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# **The Negotiation Issues in Nigeria's Post-Independence Conflicts**

**Layi Egunjobi and Ndubuisi O. W. Odiaka**

Nigeria which typifies the condition in most African countries, is bedeviled by disputes and conflicts which impact so negatively on the country's economic growth and quality of life indices. Disputes usually range from local, tribal, and religious skirmishes to national, regional, and international engagements. These naturally involve negotiations in form of agreements, treaties, dialogues, and national conferences which may be conventional or cultural. At the same time, Nigeria's nationhood is still being questioned and even threatened 100 years after unification and 54 years after independence. The basic argument in this paper is negotiation as a factor may have played a significant part in the persistence of Nigeria's disputes over time. The aim of the paper therefore, is to delve into the history of Nigeria's conflicts since 1960, highlighting and assessing the various conventional and traditional negotiation modes. The paper relies mainly on secondary historical information the contents of which are analyzed to lead to an in-depth understanding of the modes, processes, and outcomes of factors. This is with regard to the four case studies: the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute (1913-2006), Niger Delta militancy and insurgency (1985-2011), and Boko Haram terrorism (1980-2013). Expected findings of the paper include: identification and understanding of various methods of negotiation in the case studies, varying degrees of success and failures (short-term and long-term) as outcomes of negotiation, and persistence of an unresolved national question.

## **Introduction**

The post-independence Nigeria has been bedeviled by disputes and conflicts ranging from national-separatist conflicts, religious rivalries, ethnic/tribal, political, and environmental disputes among others. The Nigeria Civil War or the Nigeria-Biafra War, which occurred shortly after independence from colonial rule, served as test of national strength by fire. A national question then sufficed to query the aftermath effect of the war on the integrity and veracity of the nation-state. Rather than grow stronger in national unity, natural and environmental blessings turned a curse and "the opium of the masses" became a violent tool in the hands of the rich. In the bid to find balance and retain essence of nature, governance passed to the hands of the military, thus, the loss of human rights and the rise of activists against environmental, social, and political injustices. With the increase in the disintegration of the country into classes, one need stands out as common in the minds of all—peace. Therefore, struggles to achieve this informed employment of several modes of conflict management including negotiations.

This paper seeks to highlight and assess the various conventional and traditional modes of negotiations in the history of Nigeria's conflicts since 1960 and its implications on the sustainability of the nation-state. In order to achieve the stated goal, this piece presents brief historical reviews of the negotiation modalities of four major conflict situations that

required the establishment of negotiation parties by the federal government. These include the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), Nigeria-Cameroon boundary dispute (1913-2006), Niger Delta militancy and insurgency (1985-2011), and Boko Haram terrorism (1980-2013). The intensity and national implication of the disputes and group grievances informed these choices for study. Critical, likewise, are the negotiation strategies employed by Nigeria as the most populous nation in Africa because of her great influence and impact on the continent's polity. Finally, this paper intends to juxtapose and understand the various modes of negotiations employed by the parties and then reviews the successes and shortcomings of the methods.

## Key Concepts

Conflict has been described by social scientists (Francis, 2006; Swanstrom & Weissmann, 2005), as an inevitable event in the human existence resulting from ambiguous languages, little or no communication, scarcity of resources, and differences in ideas and belief. Others include unresolved grievances and disparities in power distributions. Conflict has been defined by Francis (2006) as the "pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups" (p. 20). Similarly, Akpuru-Aja (2007) defined it as involving "two or more parties in opposition to interests, principles, practice or strategies" (p. 15). The inevitability nature of conflict shows its relevance to development and growth, therefore, describing it as either good or bad depending on the modes of response. Ivorgba (2005) drawing ideas from Joyce Abarbanel compared conflict with pain in the body. According to him,

Conflict is . . . like the pain . . . , a warning signal in our lives. Conflict gets our attention so we can diagnose and heal the real problem. It is the "visible symptom of a deeper problem." Conflict is a great privilege that we have to make changes. (p.1)

Whichever way we decide to make the change would determine the outcome or direction of the conflict. This is because it is not really the conflict that is the problem but how we deal with it.

