

## CHALLENGES OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: A THREAT TO THE CONTINUOUS EXISTENCE OF NIGERIA AS A SINGLE ENTITY

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### Abstract

*This study examined the Challenges of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: A Threat to the Continuous Existence of Nigeria as a Single Entity. The objectives of this research were tailored towards theoretically and empirically analyze the causes and consequences of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria and make recommendations to government. The data generated qualitatively from the in-depth desk review of the secondary sources were analyzed using the content analysis method. The adopted theoretical framework for this study is the theory of instrumentalism which was propounded by Heyness, Galtung and Huntington (1993). Instrumentalists believe that there is a strong relationship between religion and violent conflicts in Nigeria. Also that ethnicity can be used as a tool and instrument to project violent conflict in a society. The findings of the study revealed that to get employment or any other benefits from government, unless the candidates' tribesmen are in government. In addition ethnic and religious conflicts have led to the loss of lives and properties in Nigeria. Therefore, law enforcement agencies should be given marching order to deal decisively with the perpetrators of ethnic and religious conflicts. Government and private organizations should enthrone the culture of Merit otherwise development will not be achieved, because mediocre as employees of government.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, Ethnic Conflicts, Religious Conflict, Nigeria, Single Entity, Continuous Existence, Solutions.

### Introduction

Conflict as a generic term is a universal phenomenon and it is as old as man himself. This is because anywhere two or more agreed to live together, there is bound to be conflict once in a while, as a result of divergent views over issues. Conflict can therefore be found in national or international relations, students' authority relations, within an extended family circle, commercial and industrial relation, among spouses within a union etc.

From the foregoing, conflict has become inevitable among a group of people. However, conflict resolution is therefore the main issue of concern.

This study therefore is on the challenges of ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: A Threat to the continuous existence of Nigeria as a single entity. The reason why the researcher has taken time to study the two concepts or variables (ethnic conflicts and religious conflicts) together stemmed from the

fact that most of the times, the two conflicts go together. Accordingly, Metu (1994:69) argues that most inter-religious disturbances usually developed into ethnic conflicts even where they began as purely religious disagreement. In the same vein, Egwu, (2001: 1-2) argues that ethnicity, politics and religion have a link in Nigeria when he says,

The prevailing trends threaten both the state and civil society, driving home in a telling manner the danger of negative social and political mobilization of ethnicity and religion. Although the link between ethnicity and politics had long been recognized, the growth, in recent times, of political Islam, draw our attention to wide spread contemporary religio-political development, the emergence of revivalist, neo-traditionalist or fundamentalist versions of monotheistic religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism. As with; the ethnic question, it increases the prospect for religious violence.

To properly understand the concept of ethnic conflicts, the understanding of the concept of ethnicity is very crucial. What then is ethnicity? Nnoli, (1980:5), defines the concept thus, "it is a social economic phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups".

Irukwu, (1983: 285), also defines the concept as

a total commitment to and loyalty and love for ones own ethnic group and a distrust and dislike of other ethnic groups to the detriment of the political nation which in the context of Nigeria is a political union of more than 200 ethnic groups.

The picture painted by the concept of ethnicity in Nigeria is so bad that for any group of people to attract Government attention in terms of the provision of social amenities, etc, the group or tribe must have someone in Government. According to Nnoli, (1980: 17),

Superficially, Nigerian politics have presented an image of struggle among the various ethnic groups for a division of national resources. Most Nigerians have come to believe that unless their own men are in Government, they are unable to secure those socio-economic amenities that are disbursed by Government. Hence, Government decisions about the siting of industries, the building of roads, award of scholarships and appointments to positions in the public services are closely examined in terms of their benefits to the various ethnic groups.

In some other countries, provision of socio-economic amenities is the right of the citizenry, and is not undermined. No wonder even the remotest villages in such countries are as developed as the cities which discourages rural - urban migration. As quoted above, if a particular ethnic group is dominating the political affairs in Nigeria, they can be sure to get anything they want for their people at the expense of other disadvantaged ethnic groups.

Nigeria has had both ethnic and religious conflicts to an unfortunate magnitude of loss of lives and properties.

