

# **Cultural hegemony and ethnic minority struggles in Nigeria**

Onyekachi E. Nnabuihe<sup>a,\*</sup>, Ifeanyi Onwuzuruigbo<sup>b</sup> and Martin Ayankaa Ihembe<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Criminology, Security, Peace and Conflict Studies, Caleb University, Lagos, Nigeria;

<sup>b</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria;

<sup>c</sup>Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

\* CONTACT: Onyekachi E. Nnabuihe. Email: onyekachi.nnabuihe@calebuniversity.edu.ng

## **Abstract**

This study explores the plight of ethnic minorities and marginals and their increasing quest to obliterate their subordinate status and attempts by the dominant groups to maintain the status quo in Nigeria. Such interactions have induced resistance and increasingly stimulated questions of insecurity. Extant explanations of ethnic hegemony have mainly focused on describing and analysing the phenomenon with the attendant socio-political, economic, and environmental issues. This approach has neglected the interaction between hegemony and resistance in majority/minority relations. This brings to the fore the need to interrogate this missing link. Drawing from interviews, institutional reports, and other secondary sources and relying on the cultural hegemony thesis, we argue that questions of cultural hegemony and instances of resistance, counter-resistance, and reverse influences have had significant consequences for contemporary Nigeria's politics. This trend stimulated bitterness, suspicion, and violence in the socio-political life of the country and manifested in voting patterns and political violence.

**Keywords:** Ethnic minority struggles; majority/Minority relations and resistance; cultural hegemony; citizenship crisis; Nigeria's federalism

## **Introduction**

This article investigates the plight of ethnic minorities and marginals in their struggles against dominant groups in Nigeria's federal structure. It explores the increasing quest by ethnic minorities and marginals to obliterate their subordinate status and attempts by the dominant groups to maintain the status quo. Such interactions have not only induced resistance and counter-resistance but have increasingly stimulated questions of violence and insecurity. Evidence from different parts of the world suggests that minorities and marginals are often propelled by the quest to eliminate their subordinate status through various approaches including violence (Akinyele, 2013; Miguel et al., 2004). 'Minority groups in Africa are frequently the victims of local and global power structures' (Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017, p. 1). This is because minority groups are often marginalised within their societies, leaving them vulnerable and making them prone to more exploitation (Stacey, 2022).

While the minority question is not new and exists and spreads across diverse global political spaces, in Nigeria, the majority position of some groups – Hausa and Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba – confers certain advantages, and privileges and provides the impetus for displaying certain hegemonic tendencies (see Mustapha, 2000, 2005; Osaghae, 1995, 2002; Osaghae & Suberu,

2005). The minority groups often complained of being relegated or marginalised by the dominant groups in elite recruitment, disrespect and/or elimination of their customs and traditions as well as discriminatory neglect in the distribution of infrastructure including government amenities such as roads, schools, water projects and scholarship (Nnabuihe, 2020).

In Northern Nigeria, there is a growing struggle between the dominant Hausa and Fulani hegemony and the minority groups in the Middle Belt (see Nnabuihe, 2019; Nyityo, 2014; Shenton, 1986). As such, the Middle Belt often accused the Hausa and Fulani groups of creating a caste system mainly for keeping other groups in perpetual servitude (Nyityo, 2014). Similarly, the Kanuri and other minorities in the northeast have significantly protested what they termed Hausa and Fulani domination in different areas of their lives – economic, political, social, and cultural (Saunders, 2019). In the Western region, the Yoruba were, accused of excluding members of the minority groups in the Mid-West from the corridors of power. Apart from the replacements of Chiefs Dennis Osadebey and Jerry Okorodudu as the opposition leader of the Western House of Assembly and Western Commissioner in London respectively, minority groups ‘struggled with absorption into Yoruba community, which rose in influence with the ascendancy of Yoruba political hegemony in the Western Region’ (Usuanlele, 2018, p. 160). In the Eastern region, the minority groups of the Niger Delta accused the Igbo of political and cultural dominations, which significantly increased the level of volatility in the area (Akinyele, 1996). In all of these cases – north, west and east – the domination of the minority groups manifested in the monopolisation of the top cadre of the civil service bureaucracy as well as the imposition of the socio-cultural value system of the dominant groups over the minorities to the extent that the latter was perceived to be inferior to the former (Akinyele, 1996; Nnabuihe, 2019).

Extant explanations of ethnic hegemony have mainly focused on describing and analysing the phenomenon with the attendant socio-political, economic and environmental issues (see Mustapha, 2000, 2005; Nnabuihe, 2019; Osaghae, 1995, 2002; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). This approach has neglected the interaction between hegemony and resistance in majority/minority relations. As one hegemonic tendency of the majority groups rescind, a more alarming one emerges. This brings to the fore the need to interrogate how socio-cultural factors have intervened in majority/minority groups’ relations and gave the majority group an advantageous position in ways they have continued to dominate the subaltern. Moreover, Antonio Gramsci’s thesis on cultural hegemony reminds us that there is a connection between culture and power (Gramsci, 1971). This suggests that culture could be deployed as an instrument of domination and negotiating power relations (see Nnabuihe, 2023).

Yet, literature on dominant groups and minorities has extensively drawn attention to colonial cartography and the ways in which it lumped different groups together without recourse to their identity and political independence (Ajayi, 1992; Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017). Most of these studies suggest that colonial policy of indirect rule required the homogenisation of ethnic identities and at the same time created distinct hierarchies of ‘tribes’ and clans, which in turn stimulated tensions and fissures that are peculiar to heterogeneous societies as they have defined inter-group relations and conflicts in Africa. This colonialism-centred debate and the attendant domination and marginalisation narratives induced discussions around the country’s political existence involving the sharing of power and the management of resources between different socio-cultural groups. This came to be known as the national question. As such, there are several nuanced and insightful scholarly writings engaging the minority question as a significant part of the national question (Ajayi, 1992; Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017). Therefore,

emergent discourses on the minority-dominant groups' relations were viewed from different lenses including ethnic politics, democratic governance, and minority rights.

While there were significant struggles, questions of domination, resistance, and obliteration between the concerned groups in the pre-colonial era, the colonial state promoted divisions and constructed the majority notion privileging the historical and cultural claims of the groups that claim to be dominant (Ochonu, 2014; Tar & Shettima, 2010; Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017). This strongly manifested in the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Oyo Empire as the capitals of the Hausa and Fulani groups and the Yoruba groups. In doing so, the colonial authorities originated 'political and economic control by numerical majority groups ...' – both religious and ethnic (Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017, p. 3). Such ethnically dominated politics has continued to 'create disparities, discontents and alienations' (Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017, p. 3). This worsened in the post-colonial era given its foundation on the liberal democratic model built on majority rule but also on rights of minority groups to political participation, social inclusion and economic resources.