The various modes of conflict transformation include avoidance, facilitation, mediation, and negotiation. Others are competition, arbitration, litigation, and the use of force. This paper focuses on "negotiation" or bargaining as one of the modes and as a joint problem solving mechanism. Ivorgba (2005) describes "negotiation" as a form of "collaboration . . . a situation where some people seek to satisfy their needs and interests while at the same time seeking to maintain relationships with others" (p.2). The glossary of the Berghof Foundation (2012) further described the process in a similar vein with Fisher and Ury (1991) in their *Getting to Yes* as mode of communication between two parties that seeks to reach an agreement. According to the glossary, "negotiation" is a "face-to-face discussion for the purpose of reaching an agreement on a situation that is perceived as a problem or conflict" (Berghof Foundation, 2012, 49). Herb Cohen (2007) in *You Can Negotiate Anything* succinctly defined it as taking advantage of "information and power to affect behavior within a web of tension" (p.16). Cohen's definition clearly presents negotiation as a process whereby both parties attempt to outwit the other to get enough off the table, make minimal concessions, and maintain cordial relationship. Conflict transformation has over the years required multi-faceted means of settlement beyond a

single mode. In other words, the settlement of disputes with the employment of negotiation is insufficient without utilizing other means requiring legal binding documents to cement the agreements reached. In most cases, this would be at the intervention or involvement of a third impartial party.

The various national disputes in Nigeria have naturally involved negotiations in the form of agreements, treaties, dialogues, and national conferences which may be conventional or cultural. In spite of the employment of such alternative measures to conflict resolution, Nigeria's nationhood is still being questioned and even threatened 100 years after unification and 53 years after independence. After the survival of several military regimes, dispute resolutions through alternative measures became an ingredient of achieving a sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

Individual or group attempt at managing conflicts effectively, according to Greenhalgh (1993) requires the deep and adequate understanding of the "underlying dynamics of the conflict—which may be very different from its expression—and whether they can identify the crucial tactical points for intervention" (p. 7). Beyond the requirements and necessary ingredients for adequate negotiation, the personality of the individual or group of people likewise influences the outcome of the process. Sprall III, Okonkwo, and Akan (2011) present cultural profiling as individual or group characteristics and implications to the various strategies employed in negotiations. These strategies dictated by cultural or personal colorations, as well as inadequacy in Greenhalgh's negotiation requirements, have impacted largely on conflict transformation and in extension to national development. This section seeks to review the various conflict situations whereby negotiation, as a strategy for conflict transformation, was employed.

## **Nigerian Conflicts and the Negotiation Processes**

The sensitivity of conflict situations at the international or intra-national level, especially in a budding democracy as Nigeria though occasionally dotted with political stains, requires skilled negotiation ability. Such conflict transformation modality necessitates the absence of personal or group grievances and sentiments, defined by Cohen as positional bargaining procedure, but the need for a lasting relationship. This section, therefore, intends to critically review the mode of negotiation and the outcome of the processes of the conflicts under study. It does not seek to do a significant review of the historical antecedents of the conflicts but focus on the negotiation modalities employed in the attempts to transform the situation.

### ***Nigeria-Cameroon Bakassi Peninsula Negotiation***

The territorial dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon dates back to September 10, 1884 when the Obong of Calabar sought solace for his Efik speaking people with the Queen of England through a signed treaty (Ifeanyi, 2011). The disputed land, which stretches to a length of 1582 kilometers from the Lake Chad (Yagba, 1995, p. 44), have Nigeria, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea share land and sea boundaries. The main issues of conflicts between these two countries are the presence of oil, environmental and historical

sentiments and attachments of the original indigenes of Bakassi on the land, and the national identity of the people of Efik.

The defining moments of the conflict situations include the negotiation processes between the British and German governments over the delimitation of the territories in 1913. Both colonial governments agreed through a signed treaty on the settlement of the frontier and the regulation of navigation in that same year. These agreements were borne out of the various needs of the governments—while the British were interested in the economic advantage derived from the sea access through Calabar, the Germans had the availability of shrimp in mind. In order to meet their needs, both colonialists made concessions in exchange. The British conceded the Bakassi Peninsula to the Germans in exchange for a navigable port. After the World War I in 1914, the territory was redistributed among the British and French governments under the supervision of the League of Nations even though the old border was retained.