Right from the pre-colonial period in Nigeria, ethnic conflict began to manifest. The pre-colonial period was characterized by wars. What is called Nigeria today is the amalgamation of different ethnic groups by the colonial masters when Lord Lugard became the first Governor General for Nigeria after the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated in 1914 (Anyaele 2003). There were empires, caliphates, clans, communities, kingdoms, emirates fighting one another for domination. For example, the Fulani emirate of Sokoto had to fight the Hausas because of the domination of Fulanis by the Hausas. This was led by Usman Dan Fodio in the war called "Jihad" or Holy War". The Oyo Kingdom had a lot of intra-ethnic conflicts. The Jukuns of Taraba State and Edos of Edo State fought the Igalas but historically, the Igalas defeated them. The Hausa/Fulani fought the Tivs of Benue State also, but the Tivs were not defeated, hence, no emir or emirate (kingdom) in Tiv land today. The Tivs were very hostile to the Fulanis and also were relatively uncivilized with regard to Islam (Crowder, 1962).

Ethnicity became pronounced during the colonial period. This was because the colonial masters found ethnicity earlier as an easy tool to effectively rule Nigeria. That is to say that colonialism promoted ethnic conflict in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the nationalists or petty bourgeoisie who inherited power from the colonial masters had internalized it for their selfish interest at the expense of national unity or integration. As the colonial ethnic ideology was internalized, it continued to manifest itself in many ways. Firstly, at the political level, secondly at the economic level and thirdly at the educational level in terms of their inequalities (Mustapha, 1986: 84–87) and Isah, et al (1988).

The beginning of this ethnic politics was the emergence of three dominant political parties which were regionalized. The Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was based in the North. The Action Group (AG) was based in the Western Region and the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon which later became Nation! Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was based in the East. The voting pattern was therefore determined by the region one hailed from and the ethnic group in control of that regional power. This threw the first Republic into a colossal failure as the election of 1959 was said to have been rigged. Therefore, hatred and infighting became very prominent in the polity (Vickers, et al (1973)).

The incidences of ethnic conflict in Nigeria are alarming in view of the waste of lives involved. The civil war in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970 which almost disintegrated the country from being a single entity was an ethnic war. According to Egwu, (2001:2). “With respect to ethnically motivated violence for example, Nigeria has had more than its own fair share in the last two decades living, aside the fratricidal war which threatened to vanquish the nation between 1967 and 1970”.

Among several others, those that were significant in terms of capturing national attention includes: Zango Kataf disturbance of February and May, 1992 between the Hausa and the Kataf, the protracted conflicts and violence which occurred between the Jukun and the Tiv in Wukari in Taraba State, the Ogoni and Andon conflicts in Rivers State, the Chambar and Kuteb crisis also in Taraba State. A humanitarian tragedy in the form of loss of lives and properties in these chains of violence encounters are prohibitive. While Okoye, (2000) suggests that the “Bantustanization” policy in Northern Nigeria resulting from “ethnic and religious cleansing of communities, groups, and individuals has led to the death of over 15,000 persons between 1990 to 1999”. Hudgens and Grillo (1995) have estimated that the Tiv – Jukun conflicts claimed about 5,000 lives.

Since independence in 1960, successive regimes attempted to overcome ethnicity. The civil war in Nigeria from 1967 -1970 was a result of ethnic chauvinism in the polity then. The Easterners who were the victim made a determined attempt to opt out of Nigeria in order to constitute itself into an independent entity in 1967. General Yakubu Gowon, the then Head of State of Nigeria refused and fought vehemently to bring the Easterners back for the sake of unity of Nigeria. Where is that unity in Nigeria today? General Aguyi Ironsi, some other leaders all made very bold attempts at eliminating the monster called ethnicity but alas, they could not because their efforts were being misconstrued.

