



ETHNO - RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES IN 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA: PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Some Nations and sovereignties may have to pass through persistent, complex and terrible evolutionary challenges before attaining cohesion and development, while a few others may not. The complexities and dimensions manifested by the litany of Crises and disturbances within the Nigerian polity points to deep-seated lack of trust, suspicion and an eclipse of fraternal confidence amongst the diverse cultural and religious entities inhabiting the area. These discordant tunes have continued to exert its toll considerably on human and material resources, hence a deadly threat to the functionality and structural existence of the country. Ethno-religious divide remain the identified issue, fanned by indoctrinated stereotype and primordialism. Towards identifying the many psychosocial implications unleashed by this scenario, this study while adopting the Conflict Trap theory as a major tool, found it convenient to methodically advance the research in a multi-dimensional way. Containing and resolving 21st century ethno-religious challenges in Nigeria cannot be achieved remiss of the practice of proper federalism and re-structuring.

Keyword: Ethnicity, stereotype, Discrimination, Religion, Diversity.

Introduction

Most scholars share the view that British imperial presence had been felt in the area that later became Nigeria as from the middle of the 19th century. The same set of scholars also allude to the fact that despite the above, British colonial administration officially commenced in Nigeria on 1st January, 1900 *vis-à-vis* the eventual termination of the Royal Charter previously granted the Royal Niger Company to administer the area on behalf of the British government.

To effectively secure administrative convenience, imperialist Britain not only adopted the policy of divide and rule, but went deeper into the colonial scheme by applying the marriage of convenience of primordially independent nationalities. Thus Britain deliberately placed some ethnic nationalities at vantage positions over the existing groups, since this lopsided arrangement was done without consultations. Such was the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914. It may be poignant to note that prior to this incident, through the Land and Native Right Ordinance of 1910, the British

colonial power not only tried to separate the Northern ethnic groups from their Southern compatriots, but went ahead to discourage the migration of Southerners to the North, (International IDEA, 200: 93). This policy gave birth to the *Sabon Gari* system that became prevalent in many northern Nigeria cities as from 1911. Such divisiveness aided British perpetual grip and manipulation of Nigerians.

Nevertheless, ample historical evidences show that Nigerians have fairly inter-related harmoniously for centuries, before being brought together in a new modern nation state, but the caveat is not on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Expatiating on this, Usman (1994) stated that:

The primary source of our history showed that the fluid boundaries of the ethnic groups of Nigeria even before the 18th century were very rarely conterminous with the boundaries of the polities, intensive migration, extensive networks of division of labor and commerce did not allow for the emergence of ethnically monolithic polities (pp17)

Ethnicity, ethnic politics and religious bigotry became lethal weapons purposely to create evidence-based fruits of the divisive and discordant seeds sown by imperialist Britain which emphasized cultural and linguistic differences (Hamman, 2003:10), hence condensing and raining socio-political upheavals in Nigeria Cultural and linguistic differences were glaringly emphasized while communal sentiments got encouraged (Nnoli, 1978:113); mistrust and suspicion came to the fore leading to the poisoning of inter-ethnic relations within and between Nigeria's regions. It was therefore the colonialist that created Nigeria's ethnic consciousness through the use of local authority structure of divide and rule, and as the indigenous political class intensified their struggle to inherit power from the departing colonialists, ethno-religious cleavages got aggravated.

Nigeria's political history is replete with British and self –inflicted errors and anomalies which got willfully absorbed into its pathology overtime. In its nearly 58years of existence post its pseudo-independence, Nigerians have had to contend with a 30 months genocidal civil war, miss rule, suppression, and oppression for almost 30 years. The ambitious military in their ignoble incursion into governance on the platform of their spurious claims ended up heightening and fuelling ethnic polarization and democratic agitation in the country. Ethno-religious identity became the footstool of these Generals; hence a scholar was irked to lend credence to this noting that



The escalation of ethnic and regional symbolism can also be connected to the patronage of sectarian, ethnic and religious organizations and the extension of largess to their leaders by the regimes of general Babangida and Abacha, which went around in circles looking for legitimacy even at the expense of undermining national unity. They made ethno-religious basis relevant in the recruitment of their agents (Kazah –Toure, 1999: 144)

Amidst myriads of absurdities and national governance antithetical to internationally acceptable human standards, Nigeria has staggered into its fourth republic all the more dazed with unprecedented level of ethno-religious violence and mayhem. The *Boko Haram* continuous depredations mostly in Nigeria's North-east is turning out to be a child's play to the emerging trend of ethnic and culture-group killings and cleansing enveloping certain parts of Middle-belt and some parts of Northern States. It is sad to observe that this scenario is hatched and executed over an atmosphere of grave State silence and non-intervention. Nigeria is bleeding profusely, and sentiments are emotionally feeding fat from the daily butchery of fellow paternal relations and religious adherents in cold blood.