In 1962, two years after the independence of the countries, the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon exchanged notes acknowledging the Cameroonian ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula. The Cameroonian government, however, sought to review their maritime border in 1970, which was “vaguely defined by the 1913 Anglo-German treaty” (Ifeanyi, 2011, para.3). The singular explanation to such move at that period has been pointed to the wealth of oil and aquatic life in the peninsula (Tarlebba & Baroni, 2010, pp. 204-205). Revisiting the Anglo-German signed agreement, the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon disputed over the clarity of the “navigable” port, which earlier served as one of the points of concessions by the Cameroonians. In 1971 Nigeria’s head of state, General Gowon, and the Cameroonian President Ahidjo met in Yaounde to sign the Maroua Declaration for the partial extension of the 1971 maritime boundary. They also signed the “Coker-Ngo” line by the British Admiralty Chart No. 3433 establishing the boundaries along the three-nautical mile limit. This agreement did not, however, include the negotiation on the ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula. Basically, asides from the issues arising from the vaguely demarcated boundaries before the independence of the two countries there were no serious conflicts until 21 years after. Conflicts between Nigeria and Cameroon escalated into violence intermittently between 1981 and 2005 (Tarlebba & Baroni, 2010, pp. 205-206).

In the bid to ensure a third-party intervention, the Cameroonian government referred the alleged territorial violations by the Nigerian Armed Forces to the Organisation of African Unity and then to the Security Council of the United Nations. In 1994, it further filed an application to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for legal intervention. Facilitated by the United Nations’ Secretary General Kofi Annan, representatives from both countries were called up for negotiation. While the Cameroonian representatives held on to the Anglo-German agreement of March 1913, the Nigerians proposed a referendum to determine the nativity and indigenization of the people and the peninsula. On Thursday, October 10, 2002, the ICJ ruled in favor of Cameroon considering the colonial documents they presented. A month before the ICJ’s verdict Kofi Anan had called on the presidents of both countries for a meeting to discuss the Court’s final decisions ahead of public knowledge. Both parties agreed to respect the decision, establishing a joint committee consisting of members from both countries to work on modalities for a hitch-free handing over ceremony.

Reviewing the implications of the ICJ ruling on both sides, Tarlebba and Baroni (2010) established the fact that the ruling gave a boost to the public admiration of the Biya's administration and deeper trust for the United Nations. Although this had more negative social, political, and economic implications on Nigeria and its government, from the international viewpoint, Nigeria could be respected and seen as a promoter of peace.

### ***Negotiation in the Nigerian Civil War***

Aneke's *Untold Story of the Nigeria-Biafra War* (2007) chronologically presented the various peace processes from the advent of the military regimes to the end of the Civil War in 1970. A year before the war broke out, the government initiated a "Lagos Peace Conference" with the aim of justifying the existence of the country as a single nation or four tribally-based autonomous regions. The national conference, which commenced in Lagos on September 11, 1966, had 26 representatives drawn from the four regions: West, Mid-West, East, and North. While the regional delegates argued on issues of power distributions among the regions, the possibility of reaching compromise grew much more difficult. Loose confederation was a deeply contested option on the table of the national negotiation process as against the Gowon government's interest of a strong central government. In the end, the conference's inability to reach a national consensus due to the influence of the Supreme Commander only deepened tribal tensions and grievances in the line of ethnicity. Then came the Aburi Peace Conference held on January 4-5, 1967 in Ghana by the Nigeria's Supreme Commander and Regional military governors. The Military Supreme Council decided to meet in Ghana on Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu's terms of negotiation. The meeting sought to reach an agreement on the national question earlier debated on in the national conference in 1966, which reached an impasse. The negotiation party did not come up with a communiqué that outlines the agreements reached on the major issues in dispute.

In view of the earlier deadlock, the Ghanaian government, in March 8, 1967 intervened by facilitating a renewed negotiation, which produced agreements on fundamental issues. Among these are the reorganization of the army, return to Regional autonomy, rehabilitation of Eastern Refugees, joint constitutions for military appointments, and cessation of all arms importation. As prospective as the terms and facilitated process was, it only reached another gridlock as the Supreme Commander refused to implement the agreements.