As regards religious conflicts, Nigeria has really witnessed many instances. Ikenga –Metu (1994), has advanced three broad types of religious violence. They are intra religious disturbances which involved different denominations or sects. Inter-religious conflicts prevalent between adherent of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimension and inter-religious conflicts which though, have socio economic origin end up in the form of religious conflicts. Ikenga Metu, (1994:69) listed some of the prominent examples which include the spate of Maitatsine riots which ran between 1980 and 1984 in Dan waki Ward in Kano 1980, Bulunkutu near Maiduguri 1982, Rigassa in Kaduna and parts of Kano in 1982 and in Jimeta in 1984. Others are, the Funtua religious riots of 1983, the Christian/Muslim disturbance of 1986 in Ilorin, a face between Muslim youths and Christians at the University of Ibadan the same year, the Kafanchan riots of 1987 and the Bauchi riots of 1991. It is estimated that the Maitatsine riots of Kano claimed 4,177 lives, while that of Jimeta in 1984 respectively and Rigasa in Kaduna in 1992 led to 763 and 175 casualties respectively (Ikenga-Metu, 1994:69).

The regionalization of politics made national integration in order to pursue the same objective in Nigeria elusive. Therefore, politics was seen as an ethnic struggle to control the state power. Hence, government actions in siting industries, building of roads, award of scholarships and appointments to positions in the public services are closely examined in terms of their benefits to the various ethnic groups (Nnoli, 1980).

### **Problems of the Study**

Intricate ethnic, religious and regional division have plunged Nigeria deep division which caused major political issues. Religious conflicts are common phenomenon in Northern Nigeria, Africa and Middle East, particularly Arab World.

In Nigeria, the impact of ethnicity and religion is more devastating. For example, there was intra ethnic crisis as a result of election in 1964 and 1965 in the Western Region respectively which culminated in the Tafawa Balewa government declaring a state of emergency in the area. Also, in the same area, was the conflict between Ile Ife and Modakeke in the late 1990s. Another example was in 1967 when Nigeria was plunged into a thirty-month civil war.

It is against this background that it becomes necessary to state the other problems of ethnicity identified as follows;

Firstly, many Nigerians think and act not in the national interest but in their own ethnic and religious interests.

Secondly, ethno-cultural and religious orientation coupled with negative international factors make efforts aimed at making Nigeria a united country very difficult task.

Thirdly, ethnicity and religion constitutes an impediment to socio-economic and political development of any country. For example, in Nigeria people gain employment, promotion, favour and scholarships not on the basis of their qualification/merit or hard work but on the basis of the fact that they belong to a particular ethnic or religion group. This has paved the way for mediocrity and incompetent persons being employed.

Fourthly, there is the break down, break away, civil strife, civil war, minority nervousness, ethnic and religious clashes, all of which will typically be regarded unusual in normal states but are common forces or actual occurrences in divided states as Nigeria (Osghae and Suberu, 2005:4).

Fifthly, the efforts, in form of policies made by some of our leaders to solve ethnic problem did not work. Instead of arresting ethnicity they rather encouraged it. For example, General Ironsi's unpopular Decree 34 of 1966 which returned Nigeria to a Unitary System of Government, though intended to build a united Nigeria, the Decree was rejected by many Nigerian especially the Northerners who saw it as a chance for Southern domination. The fear of Southern domination was so much that hatred for the Southern ethnic groups was severe.

Sixthly, In Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Kwara, Plateau and Kaduna States just to mention a few, because of the heterogeneous nature of the tribes in the states, each tribe wants to have the governor of the state to come from its own ethnic group. Incidentally the tribe that has overwhelming population in most cases always has their way though the minorities have their say; therefore there is severe hatred for the majority tribe in such states.

The efforts by the successive Governors to address the issue in terms of appointments, etc. given to other ethnic groups in the state seem not to have solved the problem.

Ethnicity has become uncontrollable and therefore deserves serious attention by all well meaning Nigerians.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Ethnic and religious conflicts are cankerworm in political, economic and social life in Nigeria. Studies have shown that ethnic and religious conflicts have defied all solutions. However, there is the saying that whatever has problem has solution too. The only thing is the inability to know or discover the solution. Against this background, this paper is aimed at finding out the following in Nigeria in regards to the subject matter or concept under consideration.

### **General Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this paper is to theoretically and empirically examine the causes of the identified problems of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria as the general objective.