Seeking plausible psychosocial implications for this persistent loss of fraternal confidence, suspicion and ethno-religious vendetta/acrimony is the objective of this study. To actualize the forgoing, this paper is divided into five sections and a conclusion.

(I) CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Towards drawing a clearer picture of the subject under study, it is essential to primarily explain the two concepts of ethnicity and religion with regards to human and societal existence and functioning. Only when this is done, would a proper yardstick emerge *vis-à-vis* the emergent challenges that occur, emanate, and by implication, affect adversely the Nigeria State which harbors a litany of ethnic groups.

Ethno-religious challenges in the context of this study, by implication are simply the negative fallouts and manifestations exhibited willfully, covertly, or overtly against a group by any other group, meant to deter, discriminate, subjugate or eliminate perceived or real competition or opposition. Such challenges militate against the orderly function of standardized basic etiquette and societal norms, hinged on the fundamental rights or principles accruable to humans.

The propagation and practice of ethnicity and religious intolerance in a plural society like Nigeria; more so, a federation is not only a formidable destabilizing

force against national cohesion, but a complicated drag in fundamental state development.

Ethnicity draws a significant picture of belonging to and having sentimental loyalty to a group, and in drawing and exercising such attachment, identity and exclusiveness would easily provide distinctiveness and sacrosanct pride. Laying more credence to this, (Sanda, 1976) posits that an ethnic group consists of interacting members who define themselves as belonging to a named or labeled social group with whose interest they identify, and which manifests certain aspects of a unique culture, while constituting a part of a wider society (pp 32). An ethnic group could refer to a set of people who share one or more of the following characteristics; race, religion, paternal origin, language and cultural traditions. Omu (1922: 170), expatiates that ethnicity applies to the consciousness of belonging to, identifying with, and being loyal to a social group distinguished by shared cultural traditions, a common language, in-group sentiment and self identity. This concept of ethnicity changes status or acquire passionate and aggressive attributes when new elements enter into relationships. These elements include socio-economic and political competition, fear of domination and closer group interaction, fostered by the logic of urbanization and internal migration. The resultant development is that inter-group relations undergoes mutational characters and features such as ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination.

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to assume that one's culture or way of life is superior to another's. It is the tendency of human groups to judge external phenomena with reference to attitudes and values that are specific to the group, hence, *Akinwumi*, (2006) opine that ethnocentrism is an outlook in which one's own group is the centre of everything, and all others scaled and rated with reference to it. It usually takes the form of a wariness and distrust of outside groups and a belief in the unquestionable superiority of one's own people.

Prejudice on the other hand is a negative attitude towards an entire category of individuals who have some characteristics in common that is not shared by all people; as such it results in three components: affective, cognitive and behavioral.

The affective component concerns how much the person likes or dislikes the attitude – object, person, group, things, or situation; the cognitive component consists of the person's beliefs about the attitude-object while the behavioral component concerns the way a person feels that he or she should act towards the attitude object (Encyclopedia Americana, 545a)



Discrimination on its own is behavior that excludes members of a group from certain rights, opportunities or privileges resulting from prejudicial attitudes. It is assumed that in most instances, prejudice creates discrimination and people tend to associate better and easily with individuals who possess similar beliefs, attitudes and values. Dislike for members of another group is not merely on ethnic or group dissimilarities, but rather on perceived-belief dissimilarity.

The danger with ethnocentrism is that an assumption often becomes a conviction, that the values, culture of one's group are superior to those of others, while those of others are looked upon with disapproval, scorn and even contempt. (Summer,1955:10). In its positive side, ethno-centrism keeps a group together; while on the negative angle it is the root of inter-group prejudices and antagonism. A group exaggerates its good qualities while deriding others, hence stimulating disharmony and altercation between groups. Eyo identifies psychological fear as the cause of ethnicity when he said:

... at the root of ethnicity is fear, fear of the unknown, fear of losing the predictability of one's way of behaviour....., fear of having one's established values changed, thus cutting one adrift in a wider and more uncharted sea called Nigeria that seems to lack an articulate goal and value system, fear of competition for scarce resources and a lot of other fears that may be explicit or implicit. (Eyo, 1980:8)

