

CARITAS UNIVERSITY AMORJI-NIKE, EMENE, ENUGU STATE**Caritas Journal of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities**

CJMSSH, Volume 1, Issue 1 (2022)

Socio-Historical Antecedent of Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Development Issues in Nigeria**ORJI, O.E.****Authors' Affiliation:**

Department of Sociology, Faculty
of Management and Social Sciences,
Caritas University Amorji-Nike
Enugu.

blessedokoroee@gmail.com

Keywords:

Conflicts,

Development-issues,

Ethno-religion,

Socio-historical

Conflict Management

ABSTRACT

There has been a popular misconception about the genesis of ethno-religious conflicts and socio-political imbalance between the North and South, the trinity and the rest ethnic groups in Nigeria. Federalism is regarded as the slogan of existing member states whose composition in any case infringes the principle of internal self determination for ethnic groups, or as the legitimate demand of ethnic nationalities many of whom still consider themselves submerged. It is thus legitimate to insist that the character of the Nigerian federation, otherwise known as "the federal character of Nigeria" is historically determined. The ultimate origin of multi-ethnicity lies in our pre-colonial history though it came unmistakably to the surface only after 1946. It at the root of the imperious and insistent demand by each ethnic group, no matter how small numerically or how poor materially, or how backward educationally for a recognized, fair and dignified place in the Nigerian sun. Language has been treated as the easiest and most objective criterion for determining ethnic affiliation. The duality of North and South derives from psychological and irrational hang-over from our colonial past which have transformed an imaginary line on our country's map into a barrier that only few have been able to scale. It is at the root of the tension and mutual suspicion between the 'North' and the 'south. This paper attempts to locate this malaise on the unholy and forceful marriage of all hitherto independent kingdoms that today make up the federating units of Nigerian society.

Introduction

Nigeria is searching for a suitable mix of ideas which are supportive of nation building and at the same time addresses the ethnicity question without leaving out the ideas and techniques of the West. This formula, by implication points to the fact that Nigeria needs a workable paradigm for political order, which answers to the economic, social and cultural challenges and peculiarities of Nigerian society without suggesting exclusivism of the Western hypothesis as the crux of globalization which all nations have been caged in coercively. Having quaffed ethnicity more than nationality, the blend of Western hypothesis to produce the Western type democracy becomes a quagmire. What is rather produced is corruption justified in ethnic balance

Nigeria's solution will need to be defined and implimentationally advised by policies, which reflect the cultural realities of our social being in marriage with the principles of nation building and nationhood. Hence, the solution would need to be constructed on Nigerian cultural characteristics, the culture of mass society. Therefore, such social engineering would need to acknowledge both in theory and practice tolerance, social inclusivity and the coexistence of cultural diversity. Nigeria has hungered for answers to the challenge of pervasive and benumbing underdevelopment strengthened by national and international (internal and external) corruptions. Managers of Nigerian nation need to turn the cross -border nature of Nigerian ethnic and cultural groups to the advantage of Nigerian people.

A cursory examination of the history of post – colonial Nigeria reveals that, in the first decade of Nigerian independence, the representatives of the ethnic groups were ethnic conscious rather than nationally minded. This opened the young country up for ethnic rivalry that culminated into autocratic regimes or lost of power to military bureaucratic dictatorships geared towards ensuring ethnic supremacy. Thus, even in civilian democratic regimes, elections are ethnic bias. This, except from 1999 till date has produced coups de tat and counter coups de tat. All strengthened by ethno – religious sentiments. Attempt at rotational government under democratic dispensation to right the wrongs has produced miss-governance and undemocratic practices rather than scooping ethnic sentiment and shop for best candidate. These have also made all political parties past and present to be

barren and bankrupt of a workable manifesto, and the populace (the electorates) miss-led.

Towards a theoretical understanding of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria

It may be imperative and pertinent at this juncture to take a brief look at the theoretical basis of state response to ethno- religious conflicts in Nigeria. According to Keller (2015), this may be characterized in three main ways: vis-à-vis, the re-distributive, the re-organizational and the regulatory or repressive. In the re-distributive mechanism, state resources allocation including opportunities are altered to favour one group at the expense of other(s); in re-organizational, the existing state structure is reconfigured or restructured to accommodate genuine demand by hitherto marginalized or inadequately represented group(s); and in the regulatory frame work, the state make use of coercion or repression to stifle dissension.