### **Specific Objectives of the Study**

The Specific objectives of the paper include the:

- i. To examine the extent to which the identified problems of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria have caused some distrusts or disaffection.
- ii. To enumerate and recommend appropriate measures to reduce and if possible to eradicate ethnic and religious conflicts from Nigeria.

### **Significance of the Study**

Ethnicity has become strongly identified in the polity to the extent that it is now a household song. There is virtually no organization, both private or public where you are sure of getting employment if the man from your village or tribe is not there.

It is in the realization of the set-back ethnic and religious conflicts have caused to Nigeria and the need to discover where we got it wrong that it becomes imperative to address their root causes, diagnose and advance possible ways of preventing it or managing it if they are still there in both public and private sectors. It is in view of this set back that the cankerworm has caused to Nigeria that the importance of this paper cannot be over-emphasized for several reasons.

- (i) The paper is important for students and youths because admission into higher institutions will no longer be based on ethnic consideration and religious affiliation but on qualification, when ethnic and religious conflicts must have been eliminated.
- (ii) Practitioners or professionals will also benefit having known the causes and consequences of ethnic and religious conflicts and its elimination, a possibility of developing a concept for future use.
- (iii) Government and general public would also benefit because if ethnicity and religious conflicts are eliminated from Nigeria, we will now trust one and another (whether in Government or not) irrespective of where a person hails from.

Furthermore, we will now speak with one voice and imbibe our common traditional values of fighting corrupt persons in our midst. Unity will automatically be achieved.

### **Ethnicity outside Africa**

Ethnicity is a worldwide problem, especially in a heterogeneous society. In other words, it is not restricted to Africa or Nigeria alone. Michael (1967) argues that "ethnicity persists most obvious in those societies that have been labeled complex, multiple, multi-ethnic, segmented, heterogeneous, urban, industrial, pre-industrial or plural".

In the former USSR, it was reported that ethnic clashes killed more than 100 people in the Central Asia Republic of Uzbekistan on 12/06/89. The crisis lasted for a week: It was between the Uzbeks and minority Meskhetians, a Turkish people deported to Central Asia by Joseph Stalin in 1944. Russian former President Gorbachev reacted to it by blaming Islamic fundamentalists, (Concord, June 14, 1984). Nnoli (1980: 5) defined ethnicity as "a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups". Nnoli pointed out that the ideology of ethnicity has taken roots both within

and outside Africa. This is true, as ethnic crisis in Ukraine between Ukraine and Russian tribes killed over 100 people in May 2014 and June 2014. Examples of ethnicity outside Africa according to Nnoli (1980: 5) are "racial violence in the United Kingdom and the United States of America and Jewish chauvinism in the Soviet Union, Wallon-Flemish rivalry in Belgium, French and Canadian separation in Canada, Croatian separatism in Yugoslavia, South Tyroleans' dissatisfaction with Italian rule and the resurgence of Scottish, Welsh and Irish chauvinism in the United Kingdom."

According to Enloe, (1980), in Scotland, the state uses ethnicity to mobilize and deploy military to study the politics of manpower. Furthermore, ethnicity is being viewed by Enloe (1980: 9) to be a means used by the government in power to divide the citizens and rule them effectively. She says

Ethnicity is indeed an artificial construct, a false consciousness nurtured by uneasy central power-wielders who would prefer to rule through tactics of divide and rule rather than to confront basic contradictions in their societies.

Enloe (1980: 9) further defines ethnicity as a "basis of collective identity derived from shared descent and rooted in sub-rational emotions".

### **Ethnicity in Africa (Nigeria)**

In Africa (Nigeria) according to Nnoli (1980), it is obvious that African politics can easily be interpreted along ethnic lines. He argued that the concept of ethnicity in African politics has a colonial origin and its functions were tied to the nature and purpose of colonialism. Therefore, Nnoli (1980) says,

The ordinance assisted indirect rule, discouraging the free and uncontrolled immigration of Southerners to the North, who might undermine the traditional authority of the Emirs and therefore destroying that alliance between the Fulani ruling class and the colonial administration which Lugard regarded as crucial for colonial exploitation. Southerners who crossed this barrier were forced to live in housing areas segregated from the indigenous population. In Zaria for example, colonial policy led to several settlements, (a) the walled city for indigenes, (b) Tudun Wada for Northerners who are not indigenes to the town, (c) Sabon Gari for native foreigners who are Southerners.