Religion may be explained as a cultural system of designated behaviors, practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics or organizations that claims to relate humanity to supernatural, transcendental or spiritual elements (Wikipedia.org). Though there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion, one thing is clear, faith plus reason enmeshed in sacred histories and narratives, accompanied by prayer-patterns, rituals, sacrificial ways, commemoration and veneration of deities, all aim to give a meaning to life. This bond between man and higher beings elicits virtue, *vis-à-vis* the individual's broad social obligations to family, neighbors and then God. Religion, just like nationality, race or ethnicity, creates and nurtures a distinct identity built and sustained by doctrines. Emotions, expressions, anxieties and misfortunes, including the unknown bedeviling human existence are easily accommodated and packaged into an idealistic end. Such utopian imagery remains the pivotal force, strongly convincing and embellished with euphoric assurances of superfluous rewards, mostly in eternity. Common observations have shown that religion, mostly under extreme application beclouds rational thinking, hence could comfortably drive and determine individual or group actions. Most worlds' religions demand total compliance and obedience to

dogmatic principles. Of great importance are certain lofty mundane observances and promises which equip devotees with the singular conviction that theirs is the ultimate, hence every other religion is a farce.

Religious intolerance is a blind refusal to understand and respect views or positions that are opposed to one's cherished religious views (Alanamu, 2006: 607). Along the same pedestal, Ekwunife submits that, it is a blind and fixated mental and psychological negative attitude towards religious beliefs and practices that are contrary to one's cherished beliefs and practices. (Ekwunife, 1993:20). Such negative attitudes exhibit themselves in situations whereby leaders or groups in any society blindly refuse to understand and respect contrary religious views and practices, except the ones they consider to be true. Intolerance could degenerate further and deeper into series of violence and utter destruction of lives and properties, when driven by extremism or fundamentalism. At this juncture, action becomes deliberate, accompanied by suicidal recourse most especially when particular individual or group selfishly and dangerously manipulate this 'opium' with their wand, after all, available raw materials (the ignorant, and uneducated poverty stricken gullible masses) are in abundance (Ezeonwuka, 2014: 46). In the context of this study with the reference to place and time, militant Islam with its contemporary global resurgence and sectarian depredations presents a perfect picture.

(II) THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since challenges could come in the form of discrimination, inhibition and antagonism, it pre-supposes that it could degenerate to violence (physical and psychological). The relevance of Marx's Class Struggle theory, Frustration/Aggression theory, Interdependence/Mutual Aid Theory, including Hobbesian natural anarchy assertions to this study is not in doubt, but it should be noted that consensus and conflict may be polar opposites, but neither alone can offer full explanations for the changing nature, pattern and scope of inter-group relations in 21st century Nigeria. Violence could be structurally rationalized on the basis of greed, grievances and the correction of prevailing social injustice and inequalities. Painting any picture simply based on the behavioral patterns of human societies with other groups not only appears stratificational in structure, but could end with limited perspective sequel to its myopic gaze on human relations based on role and statuses.

This study is anchored on Conflict Trap theory. It is considered a functional apparatus *criticus* precisely because of its conceptional elasticity and heuristic coherence in the examination of a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon as ethno religious challenges, moreso in a tactile and tangled 21st century Nigeria



Exponents of the Conflict Trap theory include Havard Hegre, U.L. Elliot, Paul Collier Ankle Hoeffler, Reynal-Queroland Nicholas Sambanis. They opine that once a conflict has erupted, it tends to develop a momentum of its own. Peace seemingly becomes elusive, and hard to restore. Even when peace is restored, it often does not endure (Collier *et al.* 2003).

Conflict Trap exponents ascribe the lengthy pattern of typical conflicts to a number of interlocking factors, most especially they believe that conflicts in multi-ethnic societies endure as a valuable tool for massaging, rallying, mobilizing and galvanizing ethnic sentiments for both the warring groups and the government. Moving on, they still contend that where the population has significant grievances, conflict serves as an effective political strategy towards the pursuit of their goal, objectives and interests, though the seeming difficulty for those in authority and power to concede to the demands of the group many not always be assured, since such may encourage the flowering, proliferation, mushrooming and radicalization of other groups, which often have opposing objectives. Again a lengthy conflict is determined by the response of state institutions, availability of fund for sustaining the conflict and accessibility of arms to the warring parties. When weak state institutions-security and legal department prove incapable of deterring and apprehending violators of the laws, belligerents tend to be emboldened and imperious, thereby widening and taking the conflict to the next level.