Consequently, asymmetrical majority-minority relations in Nigeria continued to degenerate, stimulating debates around the need to rethink and restructure the political space and address the questions of insecurity. The majority groups have continued to monopolise socio-political goods in ways that exclude the minority groups. Such interactions have induced the consciousness of minority groups to consolidate their ethnicity by obliterating instances of hegemony (Tar & Shettima, 2010). This study utilizes the cultural hegemony thesis to explain majority/minority group relations and the growing notion of insecurity in Nigeria. It does so because emerging research has rarely drawn attention to the ways dominant groups deploy their cultural strength to influence and control minority groups and how these interactions structure inter-group relations and shape conflicts in Nigeria (Nnabuihe, 2023; Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017).

The study raises the following questions. How has the idea of cultural hegemony and its interaction with conflicts been historically produced in Nigeria? To what extent were cultural forces, state institutions, agents and policies implicated in the cases of cultural hegemony and conflicts in Nigeria? What complex political structures and power relations conditioned by historical narratives, cultural differences, autochthonous discourses, majority/subaltern group discussions and social inequalities in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial dispensations are implicated in the growing conflicts and insecurities in Nigeria? What are the main similarities and dissimilarities in the cultural hegemony and conflict cases in Nigeria? These questions animate the study.

Rather than treating the origins of conflicts and insecurities in Nigeria as manifestations of economic and political domination and in isolation from cultural and normative hegemony, the field research of this study focused on the idea of cultural and normative hegemony and their interaction with resistance to show how these interactions stimulate cases of conflict and insecurity. In doing this, the article examined a collection of cases from different parts of Nigeria, drawing the similarities and dissimilarities and making systematic comparisons across a broader set of cases. The study drew on qualitative methodology and employed the case study research design, relying on information and data gleaned from interviews, personal observation, and secondary sources. There were 30 in-depth interviews conducted with the people of the defunct regions of Nigeria – North (12), East (6), West (6) and later the Mid-West (6). The respondents were selected from people who are sixty years old and above and who possess sound knowledge and penetrating insights into the dynamics of majority/minority

relations in the defunct regions of Nigeria. All interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2022 in the defunct four regions and data were analysed thematically using the objectives of the study and benefited from narrative and interpretative styles.

Following the introduction this study is divided into five sections. The first explores the concepts of cultural hegemony, minorities, marginals, and the national question. It draws the linkages between these concepts and how they combine to affect conflicts in Nigeria. The second explains how colonialism created a citizenship crisis and complicated domination narratives. The third section interrogates the impacts of military actions on Nigeria's federalism and how that has continued to reinforce the questions of cultural hegemony and conflicts. While the fourth gives attention to cases of cultural hegemony and minority resistance, the fifth offers the conclusion.

### ***Cultural hegemony, minorities, and the national question***

There is rarely a consensus in the literature on the definition of hegemony. While the notion is dominantly deployed in the field of international relations (IR) to explain the questions of world order, the understanding is seen to be conceptually vague. Dominant discourses in IR tend to conceive hegemony as the domination of a state or group of states by another state or group of states in foreign relations. In this connection, hegemony is claimed to be in existence where 'global politics is' seen as 'a realm of domination and submission ... where the only question that needs to be asked is, "who is going to dominate whom?" (Davis, 2015, p. 1). What this implies is that hegemony is essentially the dominance of an actor, nation, or a handful of actors within a region. It suggests that a handful of actors/countries dictate the rules for all the others in the international system.

Cultural hegemony draws from consent to a certain social order which produces and reproduces domination by majority groups through an interconnection of institutions, social relations, and ideas finding the acquiescence of lower classes (Gramsci, 1971). In this connection, "cultural hegemony refers to a situation in which a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert 'total social authority' over other subordinate groups 'winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural'" (Kim, 2008, p. 393). The phenomenon remains crucial in explaining the domination of minorities.

Minority is a concept of numerical relations. While the concept prominently refers to a small group of people or things within a larger unit (Akinyele, 2013), there has been a distinction between numerical minority and sociological minority (Momoh, 2018). The sociological minority postulation emanates from the fact that size alone is not sufficient to classify a group as a minority. Besides, a group that is smaller than another 'may not always behave or be treated as a minority, depending on the absence or presence of other factors' (Gearth & Mills, 1946, p. 190). Consequently, the emphasis moved from the number explanation to attitudes in inter-group relations. For instance, the Fulani in Northern Nigeria is a group of relatively small numbers, yet, not significantly considered a minority group. A minority group is also conceived by physical and cultural attributes which such groups tend to preserve.

In this connection, the elements of technology, size, territory, and power relations feature prominently in the conception of minorities. This implies that such attributes are responsible for differential and unequal treatments meted out to such groups, who, in turn, regard themselves as the object of discrimination. What is clear is that the so-called minorities are made to accept a status conferred on them by the dominant society. Gramsci (1971) contended

that hegemony requires consent but you don't have to give this consent. Minorities are shaped by the creation of certain narratives and made to ingest such accounts that form part of the dominant society.

As would be shown shortly, the minority question forms an important part of the larger national question. This draws attention to the strong connection between fear, ethnicity, and inequality (Osaghae, 2002). This connection often manifests in plural societies, especially in cases where minority groups engage in struggles to share power and manage resources. Such relationships often trigger fear, suspicion, and uncertainty which frequently result from social interactions and provide explanations for growing group inequalities (Nnabuihe, 2019; Onwuzuruigbo, 2011). In Nigeria, pioneer studies on this subject captured instances where actions and pronouncements of various pre-independence leaders suggested fears of domination by one ethnic group and region against the other (Ikime, 2001; Isumonah, 2005). Following its amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates and what appeared to be highly oppressive tendencies towards ethnic minorities in the Nigerian state, which was aggravated by the introduction of regionalism under Richard's Constitution of 1946 (Adangor, 2018), there emerged a series of petitions by minority groups expressing fears of domination. This led the British government to set up the Henry Willink Commission of Inquiry to interrogate the questions of minorities (Oduntan, 2017).

The minority question in Nigeria is characterised by a situation 'where both "major" and "minor" ethnicities are locked up in a protracted competition for the control of state power and larger access to a scarce resource, both social and material at the expense of others' (Akubor, 2017, p. 167). This pattern of relationship triggered instances of inter-ethnic conflicts arising mainly from groups feeling deprived. Minority questions, as already observed, owe their emergence to the political reforms from 1946 which created regions over the predominantly native authorities that were in existence. Importantly, Indirect Rule in northern Nigeria as elsewhere in the country which 'depended on three legal enactments – a Native Courts Ordinance, a Native Authority Ordinance and a Native Revenue Ordinance' (Afigbo, 1967, p. 693) became a source for inventing cultural hegemony. In part, the role of the Native Authority Ordinance in establishing majority group hegemony across Nigeria but mainly in the northern region was evident in the actions of those Moses Ochonu referred to as 'colonially minted subcolonial chiefs' ... which not only 'disrupted traditional ways people related with each other and with authority' (Ochonu, 2014, p. 12), but created proxies from mainly the majority groups who sought to control the minorities. While minority-induced conflicts were not common before the Willink's Commission, they became dominant after the commission turned in its report and as decolonization drew nearer (Akinyele, 1996; Ikime, 2001; Isumonah, 2005). This triggered the national question and the need to address it.