Furthermore, according to Nnoli, ethnicity began to have more influence in Africa when colonial masters began to regard certain African language groups as superior or inferior depending on their progress in the acquisition of colonial social-economic fortunes.

Ethnicity can be easily identified with class according to Chukwu (1989: 7) "the core of Nigerians knows nothing about ethnicity and tribalism. It is an elite affair in the political game of power and wealth by gluttons"

Nnoli, (1980), also disclosed the classes that exist in Nigeria. There are comprador bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, working class, peasants, etc. In Nigeria, Nnoli opines that ethnicity is an instrument of oppression by the bourgeois class. The bourgeois class therefore presents politics which is along class struggle as an inter-ethnic struggle. Depress (1985) also says that ethnic lines are so inter-twined with class lines that the two phenomena tend to merge empirically into each other.

It is noted that the problem that culminated into a civil war in Nigeria from 1967-1970 was an intra class struggle between the petty bourgeois class from the North and South which was given an ethnic interpretation by the same class. It should not be misconstrued to mean however, that all the members of the bourgeois class participated in the class struggle. To buttress this point, Ekekwe, (1986: 3) argues thus,

"Class action is historical. However, it is not only when all the class members participate that an action qualifies to be called a class action. Individuals and small groups who belong to particular classes can, and do act for their classes. But this does not mean that every individual action is a class action. And although an individual's action may be significant, it should hardly

be seen as the result of his or her unique genius or essence. It should rather be understood as one of the possible options which the prevailing social relations of the time allow.”

Post colonial Nigeria internalized ethnicity even after our so called independence in 1960. As the colonial ethnic ideology was internalized, it began to manifest itself in many ways.

Abdul (1986), Nnoli (1980), Danjumaet at (1988) have all posited that ethnicity manifests in Nigeria from three perspectives, namely, political, economic and educational perspectives in terms of their inequalities. From the political perspectives, the regionalization of politics in the first republic created a situation in which each region was controlled by a regionally based party. Thus by 1953, the major political parties in the country namely, the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon which later became National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG), became identified with the three major ethnic groups, namely Igbos, Hausas and Yorubas representing three regions of the country, East, North and West respectively (ROAPE (1986)).

The inequality revealed by the Northern Peoples Congress’ share of the seats in the Federal House of Representatives relative to its share of the votes was to cause acrimony within the political system. Also the undemocratic electoral methods of other parties meant that the NPC could always win most of the seats in the North and consequently form a government in Lagos.

Table shows the regionalization of political parties

PARTY	North		West		East		Nigeria		
	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Votes	Seats	%
NPC	134	77	-	-	-	-	1922179	134	43
NCNC	-	-	23	35	58	80	2594577	89	29
NEPU	8	5	-	-	-	-	509050	8	3
AG	25	14	34	53	14	19	1992364	73	23
Others	7	4	8	12	1	1	169627	16	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7187797</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>100</b>

(Ahmadu, 1983)

Since 1960, out of the 14 leaders, Tafawa Balewa, Ironsi, Gowon, Murtala, Obasanjo, Shagari, Buhari, Babangida, Shonekan, Abacha, Abdulsalami, Obasanjo, Yar’Adua and Jonathan, ten are from the North. By 2011 when Umaru Musa Yar’Adua was expected to hand over to another person, if not for his demise in 2010, the Northern leaders would have been in power for thirty nine years, i.e., from Tafawa Balewa – Umaru Musa Yar’Adua. On the other hand, the South has produced only four leaders, namely, General Aguyi Ironsi, General Olusegun Obasanjo (twice), Chief Earnest Shonekan and Goodluck Jonathan whose duration in office put together totaled only seventeen years. by the year 2015

At the economic level, the South has a clear lead. This is largely as a result of early contact with the western capitalist. The Lagos-Ibadan axis has about sixty (60) percent of all industrial output in the country. Other pockets of manufacturing areas are concentrated in the Hausa-Fulani areas of Kano-Kaduna in the North and the Igbo dominated Enugu-Aba-Port Harcourt zone, (Analyst (1988).