A poignant referral to the lengthy pattern of conflict lies in the fact that such a conflict has occurred, a template is raised and established, hence making it difficult to return to *status quo*. In buttressing this view, Collier *et al* observed thus:

Violence entrepreneurs, whether primarily political or primarily commercial may gain from conflict to such an extent that they cannot credibly be compensated sufficiently to accept peace. Those who see themselves as political leaders benefit from war because they can sustain their organization in hierarchical military style with power concentrated in their own hands (Collier *et al*, 2003:12)

When violence leaders already perceive their selfish economic loss and redundancy when peace is arranged and achieved consciously or otherwise, their tantrums and cooperation may actually negate real peace

The strategic importance of, and the ontological demands of inter-group relations to Nigeria's existence and development *vis a vis* the current ethno-

religious challenges and its psycho-social implication to contemporary nationhood can only be fully appreciated and evaluated with due recourse to underscoring and offering deep insight to the interlocking factors that sustain conflict.

Conflict Trap theory presupposes that once conflict has occurred, it lengthens, and becomes challenging to restore peace on account of ethno-religious pluralism, proliferations of arms, existence of income disparities, weak state institution and activities of criminal entrepreneurs. This tool through its viable perspectives would help this study to appreciate the contemporary ethno-religious, challenges in Nigeria as either perfunctory, deficient, restrictive, illuminating or contemporary. In so doing, the psychological fallouts would apparently become bare.

(III)LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethno-religious altercations still remain a portent source of violence and conflict in Africa and Asia. It is simply a running sore in Nigeria, hence many scholars have spent precious time trying to diagnose, contain and tackle it at least through suggested solutions.

One may not easily overlook a trail blazing submission made by Nnoli, through which he asserted that ethnic groups are social foundations distinguished by the communal character of its boundaries, language, culture or both. He went on to assert that when the members become characterized by a common consciousness of their identity *vis-à-vis* other groups, with in-group or out-group differences become pronounced and marked overtime. Consequently, such exclusivist, identity,-based discrimination undoubtedly results in conflicts over scarce economic resources and socio-political goods. (Nnoli, 1978:5).

Along this pedestral, Suberu rather appears to have gone further when he opined that ethnicity hardly exist in pure forms, rather manifest as a consequence of ethnic group identity mobilization and politicization, especially in a competitive ethnically-plural environmental context (Suberu, 2006). However, a little bit of divergent view and caution came from Wolf (2006), when he observed that ethnicity on its own does not cause conflict such as several factors are always at play in each conflict situation, arguing that identity is a fact of human existence, and that it is what people make of it, or what and when they wish to display it that brings the differences between ethnic cohesion, harmony, or conflict.



Towards contributing to the issues, the understanding concerning group mobilization and social identity, Lippmann- a journalist rather preferred and choose the word “stereotype”, as not only a picture in the head which particularizes one to a group, but tends to ascribe a behavioral pattern considered common to that group to this individual (cited in Smith, 1998: 660). Sustaining and promoting this idea, a stereotype could then refer to a set of characteristics, attributed to all members of some group, it involves belief that all members possess the qualities (Preiswerk *et al*, 1978: 173). Pointing at its several shortcomings as inaccurate yardstick (positive or negative) towards predicting people’s behavior Sharon and his cohort tersely cautioned that it’s relatively harmful, because it takes away the freedom and the ability of each member of a group to be evaluated as an individual. From the political point of view, stereotyping adumbrates uniqueness and reality, hence could easily provide a means, or parlance by which groups in power easily rationalize war, religious intolerance and economic oppression (Sharon *et al* 1997: 122). The way and manner information experts, stakeholders and activists of the contending groups refer to themselves at any given time (the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ sentiment) is crucial in conflict dynamics. The more confrontational the references or definitions (‘we’ compared to ‘them’) the more likely inter-group relations take a turn for the worse. Though historians believe that stereotypes spring out from past events, psychologist suggest stereotypes are products’ of routine categorizations, hence allowing an out-group homogeneity effect (having a thought in common), than members of the in-group (Linville *et al*, 1996:123, Ostrum, 1980:536). Moreover, stereotype can twist or change one’s perception of an individual through ‘contrast effect’-a tendency to perceive stimuli that differ from expectations, as being even more different than they really are (Brehm *et al* 1996:124). In drawing conclusions, Inweregbu (2006), does not mince words when he asserted that stereotypes impede the establishment of good personal relationship across ethnic groups, in the form of attitudes, values and ideas which are transmitted to individuals through socialization.

