on religious than racial themes, but the ethnic group identity still remains strongly in the debate (Ojie, 2006). Further, Nigeria today has strong undertones of a neopatrimonial regime, or a regime that relies on patron-client linkages to govern, largely based upon "ethnic, linguistic, and regional heterogeneity" (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1994, p. 469). These linkages have hampered the transition to democracy, however, underscoring an important point as to why Nigeria has not completely become a democracy whereas Cape Verde has (Ojie, 2006, p. 555). This point is that ethnic polarization of a society into a heterogeneous collection of interests makes democracy impossible (Ojie, 2006, p. 548). Cape Verde, with its ethnically homogenous population, has been able to transition to and maintain its democracy, while Nigeria has suffered from the instability of ethnic heterogeneity.

Ethnicity and Democracy

Why is democracy impossible to achieve for heterogeneous societies that are divided along ethnic lines, like Nigeria? The answer lies in how polarized ethnic groups interact with democratic institutions. In the cases of Cape Verde and Nigeria, both nations practice presidential democracy, with Cape Verde following the semi-presidential model enshrined by France and practiced in Portugal (where Cape Verde imported it from). Both offer slightly different takes on the concentration of governing power, but the importance of both systems is that only one individual can be president. This distinction has proven to be an issue for Nigeria, as the office of president has become linked to the ethnic debate since only one person, and therefore only one ethnic group, can be, or hold the office of, president (Ojie, 2006, p. 561-562). The result has been that presidential elections in Nigeria are not polarized along party or ideological lines, but instead along regional and ethnic lines.

The presidential nature of Nigeria's government has been criticized as exacerbating the ethnic tensions within Nigeria to the point that political deadlock and violence become inevitable (Aborisade & Mundt, 1998, p. 129). The nature of a presidential system in an ethnically heterogeneous nation is that while it may in theory provide stability in fixed terms of office, it actually has the opposite effect since fixed terms help to ensure extended conflict between groups, particularly over policy debates (Aborisade & Mundt, 1998, p. 129). This system, however, would work exceptionally well in a homogenous society, such as Cape Verde (where it does), since ethnic undertones of conflict would not dominate, or even be considered, within the election for president nor the resulting policy debates or decisions that are implemented. Cape Verde's success with this system, thus, can be attributed to its lack of ethnic competition for the office, whereas the Nigerian presidency is linked with persons campaigning on their ethnicity instead of their merits. The Nigerian presidency has become an office that each ethnic group seeks in order to "award" their members with political patronage and power, thereby not just polarizing, but also ethno-polarizing, the office (Aborisade & Mundt, 1998; Ojie, 2006).

The examples above of Cape Verde and Nigeria illustrate why there is a drive in modern states for "cultural homogeneity and the universalization of ideals" among rival groups in an effort to do away with ethnic divisions and achieve political stability (Smith, 1996, p. 457). Further, many heterogeneous societies are adopting institutions that better allow for channeling and, at least partially, subduing ethnic tensions, such as the adoption of parliamentarian and federal systems of government (Vanhanen, 1999, p. 66). This is partly the case in Nigeria, where a federal system of government allows for the various ethnic communities to control their own states below the federal government, free of influence from the other groups. For Cape Verde, however, ethnic conflict is virtually unheard of and the political conflict in Cape Verde is associated with democratic debates not unlike those seen in many First World countries (Vanhanen, 1996, p. 72; Lobban, 1995). For ethnically heterogeneous countries like Nigeria, therefore, it is important for ethnic conflicts to be both addressed and contained if any transition to democracy is to be achieved (Smith, 1996, p. 458).

Conclusion

For much of Africa, the transition from European hegemony to democratic self-government has proven to be problematic and difficult at best. As the examples of Cape Verde and Nigeria demonstrate, ethnicity has a profound impact on the democratic transitions of many African nations. For Cape Verde, the ethnic homogeneity of its populace allowed the country to create a cohesive society in which democracy has thrived, making the nation today one of Africa's rare democratic states. In sharp contrast to this is Nigeria, which, like so much of the continent, has been plagued by intense social and political violence rooted in the deep ethnic divisions that have come to dominate Nigerian society. It is this ethnic heterogeneity that has served to hamper both Nigeria's and Africa's transitions to democracy. In order for Africa to move beyond this ethnic violence and achieve the coveted democratic ideal, the ethnic divisions that currently exist must be replaced or, at the very least, subdued, allowing for a more unified national identity to take hold. For without this homogeneity, democracy will not take root and flourish.

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