The point then emanates that the wrong approach to ethno-religious issues in Nigeria breed feeling of alienation and conflict. Equally theoretically germane in this regard is the rentier economy notion popularized by Beblawi and Luciani (1987). The rentier notion refers to the sharing of produce or natural stock of wealth without contributing to it. In the Nigerian situation, it is often the contention of the minority agitators in the South that wealth produced by the south is used mainly to develop the North by virtue of the Northern hegemonic domination of power. This power has also been used to advance the dominant religion in the North against others. Again, Marxian view of religion as the opium of the masses is expedient in this discourse. The instrumentality of religion is used by the Northern hegemonic leaders to organize the North against the South with unrealistic promises. This organization such as Boko –haram is a mechanism to ensure a firm holds of power that determines all in all in Nigeria.

Deduce this to imply that our theoretical underpinning reveals that Northern dictators who ruled Nigeria for a long time made use of the regulatory framework in facing the ethnic and religious issues. The plethora ethnic mayhem by Islamic fundamentalists and the recent epitomic bombing of church and killings by Boko-haram, bandits and Fulani cattle herdsman without sincere solution from concerned authorities signified this crass use of coercion and repression to stifle genuine dissension. Little wonder almost the entire

North including formal INEC boss sacrificed fairness on the altar of ethnic religious interest in the 2015 presidential election. Hence, from the starting point of this present administration a marked ambivalence that ultimately favours the regulatory framework was overt. This thinking is supported by secret but open support of Fulani cattle herders, palliative rather than military approach to Boko-haram and banditry issues. Quick and full military response to harmless IPOB, an episode that left many youth of the Igbo ethnic group of the South –East dead. This sheer brute force is systematically and technically on a mission of ethnic cleansing just because the Igbo are no longer interested in the asymmetrical unity of Nigeria.

Religion and national unity

Conflicts between states and religions dates back to the early histories of nation building. In imperial Rome, the king and Pop locked horns over the control of both spiritual and secular lives of people. In early Britain, a similar situation often plunged the entire nation into turmoil and instability. In contemporary societies, there have been sporadic national crises that have their origin in religious loyalties. The problem has been that religious groups have values and patterns of life that are exclusive of non members and therefore capable of posing a formidable obstacle to the idea of national solidarity since in many cases it has conflicted with the nation's objective or co-existence.

In Nigeria, the story has not been much different. In pre-colonial times when the different communities that make up what is today known as Nigerian nation were still independent political units. Societal organization was such that the political head was also keeper of the public conscience. Even in larger empires where village priest was not also the village head, he was often consulted in major decision making exercises. This was because the priest was seen as a go-between, between the gods of the society and the people. The arrangement and division of power between priest and kings were so tidy, having been developed over generations that a conflict of power rarely occurred. This was more so because the society was religiously homogenous. And so, religion did not pose the danger of causing a schism in the society. However, with the formation of a new form of society, Nigeria for instance, where many different and varied religious sects and hitherto independent socio-political units with their different and often

opposing beliefs, myths and dogmas, the result was profound and uncompromising allegiance and sometimes hallucinatory surrender to the prescriptions of their different religious sects.

This ushered in sub-group loyalty and loss of the desired spirit of national unity and national consciousness. People have indeed gone to a ridiculous extent and many have sacrificed their lives and properties to satisfy religious demands. The daily star of July 6th 1977 contains an account of school pupils who were suspended from school for refusing on religious grounds, to say the national pledge. During 1973 census, a group of fanatics refused to be counted because it was against their religious dogmas. Extreme loyalty to the religious tenets of divergent religions has caused religious rivalries, which have overflowed into political rivalries all of which have posed a formidable obstacle to national cohesion. The pre – war political scene of Nigeria was full of both verbal and physical conflicts of the two major groups (Christian –South and the Moslem North). For instance, the new breed magazine of January, 1977 reported that alhaji Ribadu, minister of defense in Nigeria's first republic said, "The political conquest of the southern Nigeria was a religious obligation that the Northern Nigerian people's congress owed to the world of Islam. The Koran had to be dipped into the Atlantic Ocean at the extreme Southern Nigeria before jihad would stop". The climate in which this kind of statements were made and cheered was largely contributory to the ruin of first republic and the plunging of the nation into chaos and civil war.