Another factor which could either closely bind or easily and strongly disunite people in any society is ‘**religion**’. This being an elusive and imprecise concept, not only lacks objectivity but is largely driven by emotion (Egwu, 2011, Agarwal *et al*, 1994). Adeniyi (1993), attempted a contribution to this concept when he defined religion as a body of truths, laws and rights by which a man is subordinated to a transcendent being.

Drawing similar conclusions, Peter (1999), conceptualized religion as a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive long-lasting mood and motivations in men, by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. On a broader perspective, Alanamu (2004), prefers seeing religion as involving both the material and the spiritual context; exhibits institutions and officials on the one hand, while undertaking the spiritual engagement on the other, thereby claiming to be characterized by supernatural and sacred transcendentalities simultaneously.

(IV) REFLECTIONS

The greater challenge to the world community in this century is how to promote harmonious relations between peoples of disparate histories, languages and religions, who find themselves intertwined in a single state. (Augustine, 2003)

This study couldn't have come at a better period than now – a time of great distress and deep eclipse of hope and fraternal confidence in the body politic of Nigeria: the Presidency is subtly melancholic; the judiciary not just compromised, but steadily oozing out contradictory pronouncements and bench warrants that threaten the national redline; unimaginable level of youth unemployment and poverty in the land; the national economy and political terrain in a quagmire; the educational sector, a high-sounding nothing; the Nigerian citizens over-policed but under-secured. Several works have been done on the subject of ethno-religions challenges in Nigeria, and some have expectedly generated development debates. Though the present scope revolves within the 21st century, a deleterious historical damage would be created if this paper fails to situate the contemporary ethno-religious challenges in Nigeria as a bonafide product traceable back to the 20th century. Post-independence, the horrendous experience of negative politicking as portrayed by the actors of the first, second, third and fourth republics, shows that no political party can be exonerated from the awful political ineptitude inherent in the practice of politics in Nigeria. Regardless of the many catalytic reasons feeding the orgy of ethno-religions conflagrations, selfish elites and ethno-religious entrepreneurs easily stoke the sentimental embers of ethnicity, religions schism, selective illusions and inferences largely lacking in balanced historical acuity to mobilize support and unleash mayhem on their perceived opponents. The twin problems of rigid identities and excessive religiosity remains a cancerous running sore in the survival gait of the Nigerian project. A large proportion of able-bodied Nigerian youths are idle, unemployed, frustrated and aggrieved with the social system, and so remain willing and ready to be recruited and mobilized to engage in



.....and ethno-religious conflicts, because such offer them opportunity to break into public and private property and cart away whatever they can find (Imogighe, 2003).

Much of these problems trace back to the post-colonial Nigerian State which is neocolonial, hence not focused towards solving the domestic problems (socio-economic), and by implication not poignantly and eloquently poised to reconcile conflicting claims between and betwixt the peoples of Nigeria, having been silenced and hounded with a political unity by colonialist Britain. Indeed, at the twilight of the 20th Century, the preponderance of intra and inter-ethnic squabbles and inter-religious conflicts seriously diminished the sanctity of the state in Nigeria. Succumbing to the weight of these centripetal and centri-fugal forces, sequel to lack of autonomy, as its legitimacy withered, the state promoted and intensified primordial dispositions in the contestations amongst co-habiting groups for scarce resources and commanding positions, wild spread disenchantment, and feeling of alienation and cynicism for the government in its policies grew. When primordial loyalties became the defining variables for belonging, social chaos and anarchy cascaded the country to the 1967-70 civil war, the ethno religious mayhems of the 1980s and 1990s. The state has responded to its loss of legitimacy by fragmenting the country into more states and local government areas to appease rival groups (Falola, 1988: 50).

Nigeria is one of the most crowded African country with a population of about 182 million by 2015 (World Population Prospects, 2015:21). The Demographic and Health Survey certify 53% as Christians, 45% Muslims and 2% as other religions. Similarly, Afrobaro Pew forum declared 46% Christians, 52% Muslims and 1% for others in 2009 (Pew Research Center, 2010). Whatever the exact percentage are, it is clear that Nigeria is a country with very large Christian and Muslim population. This situation makes Nigeria a potential fault line between Christians and Muslims. In this sense, Nigeria can be defined as a 'Cleft Country' and then a 'test case' of Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis (Paden, 2007; Olojo, 2014:7).