The civil war also promoted economic imbalance which is one of the causes of ethnic politics in Nigeria. Those who did not participate fully, for example, the West used that period to consolidate or boost their economic base. The Yoruba bourgeoisie were able to use that wealth to buy out shares available in industries and companies as a result of the promulgation of the Indigenization Decree of 1973. At the other end of the ladder were mostly the minorities from the middle belt, who formed the bulk of the fighting force on the Nigerian side. The participation of the minority to keep Nigeria one, did not bring them any political or economic benefits. If anything, they seemed to have been further marginalized in the scheme of things (Analyst 1988).

To buttress the point that social infrastructure and economic activity was concentrated in the South, particularly the Western part, Nnoli (1980), argues thus:

The western part of the country has retained a disproportionate share of the nation's industrial and economic concern. In 1971, for instance, Lagos State alone had 32% of all the country's industries. Similar figure for the then East Central State was- 17% and 14% for the then Western State. On the other hand, the six northern States put together had 21%. In the same year, the share of Lagos State in the country's industrial labour force was 47% while that of the six northern states put together was 28%.

The uneven development within the Nigerian economy is a product of capitalism in Nigeria in its unequal character.

At the educational level, the South also has a clear and comfortable lead. This was partly the fault of the British who did every thing possible to prevent the emergence of an educational system which might later pose a threat to British domination as had happened in the South. The exclusion of the Missionaries from the Moslem North made them restrict their works among the non-Moslem minorities, i.e., the Middle Belt. Because of these evangelical and educational activities of the missionaries, the minorities are comparatively more educated than the Hausa — Fulani people. They (minorities) have also used this fairly advantageous position to enlist into the army and police. Today a substantial percentage of the fighting forces and officers in the Armed Forces are minority Christians though this domination has not given them political authority, (Kuklinski, A., (1978)).

As a consequence of this, Northern Nigeria fell behind the South in terms of the development of Western education as shown by the table below.

Secondary School Output in Northern and Southern Nigeria (1906-966)

Year	Number of Schools		Pupils in Attendance	
	North	South	North	South
1906	0	1	0	20
1912	0	10	0	67
1926	0	18	0	518
1937	1	26	55	4,285
1947	3	43	261	9,657
1957	18	176	3,642	28,208
1965	77	13,305	15,276	180,907

(Adamu 1973: 51)

It is this educational gap between the former regions that has been exacerbating ethnicity. Today, this picture is not likely to have improved in favour of the North, especially since the introduction of School fees and all manner of levies across the country means that a poorer North stands at disadvantaged position than a more prosperous South.

Furthermore, the quality of education in the North was generally poor according to Adamu, (1973: 65),

Until 1931 the 'most important aspect of northern education was obedience and respect. In Katsina College, it was good character and not academic achievement that was considered in awarding certificates, there was no examination.

This disparity in the educational fortunes of the northern and southern parts of the country has not only continued to widen, but has also reflected at other levels of the educational system. For example, in the 1969-1970 academic year during the civil war, an examination of geographical distribution of students in Nigerian Universities showed that while the then Western States now six states alone had 48% of all students, the then six Northern States now twenty five states (including Federal Capital Territory) has only 19%, with Kwara State contributing almost half of the Northern total, NUC (1978).



This inequality in education is such that some Nigerian patriots of Northern origin have come to the conclusion that the educational gap is unbridgeable (Adamu (1973)).

Also there was the disparity in terms of the numbers of people in both public and private enterprises in the country. This disparity is not surprising but a reflection of the educational disparity. By 1955 there was hardly a single Northerner in the senior cadre of the Public Service. In order to prevent the better educated ethnic groups of the South from securing the senior posts and associated benefits in the Northern bureaucracy, the regional party and government adopted and began to implement the policy of Northernization. Thus, 1957 the policy was defined by the Regional Public Service Commission as a system wherein

If a Northerner is available, he is given priority in recruitment. If no Northerner is available, an expatriate may be recruited or a non-Northerner on contract terms (Dudley, 1968: 220).