The national question essentially concerns itself with the fundamental basis of the country's political existence (see Ikime, 2001). It raises the crucial issue of the constitution as the basic law that governs the co-existence of Nigerians as individuals and cultural groups within one political system or state. The National Question involves 'the sharing of power and management of collective resources in terms of access, control, and distribution' (Ajayi, 1992, p. 1). This implies that the national question is not only concerned with issues such as 'revenue allocation and the creation of states and local government areas but also education, religion, language, and cultural policies' (Ajayi, 1992, p. 1).

Discourses on the national question, therefore, have centred on various disputations including its origins, existence or non-existence in Africa, and its connections to the issues of power and

governance among others (Ikime, 2001; Momoh, 2018). Thus, the notion is a problem of human essence and a phenomenon beyond ethnicity rather than a denial of it. Momoh argues that the narratives of oppression, domination, and marginalisation animating discourses on the national question ‘all boil down to issues of alienation, inequality, and inequity in society’ (Momoh, 2018, p. 1). While Momoh demonstrates very clearly that ethnic explanation cannot capture the totality and ramification of the national question, he validates the claim that the unevenness inherent in the various questions that form the national question in Nigeria induces tendencies for domination, struggles between minorities and majorities and a tensed security landscape (Nnabuihe, 2019). In this connection, there is a relationship between cultural hegemony, national questions, and growing insecurity in Nigeria.

### **Colonialism and the crisis of citizenship: ethno-religious identities and group domination**

Colonialism played a crucial role in structuring the Nigerian state and framing the ‘big three’ ethnic groups – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba – as ‘lords’ who have continued to dominate other groups and dictate the trend of politics. This scenario is structured, albeit by colonialism around the citizenship question. Colonialism compounded the citizenship question in Africa by creating multiple loyalties and leading to a situation where the colonised people saw themselves first as members of their ethnic enclaves. It is these divergent loyalties that have continued to induce differences and confer unfettered rights to certain groups while leaving others to contend on the periphery. In the post-colonial era, apart from the many other pervasive issues created by the citizenship question and indeed, the national question, the failure of the state boosted feelings of difference and highlighted the importance of ethno-religious unions, indigene-settler questions, and majority-minority dilemma (Nnabuihe, 2019). Oil politics and its accruing revenue deepened the struggles between majority and minority groups.

Citizenship – the act of tying an individual to a territorially bounded polity – gained prominence mostly in post-colonial Africa when its laws grew in importance as the new African states had to permanently define who legitimately lived within the border of its territory and who did not (Nnabuihe, 2020). The concept implies ‘to be endowed with a repertoire of rights and obligations that is not, by definition, available to outsiders’ (Crepaz, 2008, p. 2). This constructed legal wall often stipulates who is eligible and who is not, who is in and who is out, who belongs and who does not. While the citizenship crisis became intense in the postcolonial era, it had its origins in the colonial era when the authorities attempted to create inferior and subordinate citizenship among Africans (see Shenton, 1986). Instances of cultural hegemony in Nigeria, therefore, resonate with the citizenship question where struggles over belonging and ethnic domination not only manifest themselves in the multi-ethnic setting of the country but are the ‘fatal affliction of the ... political process’ (Afigbo, 1989 cited in Mustapha, 2005, p. 4).

The notion of citizenship, often defined in exclusionary terms, has deepened questions of inequality and the preponderance of one ethnic group against the other. Nigeria has 374 ethnic groups. These groups are broadly categorised into ‘ethnic majorities’ and ‘ethnic minorities’ (see Mustapha, 2000, 2005). The numerically and politically dominant groups or hegemonic ethnic groups include the fused Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Igbo in the southeast (Mustapha, 2005). Apart from these aforementioned three, other ethnic groups are considered minorities with some regarded as ‘large minorities’ (Mustapha, 2005). Some of the large minorities include the Ijaw, Kanuri, Edo, Ibibio, Nupe, and the Tiv. Coincidentally, the homelands of these dominant groups are the centres of large population concentration as recorded in the 1963 census. This indicated that the majority groups

constituted 57.8% of the national population with the Hausa at 11,653,000 (20.9%), the Yoruba at 11,321,000 (20.3%), and the Igbo at 9,246,000 (16.6%). On the other hand, the large minorities constituted 27.9% (Mustapha, 2005).

While it appears, there is a tendency of the minority groups to cluster – politically, linguistically, and culturally – around the big three to share in the political largess of the state, a closer examination will reveal forms of hegemonic tendencies perpetuated by the three ethnic groups using cultural influence. In northern Nigeria, relations between the composite Hausa-Fulani and other groups such as the Kanuri and Jukun in the north-east, the Tiv, Nupe and Berom in the north-central are characterised by narratives of hegemony and counter-hegemony even since pre-colonial times (Mustapha, 2005). Processes of conquering today's northwest and institutionalisation of Islamic practices by the Fulani have been interpreted as tendencies of hegemony in the region (Shenton, 1986). Apart from obliterating the *Bori* religious observances among the Hausa, the Fulani instituted the Emirate councils which altered political processes in the present-day northwest (Adamu, 1978). While the Hausa ethnicity successfully fused with the Fulani to produce an ethnic category in the region, the experience with north-east minorities has produced questions of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

Unlike the northwest, the Kanem-Bornu axis significantly resisted Fulani control. The Kanem-Bornu empire straddled what is now southern Chad, northern Cameroon, northeastern Nigeria, eastern Niger, and southern Libya and was regarded as one of the most powerful empires in Africa (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). This influence was, however, curtailed with Fulani penetration and contest for the empire's suzerainty. Invading from the West, the Fulani have had a rusty relationship with the Kanuri – the dominant ethnic group in the region and this has continued to influence societal relations including security questions. While Kanem-Bornu has had long-term relationships and interactions with Hausa states popularly known as the Hausa seven or *Hausa Bokwai* – that is, the descendants of *Bayajjida* – Kano, Katsina, Daura, Zaria, Biram, Gobir and Rano (Steve, 2020), attempts by the Fulani to dominate the Kanuri and surrounding groups has stimulated hegemonic tendencies. In addition, the Kanuri/Hausa relations were strengthened by factors such as religious bonding enhanced by Islam, trade, commercial activities, and warfare, but Fulani attempts to impose their variant of Islam on the Kanem-Bornu axis – an action that has come to be known as the Fulani war or holy war – was seen by the various ethnicities in the area as an attempt by the Fulani to cease control of the area. This has been strongly resisted at different times.<sup>1</sup>