It is note worthy that, within the wide Christian and Muslim categories, there lie many sub-cleavages potentially active politically as occasion demands. Among the Christians, potentially under –Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Pentecostal fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and the Catholic Bishops Conference, salient intra-group disconnect remain. Amongst the Christian group are – Anglican 10%, Baptist 8%, Methodist 5%, Lutheran 5%, (Protestant) the Catholics 15%, the Pentecostal Churches 30%, and the Evangelical Church of West Africa 2%, Jehovah Witnesses 5%, Aladura, Cherubim and Seraphim,

Celestial Church of Christ 20%. (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005:11). However these figures may appear controversial to some peoples not the, but it is not the crux of this study. Among other issues, it should be noted that Protestant –Catholic cleavages have continued to play an important role in elections among the Igbo communities living in the South east of Nigeria (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005:11). This is not only stereotype in action, but a serious psychosocial challenge.

Potent Muslim sub-cleavages in Nigeria include Ahmadiyya 12%, Sanusiyya 5%, Tijaniyya 3% and Quadiyya 8%. While the fundamental global historical polarity remains between the Iranian –backed Shiites, and the Saudi Arabian backed Sunni groups. A I rising wave of new sentiments based on *waahabi* and *salaafi* ideologies *vis-à-vis* sectarianism, Islamic theocracy and extremism, have evoked dangerous *and* suicidal orthodoxy in the largely Muslim North, at least promising to provide and console in eternity what the state has utterly denied them physically, hence the emergence of *Boko-Haram*, and allegiance of other groups to other international terror groups like the *Taliban*, *Al Qaeda*, *Al Shabab*, among others.

Beside the dominant Hausa Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups, more than 250 smaller ethnic or culture groups exist in Nigeria. These populations operate under the religious identity of Christianity, Islam and traditional religions. Underlying the North South cleavage in Nigeria is the problem of the inter and intra ethnic and religious divide and suspicion. This is obviously the problem of identity, and the manifest dimension since the beginning of the 21st century appears to challenge certain designated textbook analysis, hence Rothberg's Nigerian stable identities and identity formation treatise (Rothberg 2002: 88) may have to be re-examined. Nowadays, in such conflicts occurring along the convergence of ethno-religious lines, it's rather often very difficult to tell the differences between religious and ethnic crises, because the dividing line between them is slimmer than thin. (Osaghae and Suberu 2005: 19; Eukora 2005: 633). Ethnicity and religiosity have emerged as the most basic and politically salient identities in Nigeria. Though both cleavages may sometime run parallel, religion remain deified and as an amplifier for mobilization, may be relevantly handy.



SOME CASES OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

April 14 th , 2000	Nassarawa-Agyaragu Crisis	Over 150 persons killed, properties worth millions destroyed
May 2000	Kaduna Sharia roits (Muslims and Chrsitains)	Over 1,500 persons killed, properties worth millions lost
October 2000	Lagos -Kano (Idi Araba/Oko-Oba)	Over 1000 persons killed, many properties destroyed
June 28 th , 2001	Azara Crisis	Over 80 persons killed
June 2001	Zaki-Biam	Many people killed
September, 2001	Plateau (Tiv -Jukun)	1,180 people killed
October, 29 th 2001	Plateau (Tiv -Jukun)	79 people killed, many properties destroyed
June 1 st , 2002	Yelwan-Shandan	84 people killed
May 2002	Kaduna (Christians/Muslims)	Over 200 killed
Nov. 2002	Kaduna (Christians/Muslims)	Over 600 killed
June 2004	Numan Crisis	17 persons killed, worship centres destroyed
May 2004	Yelwan-Shandan	48 people murdered via church
May 12, 2004	Kano mayhem	Uncountable people killed, many Churches burnt
May 2005	Sokoto (Shia-Sunni Muslims)	Many people killed

Source: Author's records from newspaper low-case reports

- ❖ Those committed by *Boko Haram* and Fulani Herdsmen terrorists which still remain a novel case, and still on-going are not included in this chart.

In Nigeria, blatant un-patriotic behaviour and manifestations unfortunately stream from the leadership, the political class, the civil service to the many segments of the society. When preference and allegiance does not comply with national aspiration, character and equity, but rather blindly tow the ethno religious arteries, the resultant implication is that national citizens' patriotic indebtedness remains a figment of mere imagination. Allegiance cannot be preached and impacted, but can only grow naturally from inward sentiments and conviction.

