

The African Culture of Forgiveness and the Formation of Government of National Unity in Africa: The Nigeria Experience

Raji Shittu

Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies

University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper studies the impact of the African traditional culture of forgiveness on the efforts at bringing about political stability and democratic consolidation in Africa using Nigeria as a case study. The research findings which were sourced from secondary data shows that the traditional culture of forgiveness has largely been used successfully across African countries as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism to resolve protracted disputes. Such culture of forgiveness as applied to the resolution of political disputes in Nigeria through the establishment of Government of National Unity (GNU) has helped to stabilise the country's polity and thus promoted democratic consolidation. However, in spite of the central role of GNU as a viable socio-political dispute resolution and emotional healing mechanism, the strategy has some pitfalls for political processes and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The study reveals further that since the establishment of party alliances and government of national unity in the country right from the first republic, none has worked adequately within the range of an unconditional forgiving spirit owing to the fact that the issues that are associated with Nigeria's disunity are contradictions that are far beyond political disputes. There is unwholesome federal structure arrangement in Nigeria that is contrary to normal functional federal practices all over the world. The issue of national unity in Nigeria has been forced on the federating units and interwoven with ethnic loyalty. The above divisions have created some kinds of conundrum in the polity without sufficient forgiving spirit. Any federal arrangement that benefits one region at overwhelming disadvantages to the others cannot last. This seeming divides underscore the need to renegotiate the basis of Nigeria's national unity through a sovereign national conferences to address disagreements and perceived marginalisation amongst different groups in Nigeria.

Introduction

Since human creation, each society has developed its own culture of managing its

socio- political disputes in a way that preserves the cohesion of the fabric of such society. The cultural approach to managing disputes thus

play a vital role in promoting peace, security and social harmony in the society and the restoration of good relationship amongst the people, leading ultimately to decreased friction within the communities. One of such cultural mechanism for conflict resolution in Africa is the culture of forgiveness which has been used in Africa as a courageous and powerful expression of unconditional acceptance of love as an avenue to stop the transfer of hate from one generation to another.

Though earlier consigned to religious dogma as a weak form of seeking restitution from physical and psychological injuries, forgiveness now plays a central role in the post conflict resolution and reconstruction of many African countries. More than before, the spirit of forgiveness is highly relevant in a post cold war communities that are frequently characterised more by intra-state frictions which are largely being managed internally with all forms of novel ideas unlike in the Cold war era, where there were sufficient external interventions in the management of Africa's internal crises because of the need of the capitalist and socialist oriented countries to seek loyalty for their ideological leanings from African countries.

Owing to dwindled external intervention, internal conflict resolution mechanism is now being adopted by many African countries in order to maintain and sustain internal order and in an attempt to rebuild the war torn African countries through the culture of forgiveness. Act of forgiveness is a foremost socio-cultural reconciliation technique and a private and collective religious obligation to rebuild a previously harmonious society that has been fragmented by the tradition of deep

seated hatred.

For instance, Nelson Mandela's courage to negotiate with, and forgive those who imprisoned him largely made South Africa to be relatively peaceful today after the previous political culture of violence in the country.²

Act of forgiveness also represents a genuine personal and collective willingness to release the hurts of the past, accompanied by hope and determination to begin a new form of relationship from the hatred of the past. For instance, Biehl Amy, a full bright scholar, working on the transition to democracy in South Africa, was killed in 1993 by four blacks in Guguletu (Capetown).³ Amy's parents did not only plead for amnesty for Amy's killers at the Desmond Tutu-led reconciliation committee, but also gave scholarship to their child killers and hired them to work at Amy Biehl Foundation after graduation. This single act of magnanimity confirmed the intense power of forgiveness as an effective conflict resolution mechanism in Africa. Forgiveness is a source of social harmony because it restores good relationship in the society and decreases frictions.⁴ The central role of forgiveness to the sustainability of peaceful coexistence in the society thus indicates that there is no bright future for any society or country without a forgiving spirit. The failure of the electoral process to enthrone credible elections in many African countries and the attendant dispute arising from unresolved political conflict has led to the introduction of the traditional method of conflict resolution.⁵ This tradition is largely rooted in the African traditional culture of short memory of hate and the adoption of forgiving spirit to promote peace and development through the establishment of Government of

National Unity (GNU).

