

Effect of Ethno-Religious Conflicts on Nigerian Nation-Building

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Abstract: Ethno-religious conflicts have become conspicuous in the Nigeria of today that the country has come to earn for itself an epithet, 'The Theater of conflicts'. Drawing from the Conflict Theory of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, this paper examined the topical issue by looking at the history, drivers, effects of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria as well as the mechanisms or steps taken to stop or minimize their occurrence in the country. The paper discovered that there were numerous causes put forward in the literature as providing the fuel for ethno-religious disturbances in Nigeria and that its consequences to nation building are staggering. To avoid these consequences, a number of measures have been put in place but that some of those measures have not yielded the necessary results, hence the continued reoccurrence of the malaise. Accordingly, the paper recommended that: an in-depth expert study of the remote and immediate propellers of ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria should be conducted with a view to discovering holistically their causes, that Government should review its current approach of classifying all ethno-religious sentiments in the country as trouble making and dismemberment seeking, so that all latest or manifest injustices can have the opportunity of being addressed, that all ethno-religious grievances are nipped in the bud so as to save government and its people of the serious consequences that go with any belated step and that new and enduring institutions of nation building are created while existing ones that meet current realities are retained and overhauled, that the long canvassed 'wazobia' lingua language policy should be rolled out as part of building a bond oneness among Nigerians.

Keywords: Ethno-religious. Conflict and Nation building.

1. INTRODUCTION

Before Nigeria became what it is today, life among the different peoples of the pre-Nigerian State was relatively peaceful, collaborative, cooperative and complementary. But with the coming of the white man on the West African coast and the eventual annexation of Lagos in 1861, the peace and unity existing among the people of the independent non state republics became shattered (Madubuko, 2008). From then on, one thing led to the other and on 1st January, 1914, a new nation called Nigeria was born. According to Maduabum (2008), the name Nigeria, meaning, 'Niger Area' was coined by one then Miss Flora Shaw, who later became the wife of Fredrick Lord Lugard, the first Governor General of Nigeria.

Lugard's action of 1914, created a country with a total land mass of about Nine Hundred and Twenty Three Thousand, Seven Hundred and Sixty Eight (923, 768) square kilometers in radius, a country which, as of the last population census in 2006, is home to more than One Hundred and forty million (140m) people, (NPC: 2006 census). With a 2.8% annual growth rate, this population is, by 2013, estimated to have reached 173.6m and 189.5m as at 2017 (United Nations Estimates).

The major ethnic groups that make up the country are the Hausa/Fulani, the Igbo and the Yoruba in addition to well over Two Hundred and Fifty (250) other ethnic groups that are scattered within the length and breadth of the country (Asuzu, 2006, Oladele 2004, Falade and Falade, 2013). The Hausa/Fulani, who are mostly Muslims, constitute the largest population in the north. Other ethnic groups in the north include the Nupes, the Tivs, the Kanuris, the Gwaris and many others. The Yoruba, with a slight Christian majority remain the dominant ethnic group in the south western flank of Nigeria with a few of them also found in some Nigeria's north central states of Kogi and Kwara. In the East, the Igbo, who are predominantly Christians and traditionalists, are to be found and the Niger Delta is home to such ethnic groups as the Efiks, the Ijaws, Ibibios, Anang, Urhobos and the Itchekiris.

With a small population of animists, pagans or traditional religious worshippers, the country is divided into two roughly equal Muslim-dominated North and a Christian-dominated South. One unique feature of the country's ethno-religious configuration is that within the two geographically isolated areas of north and south, you can find adherents of other religions. Some northern states like Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba, Kwara and Kogi, for instance, has significant Christian population while Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun and even Edo, all in the south, also have significant Muslim population.

This diversity and its large population mark Nigeria out as one big nation in Africa. But like every other country in the world, it needs peace, economic development and political stability to be able to play its role well and assume its rightful position in world affairs. To achieve this, the country's past and present political leaders have embarked on numerous policies and programs that will catalyze development.

