic and political resources by mobilizing particularistic identities and hitching these constituencies to the political agenda of the military autocrats. As a community magazine in southwestern Nigeria put it:

> The reality of today's Nigeria is that any tribe, State, Community or interest group that does not want to be lost in the crowd, should device means of consistently putting its interests, needs and problems across to the Government...(Idanre Community Magazine Sept. 1996).

More often than not, the 'devices' employed rely heavily on advancing particularist and exclusionary claims. As a consequence, there is a heightened sense of ethnic consciousness and conflict (Osaghae 1995). The transformation of minority identities since 1985 is best understood against the background of this wider dynamic. While some minority groups joined the frenzy of advancing particularist goals and interests - as in Taraba State -, others saw themselves as 'victims' and resorted to the same particularism as a means of defence - Ogoni and Zangon Kataf. The combination of economic crisis, structural adjustment and political engineering under autocratic tutelage was bound to destabilize existing consensus, leading to the politics of difference and the splintering of common identities. As Bangura (1995,7) succinctly puts it:

> Recession and economic restructuring have reduced the resources available to the state sector, and thus the incentives for disadvantaged groups or individuals to remain loyal to previous social and political arrangements

offered by the state. In addition, ethnic affiliations and forms of mobilisation have become important as the scope for plural forms of organisation has widened. I would like to stress the point that it is impossible to liberalise ethnically plural societies under conditions of economic decline without ethnicity becoming a major feature of political organisation. The demand for forms of politics that are devoid of ethnicity is actually a pipe dream!

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