Recurrent features of traditional, regional and state illegitimacy have continued to breed hardship, poverty and social disharmony in the country, hence manifest as rancorous war of words and high intensity contestations. The on-going *Boko Haram* atrocities and mayhem, including the novel Fulani herdsmen asymmetric onslaught has turned and relegated the 1966 Igbo pogrom and the subsequent three years genocidal civil war (ethno-religious crisis) as a fore play.

(V) Psychosocial Challenges

Having considered and weighed the myriads of challenges emergent from Nigeria's Ethno-religious crisis, this study situates that the problem is not merely the unfolding of Anderson's inevitable character of heterogeneous nation-states, but the problem of deliberate infusion of manipulative Caliphate colonialism, stringently and strategically employed to sustain British imperialist intentions, far from the developmental demands of 21st century Nigeria.

The many continued horrifying ethno-religious carnages appear to have negatively affected the psyche of majority of the citizens; hence they are largely politically disenchanting, apathetic and cumulatively unpatriotic to state affairs. Driven by the atmosphere of rancor, ethno-religious discrimination, impunity, corruption and injustice, violence remains a recurrent resort since intolerance presents as a preferable option. This is simply a drag on proper democratic ethos and practices, most especially when law and order remain elusive. The citizen may not only see democracy as irrelevant (Wada, 2001: 62) because of the system operators inability to safeguard their lives and properties, but equally when it becomes obvious that the leadership is out-rightly manipulating primordial loyalties -ethnicity, region, religion and personalities in order to keep the opposition divided and divert attention from its own failing (Ihonvere, 1994: 48).

Ethno-religious discrimination is basically a social problem, and it is alarming and disheartening to observe that a high degree of discrimination is exercised against one another in Nigeria today. This disposition is evident in all spheres of life-politics, sports, education, economic, including other social endeavors. Dominant feelings and roles engage the dominant three ethnic groups [Igbo, Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba] on the national stage, moving with this experience amongst the smaller groups in the states and regions, currently deepening in aggression, identity-recluse and discrimination. Discriminatory influences have seriously pervaded the psyche and behavior of Nigerians that organizations, institutions, the civil service, including appointment into positions in governance have all lost the natural technique of honoring meritocracy. As fair competition is relegated to the background, incompetency is harvested abundantly through low



national productivity, inefficiency, poor performance in academic field, international sports and governance; hence the call for national integration remains a mirage. It is heart-rending to observe the extreme level of ethno-religious discriminatory practices openly practiced in the admission of students into higher institutions, Army/Police, Prisons, Immigration and the Federal Road Safety recruitment sessions. When mediocrity receives accolades, natural motivation for proper useful engagement and mindset dulls. Besides, such incidents and developments create and leave in its trail bizarre experiences in the minds of Nigerian youths, with a tendency for uncontrolled anger and reprisals. The perturbing question would be, how far would these emergent Nigerian populace go with these negative experiences and stereotypes in the cause of nation-building?

On a daily basis, it is disheartening indeed to observe the way and manner the violence quotient of Nigerians, especially those in the far North is rapidly growing. Apart from the wanton destruction of lives and properties and incalculable harm to the socio-economic and political life of the country, disregard for the value for life is fashionably fanning the embers of ethno-religious intolerance. Issues and problems which would have easily been handled and orderly resolved through legal adjudication and redress are rather impulsively and hastily handled through biased mob-mentality and ethno-religious sentiments. Today, in Nigeria, fear, anxiety, suspicion and curiosity is widespread, most especially from the Middle belt up the core Northern enclave. The global information highway though quite informing, is not helping matters. Target news, target audience leaves no time for verification.

Subsequently, this has affected adversely labor and employment migration; hence while some core Northern states remain in dire need of qualified and enabling non-Northerners in the Civil Service, the Southern states ever remain congested and over-supplied. On the other hand, migrant workers from the core Muslim North who traverse the South, including the ravaging Fulani herdsmen, stealthily move in columns, calculating and digesting every move.