Unfortunately for Nigeria, its diversity in ethnicity and religion, rather than being an asset, has become something like an Achilles heels. It is not out of place that opinions vary and some governments' actions and inactions, especially on some issues are bound to generate some ill-feelings among the various ethnic and religious divides in the country as such instances abound in our recent history. For instance, when the former military president and commander-in-chief of Nigerian armed forces, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (rtd), took Nigeria into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in early 1986, (Asuzu: 2006, Onwubiko: 2012), prominent citizens of southern Nigeria extraction, notwithstanding the much touted goodies that awaited the country from that step, mouthed all sorts of opposition (though without success) to the move. When the same government took steps to restore diplomatic relations with the State of Israel which biblically has a shared history with Christianity, notable leaders from the majority Muslim North screamed blue murder, apparently because of their (northerners') strong attachment to the Arab-Palestinian cause or simply because northern Nigeria has the same religious affinity with Palestinians. In the not so distant past, the move by the immediate past governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and reigning Emir of Kano, Malam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi to introduce Islamic Banking in Nigeria, was met with very strong opposition from some prominent Christian leaders from the southern part of the country.

In the light of the above, this paper is attempting to take a critical look into how these ethnic and religious disturbances is affecting the State of Nigeria and what are being done to curb or control the menace so that meaningful integration can take firm root in the country.

Key Words: Ethno-religious, Conflict and Nation-building

Ethno-religious: This is coined from the two separate words of ethnicity and religion to describe a phenomenon that has ethnic and religious coloration. According to Osaghae, cited in Fawole and Bello (2011), ethnicity is a social formation resting upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. A belief in common organs and a broadly agreed common history provide an inheritance of symbols, heroes, values and hierarchies and confer social identities on both insiders and outsiders. Socially, it can be regarded as the employment of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict and cooperation. On the hand, religion is defined by Ayinla (2003) as a particular system or set of systems in which doctrines, myths, rituals, sentiments and other similar elements are interrelated. We take religion to be the belief in the existence of the Supreme Being who controls the universe and includes all rituals by which the human being relates with the higher being to establish or reestablish contact with the creator. Today's major world religions include Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Shinto, among others (Momah: 2013). When a group is described as ethno-religious, the members of that group have both ethnic and religious similarities.

Taking bearing from the above insights, ethno-religious conflict is the clash, contention, disagreement, battles, rivalries, controversies or quarrels among ethno-religious groups which stem from some incompatible differences over symbolic values to the groups involved. Some of these symbolic values that cannot be traded off include religion and language (Uhunmwuagho: 2011). In summary, an ethno-religious conflict is a conflict or disagreement that is caused by ethnic and religious differences.

Conflict: Conflict is defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different persons and groups, (Nnamani and Onuigbo: 2012). According to Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, cited in Uche and Okeke (2011), it is a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what appear to be incompatible goals. Conflicts can be latent or manifest, violent or non violent and can occur within an organization or between organizations, within an ethnic group and between ethnic groups, within a State and between States. Conflict is an inevitable reality of social existence and a universal attribute of nature, life and society. It is a social phenomenon that occurs even among lower animals and can also occur among the best of relations, friends or even among siblings and between husbands and wives. Struggle for scarce or limited resources, power, ego and even a lack of communication are among the major sources of conflicts in society.

In the light of the above information, it can be understood why the Nigerian State, especially since independence, has earned for itself an epithet, 'The theater of conflicts' The conflict situation in Nigeria has lately heightened both in scale and spread that it now defines our national life.

Nation-building: Akoto cited in Williams (2014) defines nation-building as the conscious and focused application of our people's collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours. It involves the development of behaviors, values, language, institutions, and physical structures that elucidate our history and culture, concretize and protect the present, and insure the future identity and independence of the nation. Nation building is a deliberate, keenly directed, focused and energetic projection of national culture, and collective action to develop a political and economic system. It involves building institutions of self-government that are culturally appropriate to the nation and that are effective in addressing the nation's challenges. Gambari (2008) notes that nations just don't happen by historical accident; rather they are built by men and women with vision and resolve. Nation-building is therefore the product of conscious statecraft, not happenstance. It is always a work-in-progress; a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-invention. From political and economic perspectives, nation building entails developing and instituting a democratic polity with an ability to sustain itself as a sovereign by giving freedom and liberty to its people to use a well laid mechanism or system of leadership recruitment and leaving a legacy or culture of smooth succession of power to future generations. It also includes efforts made to improve industrial development through improved production of goods and services, including raising the standard of living of the people and building the mind of the people together to want to continue existing as one nation (William, 2014).