This traditional culture of conflict resolution largely centres on the Africa's culture of forgiving wrong doings in spite of the intensity of the offence. This dispute resolution model was used to resolve the political conflict in Kenya and Zimbabwe where the government and opposition are working together in spite of the extreme brutality of the opposition by the governments of the two countries. In Nigeria also, the ruling party, the Peoples Democracy Party (PDP) and some of the opposition parties worked together in 1999 and 2007 under the government of national unity after the disputed 2007 general elections which was reported by many observers to have been significantly flawed. To complement the traditional conflict resolution mechanism in Africa, the Africa Union's Peace and Security Council was established to effectively manage and resolve conflict in Africa. Part of the conflict resolution strategy of the council was the establishment of the African Council of Elders (ACE) (Called the African wise men) which largely consists of African former Head of State to resolve conflicts in the continent.⁶

The African PSC is a traditional non-military resolution mechanism that was established in 2003 to focus on collective security amongst African countries and to serve as an early warning signal that could respond to potential or actual conflict situation in Africa. African PSC adopts the strategy of preventive diplomacy, peace making, peace building and postconflict humanitarian campaigns and crises management amongst other functions. In spite of this efforts, political governance in Africa are still riddle with one form of complication

or the other leading to democratic reversal rather than consolidation. Attempt is made in this paper to examine the prospects and problems of government of national unity in Africa, using Nigeria as a case study. The study adopts descriptive examination and analysis of data through secondary source.

Through secondary research methodology, data are gathered primarily from existing texts, journals, newspapers and other relevant sources of information.

Definition of Concepts

Culture

This refers to the ways of life and the traditional civilisation of the people .It represents the total self-expression of the people as it covers their arts, beliefs, emotions, values, social institutions and pattern of dressing, amongst others.

Forgiveness

This means the action or process of absolving sins through the act of free pardon and the act of giving up all legitimate claims in respect of a particular issue in order to promote peaceful co-existence within the society. Forgiveness is the renunciation or cessation of resentment, indignation or anger as a result of real or perceived offence, disagreement or mistakes or ceasing to demand punishment or restitutions by the offended.

Government of National Unity (GNU)

This is a government that is based on alliances, coalition or fusion of different political parties, especially between the party in power and the opposition parties and the alliances of different groups in the society that are put in place in

order to promote oneness, cohesion and unity of purpose amongst the allying parties.

A Review of Literature

People derive their sense of meaningful existence from their culture.⁷ Thus their personal and group worldview greatly affects their values and such worldview provides the foundation for the social norms by which people live. Through the internalisation and sharing of their cultural attitude and values with their fellow beings, and by handing down such culture to the future generations, society do reconstruct themselves on the bases of their shared cultural image and heritage.

The cultural worldview of a society also determines the tempo and temper of the political environment.⁸ In many parts of contemporary Africa, there is a prevailing political culture of violence, but further researches clearly confirmed that the political environment of such society is characterised largely by selfish interest, private accumulation at the expense of collective aspirations and competitive drive for power and resources as well as political exclusion. This culture of Prebendalist politics thus promotes the culture of perpetual socio-political conflicts in Africa. For instance, dividends of democracy and good governance in Africa are unevenly distributed amongst the populace, having been highly concentrated around the leadership and their cronies and other privilege members of the society. The lust for power to maintain perpetual control over privilege positions and development resources has thus promoted "sit tight" leadership, personalisation of power, intense manipulation of election and frequent conflicts amongst political elites. This culture of

prebendialism thus promotes politics of exclusion and manipulation to a frightening level resulting in vicious cycle of crises, poverty and general socio-economic crises. The intervention of African tradition of conflict resolution mechanism has thus being employed in the process.

The previous West centric focus of Africa's conflict resolution mechanism, which is largely rooted in military intervention and cease fires, and legal adjuration of cases have not adequately resolved political disputes in Africa.⁹ The initial ceasefire often collapse because many agreements were signed under duress while court cases instituted to settle political disputes often witness prolonged delay thus generating political bitterness between the losers and winners.

The African culture of forgiveness is therefore applied as a compromise and middle range approach to resolving Africa's political logjam in which there is no total winners and losers because such forgiving spirit clears the guilt of the offender without further destroying the offended and the society at large is at peace, contributing more to the debate on the relevance of forgiveness to peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa¹⁰ opines that forgiveness represent the ultimate practical peace making wisdom from Africa which favour restorative rather than retributive justice, operating in a direction that favours reconciliation rather than estrangement of disputants. This forgiving culture works toward the offender realising the hurtful impact of his action to the other party and towards correcting such conduct in a more peaceful manner rather than punishing him in revenge for wrongdoings¹¹ identified the philosophical African world view of forgiveness, and

reconciliation in general within the concept of “Ubuntu” which originates from the Baza people in Southern Africa. This concept represents unity of humanity, principles of empathy, sharing, cooperation and forgiveness in efforts to resolve common problems. The concept of “Ubuntu” also represents deep love for one another amongst the African people as an important source of forgiveness arising from strained or broken relationship amongst individuals and communities. The forgiving spirit of Ubuntu thus serves as an aid for providing remedies which contribute towards a more mutually acceptable solution for the parties in conflict. The African culture of forgiveness thus contrasts with the West centric culture of vengeance and retributive judgment.¹²

Identified five stages of peace making in most African culture which ultimately makes forgiveness easier to achieve. These include acknowledgment of guilt by the offender, showing sincere remorse and repentance, paying adequate compensation where necessary and seeking forgiveness. The author opined that offended inspired forgiveness spirit frees the mind of the offended from suffering from the previous hurt and pains and in the process launches a new beginning in rebuilding his emotional, physical and social relations that were damaged during the crises.