Consider the existing scenario prevalent in the country at this stage, when the Nigerian army remain actively involved in the assistance and provision of domestic security in every state of the federation, rather than remain resolutely committed to defending the nation against external threat. This is so because the Police and other sister security agencies either appear to be overwhelmed or are deeply compromised, resulting in gross incompetence or deliberate inaction, hence aiding violence and terror. Moreover, the army in most places and at various occasions has been accused of highhandedness and ultimate disregard

for laid down rules of engagement, human rights violations and the erroneous application of force multipliers. Nigeria has apparently inherited the social problems of internally displaced persons, accompanied by its attendant psychosocial maladies and gender-related challenges. The complexities generally manifesting and massaging ethno-religious atrocities and challenges in 21st century Nigeria appear not only overwhelming, but beyond textbook analysis.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Nigeria is a country where principles and ideals collide, ideas and dreams strike against commonsense, fairness, practicality and expediency. In undated daily with the orgy of violence, large- scale killing of citizens, kidnapping, bombing, amidst massive destruction of properties coupled with its attendant displacement of people, like a 'drunk giant', Nigeria is staggering on. Though this condition dates back to the 1960^s, this cankerworm elicits immediate attention sequel to the increase persistence, rapacious dimension, national spread, and classical execution playing out recently. Deeply inept and parochial as the leadership continues to be, bad policies continue to create and replicate an endless spiral of unimaginable uproar of poverty and aberrations in Nigeria. Ethno-religious stereotyped sentiments easily provide a perfidious indoctrinable recourse for this gap. Sparks and upheaval from global resurgent Islam appear to not only threaten internal balance, national unity and development in Nigeria, but tends to increase the fragility of the national fabric. Once hard work is neglected, mediocrity and corruption receive accolades; the majority vulnerable poor are inevitably intimidated, blackmailed, deceived and manipulated by the imperious comprador few that benefit from this orgy of violence. Surprisingly, all identified domestic ethno-religious trigger factors are not Nigeria-new, but the pervasiveness and complexities of each new incident, somehow portend how close the country is to the precipice. So long as 'Nigerian federalism' remains a mere theory, the agitative mind must continue to beckon and invoke the cherished goals of re-structuring, self determination and actualization, hence re-enacting the misfortunes of a nation whose indigenes live in critical emergency. In view of the *raison d'eter* of this paper, efforts were made to examine and proffer solutions to the litany of psychosocial fall-outs of ethno-religious challenges facing contemporary. Nigeria.

This paper explored and highlighted the dimensional condiments of the psychosocial implications of the persistent ethno religious challenges ravaging contemporary Nigeria. While peaceful co-existence and interaction has remained highly elusive, the disparate groups and entities appear to be retreating back to pre-colonial primordial status, while utterly disregarding enabling constituted laws that promoted nation-building, social justice and equity. The current ethno religious discriminatory tendency in government appointments as exhibited by



the Presidency in a multi-cultural and religion-diverse entity reflects negative signals.

Quite aware and concluded that ethno-religious challenges is conscienceless and incendiary to Nigeria as an entity, this paper posits that the nation cannot continue like this, since no sovereignty can survive this sustained level of barbarous, unchecked sanguinary fury. To attempt a check on this endless cycle of reprisal and retaliation in order to place the federation on a sound footing, total re-structuring must accommodate sound devolution of powers from the centre to the federating units, hence anchoring citizenship rights on residency as obtained in other plural societies.

Moreover, since intergroup relations remain ontological to Nigeria's existence and development, inter-cultural and religious dialogue must be stimulated through emphasis on the histories of federating units. By so doing, ethno religious understanding, awareness, accommodation, tolerance and co-existence would be achieved. As a logical sequence to this, the dialectics of existence ordinarily dictates that each human group must consciously and or unconsciously relate with other groups to be able to survive, after all, contact, interaction and interdependence remains a basic constant for life.(mutual aid).

Due to the complexities inherent in intergroup relations as a social phenomenon with broad continuum, Behavior scientists must be able to soar above the mutational nature of the polar opposites of consensus and conflict, to conceptualize intergroup relations as states of friendship or hospitality, co-operation and competition, dominance or subordination, alliance or enmity, peace or war between two or more groups and their respective members. (Sherif and Sherif, 1969:88). Zoning of political offices though not a democratic ideal, may help most especially if constitutionally entrenched and sustained.

Since no group of human community not withstanding its level of development can be an island entirely to itself, this paper tersely contends that there's always a light at the end of the tunnel, though the burning of tunnels between the diverse ethnic religious groups is only making such tunnels to be long. Historical narrative alone could constitute a source of ethnocentrism demonstrated in stereotyping cultures, whereas Psychologists remain more concerned on how they grow and operate in 'individuals' mind. A national orientation is advocated, purposefully deployed towards smoothening those edges that sharply distinguish and divide, in so doing promoting those that accommodate and unify.

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