We see from the above that nation building goes beyond development of physical infrastructure to include the building of human capital, norms and communication linkages that can be sustained by institutions such as governmental and non-governmental organizations that promote good governance and thus socio-economic development.

History of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria

Ofoeze, cited in Ikejiani-Clark (2009) contended that the state, in both its historic and modern senses, is by its nature and character a product of conflict and generator of conflicts and conflict situations. This statement is particularly true of a country like Nigeria where overwhelming ethno-religious differences and a forced amalgamation are added issues.

Each of the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, prior to colonial invasion had existed independently on their own and had their own socio-cultural, political and economic systems by which the entire life of their respective members were organized. The system varied quite markedly among them so much so that in some cases, they were mutually antithetical and contradictory. It was these rather disparate ethnic groups that the colonial invaders forcefully melted into one political entity called Nigeria without any meaningful plan to unite them whatsoever beyond forging them into this amorphous unit, (Ikejiani-Clark, 2009). In order to keep the ethnic groups perpetually apart, the colonial masters actively adopted disintegrative administrative policies of divide and rule, thereby politicizing and poisoning inter ethnic relations among Nigerians. According to Nnoli (1978), they did this by creating the myth and the propaganda that Nigerians were different

and separated from one another by great distances, by differences of history and tradition, by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers. By doing this, they did not only erase the thought of a Nigerian nation from the minds of members of the various ethnic groups but also planted the seeds of inter-ethnic conflicts, hatred and hostility among the people. The overall effect of these divisive colonial policies was the embitterment of inter-ethnic relations and escalation of the tension and antagonism among the various ethnic groups in the country. This in turn led to the intensification of feelings of mutual suspicion, distrust and antagonism among the various ethnic political leaderships especially as the colonial authorities, played them against one another. In this way, rather than rightly seeing the colonial authorities as the enemy, each of these ethnic groups saw one another as the enemy, with each courting the assistance of the colonial officials to undermine, supplant and possibly destroy the other or others.

At the time of independence in 1960 therefore, there was no Nigeria national political leadership with a mission for Nigerian nation building. Rather, what we have was motley of mutually antagonistic, disparate and fire-spitting ethnic leaderships that are engulfed in ethnic power struggle for domination. The Hausa/Fulani ethnic group which secured power through the assistance of the colonial authorities, rather than using it to initiate policies that will promote inter-ethnic reconciliation and national integration, regrettably deployed that power in a manner that clearly skewed it to its own advantage in the allocation of state resources.

Standing on this faulty foundations, it was therefore not surprising that around the period of independence in 1960, signs that all was not well with the nation of Nigeria had already begun to manifest. The first of such ethnic tensions showed up in May, 1953 when, as a result of late Chief Anthony Enahoro's motion on the floor of the House of Representatives for Nigerian self rule in 1956, the north objected to the date (1956) and supplanted it with 'as soon as possible' on the ground that the country was not yet ripe for independence, (Olawale, cited in Amuwo, Agbaje, Suberu, and Herault, 2004). A move by the Action Group (AG) and the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) leaders from the Yoruba and Igbo-dominated southern Nigeria to undertake a campaign tour of the north to educate the people on the issue was vehemently resisted by some battle ready youths in Kano, who were mobilized against the visit by Malam Inuwa Wada, (the then Information Officer, Kano Native Administration) and others. In the end, what was meant to be a sensitization tour of the north against continued British rule, turned into an ethnic conflict in which about thirty six (36) lives (mostly Igbo) were officially declared lost with many more wounded and properties running into millions of naira, destroyed.

Between 1960 and 1966, there were a number of conflicts in the country which seemed to question the continued existence of the new Nigerian nation. Among these conflicts were the Tiv riots of 1960 and 1964, the census crises of 1963, the national election crises of 1964 to 1965 and the coup and counter coups of January and July, 1966 respectively. However, the first and most recorded event of what appeared to be a political crisis but which later assumed an ethno-religious status few years after independence, took place in 1966, (Okpanachi, 2010). The aftermath of the late Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu-led abortive coup d'état led to the subsequent pogrom in which south easterners living in the north were massacred in retaliation of northern leaders who died in the coup and the events which later followed, led to a bloody thirty months civil war that ended in January, 1970.