In other North-eastern states such as Bauchi, there has been increasing contest between smaller groups and the Hausa and Fulani fusion. This is implicated in the raging conflicts between the Sayawa and the Hausa in Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi, tussles for traditional stools in Gombe, and contestations between the Jukun and the Hausa in Taraba. Like in the north-east, minority groups in the north-central zone had strongly resisted Fulani Jihadist expansions advanced by its major proponent, Usman dan Fodio. Dominant narratives have shown how what they referred to as 'militant Islam' pursued by the Sokoto Caliphate aimed at conquering non-Muslim areas and converting conquered persons by changing their form of identity (Nyityo, 2014). Under this condition, some of the central Nigerian minorities including the Berom and the Tiv resisted with violence (Nyityo, 2014). Although the minority groups, deploying the violent resistance approach, significantly succeeded in wading off the invading Fulani groups and halting the institutionalization of Islam in many of their territories, the Fulani consolidated their hold of northern Nigeria and its minority groups, assuming the status of hegemons.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike Northern Nigeria where the Fulani featured prominently, there was rarely a single hegemonic ethnic group that perpetrated hegemonic tendencies in the South. But like northern Nigeria, there have been raging questions of domination and counter-domination between larger ethnic groups and their surrounding minorities in Southern Nigeria. Discourses on ethnic relations in the former Mid-Western region suggest that there were cases of domination exhibited by the Edo – Bini – against other minorities in the former Benin empire (Usonianle, 2001). Attempts to revive the Benin Kingdom and the alleged concomitant oppressive rule were strongly resisted by Delta minorities.<sup>3</sup> Although some groups in the area appear to have obliterated some forms of domination and consolidated their ethnicities, the attempts to obliterate the domination of one ethnic group against the other have persisted.

On the other hand, the Yoruba-Edo ethnic relation has been one characterized by questions of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Colonial policies, educational infrastructure and literacy levels had conferred certain advantages to the Yoruba over the Edo.<sup>4</sup> This led to the quest by the Edo to obliterate the Yoruba domination both politically and culturally resulting in the rejection of the Yoruba language as the instrument for communication in the Yoruba-dominated CMS church and the formation of an Edo faction of the Church (Usonianle, 2001). This pattern of relationship has continued to persist between the aforementioned groups.

In the old Eastern region, geographical proximity between the Igbo and her minority neighbours including the Effik-Ibibio and the Ijaw encouraged significant cultural and other forms of relations before the advent of colonial rule. These interactions were partly cordial and sometimes frosty. Although there were occasional wars between Igbo settlements and their minority neighbours often resolved by the signing of peace pacts,<sup>5</sup> Igbo relations with the Ijaw had experienced questions of domination and counter-domination. This resulted from two important factors – the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in which the European merchants relied on Ijaw middlemen to access Igbo slaves; and the struggles that ensued between the coastal Ijaw and the hinterland Igbo over engagement with Europeans on palm oil and palm kernel businesses (Oriji, 2011). In both cases, - the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the palm trade, the Ijaw, through their interaction with Aro slaveholders – an Igbo sub-group in present-day Abia state – and their strategic location at the coastal region, facilitated the processes of acquiring Igbo slaves for European merchants on the one hand (Njoku, 2016) and also provided the opportunity for the Ijaw to maintain their hold on the ports of the coastal area in the palm business on the other (Ekong, 2014). Under these conditions, a substantial number of Igbo slaves bound for Europe and the Americas were retained in Delta city-states to serve the Ijaw, many of whom were incorporated and acculturated to serve as full citizens (Akpan, 2016). In addition, this hegemonic position of the Ijaw was consolidated in the better part of the palm oil trade without resistance on the part of the Igbo. This gave the Ijaw an edge over the Igbo and the latter worked hard to obliterate the domination of the former. Nonetheless, these occasions of dominations and counter-dominations raised various issues of citizenship and its interaction with persistent national questions.

### **Majority/minority relations: the impact of military actions on Nigeria's federalism**

Federal arrangement provides the window to address the needs of minorities and manage diversity. Nigeria's federal system privileged some ethnic groups including the Hausa and Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, over and above others who were considered to be subordinate groups. This led to what Claude Ake referred to as 'the politics of anxiety' in the 1950s (Ake, 1985, p. 12), resulting mainly from the domination of the three regions by the three dominant groups. Accordingly, the entrenched 'majoritarian hegemony' and territorial ethnicity

(Mustapha, 2005), triggered the quest for self-determination by the subordinate groups. While the Midwest Region was carved out of the old Western region in June 1963, 'the quest for state creation by the minorities across the three regions were not fully actualised until the Civil War broke out in 1967'.<sup>6</sup>

The creation of states on the eve of the civil war to an extent obliterated the hegemony of the dominant groups and consolidated the ethnicity of many minorities. In achieving this, the military played a very salient role by interfering with Nigeria's form of federalism and the quest for self-determination of several groups. After the War, the military government deepened centrist policies aimed at forging a strong centre to the detriment of the minorities. These centrist policies led to the concentration of oil wealth in the 'federal military' government and were sustained in the 1979 Constitution (Obi, 2005). This development reinforced the national question debate of the 50s, which partly re-emerged as 'resource control' and was strongly championed by South-South Governors during the early years of the Fourth Republic. This agitation became deafening in the early 2000s with the rise of militancy, accompanied by the bombing of oil installations and kidnapping of oil workers.

A respondent, on the subject of resource control, alluded to the Western Region submitting that 'Awolowo utilised the proceeds from cocoa for the Western region by introducing universal education in the region. They were ahead of us. But when we had oil, we were denied access and resource control changed'.<sup>7</sup> Although the North also enjoyed such control of its resources – ground nut, tin, and columbite – it did not translate into the kind of development recorded in Awolowo's Western Region. Similarly, the Ijaw had expected that their support to the federal military government during the Civil War, and resource control would be left in the hands of the newly created states to improve the well-being of minorities.<sup>8</sup>

Failing to secure state creation, the minorities sought for a centrist federal system. While this centrist framework has not yielded much for the minorities, they still prefer this rather than having their identities obliterated in cases of a strong region. The focus, therefore, is not just to secure resources on 'their land' but to consolidate their identity. This was captured by the fears of Northern minorities who, like their Southern counterparts, feared that more independent regions would further muzzle their rights and identities. This concern was expressed by Domkat Bali, a former Chief of Defence Staff and a Northern minority when he noted that:

I come from a small tribe – the Tarok tribe in Langtan. It is a small tribe within a small group. If the North secures independence from the rest of the country, the Hausa/Fulani would be so dominant that they will lord it over us whether we like it or not. A bigger Nigeria will check such excesses. So, the bigger Nigeria is, the freer my tribe and myself would be. (Siollun, 2009, p. 121) Marx Siollun demonstrated the power of identity in Nigeria's political violence and history of military coup culture...

The above corroborate positions expressed by other northern minorities, who, till the present are agitating for what they described as 'total liberation from the Hausa and Fulani'.<sup>9</sup> The Fulani, allied with the Hausa, is regarded as the 'historical oppressor' by the region's minorities. This perception among others led to the creation of Benue-Plateau State in May 1967 and Plateau State in 1976. In this light, Middle Belt minorities, like other minorities elsewhere, prefer to have a region of minorities free from the shreds of any of the dominant groups or remain in a centrist Nigeria controlled by minorities. One respondent noted that:

Middle Belters like myself prefer to have a Middle Belt without any trace of Fulani or Hausa. We want to see an end to the historical domination of the Hausa and Fulani. If we cannot have a region without Hausa/Fulani influence, we prefer to have a Nigeria with a strong centre where minorities are in power. You may think this is impossible but the minorities together are bigger than the big three ... .<sup>10</sup>

What is clear from the above is that while the centralisation of power by the military reduced the fears of the minorities from their ‘traditional oppressors’ in the regions, the dominant groups have consequently built networks to perpetuate their dominance, obliterating in some cases, the identities of the minority groups.