Nwanko¹³ listed eight healing progression that leads to forgiveness from the point of hatred. The author termed this progression as the psychological variables engaged in a process intervention on forgiveness. First is the negative psychological position of the offended not to forgive the offender noting the positive point of keeping malice, hatred and

revenge. The second stage of positive forgiveness progression is the positive self confrontation of the inner anger of the offended in favour of forgiveness of the offender by working hard to release rather than harbor hanger. The third stage of forgiveness is the offended’s admittance of shame and error of not forgiven according to divine dictates of the society, fourth, is the cognitive, rehearsal of the weight of the offence by the offended, relating to occasional flashes of what led to the issue in the first instance while the fifth stage of forgiving progression is the identification of the fact that old hatred has not resolve the problem but has only promoted further ill-will that has not helped the offended and the offender but has rather contributed to the fragmentation of the society which the offended have a divine and cultural duty to protect. The Sixth, stage of forgiveness relates to the establishment of genuine commitment by the offended to forgive, especially when the offender shows sincere remorse, noting the strong traits of forgiveness as against the earlier stand of weak compassion for the offender by the offended.

The seventh stage of forgiving spirit is the realisation by the offended of the fact that he might also have been an offender who might have been previously forgiven of his own offence because of the society’s affection towards him and his own duty and responsibilities to reciprocate such gestures towards others. The eight and the last stage of a forgiving progression is the awareness by the offended of the negative effect of hate and the positive effects of love and forgiveness in the society and his resolve to forgive unconditionally because of the healing benefits

their in. As noted by¹⁴ the overall key to achieving forgiveness is largely rooted in the offended willingness to explore the range of the above mentioned forgiveness processes and to persist until forgiveness is attained.

Olajide¹⁵ notes the relationship between frustration, anger, hate, revenge and forgiveness. He argued that frustration arising from the denials of needs, rights and privileges leads to anger which is the primary stimulant to committing an offence and an understandable reaction to extreme frustration. Hate is generated from the offence committed knowingly or unintentionally while revenge is self-help effort to get justice as the offended sees it, which could result in vengeance that aggravate the crises while forgiveness stop the unending vicious cycle of anger and hate thus returning the community back to the pre-anger days of love and care. Therefore, forgiving is the only act amongst the four variables which does not merely react but serves as a new condition that promote intense harmony in the society¹⁶ identified three main kinds of forgiveness. These include conditional or restitution forgiveness, pressurised or coercive forgiveness and unconditional forgiveness.

A conditional forgiveness is a state of total forgiveness of an offender after punishing such offender to similar degree of physical and psychological pains suffered from him. It is a revengeful act of forgiving and resentful actions towards the offender. Coercive forgiveness is a form of forgiveness that stems from low self esteem of the forgiver. It happens when the offended feels powerless to achieve justice, thus displaying self-defeat, self-acceptance of defeat, weak psychological strength and coercive respect for the offender (usually the superior)

despite the presence of anger in the offended and his natural unwillingness to forgive. Such model makes the offended to forgive temporarily without forgetting the offence committed against him. He may return to vengeance when he gets the power to do so. Linking coercive form of forgiveness to politics, those who have suffered most severely at the hand of old regimes not only want to revenge for particular wrongs, but the settlement they often seek is one that also victimises the regime (s) before it on vengeance such as trial by “administrative fiat” or setting up of tribunal instead of taking the matter to the regular court. Such cycle of vengeance does not accommodate sincere forgiveness as it promotes tyranny. This traditional concept of coercive forgiveness of righting the wrong committed and settling grievances through summary trial and political vendetta is a major character of the African politics.

An unconditional forgiveness is a cultural norm and divine religious injunctions which demands that and offended should forgive the offender no matter the amount of the offence committed against him.¹⁷ Unconditional forgiveness is one form off letting-off anger by the offended which is giving freely without any form of expected reciprocity. Such form of forgiveness is equated with genuine agape love which bothers on divine responsibility and the traditional practices of the African people to truly care for one another. Such form of forgiveness goes beyond seeking fair solution or commensurate justice but rather, it seeks compassionate resolution of conflict.

In compassionate and unconditional form of forgiveness, the forgiver let-off anger in the face of intense destruction done to him reaching

instead for the greater and more universal power of hope for better future. It also breaks the possible circle of moral guilt and shame that may be felt by the offenders. Unconditional forgiveness in the traditional African setting restores sufficient measure of confidence to the offender of being genuinely forgiven and the joy to the offended for contributing his own quota to the sustainable of peace and security and for helping to restore broken relations in order to restore back the lost trust, confidence and cordiality of the past between the warring parties.