In 1980, there was yet another religious riot in Yan Awaki ward in which one Mohammed Marwa Maitatsine, a born Cameroonian, used his group to hold the country down by wantonly killing about Four Thousand, One Hundred and Seventy Seven (4,177) people and properties running into millions of naira destroyed. After Maitatsine's death later the same year, his group lasted another five years before fizzling out.

Within the same decade, a number of other ethno-religious tensions rocked the nation. Prominent among them were the furor generated by the purported secret transformation of the Nigerian observer status in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) into a full member of the body and the 1987 tensions generated by the Moslem and Christian clashes in Kafanchan, Kaduna State.

The 1990s witnessed a number of disturbances that included the Bauchi crisis of 1990, the Reinhard Bonke crusade-induced religious upheaval in Kano in 1991 in which about twelve people died and many others injured, the Zangon-Kataf crisis of 1992 and the 1999 reprisal killings targeted against the Yoruba indigenes in Kano State for the murder of their kin and kin.

With the return of the country to full blown democratic rule in 1999 and the turn of the third millennium in year 2000, ethno-religious crises, rather than abating, still persisted with increasing intensity. The first of the crises in the new millennium was the attempt by some northern states in the country to adopt the Islamic Sharia legal system which was met with stiff opposition from some Christian dominated states in the south. Tensions over the issue resulted in the death of hundreds of people in clashes between Christians and Moslems in some northern states. The next to follow in the series was the violence that flared up after Moslem prayers in the city of Jos in North Central Nigeria with Churches and Mosques set on fire. In a report released in 2002 by the panel set up by the Plateau State government on the matter, it was revealed that over One Thousand people were killed in the crisis.

Between 2010 and 2015, the country had recorded yet another unprecedented number of ethno-religious conflicts mainly from the dreaded Boko Haram and lately the Shiite Islamic sect. Until lately, bombings of religious worship places and suicide attacks on soft targets by the Boko Haram terrorist group, whose nefarious activities and fundamentalist religious ideology has long received worldwide attention, has become a daily occurrence.

The conclusion drawn from this long chronicle is that the seed of ethno-religious tensions in Nigeria was sown in the country's colonial past as can be seen from the way the country was panel-beaten into one nation without consideration of its pre-colonial history and that this seed began to germinate well before the country gained independence in 1960. With the passage of time, these ethnic distrusts, shenanigans (watered by crass ambition of our few political elites) began to fester and metastasize like a cancer.

Drivers of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

As earlier noted, a conflict is an aspect of life that is always avoided for the fear of its negative consequences. It is known for instance to bring about all forms of sad stories from damages to commodities and property, to loss of precious human lives. It has also been known to cause downturn in the economy of nations as it is known to divert human effort from farming and other gainful activities. However, the phenomenon has remained a recurring and inescapable decimal in human existence that is not only about negatives. It has sometimes also led to such positive developments as racial equality and freedom in some countries. Again countries with large defense industries have also been known to rake in huge revenues from armed conflicts.

Nigeria, especially since independence, has not been spared of these conflicts. For sure, no decade in Nigeria since 1960 has passed without a conflict, the high point of which is the devastating thirty months civil war between the defunct secessionist Biafra and the Federal Government of Nigeria. While some of these conflicts are politically, economically and ethno-religiously motivated, others have the trappings of all the factors put together. The question that readily beckons for answer is, 'what are the factors fueling these conflicts in Nigeria'?

This paper limits itself to those types of conflicts that has ethnic and religious origin, meaning that it left out those that are politically or economically motivated. But even as this live is drawn, the paper also quickly noted that there are conflicts which, though started as political disagreements or struggles over economic issues, but which later spilled over into ethno-religious crisis. There are instances also where ethnic and religious conflicts have snowballed into avoidable contests for power and economic resources. So, given the religious and ethnic character of the Nigerian federation, none of these conflicts can be divorced completely from the other. The lines tend to become thinner and blurred as we try to draw them.