### **Cultural hegemony and resistance in majority/minority relations**

Asymmetric relations between majority and minority ethnic groups in Nigeria draw attention to the questions of cultural hegemony. Nordstrom and Martin (1992) suggest that local culture is interwoven with national and international power relations, implying ‘that systems of domination, resistance, and terror may affect every form of social life’ (Hogan, 1995, p. 149). This underscores the interaction between domination, resistance, and violence. Most often, violence as argued by Amilcar Cabral is deployed by dominant groups in society to neutralize and paralyze the cultural life of minorities (BlackPast, 2009). This is because the external domination of a minority group rarely grows for as long as part of that subaltern group has a cultural life (Manji, 2017). Besides, ‘violence is more than a count of the civil or military “strife” in any society ... but the dynamic, sociocultural phenomenon of how people respond to that which threatens the entire social fabric’ (Hogan, 1995, p. 149).

Cultural hegemony is a crucial way of asserting and retaining dominance since culture often serves as a tool not only to express aesthetics, customs, or tradition but also a way to obliterate political and economic domination, ‘invent their humanity, assert agency and capacity to make history’ (Manji, 2017, not paginated). As such, once the cultural life of a group that should serve as the tool for the struggle for emancipation is neutralized and paralyzed, the group becomes vulnerable to other forms of domination. Consequently, attempts to neutralize and dominate the cultural life of a people often meet with resistance and counter-resistance which in turn reproduces violence.

In Northern Nigeria, “pre-colonial relationships ‘between the Islamic North and the so-called ‘pagan’ ethnic groups in the Middle Belt were characterised by different forms of domination and resistance” (Nnabuihe, 2016, p. 176). These patterns of interaction as Nnabuihe suggested ‘foregrounds the establishment of Islamic theocracy in Sokoto and Borno which highlighted and earmarked the Middle Belt as peripheries to be exploited’. He added that ‘the exploitation and domination of the Middle Belt by the Hausa and Fulani Muslims was further entrenched when British colonialists legitimized the core north’s “indigenous imperialist systems” over minority ethnic groups in the Middle Belt and Kanem-Bornu axis’ (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2006; Nnabuihe, 2016, p. 176). These scenarios stimulated consciousness among northern minorities for resistance and quest for inclusion in the asymmetric political system. The defunct Northern region witnessed significant ethnic divisions resulting from colonial attempts to treat many groups in the region as inferior while promoting Hausa and Fulani as virile races (Nnabuihe, 2019; Nyityo, 2014; Shenton, 1986; Siollun, 2021).

The British colonialists’ ‘attitudes, policies, and actions’ to a great extent accentuated this form of prejudice and domination against minorities in favour of Hausa and Fulani Muslim groups.

Apart from assuming that Islam imposed a natural discipline on Hausa ethnics, the British stimulated cultural hegemonic tendencies between the Hausa and Fulani against the so-called ‘pagan’ minorities of the North in many ways. First, the Royal Niger Company created a constabulary in 1886 to provide military and police security in areas where the company traded and exercised administrative control. This unit, alongside other forces, was amalgamated into the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) in 1900. Within WAFF, the British ‘pursued a two-pronged policy of maintaining Hausa as the army’s official language while simultaneously trying to recruit other “martial races” from non-Hausa areas, then teaching them to speak Hausa’ (Siollun, 2021, p. 110). Corroborating this position, a respondent suggested that ‘Hausa was placed on the table as a requirement for employment in the army for northern minorities not just in the colonial era but also after independence’.<sup>11</sup> This strategic use of language for negotiating cultural hegemony rather than fusing the different ethnicities stimulated the perception of a dichotomy between the dominant Hausa and Fulani Muslim groups against the several minorities in the area. Earlier, Lugard expressed his desire to make ‘WAFF, as far as possible, a Hausa-speaking pagan force’ (Siollun, 2021, p. 112). Today, the legacy of this ‘cultural production within, through, and for politico-effective space’ (Ngwenya et al., 2022, p. 122), is implicated in the structures of cultural domination and other forms of domination in northern Nigeria. This manipulative tendency of exalting Hausa over and above other ethnicities unsuspectingly induced a dangerous form of cultural hegemony.

Second, colonial administrative officials tended to create differentiations in the status of chiefs and emirs in Northern Nigeria. Four categories of chiefs were created – first-class, second-class, third-class, and fourth-class chiefs. Most importantly, while mainly Hausa and Fulani Muslim chiefs – ‘Sultan of Sokoto, Emirs of Kano, Gwandu and Katsina’ – but also Kanuri Muslim chiefs like the Shehu were accorded first-class status, ‘pagan chiefs’ from mainly the North West and East – ‘Argungu, Kiama and Bussa’ – were accorded second class status. Chiefs of the Middle Belt were mainly equated with ‘Fulani district heads’ and classified as third-class chiefs (Nyityo, 2014, p. 109). This development and the creation of the Northern House of Chiefs in 1946 witnessed a scenario ‘where not only the “chiefs” of the Middle Belt were missing but also business in the house was conducted in Hausa’.<sup>12</sup> Lady Lugard’s view on the relationship between northern groups is relevant here. She noted that: ‘we seem to be in the presence of one of the fundamental facts of history, that there are races which are born to conquer and others to persist under conquest’ (cited in Nyityo, 2014, p. 109). In this connection, Lord Lugard opted for the regeneration of the virile races of the Fulani and the Hausa, and moulded them into ‘ideas of justice and mercy’ that should be adopted by other northern groups – minorities – relegated as subservient (Nnabuihe, 2019; Nyityo, 2014). For northern minorities, particularly in the Middle Belt, these attitudes, policies, and actions were deliberate efforts by the colonial government to keep them socially, economically, politically, and culturally docile as well as enthroning Hausa and Fulani hegemony and most importantly cultural hegemonic rule over them.

Colonial officers’ approach to the administration of northern Nigeria raised several unsettled questions but mainly that of cultural hegemony. While the British corrected some of the precedent set, their actions and inactions prepared the stage for the cases of domination, resistance, and political violence in postcolonial northern Nigeria. Such changes occurred with the distinction between ‘Pagan Administration’ and Emirate rule in which the school of the so-called ‘Pagan Administration’ functioned in an undisturbed manner by the alien influence of the emirate in the Middle Belt (Nnabuihe, 2020).