The African Culture of Forgiveness and the Government of National Unity (GNU): The Nigeria Experience

The government of National Unity (GNU) as a democratic incentive for political inclusion of all the major stakeholders in the polity has remained a vital avenue of addressing political dispute in Nigeria shortly before independence. The GNU has served as a veritable vehicle and extra constitutional pacts from the coalition of different shades of political opinions in order to produce a more stable and peaceful political environment. The GNU in Nigeria dates back to 1959 in the first republic, when the Tafawa Balewa's Government formed a working alliance between the ruling Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council for Nigeria and Cameron, led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe.¹⁸ The main objective of the alliance was to give the NPC the majority support in the National Assembly and to promote unity in diversities amongst Nigerians. However, the working alliance between the two major parties broke down in 1963 over the allegation that the NPC led federal government manipulated

the 1962 census in favour of the North.

The 1964 election was also conducted under two major political alliances owing to the fact that each party was largely restricted to their regional domain and needed the cooperation and collaboration of other parties to form a broad based national government. These alliances were formed between the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) which was a political coalition between the NCNC, AG and some minority parties including the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), the Borno Youth Movement (BYM) and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). The UPGA was led by M.I. Okpara, the then premier of the Eastern Region. The Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) coalition was made up of an alliance between the NPC, led by Sardauna of Sokoto and the then Premier of the North, Sir Ahmadu Bello and the NNDP which was formed by the splinter group from the AG led by Samuel Ladoke Akintola, the then Premier of the Western Region. On the day of the election, voting was boycotted in Lagos and Eastern part of Nigeria owing to series of irregularities earlier identified by the opposition parties while election was partially boycotted in the Western and Mid-western Regions by UPGA. However, voting went ahead in the North with evidence of only light boycott from the strong holds of the minority parties (NEPU, UMBC) in Kano and Markudi. The large scale manipulation and widespread rigging, especially in the Western Region caused serious election carnage leading to destruction of many lives and properties through "operation Wetie" (meaning "operation wet it"). The political confusion and election violence generated from the 1964

general election and the 1965 regional election in the South-West truncated the first republic with the eventual military take over of the civilian government in 15 January, 1966 which put paid to the alliances and government of national unity.

In 1979, in the second republic, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led federal government had a working alliance with the Nigeria People's Party (NPP), under the leadership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in order to form a broad based government of national unity. The alliance was also entered into to enable the NPN led federal government to have the majority support in the federal parliaments. The working alliance between the two parties collapsed in 1983 with the NPP accusing the Shagari's Administration of reneging on its promise to reserve up to 40 percent of political appointments seat for the NPP.¹⁹ Within the period that the alliances lasted, the interest of the two parties were always in conflicts and the weakness of the coalition undermined effective central authorities that were supposed to be strong under the alliance.

Though, government of national unity in Nigeria is traditionally associated with the civilian and democratic governments to resolve political dispute, such coalition and government of national unity is sometimes enthroned by the military administration as exemplified by the General Sanni Abacha regime in 1993, when Abacha formed a coalition government, consisting of the leading members of the defunct Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC).²⁰ The coalition was put in place with the primary aim of consolidating and legitimatising Abacha's government in power. The coalition

under the regime was an enlarged one that also included representatives of trade unions and civil society organisations apart from picking members from the two government-registered and state funded political parties. The politicians and members of civil society organisations within the coalition were eventually used to consolidate the Abacha's government of national unity before been dumped.²¹

As a result of election crisis which was generated earlier from the annulment of the 12 June, 1993 presidential election which was won by M.K.O. Abiola, former President Olusegun Obasanjo also enthroned a government of national unity which drew membership from the All People's Party (APP) later renamed All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) in 1999.

Under the arrangement, late Bola Ige of the AD and Salisu Nakande of the ANPP were amongst the coalition cabinet member of President Obasanjo. In the fifth republic, President Umar Musa Yar'Adua formed yet another government of national unity with the ANPP and the Progressive Party Alliance (PPA) with three broad objectives.²² The alliance was put in place to reform and change the political culture of the Nigerian political class from confrontation to cooperation. The alliance was also designed to work out a collective framework and parameters for political reform process at the executive council meeting. The third objective of Yar'Adua's government of national unity with the political opposition was to include any interested opposition party into the cabinet in order to stabilise the polity devoid of rancor to enable

Nigerians enjoy the maximum benefits of democracy.