In another attempt at mediation by an external body, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in November 1967 named a mission consisting of four heads of state. These heads of state led by Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia are Lt. Gen. Joseph A. Ankrah, chairman of Ghana's National Liberation Council, and Presidents Hamam Diori of Niger and Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon. A mission meant to mediate in the dispute as proposed by the OAU became a one-sided show. The head of the Nigerian government opposed the major objective of the mission by insisting on using the mission to achieve his own interest of calling "on the rebel leaders to abandon secession" and categorically stating that their objective ". . . is not to mediate" (Aneke, 2007, p. 191). This move upturned the main principle of facilitated negotiations through mediation, which is upholding objectivity and neutrality. In response, the Biafran Government hardened their position and described the

OAU as a “perfect instrument for imperialist and neocolonialist intrigues” (Aneke, 2007, p. 192).

In May 23, 1968, Kampala Peace Talk began with both sides having their civilian representatives as negotiators. In the attempt to negotiate on the main essence of the war, the parties argued against the terms of initiating an enabling environment. While the Biafrans insist on a ceasefire before talks, the Nigerian sides maintain terms on the other way around. More so, the two sides argued (Biafrans) for and (Nigerians) against the need to have a neutral chairman and an outside observer. Although both agreed on an outside observer as against a neutral chairman but failed to have decent and productive discussion towards ending the war, so ended the Kampala peace talk in failure.

A proposition had earlier been made by the then-Commissioner of Information, Chief Anthony Enahoro, in a private meeting with the Pope Paul VI, to constitute a Constitutional Conference (Aneke, 2007, p. 549). This conference proposed to draw representatives from all tribes but this would take place only on the condition that the “rebels” embrace a centrally unified government. In the same vein, other parties such as the United Nations under the leadership of Mr. U. Thant began to urge the Biafran government to embrace the “OAU Proposal” of a united country, which technically is in the interest of Nigeria (Aneke, 2007, p. 576). The various moves to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the conflict proved abortive and resulted into a failed struggle for the Biafrans who surrendered after the “escape” of their leader.

Forty-four years after the war, the country is still bedeviled by the question of national unity, especially in the line of tribal tensions. Thus, the implication of such negotiation cultures, which lack the sense of protecting and ensuring a long term relationship with the other party. It is highly of note that the Nigeria-Biafra war though started from 1967 and ended in 1970 still continues especially in the ethnic lines beyond just the Biafrans. This, however, shows the weak nature of the negotiation strategies employed by the governments to ensure a united over 250 ethnic groups.

### ***Negotiating with Boko Haram***

The ongoing terrorist invasion of Nigeria by Boko Haram, a religious sect, which drew its origin from the Maitatsine sect in the 1980s (Ajayi, 2012, p. 104), has grown into an international issue of great concern. Actual date of the involvement of the sect is though controversial but it came into media light in 2009 after the extrajudicial killing of its leader in the police detention. The sect, though more militarily organized, drew inspirations from the Maitatsine sect’s objective of enforcing the Shariah law on the Northern populace. Presently, the state of insecurity in the country birth by the dastardly terrorist activities of the sect across the Northern states of Nigeria informed the initial step to establish a negotiating committee. This section of the paper does not intend to review the historical antecedents of the sects but the proposed modes of negotiation by the government. Although the step to negotiate with the terrorist group has been widely criticized by many scholars and social critics this work evaluates the intended *modus operandi* of the proposed initiatives.

As part of the negotiation methods employed by the federal government, the Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity Reuben Abati in a statement informed on a mode of strategy proposed. In his words, “the ongoing talk is a back channel one in which

those who know members of the group are talking with them on behalf of the government” (Adeyemo, 2012, para. 2). This approach, however, contradicts the proposed move by the sect. Weeks before the federal government presented their proposition the sect had not only agreed to a negotiated agreement with several conditions, they also listed a number of mediators expected to be involved. These mediators include Alhaji Shettima Ali Mongonu, General Muhammadu Buhari (Retired), and Senator Bukar Abba Ibrahim. Others are Ambassador Gaji Galtimari, and Barrister Aisha Wakil and her husband. In addition to the conditions presented for negotiation, the sect noted that the process be held in Saudi Arabia and have all their family members rehabilitated into the society.