Bashir (1988) views the magnitude or another dimension of ethnic conflict in Nigeria to the extent that it involves differences among the same ethnic groups. For instance, the Yorubas, an intra minority versus majority syndrome is still a problem. With variations in dialect, various Yoruba groups declined affinity with their fellow contending Yoruba groups. The Ijesha dialect is spoken by the inhabitants of Ilesha and most of the people in Atakumasa Local Government. The Ijebu — Jeshu also speak a dialect close to Ijesha because of proximity. But the Ife dialect is only spoken by the indigenes of its immediate environment, excluding Modakeke. The Igbomina dialect inhabits towns close to Kwara State including Ila-Orangun and Ora. These dialectical differences are so pronounced that battle for ethnic supremacy have consistently been waged by contending groups claiming ethnic superiority over the other. Intra tribal conflicts between Modakeke and Ile ife in Osun state claimed many lives and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed..

Panter-Brick, (1970), Enloe (1980), viewed ethnicity in Nigeria to have played a major role during the 1966 and 1975 coups and in political life generally. Before the 1966 coup, there was a rapid promotion of the Igbos at the expense of many other ethnic groups. The coup which followed later in 1966 was a reaction by non-Igbos, especially Northerners, against what they saw to be growing hegemony under the guise of national political centralization.

The Marxist account of the concept ethnicity, according to Egwu, (2001:16) has been undergoing reformulation, as he says;

There is the Marxist account of ethnicity which has been undergoing reformulation beyond the crude assumption of ethnicity as “false consciousness” or ideological diversion. This followed the awareness that something people are willing to die for cannot easily be dismissed and therefore legitimately deserves attention.

Ethnicity and corruption are seemingly uncontrollable in Africa especially in Nigeria and they have given the continent a very bad image. In the Nation (2008), a black American journalist expressed gratitude to God that his ancestors were sold into slavery and thus escaped the hell that contemporary African is. Imagine, instead of lamenting and sorrowing, it has become a celebration. I have no doubt that; most of our leaders who are corrupt and promoting ethnicity are shameless individuals and bereft of common sense and integrity. I am optimistic that with time, the monster called ethnicity religious conflicts and corruption will be a thing of the past with good leadership in Nigeria.. After all there is no difference between poverty in Sokoto and poverty in Calabar, or injustice in Ibadan and injustice in Kano, or illness in Kebbi and illness in Enugu There is also no difference between the common people [poor people] in Lagos, Owerri and Maiduguri, who are popularly referred to as the mekunus, ndigbenye and talakawas in Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa languages respectively.

University of Jos was closed down indefinitely on Tuesday 03/05/93 as a result of tribal conflict. The Plateau Youths went on demonstrations because they said that Ibos and Yorubas (Southerners)

prevented them from gaining admission into the school as reported by Rima Shawulu (1993: 3), a reporter that “the spate of demonstrations led to the indefinite closure of the University on Tuesday. When the bubble burst, the Ibos and Southerners in general became the victims of the anger of the Plateau Youths who had been led to believe that lecturers who are non-Plateau indigenes are responsible for their inability to get registered into the University.

In Offonry (1996)'s write up titled “Son of the Soil Syndrome, says that “within the last ten years the main consideration for strategic appointments and promotions, contract awards, provision of essential facilities and sitting of development projects appear to have been based on the area of origin. This has naturally led to each state or local community striving to be represented by their own sons and daughters at the various seats of power at the national, state and local levels”.

He further analyzed the unfortunate situation surrounding public enterprises that members of the Boards of Directors are appointed not on the individuals merit but as representatives of areas of origin and special interests. The resultant effect he said is that very often such boards are so enmeshed in squabbles over matters relating to sharing of the so called national cake that the time for planning and development activities is wasted. No wonder, such members are divided along ethnic and other narrow lines and their loyalty to their state and community than the nation or country as a whole will begin to manifest. To exhibit the desired qualities of objectivity, integrity and expertise, necessary for effective running of public enterprises is eroded.

Local communities are not helping matters. They appear to have capitalized on this unsatisfactory state of affairs. Appointments to the Boards or top management positions are seen as favour and are greeted in the media as giving the communities where the candidates emanate from, a sense of belonging. According to Offonry (1996: 27)

“press and radio announcements inserted at considerable cost by the traditional ruler, town union and individuals hail the Head of State or Military Administrator (Governor) concerned for giving the community the recognition it deserves and usually ending with the rhetoric, long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria, long live the state, long live the local community and long live the individual”.