Impact of Government of National Unity on Nigerian Polity

Since its establishment in Nigeria, the GNU has helped to stabilise the polity to a reasonable extent. The introduction of GNU in Nigeria has brought about sufficient exercise of aggregate authorities in spite of different political leanings. Through such power sharing arrangement, many Governments have been saved from violent socio-political crises arising from election disputes in Nigeria. Apart from been used as a veritable platform to resolving disputed elections, GNU has also been used to appease disenchanted political parties in Nigeria. For instance, President Goodluck Jonathan proposed a government of national unity in 2011 even though the election that brought him into power was declared credible and fair by many local and international observers. Power sharing option in Nigeria has also given room to experienced member of the opposition parties in spite of different political affiliations to participate in governance in order to stabilise the polity and improve dividends of democracy to the people.

GNU has also brought credibility and accountability to governance as the opposition parties within the government are often quite critical of the government policies, especially those policies that can hurt the poor Nigerians because of their direct access to relevant documents and information from government. For instance, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) criticised and subsequently opposed the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria in 1999 in spite of the fact that it was in working alliance

with the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) under a government of national unity. The party alliance coalition has thus increased the principle of checks and balances based on the opposition parties' institutional role at the state and national levels as the "watch dog within" of the government in power. The government of national unity in Nigeria has also decentralised political power from one dominant ruling party to multiple centres of political power base of the opposition parties. For instance, the political alliances amongst the AD, PDP and APP in 1999 decentralised Nigeria's political power at the centre which was held solely by the ruling PDP to the opposition parties in spite of the fact that the oppositions did not win the Presidential election at the federal level.

The introduction of government of national unity has also improve the content of public policies in Nigeria.²³ Good policies require different opinion input of stakeholders and alternative preferences which the opposition does provide. For instance, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) under Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Umar Musa Yar'Adua, comprised of the coalition of different people from the leading political parties thus enriching the quality of governance at the national level. The government of national unity in Nigeria has also helped to bring about ethnic reconciliation. Many of the Nigerian political parties are regionally based with the interest of their regions as their primary area of concern.

Coalition government forces such party to be concerned with the interest of the other regions. The Northern People's Congress had political alliance with the National Council of

Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC) from the Eastern part of the country which forced the two parties to work for the interest of the two regions in particular and Nigeria as a whole.

The government of national unity in Nigeria also confers some measure of legitimacy on the ruling party who might have lost their support base from the electorate, but are still in power because of their control over the instrument of force. The all inclusive forum thus allays the fear of opposition of any possible repression from the ruling party and also toned down political repression of opponents. The formation of government of national unity facilitates the equitable distribution of the Nigeria's resources which is the main source of political power struggle in Nigeria. For example, the Obasanjo regime deliberately approved constituency project allowances for the members of the national assembly which included the ruling and opposition parties. Through this arrangement, all federal constituencies whether in government or the opposition parties enjoy some measures of federal project implementations even though a greater percentage of the development funds were largely been mismanaged by the legislatures. From the above examination, it is quite clear that government of national unity has helped reasonably to stabilise the Nigerian polity.

In spite of the central role of GNU as a viable socio-political dispute resolution and emotional healing mechanism, the strategy has some pitfalls for democratic processes and sustainable development in Nigeria. First, a power sharing arrangement implies the appease-ment of disenchanted election losers in Nigeria or forceful accommodation of rejected parties into the government through

the "backdoor". Such arrangement allows adamant incumbent election losers who wish to clinch to power at all cost to negotiate their way to power through extra-legal elite bargaining and maneuvering power and through processes that does not derive from the electorates who have the ultimate political power. The GNU is thus an avenue to short change the electorates who did not elect more than one party into power at the national level. The GNU arrangement in Nigeria also have negative economic implications that is not conducive to prudent management of resources as it involves costly budgetary irresponsibility in form of high budgetary allocation to take care of enlarge cabinet (that includes unnecessary portfolios) in order to accommodate all contending parties. The power sharing arrangement which is a form of board room political incentive thus displaces the norms of credible political competition and encourages the enthronement of anointed candidates that have been rejected by the electorates for government positions. This strategy of political appeasement disrupts the vertical relationship that exists between the electorates and those in political power. The constraints on political competition by this board room all party inclusive arrangement increases the danger of political frustration and electoral apathy. The government of national unity in Nigeria has been known to have slow down policy formulation and implementation on important national issues as the opposition parties in power are always suspicious that government policy would hurt their future electoral chances.