Be that as it may, Owutu (2012) listed the major drivers of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria to include:

1. **Competition:** Cut throat rivalry between and among ethnic groups or organizations in the country seeking to gain or maintain control of state power. When one group gains access to state power, it uses its institutions to distribute economic and political benefits preferentially to their ethnic brethren, discriminating against other groups. Consequently, this aggravates a sense of shared deprivation and strengthens identification with their group, thereby providing a basis for political mobilization along ethnic lines.
2. **Mistrust:** There is a historical legacy of mistrust between and among rival ethnic groups in the country. Examples are found among the peoples of the present day Middle East. This hatred is not genetically transmitted but is a visible part of the immediate reality occasioned by myth, socialization and education. Having been a victim of this problem, one is toughened by this victim mentality, invariably uniting group members behind their leaders, who may have acceded to power – being past victims. Victimized groups, who are deprived of essentials of life, turn to violence, which they direct against their rival groups. This feeling of deprivation and unrealized expectations will naturally be interpreted as an ethnic injustice.

3. **Poverty:** Poverty and unequal access to resources is another potent cause of ethno-religious violence in Nigerian today. Despite the huge oil revenue accruing to our country, at least two-third of Nigerian population still feed from hand to mouth. The Niger Delta region presents a classic example of the manifestation of resource-induced violence and the debate over it has demonstrated the controversy over the issue in Nigeria today. According to Fatima Ibrahim, cited in Owutu (2012), the 2004 ethno-religious reprisal attacks in Kano State were caused by youths who are victims of a crises-ridden economy. These hungry youths became easily available in crises situations as a way of venting their anger on the society through what can be termed transferred aggression on non Moslems and non indigenes in the name of avenging the killings of Moslems in Yelwa-Shendam in Plateau State.

4. **Indigeneship and settler divisions:** Citing Dipo Akowonjo, Owutu (2012) also mentioned indigeneship and settlers division as one of the most significant causes of violence in our society. Indigeneship and settler-divisions is described as entrenched divisions between people considered to be indigenous to an area and those regarded as settlers. According to him, settlers are consistently discriminated against in the predominantly Christian Plateau State. The Hausa/Fulani nomads complained that the Christian farmers steal their cattle. Again the indigenous Moslem ethnic groups were fiercely opposed to the perceived expansionist tendencies of the Hausa/Fulani.

5. **Faulty foundation:** Contributing to the debate, Olu-Adeyemi (2006), observed that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are embedded in the basic foundations of our nation-state which, according to him, has remained incurable especially as efforts to obliterate them have always been truncated aggressively by the custodians of power. These foundational differences found expression in the statements credited to late Chief Obafemi Awolowo that the Nigerian State as created by its colonial powers, is a mere geographical expression and by late Sir Ahmadu Bello as the mistake of 1914 (Onabamiro, 1983). The import of these statements are that the polity called Nigeria was, from the very first beginning, erected on a faulty foundation as numerous societies, different in all aspect of life, were forcefully brought together by the colonial authorities without any consideration for internal harmony. It is therefore not strange that with the passage of time, these ethnic and religious divisions began to manifest themselves in the country as contest for power and economic resources began to intensify and as democracy and freedom began to free the people from the bondage and shackles of military dictatorship. This could be the reason why instead of abating, the cancer has, since the return of democratic rule to Nigeria in 1999, continued to increase and intensify.

6. **Ethnic and religious discrimination:** At different levels and times in the past, the Nigerian people have complained of religious and ethnic discrimination. Most ask for religious and ethnic rights within their state. A case in point is the raging militancy in the Southeastern and South-southern parts of Nigeria where the cry of marginalization and deprivation by the people are lately gaining ground. Therefore, it is clear that accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression and domination are the major causes that fuel ethno-religious conflicts (Ikelegbe 2001; Kura 2010; Salawu 2010).

7. **Breakdown of traditional institutions:** Salawu, cited in Nwankwo, (2015) included breakdown of traditional institutions, such as the family and the fall in educational standard as another causative agent of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

8. **Inept leadership:** Poor leadership and governance that culminate in poor policies resulting in unemployment, underdevelopment and poverty. This transmogrifies Nigeria from a nation perceived by the international community as being a rich country, into having a reservoir of poor people who are easily angered and available to fight or instigate conflict (Nwankwo, 2015).

Lending their voices on the issue, Egbefor (2004,) and Egbefor, Dawood and Omolumen (2015) listed a number of other factors causing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria to include:

- A. Controversial Census exercises.
- B. Feeling of 'Not in Our Interest'.
- C. Wrong application of Federal Character Principle.
- D. Marginalization in political offices.
- E. Wrong use of force to intimidate or subvert the 'Popular Will' by the State.
- F. Existence of ethnic and religious militias.