Consequently, Hausa, Fulani, and Islamic influence – including *Alkali courts* – in northern Nigeria grew significantly in such a way that ‘non-Muslim chiefs largely copied the dressing and turban culture of Muslim Emirs’.<sup>13</sup> In this way, ‘rulers and prominent non-Hausa and non-Fulani people began to exhibit fluency in the Hausa language as a way of connecting to the local political economy’<sup>14</sup> and benefit from the ‘economy of affection’. Therefore, non-Hausa, non-Fulani, and non-Muslim elements of northern Nigeria assimilated the Hausa language and Islamic culture as though it was the official language (it appears to be so even though unwritten) of northern Nigeria. What is clear is that colonial administrators’ actions, attitudes, and policies in northern Nigeria promoted Hausa and Fulani cultural hegemony over northern minority groups. Following periods of resistance to the growing questions of cultural hegemony in Jos, *Alkali courts* were replaced with Native courts to deal with judicial matters and the title of political headship of the city was changed. They ‘adopted the Berom words ‘*Manje la Gwom*’ meaning Chiefs in Council to replace the Hausa term ‘*Sarki da Majalisa*’ (Nnabuihe, 2019, p. 283).

While Hausa lost some influence on minority groups in Northern Nigeria with the establishment of Native Courts in the minority areas, the Hausa language continued to grow in significance as a tool for conducting commerce. In addition, interviewees of minority extraction in Northern Nigeria particularly from the Middle Belt suggested that for their members – minorities and mainly Christian minorities in the region – to ‘join the officers’ cadre of the military and the police, they had to add a name sounding Hausa or Muslim to their names’ (Nnabuihe, 2019).<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Hausa language and culture have significantly influenced minority groups in Northern Nigeria and this is subtly pushed to be so. To this end, people from minority groups until recently opted for Hausa names above their cultural names. Also, several items commonly used have taken Hausa names as well. For instance, among the Tiv people of Benue, a chair is called *Kujera* in the Hausa language, and in the Tiv language it is called *Kujira*. While matches is called ‘*Ashana*’ in the Hausa language, the Tiv call it ‘*Ashanu*’. Broom is called ‘*Tsintsiya*’ in the Hausa language while the Tiv calls it ‘*Chancha*’.<sup>16</sup> Even though some of the spellings are slightly different from the Hausa language variant, they sound very much alike which indicates the influence of the Hausa language on Tiv language. In all the contexts discussed above, the minority groups have continually resisted the questions of cultural hegemony, with attempts by these groups to obliterate such cultural hegemony sustaining the life-cycle of conflicts, especially in minority areas of northern Nigeria such as Jos and Benue.

Similarly, in the Western Region, the production and reproduction of horizontal inequalities sustained the questions of cultural hegemony in such a way that Yoruba was the preponderant group while the Edo, Esan, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Urhobo, and Ika-Igbo – all Western minorities – were the subaltern groups (Usuanlele, 2001). The Yoruba emerged dominant with the colonial policies that stimulated uneven distribution of educational and political infrastructure as well as other social facilities. This gave the Yoruba an edge and a head-up over the minorities. This development manifested mainly in the distribution of government and missionary schools in the Western region. The Yoruba had more schools but also more enrolments than the Mid-West minority areas in the region (Usuanlele, 2001).

While these educational advancements were welcomed development, they also created significant problems and complicated the cultural hegemony questions. Apart from resulting in the increasing unemployment of school leavers who were unwilling to engage in agriculture and crafts, educational advancements deepened competition for employment, sowed the seeds of discord, and induced alignments and realignments along and across racial and ethnic lines.

Under these conditions, groups in the Western region, mainly minorities in the Edo and Niger Delta areas perceived themselves as discriminated against and marginalised in terms of access to state resources and opportunities. As such, Pan-Edo and Pan-minority groups' associations emerged to engage in this struggle and improve the lives of Western minorities. One of the earliest groups to emerge was the Institute for Home-Benin Improvement established in October 1932. The 'Institute described itself as a party representing the Edo-speaking people of Nigeria including Benin City, Ishan, Kukuruku, Ora Agbor, Igbanke, Sobe, etc.' (Usuanlele, 2001, p. 205).

The aforesaid institute was transformed into the Edo National Union in 1943 and became instrumental in championing the cause of Western minorities particularly those of Mid-Western extraction. Although the Union was a uniting factor among the minorities, it was not sufficient in obliterating the domination emanating mainly from the Yoruba group. The local intra-elite struggle for power among the minority groups resulted in a faction deploying the Yoruba-originated secret cult – Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (ROF) – to dominate political and social affairs in the minority areas at the expense of indigenous institutions. The ROF, though a secret society that originated from Yorubaland, is said to be 'different from the Ogboni Cult in Oyo', and was an influential religious order that 'would assume great significance in the politics of Benin' (Omoigui, 2002). The influence of the Ogboni in the culture and politics of the Mid-West was so pronounced to the extent that locals in the region needed to join the fraternity to gain a 'position in the AG government' (Oduntan, 2017, p. 32). Oduntan captured the influence of the Yoruba on the culture of the peoples of the Mid-West using the Ogboni this way:

... In the Western Region, the Mid-West Movement demanded self-determination on behalf of the Benin–Delta provinces to mitigate domination and 'recolonization' by the Yoruba. The movement frowned at how the Yoruba-dominated Western regional government interfered in the cultural practices of the region by dissolving Divisional councils without consultation, by failing to pay the traditional rulers in the province, and by imposing appointments. Furthermore, it claimed that the Yoruba imposed the Ogboni, which was a Yoruba cult ... which required the adoption of Yoruba culture for qualification. (Oduntan, 2017, pp. 32–33)

Buttressing the above assertion, Oduntan suggested that the Mid-West minorities 'frowned at the limited employment opportunities available to them because government positions precluded those who will not join the Yoruba cult group, Ogboni' (2017, p. 34). Apart from inducing a form of antipathy towards the Yoruba, the use of Ogboni was interpreted to mean 'subordination of Edo and Niger Delta interest to the Yoruba in the region'.<sup>17</sup> These forms of cultural hegemony and structural violence would later manifest in different patterns of struggles between the contending groups.

In addition, non-Mid-Western political parties were employed to further entrench the hegemonic tendencies of the majority groups – Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa – against the minorities (Otite, 1973; Usuanlele, 2001). As such, the Oba of Benin, Oba Akenzua II encouraged the formation of the Reformed Benin Community and discouraged the continued existence of the Edo National Union for its relationship and submission to extant ethnic-based nationalist parties. For Oba Akenzua, this was necessary to save the Bini/Edo identity, customs, traditions, language, and culture. He argued that the award of scholarships to the Edo and the larger Central and South West Minorities by existing ethnic parties of the majority groups – mainly the Yoruba's Action Group (AG) and the Igbo's National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) – could be seen to provide a false sense of security to the minorities. Also, owing to

the political domination of the old Western region by Action Group and its Yoruba elements, 'Oba Akenzua II and prominent elite class formed the Benin Delta Political Party (BDPP) in 1952' (Aghedo, 2015, p. 142). This was done to demand the creation of a separate region for the Edo and other non-Yoruba ethnic groups in the region (see Aghedo, 2015; Usuanlele, 2001). Thus, the uneven spread of infrastructure between the Yoruba areas and those of the minorities in the region as well as perceived Yoruba domination – cultural, political and economic – of the region led to the creation of the Mid-West (Usuanlele, 2001).