The government of national unity equally encourages the internal fragmentation of the opposition parties and other disputing groups

in Nigeria in order to have a stake and claim to the centre of economic resources distributing table. For instance, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) was factionalised into two camps in 2007, each claiming to be the right party to negotiate its alliance with the ruling PDP. The GNU has equally been known to be a very fragile and transitional arrangement with a high risk of quick relapse and disintegration at the slightest opportunity because it is a marriage of inconveniences and incompatibility amongst the opposition parties devoid of legal foundation and obligation to enforce the memorandum of understanding between the participating parties in the alliances. The PDP threaten to repudiate the alliance it had with the Alliance for Democracy AD in 1999 after late Bola Ige, a leading member of the AD who was serving in Government described the party as a good organisation but without good managers. The Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) abandoned its alliance with the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led federal government in 1983 because it alleged the government did not respect some of their earlier agreements in which the two parties would share Board appointment within the ratio of 60 to 40 percent in favour of the ruling NPN. The above mentioned observations cast an overwhelming doubt on the relevance of government of national unity and the spirit of forgiveness to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Impact of Culture of Forgiveness on the Government of National Unity on Nigeria

The evaluation of the impact of government of national unity in each republic within the scope of the three main types of forgiveness (condi-

tional or restitution forgiveness, pressurised or coercive forgiveness and unconditional forgiveness) as earlier identified clearly shows that the government of national unity as constituted by different regimes in Nigeria was meant to achieve one form of forgiveness or the other. Under Tafawa Balewa government of 1959, the coalition government of national unity was built more on unconditional forgiveness as it was primarily meant to promote unity in diversities among the Nigerian populace and to reduce opposition to his government. The election that brought the regime into power was not characterised by major election irregularity; therefore the issue of forgiveness from disputed election did not arise substantially. But in spite of this, there were still the fear of regional domination especially the fear of the domination of the North by the South. The disputed 1964 and 1965 elections in Nigeria under Tafawa Balewa regime also required reasonably measure of unconditional forgiveness. Though each political party during the Balewa Government was said to have national spread, they operated essentially within the range of regional loyalty and they also promoted regional interests. They all won elections mainly in their respective tribal base. The NPC which eventually formed the government at the federal level could not form the majority in the federal houses and had to form an alliance with NCNC. The regional loyalties of these political parties coupled with disputed census, rigged elections and the attendance riot and arsons precipitated the contemporary national calamities for which each region has not totally forgiven one another, leading to civil war eventually. The physical destructions and psychological pains

that was generated from the crisis eventually led indirectly to the Nigerian civil war which led to greater loss of lives and properties and from where many Nigerians have not forgiven one another.

The working alliance between the then ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) was primarily meant to create a better working condition for the NPN which needed a working majority and to heal the wounds of the civil war. The government was able to achieve the second aim of healing the wounds of the civil war as both Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu and General Yakubu Gowon (The two foremost dramatic personalities in the war) were forgiven for their roles in the civil war and involvement in the 1976 coup plot respectively. It is pertinent to note that the 1979 election was relatively peaceful and devoid of serious manipulations. The controversy surrounding the election was primarily based on the legal interpretation of what constitute two-third majority. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) claimed that the NPN candidate, Alhaji Sheu Shagari was not duly elected because he did not win the two-third majority out rightly, calling for a re-run election between the NPN and the UPN. The court judgment was given in favour of the NPN. However, in spite of its success at the poll, the NPN did not win a majority in the two federal parliaments and needed working alliances and a government of national unity with other parties. For instance, the Party took 36 out of the then 95 senate seats (109 seats presently), 165 of the 443 house of representative seats (360 seats presently). The NPN thus formed a working alliance with NPP which had 16 senate seats and 78 house of represen-

tative seats to have a working majority over the opposition parties (UPN, GNPP, PRP) whose combined parliamentary strength amounted to 43 senate and 203 house of representatives seats. Though, the NPN won the presidential election at the centre, its victory showed negative trend to national integration as each party won overwhelmingly only in their own regional base, owing to the fact that the second republic was a bye product of previous hatred amongst different regions which was a carry over from the bitterness of the civil war and regional suspicion of the past. Even though the nine years military administration of Yakubu Gowon had greatly healed the wound generated by the civil war earlier through the policy of reconciliation, reconstructions and rehabilitation, suspicions of regional domination was still rife during the Shagari's regime.²⁴ However as earlier noted, in spite of the regional suspicions, the pardoning of both General Gowon and Odumegwu Ojukwu by the Shagari Administration went a very long way to heal the wound of the civil war. Such gesture of post civil war reconciliations and reconstruction by both Gowon and Shagari administrations was more of an expression of unconditional love for all the regions to forgive and forget the past despite the intense atrocities committed against one another during the war. The pain of the civil war failed to heal completely because the issue of abandoned properties from the war, amongst other contending issues were largely unaddressed by the Gowon and Shagari Administrations. The unresolved issue of abandoned property which largely affected the Eastern part of the Southern region which is the sub-regional base of the NPP greatly contributed to the break up of the

political alliance and working accord between the NPN and NPP.²⁵

With the collapse of party alliances between the NPN and the NPP, the ruling party ended up governing as a minority party in which the question of unity in diversities largely remained in limbo. There was also lack of adequate cooperation between the federal government and the twelve non- NPN control states, out of the then nineteen states.