- G. Creation of Mission School System and segregated residential areas like Sabon Gari, Tudun Wadan quarters right from the colonial days.
- H. Differences in educational policy between the North and the South and among regions.
- I. Lack of moral authority and the will power by the State to serve as the custodian of the Peoples' Welfare.
- J. Bad governance and lack of accountability.
- K. Poor nature and scope of economic development.
- L. Effect of rapid population growth on Nigeria's economic development.
- M. Electoral fraud as impediment to internal security.
- N. The growing rate of poverty and hunger among Nigerians.
- O. High rate of illiteracy among Nigerians.
- P. High rate of corruption and unethical practices in the country.

Clash of interest of those in authority has also been listed as one of the possible causes of ethno-religious tensions in the country. The ruling class has always applied a number of processes to express their dissatisfaction with exclusion from important decision-making processes in the country. The methods employed include religious violence and military coups d'état. Majority of the religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria are reported to be due to the large number of rich southerners who reside there. Many northern elites are hurt by the business inventiveness of the southerners and employ religion to incite people to destroy property belonging to non-natives. The results are wars fought under the pretence of being religious (Falola 1998). The last of these factors could be likened to what former President Goodluck Jonathan, while meeting with the US Congress Sub Committee Chairman on Africa, Mr. Christopher H. Smith, as widely reported in the Vanguard Newspapers of Friday, February 3, 2017, called impunity as one of the root causes of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria.

All these factors, in addition to what Barango (1987), called the emergent capitalist mode of production, distribution and consumption in Nigeria and its attendant crude exploitation of the people, acting alone and in concert with one another, have contributed, in one way or the other to heating up the Nigerian polity and fanning the embers of mutual suspicion among the various groups that make up the Country.

Effects of ethno-religious conflicts on Nigerian Nation-building

As noted earlier, conflicts, no matter their source, does not always result in unpleasant outcomes as it has sometimes led to positive changes in society. Sometimes also, the phenomenon of conflict, rather than being avoided, is, for economic and other reasons, tacitly solicited. Two good examples come into focus here. The relative academic freedom and autonomy that academics in Nigerian higher institutions enjoy today were rooted in the resolution of conflicts of yesteryears which academics in Nigeria, under the aegis of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and their counterparts in Polytechnics and Colleges of Education waged against dictatorial and over-bearing tendencies of the past (especially military) administrations in the country. Again, that the ongoing military confrontations in the various parts of the world like the war in Syria; the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) challenge; the ethnically induced civil war in the world's newest state of South Sudan and our own internal Boko Haram insurgency, mean much to the sustenance of armament industry, is not in doubt.

However, Conflicts in general and ethno-religious disturbances in particular inflict more harm than good to its immediate and remote environments. They present challenges that border on the security and corporate oneness of any country, (Fawole and Bello, 2011). Some of the effects of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria include:-

1. Weakening of patriotism and commitment to national ideals: Ethno-religious conflicts, through their constancy and depth of havoc, engender a sense of hatred among the various groups that make up the country. As this happen, patriotism, brotherhood and a shared sense of oneness is lost in the people.

2. Engenders economic stagnation: While justifying his government's decision to impose a State of Emergency in Plateau State in 2004, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, declared among other things that '.....businesses lost billions of naira and properties worth much more destroyed. He noted that visitors and investors have fled the area

and the neighboring states have had their economies and social life seriously disrupted while huge expenses are being incurred by both the federal and some neighboring states to Plateau that are involved in the management of the crises, (Obasanjo, 2004). A research report released by the Senior Executive Course No. 26 of the National Institute, states as follows, 'In addition to the irreplaceable loss of lives, losses in terms of property (goods, houses, business premises) have not yet been fully ascertained. Some survivors have permanently lost all that they labored for in their lives. As a result, one can safely argue that the aggregate of such instances negatively impact on the overall economy of the affected communities and by extension the rest of the country. New armies of the unemployed, the destitute and highly aggrieved are added to the streets with its attendant consequences. Victims are also generally made and belonging to the economically active segments of society', (NIPPS, 2004).