Even where appointments are made on merit, the pressures from the local communities are so great that those so appointed are compelled to believe that they owe greater allegiance to their own local community than to the state or country in general. This is capable of affecting their sense of judgment when the interest of their local community conflict with those of other communities. Furthermore, the whole situation often gives rise to jealousy and unhealthy rivalry among otherwise friendly neighbouring communities

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study titled, challenges of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria: a threat to the continuous existence of Nigeria as a single entity is the theory of instrumentalism. This instrumentalist theory was propounded by Heyness, Galtung and Huntington in 1993. The importance of this theory cannot be overemphasized, hence other scholars such as Hasenclever and Riltberger (2000) have further developed it.

Scholars from Africa have also contributed to the growth of the theory. Such as Goftwen (2004), Obateru (2000), Bako (2001), Egwu (1999), Jega (2000), Usman (2000), Ma’azzan, (2001) etc.

Instrumentalists argue that ethnicity is used in aggravating conflicts. In Northern Nigeria, for example, ethnicity and religion are usually used as instruments to prosecute conflicts. Therefore, the in-depth study of these two instruments (ethnicity and religion) will help in proactively ameliorating the extents of their conflicts or possibility of eradication of such conflicts.

### **Summary**

The paper has attempted an enquiry in the relationship between ethnicity and religious affiliation, sitting of industries, voting behaviour and employment. The relationship between these variables and their possible effects on politics, unity and national integration was also studied.

The paper started from the fact that ethnic conflict immensely impedes the development of any nation. Ethnic conflict is discovered to be a worldwide problem and that in Nigeria or Africa ethnic conflict has a colonial origin. Also it was found out that ethnicity identified with class structure in Nigeria..

On employment and politics generally, this paper observes that, the wider divergence in the population of the various ethnic groups with unequal development is a factor that has allowed ethnic and religious conflicts to persist. The researcher is of the same opinion with Nnoli that the uneven development within the Nigerian economy which is one of the causes of ethnicity is a product of capitalism, with it's unequal character. Furthermore, the so-called ethnic conflicts is better interpreted as the intra-elite or intra-bourgeoisie conflicts of the three major ethnic groups rather than looking at it as the problem of the masses..

It is unfortunate that because of the thriving ethnic and religious sentiments, anything an officer does is being interpreted as tribalism. The extent to which ethnicity is so pronounced made the minority ethnic groups to be forgotten or left behind in everything in Nigeria. For example the areas belonging to the major ethnic groups are developed to the neglect of the minority. Therefore, politics in Nigeria has become a struggle between the three dominant tribes. They are the Hausas, Ibos and Yorubas.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers make the following recommendations to solve ethnic and religious problems in Nigeria:

1. Education should be free at all levels and should be made compulsory. This would make everyone to be aware of the right to resist any form of oppression. It would eliminate admission and scholarship awards on tribal or religious basis.
2. Government should make the public know its actions and the reasons for taking such actions. This would go a long way to solve the problem of false impression about the actions of the individual public officials.
3. Government should not give deaf ears to public opinion and the cries of the people. This would make the people have the sense of belonging to the nation than when they are neglected.
4. The masses should be given the orientation to know and elect leaders that know their yearnings and who are capable of solving their problems. The masses should not be persuaded to vote along ethnic and religious lines.
5. Competent people should be employed irrespective of their tribes, so that work could be done well for the development of the country.
6. Promotion should be given to those who merit it, so that it would give them incentives to do even better. Promotion on the basis of ethnicity and religious affiliation should be discouraged so that no individuals would be lazy mediocre.

### **Conclusion**

In Nigeria, politics superficially presents an image of struggle among the major ethnic groups. Therefore many people have come to believe that unless their own men are in government, they are unable to secure those social economic amenities.

The researchers conclude that the elimination of tribal and religious sentiments in Nigeria, would definitely lead to national development, unity and integration and a progressive society.

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