Placing demands on the table, the sect had earlier met with the former President Olusegun Obasanjo in September 16, 2011, stating clearly their needs. According to the sect, their conditions for a ceasefire are government’s end to arrest and killings of their members, payment of compensation to families of sect members killed by security personnel, and prosecution of policemen responsible for the killing of their sect leader. Recently, in addition to the conditions of ceasefire, the group had also asked for the release of its members imprisoned in exchange for the over 270 kidnapped schoolgirls (Allison, 2014). In response to the demands of the group, a cease-fire talk was reported to have been held in Chad involving the country’s president Idriss Deby and representatives from Cameroon (Voice of America, 2014). The report, however, did not state who the envoys were from Nigeria, the representatives of the terrorist group, or the *modus operandi* for the talk. Despite the sketchy report, news of the missing schoolgirls still held in hostage by the group shows the outcome of the meeting.

Although several moves were made to negotiate with the federal government, the unstructured leadership of the sect served as an obstacle. While a member claims to represent the sect another comes to counter it. Another major obstacle to dialoguing with Boko Haram is the involvement of scammers. Shehu Sani, Director of Civil Rights Congress (a prominent northern Nigerian rights group), noted that “most of the proposals for dialogue are targeted at getting money from the government and the President has on a number of occasions been duped and deceived by people in the corridors of power” (Integrated Regional Information Network, 2012, para. 9).

There has not been any negotiation even though scholars and social critics have argued against the move for negotiations with terrorists (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 80). Kantiok (n.d.) queried the reluctant nature of governments the world over to seek to dialogue with terrorists and terrorist organizations. In his opinion, government’s dialogue with terrorists “will legitimize terrorists and terrorism in general” (Kantiok, n.d., p. 4). If the option of negotiation with terrorists is unacceptable, then what choice is available to restore peace?

### ***Niger Delta Militants and the Nigerian Government***

Negotiation of the government of Nigeria with the Niger Delta (ND) militants to end the long-standing regional conflicts that resulted into terrorist acts on governmental critical infrastructures and oil industries ended with amnesty for the groups. After several years of attempts at getting the attention of the governments through non-violent protests and constitution of consultative forum, the ND militants resorted into violence. The negotiation process though developed into several stages due to the complexities encountered in the composition of the militant groups the evaluation of the outcome remains questionable.

The militant groups though, according to Siollun (2008) were “loose eclectic mix of several aggrieved armed factions” but all seek to achieve justice for the region (para. 8). However, being one of the largest militant groups in the ND region of Nigeria, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) sought to bring the groups together under a single umbrella. Attempts at understudying the negotiation processes would be incomplete without a brief history of the conflict dynamics.

The struggle by the ND people against the oil industries and the government dates back to February 1966 with a rebellion led by a former security personnel, Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro (Siollun, 2008). Boro organized and trained a group of 40 men in arms and named it the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF) aimed at a violent takeover and control of the region but the revolt was suppressed by the federal government.

Driven by the objectives of securing reparation from the federal government for environmental pollution caused by oil spills and larger autonomy, Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1990s led a peaceful agitation to achieve this. Leading the Ogoni grassroots movement, Movement of the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Saro-Wiwa succeeded in halting the activities of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) across Ogoni land (Courson, 2007, p. 12). In response to this, however, the then military government constituted a Civil Disturbance Special Tribunal, which put an end to the group by arresting and hanging the lead persons. Further inspired by the agitations of the Ken Saro-Wiwa 1990 movement, various groups emerged in the region especially under major umbrella organizations such as the NDPVF, Federation of Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), and MEND. Although all share similar goal, MEND, led by Henry Okah, sought a central force to represent the entire militant groups in the region.