It is disturbing to note that even in contemporary Nigeria, national issues have given rise to outburst which is as outrageous as Ribadu's pre-war days. One such occasion was during the drafting of the Nigeria's post military constitution 1999. The issue was the status of the Muslim legal code, the sharia. An unfortunate publication by the Muslim students' society of Nigeria, Ahmadu Bellow University Zaria, titled "peace and unity in Nigeria, the stand of the Muslims vis-à-vis recent publication in magazines and newspapers declared: nationalism or patriotism means nothing to us compared with religious ideals....The concept of jihad is still fresh in our minds, when our faith is threatened and after issuing warning, it is then we are asked to strike" (Nwankwo, 2009). We are all aware of the mayhem (the colossal loss of lives and properties) the introduction of the Islamic legal code – sharia

has caused Nigeria society. In the opinion of this paper, intolerance and misguided policies in the cultural and religious fields have been responsible for creating conflicts scenarios in Nigeria. In some African countries, religio- linguistic issues have become in recent decades, the flashpoint for bloody conflicts and civil strife. Undemocratic politics of religion, culture and language is never far from ethnic tensions. Cultural and linguistic Arabization has been the ideological brain of contention of the Sudanese conflict since the late 1950's when with impending departure of British colonial power, African fears of Arabization, economic and political dominance was ignited by the torrid mutiny (17th August, 1955) which lingered on for decades. The rejection of 'Afrikaans' as a medium of education by South African youth in 1976 in Soweto proved to be a decisive turning point in the struggle against Apartheid and the white minority rule in South Africa. A principle and underlying factor in the Ethiopian conflict which shredded the fabrics of the society in recent decades was the revolt against Ambara culture dominance within the contemporary Ethiopian state.

In Nigeria, the different constituent ethnic groups retain strong religious beliefs and memberships of particular religions. This is because religion remains strong because of its social importance rather than because members of the group have the deep religious conviction as individuals. In Nigeria ethnic relations, religion serves as a tool for cultural defense. For instance, where there are different ethnic groups in constant striving for preeminence, religious identity then calls for a new loyalty as religious identity becomes a way of asserting ethnic pride. Thus, rather than religiosity, religion assumes more importance in cultural identity.

Federalism or federal character and the constitution

Sustainable development and by extension stability and cohesion of a nation depends on many factors one of which being the kind of constitution it has. Constitution according to Nwabueze is a formal document having the law, by which a society organizes a government for itself, defines and limits its powers, and prescribed the relations of its various organs, interest and with its citizens. It is thus, the most important document piloting the destiny of any nation to a meaningful transformation and harmonious co-existence as an entity. In my own view, it is therefore utmost folly to allow sectional sentiments supremacy over

reason in the construction of such powerful document. And this is not withstanding the recognition that religion rightly used, is an instrument for guiding individual moral conduct towards sustainable transformation. This is because no nation is valid without morality. In the same vein, no nation is valid without economic and technical efficiency in the stark realities of the global system today. Sequel to the above, I believe there is an urgent need for different ideological convictions, political phrases to meet with the drift of our contemporary society.

Again, federation is meant for societies which share a certain basic features in common. On this, William Livingstone (2010), for instance, insists that the essence of federation lies not in the constitutional or institutional structures but in the society itself. Federal government is a device by which the federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected. Thus, it is the character of the federal society that determines the structure and character of the federal constitution and not Vis-a – Vis. To this end, distinction can be made between the constitution or legal rule on the one hand, and the peculiar constellation of social forces characterizing the latter which is supposed to guide the founding fathers of any nation state in question when they decide in favour of a federal arrangement as against unitary arrangement. This basic fact is characteristic of every federation. Deduce this to imply that it is the character of the federal society that determines the structure and character of the federal constitution. Put differently, the distinctive character of each federation and by extension its stability, would appear to depend on the degree of harmony or congruence which exist between the structure and usage of the society on the one hand, and the structure and usage of the constitution on the other. The narrower the gap between the two, the greater the stability, while the wider the gap the higher the incidence of instability.

According to Kwesi Kwaa Prah (2017), ethnic characteristics are a universal and ubiquitous feature of humanity. It is how they are accommodated in the state and the policies which govern their social expression, which ensure whether they become easy and enriching facilities in the plural societies of our time or exploitable reference point by rival ruling or dominant elites. The argument here is that it is the elitist rivalry, which mobilizes ethnic sentiment for narrow political, social and economic objectives.