The bye-product of the alliance between the NPN and NPP only produced a country that was weakly united, leading to another alliance in 1983 between the NPP and other self-acclaimed progressive parties, which consisted of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and a faction of the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), led by Abubakar Rimi.

In spite of the alliances and supposed unity amongst the opposition parties in preparation for the 1983 general elections to rest political power from the then ruling NPN, the latter won more states increasing its number from the previous seven to twelve states with an addition of five more states that were traditionally controlled by the opposition parties. The party in alliances never forgave themselves for playing into the hands of NPN because of the selfish interest of the leaders of those parties in alliance that refused to step down for one another. The NPN was equally accused of rigging the 1983 elections, leading to political riots, especially in the Western part of Nigeria. This disputed electoral contest created deep seated hatred amongst the Nigerian politicians and the populace. Thus the political alliances that were supposed to produce national unity produced more disunity, confusion and

disorganisation amongst the opposing political class creating the opportunity for the military, led by General Muhammad Buhari, to seize power in 1983.

The Obasanjo's civilian administration started in 1999 as a bye-product of unconditional forgiveness process amongst the different regions in Nigeria. The administration came to office against the backdrop of the annulment of the 12 June presidential election which was presumed to have been won by Moshood Abiola from the South-West. Abiola was denied electoral victory by the Babangida Administration, thus denying the South West the opportunity to rule the country. The political impasse from the 12 June election generated political bitterness, confusion, riot and disunity amongst the political class and the populace. Obasanjo was thus picked from the South West as part of the unconditional forgiveness process to compensate the region for its earlier denial to rule. The political alliances with other political parties by the Obasanjo administration, in spite of the fact that it won the 1999 presidential election under a relatively free and fear atmosphere was meant to bring all the regions into the Obasanjo government of national unity in order to heal the political wound that was generated from the annulment of the 12 June presidential election. However the Obasanjo government later ruled, especially during his second coming, with coerced or conditional forgiveness policies as shown in the use of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to persecute political opponents. But it must be conceded here that the EFCC achieved a lot having recovered about #50 billion looted public property. 26 but the Commission's prosecution and

operational strategies were largely documented to be selective. The opposition parties also adopted a coercive forgiving spirit in the 2003 election towards the PDP led federal government as they were coerced into forming political alliances with the ruling party in spite of the fact that the election that brought the PDP into power was substantially flawed and had robbed the aligned opponents of their own electoral victories. However the opposition had to forgive the Pdp of its electoral sins because of the fear that the leadership of the opposition might be (witch hunt” by the PDP. Many serving Governors from the opposition parties then, including Buka Abba Ibrahim of Yobe and Saminu Turaki of Jigawa states, though still nursing the political injuries of the stolen mandates from their party, still decamped to the ruling PDP in order not to be persecuted by the ruling government. Many of the Governors in the opposition political parties in Nigeria who decamped to the PDP in 2007 after the electoral victory of President Umar Musa Yar'Adua were reported to have done so for fear of being victimised and intimidated by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC).²⁷

Though, they felt offended by the stolen mandate they were coerced into forgiving the ruling party because of the fear that they may be persecuted by the party.

The Yar'Adua administration appeared to have shown genuine concern for peaceful co-existence and for unconditional forgiveness from the electoral dispute that aroused from the 2007 general election which brought him into power. First, the then president acknowledged that the 2007 election was substantially flawed. And the first measure of Yar'Adua's

sincere reconciliatory move was the establishment of the government of national unity with the leading opposition parties and the enthronement of the electoral reform committee and the passage of some aspect of the electoral reform bill into law by the House of Representatives and the Senate. Though President Yar'Adua died in office in June 2011, the principle of his reform agenda was carried on by his then Vice, now President Goodluck Jonathan who conducted an election that was adjudged as relatively free and fair by the local and international election observers. The fact that there has not been substantial upturn of the election results by the courts handling election cases in Nigeria is a confirmation of the credibility of the 2011 general elections.

Conclusive Evaluation

The sum up of our evaluation of the impact of culture of forgiveness on the democratic process in Africa and Nigeria in particular is that since the establishment of party alliances and government of national unity in the country, starting from the first republic, none has worked adequately within the range of an unconditional forgiven spirit owing to the fact that the issues that are associated with Nigeria's disunity are contradictions that are far beyond election disputes. The basis for national unity does not exist in Nigeria. To start with, there is unwholesome federal structure arrangement in Nigeria that is contrary to normal functional federal practices all over the world. Naturally, in many developed countries, nations federate to provide for defense, economic, social and political cohesion and general development of the federating units within the range of consensus agreement. At the same time such