Complicating the domination narrative, the minorities accused the AG and its Yoruba agents of continuing with colonial policies at independence and that the party posted mainly Yoruba-speaking officials to the non-Yoruba areas as administrators to take over the positions left by the Europeans (Usuanlele, 2001, 2018). Apart from the Yoruba's undisguised bid for the domination of the political leadership of the region, there were allegations of discrimination against non-Yoruba in the admission of students into educational institutions, award of scholarships, and granting of loans (Usuanlele, 2001). However, some offices were specifically reserved for minorities. While the positions were seen as fractions and not offices with exerting influence over the larger region, they reduced the tensions on the ground but helped the minorities in forming opinions over the spate of domination in the region.<sup>18</sup>

These questions of political domination drew mainly from cases of cultural hegemony advanced by the Yoruba and its cultural agents against minorities. Earlier, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) opted to use Yoruba agents and deployed the Yoruba language for the spread of Christianity among the Edo and the Niger-Delta people. This enabled further penetration of Yoruba culture and influence into the hinterlands of the Niger-Delta. Besides, Bishop Tugwell of the CMS had in 1914 imposed Yoruba as the language of instruction in the Church since it was practically impossible for his Church to translate the Bible or to produce literature of any kind in the Delta minorities' languages given that they were small groups of insignificant proportion. In this connection, the Delta minorities rejected the Yoruba as the language of instruction in churches and schools. This began with the protest of Oba Akenzua II against the curriculum that previously emphasised Yoruba language and culture. The Oba insisted that the curriculum must include the propagation of Edo/Delta languages and culture (Usuanlele, 2001). Subsequently, this form of interaction led to factional splits in the CMS Church where the minority groups' languages were deployed as the medium for communication in an attempt to obliterate questions of cultural hegemony and consolidate Edo ethnicities.

Unlike the other regions, the Eastern region experienced two scenarios – a period of Ijaw preponderance over the Igbo and that of Igbo domination against the Ijaw. First, an asymmetric relationship existed between the Ijaw and the Igbo to the coastal Ijaw advantage in the Eastern region. This was sustained by structures of monopoly in trade created by prominent Ijaw chiefs. Scholars of Igbo/Ijaw history have adequately documented this (Dike, 1956). Such monopoly provided the opportunity for the Ijaw to accumulate sufficient capital which was important to survive in the periphery capitalist order the British were already establishing in the region. What is clear is that the Ijaw middlemen who were not themselves producers of palm oil took advantage of their coastal location to exploit both the Igbo traders who brought the product to the various ports in the Bight of Biafra for trade and the British merchants who needed the product for their industries at the metropole. Ijaw domination of the Igbo was primarily economic but also political since the Ijaw played active roles in the sale of several Igbo ethnics into slavery.<sup>19</sup> Under such conditions, the Igbo concluded they were not just victims of the Ijaw

trade monopoly but also under its hegemony. As such, the Igbo believed that Ijaw activities curtailed their (Igbo) cultural expressions.<sup>20</sup>

In June 2023, a former Niger Delta militant/agitator, Mujahid Asari Dokubo drew attention to this historical relation between the Igbo and the Ijaw indicating that the legacies have not been eliminated. As reported by The Punch Newspaper, Mr. Dokubo was seen in a video saying that ‘if not for the arrival of the British, he would still be selling Igbo people as his forbears did. He noted that ‘the Igbo people do not know their roots. They don’t have respect for who bought their father’ (Sulaiman, 2023). This implies that the Ijaw hegemony over the Igbo and later the Igbo over the Ijaw continues to shape interactions between the two groups. In addition, former Governor Nyesom Wike’s open confrontation on the eve of the 2023 General elections demonstrates the growing cultural tension between the Igbo and former Eastern region minorities. Thus, the pattern of events in 2022 and 2023 Nigeria reflected the ethnic and hegemonic struggles among the large ethnic groups and religions on the one hand and between the majorities and the minorities on the other.

Second, the preponderance of the Ijaw over the Igbo ended with the emergence and dominance of the Igbo in the old Eastern region. A respondent of Eastern minority extraction suggested that subsequent Igbo domination of the Ijaw in the colonial and postcolonial eras drew mainly from Igbo experience in the hands of the Ijaw. He argued that:

The later control of the Ijaw by the Igbo aimed at countering previous Ijaw domination against them. ... During its own time, the Ijaw merely stalled the expression of Igbo culture in its (Ijaw) territory, they did not influence the Igbo culture in the way the latter has done to the former.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the respondent suggested that Igbo dominance in the Eastern region did not affect only the Ijaw but also other minority groups such as Ibibio/Efik and Annan. He argued that the Igbo preponderance in the region significantly influenced the culture of the Ibibio and Annan people.<sup>22</sup>

What the above implies is that the Igbo were aware that they needed to control the cultures of the minorities to control their politics and economics. Thus, the Igbo systematically strategized, built, and affected their hegemony over the minorities. In this light, Gramsci’s idea of cultural hegemony explains group relations in the former Eastern region. Two-thirds of the interviewees in the areas that made up the former Eastern region agreed that Igbo culture became the dominant culture among the minorities including the Ijaw and Ibibio. They suggested that once a peoples’ culture is replaced/substituted, whether through subtle or coercive means, such culture tends to become inferior or eroded. Effectively, the Igbo deployed their hold on political power in the Eastern region to dominate the minorities – culturally and economically – following their (Igbo’s) numerical strength over the minorities. One such instance is an attempt to rename minority areas with Igbo names as well as attempts to administer such areas with mainly Igbo-speaking people.<sup>23</sup> One Igbo-speaking respondent of Ikwerre origin suggested that:

... There was an attempt to rename Port Harcourt as ‘Zik City’ which may have been politically motivated by the Igbo-led NCNC, but the original name of the city is an Igbo word – *Igweocha* – translated as white bicycle. This was the name until 1913 when the British substituted it with the name of a practicing pedophile, Lord Harcourt. Secondly, the original inhabitants of the city are Igbo who refer to themselves as Ikwerre ...<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note that the land inhabited by the Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria is split into western and eastern segments by the River Niger. On the West are the 'Igbo often referred to in modern terms as the Anioma, Ika-Igbo, and Ikwerre' (Siollun, 2021, p. 215). On the East are those arrogated with the Igbo identity in contemporary history. Apart from the renaming and administering of minority areas by the Igbo, minorities suffered a great deal during the Civil War. The minorities alleged that the Igbo made the minority areas susceptible to attacks by militarizing the areas and attracting the attention of the opposing forces to such areas.<sup>25</sup> This position was corroborated in the St Jorres' illuminating study where he suggested that '... the Ibo-dominated Police and army were always heavily deployed in the minority areas and some of the worst civilian-inspired massacres and counter-massacres took place there' (1972, p. 117).