The amalgamation, ethnic bias, conflict implications and development issues

The amalgamation of the divergent independent ethnic groups into what today is known as Nigeria started in earnest in 1900, when the colony of Lagos with Yoruba hinter land which was at the time under the colonial office and by 1900 formally became the colony and protectorate of Lagos. And in the same year, the Niger Coast protectorate comprising the bights of Benin and Biafra which was under the foreign office, became in 1900 the protectorate of Southern Nigeria and like Lagos came under the colonial office. Again, what later became Northern Nigeria was at the time under the Royal Niger Company. In 1900 it became the protectorate of Northern Nigeria and also came under the colonial office. On this premise, we can thus see that the process of bringing these territories and their people together administratively started in earnest in 1900 when they were all brought for the first time under the same secretary of state unlike hitherto when they were under different ministries.

The above epoch of Nigeria's history is referred to by scholars as the period of informal federation with distinctive character of duality. This duality was marked by mutual suspicion and conflict. Even the Selborne Committee of 1898 that midwife the amalgamation underlined the dual character of the projected administrative federation had advocated for two provinces to reflect this duality. According to the committee, each of the provinces, the Sudan province (the Northern Nigeria) and the Maritime province (Southern Nigeria) should be under a governor or some such officer. In 1906, the dual character of this administrative federation became more pronounced with the appointment of Sir Fredrick Lugard in 1912.

All through this period, the British saw Nigeria as a 'loose federation' of two different cultural and administrative worlds. On the cultural side, the South was throughout the period seen and characterized as pagan and barbarous. Consequently, it was subjected to the sustained propaganda of the agents of Western civilization. Thus, politically and administratively, the south had notoriety for indiscipline and unmanageability. It did not become famous as the laboratory of any new theory of colonial administration and soon proved to be an infertile soil on which to transplant the supposedly purest form of indirect rule evolved and nurtured in the North by the great Lugard and his small coterie of dedicated lieutenants. The rapid

expansion of trade, commerce and communication, education and Western legal system for which the Southern administration could have become famous was widely deprecated, for in the nostril of certain powerful pro-pagandist who preferred the feudalistic environment of Northern Nigeria, it had stench of putrefying materialism and deep rowdy modernism. Many products of the expanding Western school system made matters worse by offending the sensibility of the ruling master race through their pretension to Western culture, especially to those legal, constitutional political and human rights which were regarded as the exclusive rights of a select class in Western society. Thus, the South never approximated the colonist's paradise.

In the North, the situation was considered remarkably and pleasantly different. There was a religion – Islam which was preferred to paganism though Christianity was the most preferred. At least they were monotheists and could be submissive and respectful if treated with considerable and rationalist enlightenment their religious sensibility were not to be outraged and so the Christian missionaries were kept out except in those areas of the North where the people were despicable animists. The Bauchi and plateau and Southern Zaria in particular. Similarly, the North were to be protected against the worst forms of Western commercialism for as a cultural solvent, this was perhaps even more powerful than Christianity as preached at that time. As a result, the provision of modern means of transport and communication was undertaken only on the modest scale commensurate with the need of political administration and continued well-being of the powerful emirs.

As if to protest against the rapid change in the South, the Northern administration deliberately kept the rate of change in the north at a manageable languid pace. It prided itself in having successfully preserved the culture of the region against change. The story was the same in the political, economical and religious life of the people. The main weapon of this policy was known as indirect rule supposedly invented and elaborated by Lugard. It was cheap, and made the masses respectful and subservient to their chiefs and chiefs respectful and subservient to the colonial overlord. It spared the North the contentiousness, rowdiness and litigiousness of the South. It also made the North inward-looking and suspicious of the outsider especially the South.

The result was that the two component segments of this informal federation developed each with its own character. According to Nicolson (1969) “the period between 1900 and the beginning of amalgamation under Lugard 1912 the administration of North and South managed to develop strikingly different patterns. So different that they seemed more like the product of the influence of different ruling power than the offspring of the same secretary of state, brought by the same ministry, the colonial office”. At first, much of this cultural and administrative dualism was in the minds of members of the British colonial administration, and affected relationships between them. Thus, it led to acrimonious quarrels over railing and custom policy, over the delimitation of the boundary between the two administrations and over the role of indirect rule in the political and administrative development of Nigeria. Indeed from about 1915 to about 1946, indirect rule became the main bone of contention as well as the major instrument for ensuring the entrenchment of this policy of dual development. The principle of indirect rule according to Okonjo (1974) provided a strong argument for keeping the course of development in the Northern and Southern provinces rigorously apart, for reducing all contacts between the people of the two groups of provinces to the absolute minimum and for excluding the South from the sphere of the legislative council. It also provided the argument for restricting Southern living and doing business in the North to the Sabon Garis. To such an extent did this dualism condition the outlook of the two teams of British administrators serving in the North and South, and to such an extent did it act as an irritant in relations between them that it became a standard joke in the 1930’s that but for the Nigerian the two teams would go for war against each other.