arrangement gives the federating units the freedom to maintain reasonable level of autonomy and right to self-determination. The unity of the federating units has also never been forced but achieved through a fair and equitable management and distribution of the federal resources amongst the federating units through the principle of derivation and the principle of needs, and through policies that are geared towards oneness of purpose. In Nigeria however, the issue of national unity has been forced on the federating units and interwoven with ethnic loyalty. The amalgamation of the Nigerian federation was not discussed but imposed in 1914 by the colonialists within the range of divide and rule tactics which seems to have favoured the North. While the Southern region that has the development resources canvasses for derivation and resource control, the rest of the federation, especially the North refused to support such agitation. The above divisions have created some kinds of conundrum in the polity. Any federal arrangement that benefits one region at overwhelming disadvantages to the others cannot last. This seeming divides underscore the need to renegotiate the basis of Nigeria's national unity through a sovereign national conferences to address perceived marginalisation and oppression which has led to agitation, riot and state of insecurity in Nigeria. The fact that the majority of the Southern axes of the Nigerian federation seek succession or derivation is a serious indication that they feel unsecured in a federating unit they are expected to contribute to its survival. Right from independence, there has been a different understanding and interpretation of the type of national unity that is sought amongst the

federating units. While the North wanted self autonomy and gradual steps towards independence because they fear the Southern axes would dominate the North because the needed manpower to bring about development in the North were not adequate, the Southern axes wanted immediate independence. Therefore, prior to independence, Nigerian leaders never had consensus of what type of national unity they wanted. Each was concerned with regional loyalty and ethnic cleavages and no consensus efforts were made to inculcate a true Nigerian dream in every Nigerian. The contentious issue of national unity at independence, unequal representation at the federal houses, minority question and revenue allocation formula need to be adequately addressed before Nigerian can achieve a resound unity and unanimity of purpose at the national level as opposed to the current coerced unity that is characterised by selfish ethnic parochialism and overt regionalism. The inability of most successive governments to assuage the fear of various federating units by their inadequate implementation of various uniting policies like the federal character commission, quota system, federal police and military command structure and the contentious issue over the desirability of such policies, have been interpreted variously as a deliberate strategy of the region in control of the centre to suppress other regions thus leading to more disunity amongst various regions. The creation of more states by the military administrations, rather than unite the nation has led to increasing affinities to statism and state of origin syndrome at the detriment of national unity. All the above mentioned negative tendencies amongst others have led credence to the assertion that Nigeria

is a mere geographical expression because the foundation for unity and nationhood formation has not been adequately laid. Genuine unity could only be achieved when every region is comfortable with federal arrangement in Nigeria.

Endnotes

1. Harvey Sindima (2011). *Promoting a Culture of Community Solidarity in Africa through Forgiveness*. Wikipedia.org./Ubuntu.www.colarode.edu.htm
2. Charles Levan (2007). A.Political Alliance and Inclusive Politics in Africa's Uncertain Democracy.www.allafrica.com.The Punch,15th February.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Op. cit.
5. *Ibid*
6. Bola Adewoye (2011). "Power Sharing Agreement and the Impact of Political Governance in Africa." *International Journal of Policy Administration and Institutions*. Vol. 24, No. 1, January edition.
7. Harvey Sindima (2011). Promoting a Culture of Community Solidarity in Africa through Forgiveness.Wikipedia.org./Ubuntu.www.colarode.edu.htm
8. Naxial Watchat (2011). Nigeria:What is Government of National Unity?www.allafrica.com.posted, 27 July.
9. Jephias Mopuva (2008). Government of National Unity as a Conflict Prevention Strategy: The Case of Zimbabwe And Kenya. African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy,University of the Western Cape Town.www.allafrica.com.
10. *Ibid*
11. *Ibid*
12. P. Norris (2011).*The Concept of Federalism as a Panacea to Government of National Unity in Africa*. Daily Mail Accra. www.allafrica.com. Retrieved on 18 August.
13. Martins Nwanko (2002).*Democracy, Citizenship and the Challenges of Governance in Africa*. Oxford: Clarinda Press.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Olajide Ojo (2002).*Power Rotation and Political Alliances in Africa.Conference on Africa and Development Challenges of the New Millenium.La Palm Beach Resort, Ghana*. 23-26 April.
16. Reuben Abati (2007). Yar'Adua's Government of National Unity. *Weekly Insider*, 16 September.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Op cit.*
21. Jephias Mopuva (2008). Government of National Unity as a Conflict Prevention Strategy: The Case of Zimbabwe And Kenya. African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, University of the Western Cape Town.www.allafrica.com.
22. *Ibid*
23. *Ibid.*
24. Ibrahim Yusuf (2002). The African Union and the Challenges of Integration in the 21st Century. Public Lecture Series.Asa Youth Council Forum, Afon, 26 April.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Farida Waziri (2011). EFCC has Achieved a lot. NTA Interview, 25 April.
27. S. Maya (2001). Distilling the Vision of the African Union (AU). *Southern African Economist*, Vol. 14, No. 6.