Several peaceful and non-violent attempts have been made over the years by diverse groups within the region to get the attention of the federal government on the severe socio-economic conditions of the people (Branigan & Vidal, 2002; Courson 2007; Human Rights Watch Report, 2003). All such attempts however ended in violent responses from the government at the protesters. In May 2006, a Nigerian court ordered Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) to pay a reparation fee of \$1.5 billion to a host community. SPDC in response filed an appeal and refused to accept the verdict of the court. In reaction to this, the groups became militant in nature, destroying the infrastructures in the oil industries, forcefully shutting down production and threatening a complete takeover of the region.

After series of unsuccessful violent intervention from the government to curb and seize the rising unrest in the ND region, President Umaru Yar’Adua’s administration in September 2008 considered a peaceful measure. In September 10, 2008, the administration constituted a Technical Committee to recommend ways to reduce violence in the region. This step bought a unilateral ceasefire from the militants. Consequently, the committee in December 2008 made several recommendations. These include: appointing a mediator to facilitate discussions between government and the militants; grant amnesty to some militant leaders; launch disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation campaign; and channeling 25% of the oil revenue to the Delta up from the current 13%. However, dissatisfied by the recommendation, President Yar’Adua, in February 2009, constituted another committee to review the earlier recommendations on possible resolution of the ND unrest. The government, in the end, considered a “conditional amnesty” (IRIN, 2010, para. 22). Although the militant groups expressed their displeasure and distrust about the

amnesty process, they, under the leadership of MEND, named a five-man team of mediators to liaise with the government on their behalf. These included: Retired Admiral Mike Akhigbe, literary icon Professor Wole Soyinka, Retired Major General Luke Aprezi, Dr. Sabella Abidde, and Mrs. Annkio Briggs. Several attempts such as this, of drawing the government to a negotiating table, failed. Rather than negotiate, the government insist on proceeding with the amnesty processes. Despite their earlier insistence on a negotiated resolution, MEND on October 25, 2009, announced a unilateral truce and accepted the government's amnesty proposal (Malina, ND). Although this was accepted by many prominent militant leaders including Tom Polo, Ateke Tom, and Henry Okah among others, "elements claiming to represent threaten continued attack after the expiration of the deal" (Malina, ND, Parag. 13). Years after the act of truce or "settlement" deal, evidence has shown that the government has failed in the attempt to restore peace in the region.

### ***Negotiation Issues and the Future of Nigerian State***

After several years of conflict intervention through diverse means by the federal government, history has showed that the consequences of the modalities are experienced by the people in the near future. It is imperative to highlight here that the culture of negotiation hangs on four main stands, which includes respect for the other party thereby gaining trust, compromise, willingness to budge, and relationships. All negotiation processes are expected to be built on these premises. Review of the earlier narrated negotiation processes of conflict situations, however, presents contrary modes and hence their present implications on the polity of the nation-state.

On a closer look at the Nigerian Civil War 44 years after, national dialogues have consistently reoccurred in various modes either from the point of view of national conference or appealing to an aggrieved party. All these have, in the end, pointed to seeking a stable, equitable, and just polity. One of the national questions facing all ethnic groups in the country has therefore remained, which is acceptable, decentralized or centralized system of government? Governmental administrations, one after the other, have over the years called for reviews in the modalities of political construct and/or the need for national fragmentation in the line of ethnic considerations. These have come in the form of constitutional and political reviews. They include Clifford Constitution 1922, Richards Constitution 1946, Macpherson Constitution 1951, Lyttleton Constitution 1954, 1960 Independence Constitution, 1975/76 Constitutional Conference, 1988/89 Constitutional Conference, 1994/95 National Political Reform Conference, and 2005 National Political Reform Conference. The military administrations, according to Ajayi (2005), likewise "set up a jamboree of 'elders-in-council' to discuss what is good for Nigeria" (Parag. 5). Common to these processes is the negotiation strategies employed "with a view toward reaching agreement where some interests may be shared and some may be opposed" (Notini, 2008). Interestingly, however, most of the negotiated disputes between the government and another have had the earlier not fully fulfilling its own part of the agreements. Judging from the Nigeria-Biafra war and with the Niger Delta militants, the federal government has had history of non-commitment to joint agreements with an opposing party or group. This is due to its (Nigeria's) assumed strength and power to control the outcome of the process. In the end, however, the more powerful group (in this case the Nigerian government) tend to "settle" or pay-off the leaders of the opposing group

by ways of “juicy” amnesty programs so to cover-up the unsettled issues. Consequent to the years of the dusts being swept under the rug and bottled up emotions, at the opportunity of possible dialogue every ethnic, religious and political group let loose of their grievances over and over again (Njoku, 2014).