Institutions in the North under aegis of indirect rule; three, the treatment of the North and South as two distinct political and administrative units for all practical purposes and the inflexible maintenance of disparate standard in them; four, British maneuvers before and in 1959 to place the control of the federal government in the Northern hands in order thereby, according to them to ensure the unity and stability of the country after independence. It is in this context that the constitutional structure of the first republic and its electoral system as in the politics of the 1963 census, creation of states rising from attempt to scoop the contradictions of indolence in the regionalization with its attendant political

implications and continued ethno- religious conflicts can be explicated. Thus, it is in this premise that the foundation of ethno- religious conflicts and development debacle of Nigeria can be located.

Conclusion

It is thus legitimate to insist that an ethno –religious conflicts in Nigeria is historically determined. It was ignited by rigorous effort at institutionalization of three major ethnic groups of asymmetrical value in lieu of institutionalization of multi- ethnicity of par value and importance. Thus, duality of North and South which is derived from psychological and irrational hang –over from colonial past and which have transformed an imaginary line on Nigeria country’s map into a barrier that is too cumbersome to scale is at the root of the tension and mutual suspicion between the North and the South and in general the endless ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Again, the unholy trinity of the three largest Nigerian ethnic nationalities which was the creation of the British lies at the root of the triangular rivalry between the Hausa –Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. This has so far afflicted Nigeria with unstable and acrimonious alliance at the centre, explicating the tension and suspicion existing among these three giant ethnic groups on the one hand and the minority ethnic groups on the other.

To overcome this monster, there should be a sovereign national conference where all the federating units, (cultural, political etc) must be adequately represented on the premise of the federal structure, restructure the federal constitution to reflect the federal character (structure) and define the role and place of religion in the management of Nigeria and Nigerian people.

REFERENCES

- Akinyemi, A. B. (1977, January). Federalism. *new breed magazine vol. 9, no. 3 p35-43*
- Asiwaju, A. I. (1985). *Partitioned Africa and ethnic relations across Africa’s international boundaries*. London: C. Hurst & CO.
- Awolowo, O. (1968). *The people’s republic*. London: oxford university press.
- Azikiwe, N. (1964). *Tribalism. A pragmatic instrument for national unity*, Zik’s selected speech

- 1960-64. Lagos: *the daily times* p 22-28
- Beblawi, H. and Luciani, G. (1987). *The rentire state in the arab world*. London: croom hlem.
- Busia, K. A. (1967). *Africa in search of democracy*. London: rotledge and kegan paul.
- Cole, P. D. (1977, 06 July). National unity. *Daily star, Friday* p29.
- Dare, O. L. (1980). *More state*. Lagos: C. L. D.
- Hameso, O. L. (2018). *Ethnicity in Africa: towards a positive approach*. London: T. S C.
- Keller, E. J. (2015). *The state and mediation of ethnic conflicts in Donald Rotchild and Victor Olorunsola (eds) versus ethnic claims: African policy dilemma*. Boulder: westview press.
- Lemarchand, R. (1999). *Ethnicity as myth*. Copenhagen: university press.
- Nicolson, H. (1969). *Religion and ethnicity*. London: oxford university press.
- Nwankwo, L. D. (2009). *Perspectives on federalism*. Lagos: nok.
- Nyang, O. P. A. (2012). *The study of African politics*. Nairobi: regional office for east and hon of Africa.
- Okonjo, I. M. (1974). *British administration in Nigeria 1900- 1950*. Lagos: nok.
- Oyetade, O. S. (2016). *Language planning in a multi-ethnic state: the majority/minority Dichotomy in Nigeria*. *Journal of African studies* vol.12, no.1 p106.
- Prah, K. K. (2017). *African wars and ethnic conflicts-rebuilding failed states*. Cape town the centre for advanced studies of African societies.
- Prah, K. K. (2014). *Changing solidarities of identity, ethnicity, nationality and development in Africa*. *Eastern African social science research review*. Vol. 13 no.2 p1-25.
- Prah, K. K. (2004). *Changing solidarity of identity, ethnicity, nationality and the search for democracy in Africa*. *Eastern African social science research review*. Vol.2, no1.p56-64
- Report of the constitution drafting committee (1977).
- William Livingstone (2010). *Federalism and society*. London: *African political science review* Vol.5, no.2, p21-36.