Consequently, unlike the cases of northern and western regions where cultural hegemony gave impetus for political domination, Igbo domination of politics, civil service, and the economy laid the foundation for the spread of Igbo culture in non-Igbo settlements and established Igbo hegemony in the area. As such, the influences of Igbo are not only present in minority politics in the region as witnessed during the Jonathan presidency era but also in minority languages in the area like the Ijaw. One respondent drew attention to this when he noted that:

The Igbo language has a strong influence on the contemporary Ijaw language. Some terms in Ijaw are the same as Igbo. For instance, the Igbo word for mortar, spoon, broom, and cat are '*Odo, Ngaji, Aziza, and Olugbo*' respectively. The same words are currently used for the same items in the Ijaw language.<sup>26</sup>

While the above may have resulted from the many years of intermarriage between the various ethnicities, one-third of the respondents of minority extraction suggested that such influence of the Igbo language over the Ijaw resulted from the two groups' asymmetric relationships.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the dominant groups have 'vital interest in keeping up with the appearances appropriate to their form of domination'. Often, the subordinate groups are expected to sustain those appearances or at least not oppose them openly (Scott, 1990, p. 70). In the cases observed, minorities have demonstrated different forms of resistance. They have in most cases deployed their linguistic advantage over the dominant groups as a form of resistance. Linguistic advantage because the minorities do not only speak the languages of the dominant groups or the prevailing culture – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba – imposed on them, they also speak their own languages. Thus, the subordinate groups tend to be more multilingual than the dominant ones. Members of the prevailing political groups are not attracted to the language of the subaltern groups since it provides no particular political and economic advantage. Hence, the language of the minorities often becomes a tool of political mobilization against the prevailing culture.

## **Conclusion**

In all cases of cultural hegemony discussed in this study – including the Hausa, Fulani, and especially Middle Belt minorities in the Northern region, the Yoruba and Mid-Western minorities in the Western region, and the Igbo and Southern minorities in the Eastern region – the instances of resistance and counter-resistance and reverse influences have had significant consequences for contemporary Nigeria's politics, group relations, and security. The worrying evidence that the questions of cultural hegemony are forcefully present in contemporary Nigeria significantly stimulates bitterness, suspicion, and violence in the socio-political life of

the country. Such trends have been noticed in voting patterns in general elections, political violence, and high-level insecurity.

Consequently, attempts to obliterate the cultural and political domination of the minorities by the preponderant groups have generated and sustained political and ethnic violence of varying degrees. One respondent suggested that:

Most violent identity conflicts between majority and minority groups at various levels were triggered and sustained by attempts to resist domination. For instance, in Jos, the raging violence that has become a cycle and lasted for over two decades is not really religious but often presented as a religious problem. The real issue is that attempts to resist perceived or real domination combined with economic issues have been responsible for that recurring violence ...<sup>27</sup>

What is clear from the above is that the question of cultural hegemony has continued to reinvent the Jos conflict, sustaining it and keeping it alive. Apart from the Jos case, the Sayawa against Hausa and Fulani in the North East as well as Tiv against Hausa and Fulani in the North Central are conflicts that have been sustained by various perceptions of cultural hegemony.

In the case of cultural hegemony influencing voting patterns, it was evident in Benue where before the 2015 general elections the area hugely supported the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Having been dissatisfied with Southern Nigeria's control, the people supported the All Progressives Congress (APC) to oust the PDP. With the coming of the APC, the Fulani seized the opportunity to reinvent and perpetuate their hegemony against the Tiv, this was resisted and as such heightened the already existing domination. This in turn multiplied the cases of farmer/herder crisis in the area. The Tiv resisted the domination and what they tagged the Fulanization of the Benue Valley by massively voting against the Fulani-led APC in the 2019 general elections.<sup>28</sup> Apart from worsening the trends of insecurity, the resistance against questions of cultural hegemony revived historical struggles for resources along ethnic lines and multiplied conflicts in different parts of Nigeria. This view draws from Gramsci's cultural hegemony indicating that minorities resist majority domination most times and rely on the same when convenient.

In the build-up to the 2015 general elections, it was evident from the alliances and the shifting of alliances that contenders from minority ethnic groups tended to rely on the support of the conventional hegemons from their regions or within the Nigerian political space to ascend national prominence. This was also the case when the Ijaw heavily relied on the Igbo to secure the 2015 elections in favour of an Ijaw son – Goodluck Jonathan. The reliance on the conventional hegemons by the minority as seen in the case of the Igbo also played out in the case of Yakubu Gowon who was a minority from the Middle-Belt but had to rely on the Hausa-Fulani support to rally the Nigeria Army behind him when he became Head of State. Minorities, therefore, are consistently resisting majority domination in different forms. As such, we argue that minority agitations, despite numerous concessions in the past, have persisted and this can be explained by the presence but often neglected question of cultural hegemony which in turn has kept many communal conflicts alive.

## Notes

1. Interview with Mallam Sani Bello, local historian, Yola, August 3, 2021.
2. Interview with Bashir Mudi, Jos, February 8, 2016.
3. Interview with Emuabo Ogboru, Asaba, August 6, 2018.
4. Ibid.
5. Interview with Dominic Nwuguru, Owerri, December 30, 2021.
6. Interview with Godspower Edet, Lagos, July 7, 2021.
7. Interview with ThankGod Jaja, Portharcourt, June 22, 2018.
8. Interview, Darlington Azum, Lagos, July 7, 2021.
9. Interview in Jos with Yakubu Dokotiri.
10. Interview with Shedrack Gad, Jos, March 15, 2016.
11. Interview with Musa Dangana-Dangiwa, retired soldier.
12. Interview with Mr Jonathan Tarvarshima.
13. Interviewees in Jos and Kaduna claimed that the current pattern of dressing by non-Muslim chiefs in Northern Nigeria was majorly influenced by Fulani and Islamic cultures.
14. Interview with Bitrus Gizo, Jos, July 18, 2019.
15. Interviews in Plateau State between 2016 and 2018 indicated that this was the case.
16. Authors' observation in the field suggests this the situation on ground.
17. Telephone Interview with Damian Ovude, October 2021.
18. Interview with Damian Ovude, October 2021.
19. Interview with Mazi Okechukwu Amuta, November 20, 2021.
20. Interview with Mr Kingsley Anosike, October 22, 2021.
21. Interview with Mr. Bazil James, Uyo, May 13, 2017.
22. Interview, Mr Bazil James.
23. Interview with Solomon Preye, Portharcourt, June 8, 2018.
24. Interview with Uchenna Onuegbu, Port Harcourt, August 27, 2018.

25. Interview with Jonathan Bob, Portharcourt, June 24, 2018.
26. Interview with Chris Isaac, Lagos, October 20, 2021.
27. Interview with Patrick Stephen, phone interview, November 18, 2021.
28. This was phone conversation with an academic of Tiv origin and resident in Benue, December 15, 2021.

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### **Notes on contributors**

**Onyekachi E. Nnabuihe** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Criminology, Security, Peace and Conflict Studies, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, Nigeria, and Fellow, FAR-LeaF, University of Pretoria. This research and publication were made possible in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author(s).

**Ifeanyi Onwuzuruigbo** holds a doctorate in Sociology. He teaches Sociology in the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His research engages the nexus of politics, development, and society.

**Martin Ayankaa Ihembe** is a doctoral candidate at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He was a Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation fellow (2019-2020). His research interests straddle democratisation in Africa, governance and development, comparative electoral reforms, political theory, and judicial politics. He can be contacted via [martinihembe@gmail.com](mailto:martinihembe@gmail.com).

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