On Monday, March 17, 2014, the government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated another national conference. The conference was convened to “provide a platform for Nigerians to engage in a dialogue over solutions to the challenges facing the country” (Onuorah, Thermba, Akande, Olumide, & Inekambe, 2014, p. 1). As part of its agenda, the conference seeks to review the system of government for further considerations of the delegates. Even though this issue has been shied away from after the Aburi negotiation by consecutive military administrations (Ajayi, 2005; Onwuka, 2014) dissatisfactions from ethnic and socio-political angles have informed the recurring visit to the issue.

The negotiation process between the Nigerian government and Biafra could simply be referred to as disputes between two asymmetric powers. In this case the Nigerian government leveraged on the influence of greater military and economic strength. However, the negotiation between the two powers aimed at different needs. On the part of the Biafran government, the people through their representatives sought for a decentralized government and reparation for the Kano massacre of the Igbos. However, the Nigerian government, insisting on a strong center, considered the economic implication of losing the Eastern Region to cessation. Therefore, rather than employ an amicable resolution to the disputes, the military administration utilized violent means through economic sanctions and military engagements. In the end and typical of the Nigerian government, members of Biafra were offered amnesty without considering their grievances. Similarly, the ND region still grapples with environmental issues and huge under-development in the face of multi-billion dollar oil producing firms. Consequent to this, kidnappings and vandalisms still persists even beyond the region in spite of the amnesty intervention by the federal government.

On the part of the Boko Haram crisis, negotiating with faceless “aggrieved” party presents a rather dicey and blurry solution to the federal government of Nigeria. Boko Haram, the religious insurgent which originated from the northeastern part of Nigeria has been described as having “no sovereign status” (Akinnaso, 2013). While there are those who agree to direct negotiation with the terrorists (Voice of Africa Radio, 2014, para. 17 & 18; News Agency of Nigeria, 2014, para. 3), many others disagree to such move. Proponents of a negotiated resolution to the insurgence have also proposed amnesty for the militants. Typical of the Nigerian government as this may sound attempts have been made to dialogue with the leaders of the sects. However, the leaders of the sect have decided to remain anonymous and faceless thereby increasing the difficulties in possible negotiation moves. On the part of the federal government, however, the issue of trust to fulfill its own part of the deal has also been questioned.

Whether the federal government decides to negotiate or not with an aggrieved party within its territory, history has established the fact that either ways relationship would be affected positively or negatively. This paper therefore submits to the fact that the federal government should consider the culture of negotiation as critical and consequential to the futuristic growth and development of a nation-state like Nigeria.

## Conclusion

The above conflict situations and the consequent negotiation processes by the federal government of Nigeria, one can easily describe the character of Nigeria as hypocritical. And like an African proverb goes, Nigeria is like one who pampers another man's child to curry favor and public praise but berates without caution his own. In sum, the Nigeria-Cameroon conflict presented Nigeria as a peacemaker to the world but for its intervention strategies in other internal conflicts, it would rather "bully" its own with military might to yield to its wishes.

A peculiar country like Nigeria with over 250 ethnic groups and three main contending religions (Islam, Christianity, and Indigenous belief) that seeks to attain a stable polity and nation-state must first win over the trust of its people. The absence of this has consequently informed a heavy ripple and reverberating effect on communal sanctity, governance, and stable polity. In addition, the bottled-up emotions across the ethnic lines drawing from the Civil War era have snowballed into religious crisis and acts of politicizing religion.

In sum, an African adage says "one who cuts a piece of meat with his teeth should remember that the hand has the largest part." This means the one who tries to settle a dispute forcefully should realize that the other party is equally up to the task. But for the teeth and tongue to live in harmony, they must share the task. Therefore, in order to ensure a harmonious co-existence Nigerian government must be ready to realize that it is not greater than the people it is governing.

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