3. Breeds instability: When ethno-religious conflicts occur, they tend to throw up political instability as they expose the gross ineffectiveness of the state security architecture to detect threats and guarantee security of lives and property of the governed. This tends to generate a climate of fear and hopelessness in the people as no meaningful economic activity will be undertaken by both local and foreign investors. This leaves the polity comatose and vulnerable to all forms of depravity.

4. Erodes moral values and excellence: In an Online publication of 15th April 2015, titled, "" a blogger, Oluwaseun Viyon Ojo (2015) added moral erosion as one of the dangerous consequences of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. He noted that virtually all the holy books, including The Bible and The Quran preach the sanctity and sacredness of human life. The Bible in particular tells us in Mathew Chapter 5, Verse 9 that blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called Children of God. However, this no longer seemed to be the case.

Egbefor, Dawood and Omolumen (2015), summarized the effects of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria as follows:

1. Creates prospects of disintegration as groups become too cautious to deal with other groups.
2. Increased urban violence arising from the activities of ethnic militias.
3. Springing up of secessionist movements like the dreaded Boko Haram in the North, the IPOB; MASSOB; and the BZM in the East, MEND; NDPVF and others in the South-South and OPC in the Southwest.
4. Destruction of the social fabric and the basis for trust and mutual respect, leading to a decline in interrelationship.
5. Depletion of scarce state resources as law enforcement agencies are avoidably deployed to the streets to contain crises.
6. Difficulty in prosecuting corrupt leaders as they quickly resort to the use of ethnic and religious sentiments to evade justice.
7. Declining economy as local and foreign investors shy away from investing their money in volatile environments.
8. Accords the country a poor image in the international community.
9. Increases the rate of unemployment as investments decline.
10. Leads to political instability as it exposes governments' weaknesses in quelling the conflicts.
11. Results to labor flight as skilled professionals leave for greener pastures elsewhere.
12. Dichotomizes the country into North and South divisions.

Akowanjo (2011), articulated in his paper that ethno-religious conflicts have the potency of creating crisis over the question of citizenship, hostility between indigenes and settlers, dehumanization of women and children, e.g. rape, child abuse, child neglect, deepening of hunger in the society, atmosphere of political insecurity and instability, declining confidence in the political leadership and apprehension of the system

Mechanisms for handling ethno-religious conflicts and promoting nation-building in Nigeria:

There is a unanimity of view among contemporary scholars that the seeds of ethno-religious conflicts in various countries of the world in general and Nigeria in particular were partly planted by the European colonizers when, as a result of lack of consultation and consideration of the sharp lines of differences among the pre-state peoples, the European powers, simply corralled several strange bed fellows into states of strange bedfellows, (Hansen, cited in Ikanola, 2006).

Recognizing this undeniable truth and propelled by the need to have a stable polity in their various states as a condition for national development, successive governments in those states, on attainment of independence, started embarking on various steps to promote integration of their various peoples. Bandyopadhyay & Green, cited in Onifade and Imhonopi (2013), listed some of such steps taken in some countries to fast track nation building as:

1. Changing of state names like from Gilbert Islands to Kiribati, Ceylon to Sri Lanka, Burma to Myanmar, Dahomey to Benin Republic, Upper Volta to Ouagadougou, Gold Coast to Ghana, Rhodesia to Zimbabwe and from Democratic Republic of Congo to Zaire.
2. Changing of capital city's names and locations like from Lagos to Abuja, Dar es Salaam to Dodoma, Rio de Janeiro to Brasilia, Fort-Lamy to Ndjamen
3. Changing of national currencies like the change from Pound Sterling to the Cedi and Naira in Ghana and Nigeria respectively.

These policies, trivial as some of them may be, assisted some countries especially in Africa to fire the zeal of nation-building. In Nigeria for instance, successive governments (both military and civilian), since independence, have been attempting to create legal and institutional mechanisms as well as policies and slogans that will help to maintain peace, foster mutual understanding and promote a spirit of oneness among the people. Gen. Yakubu Gowon, while in office as Nigeria's Military Head of State between 1966 and 1975, will then always say, 'To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done', while the Radio Nigeria, before the commencement of its national Network News, till date, will always recite the slogan, 'Uplifting the People and Uniting the Nation' (Omotoyinbo, 2016). In the same vein, the defunct second republic National Party of Nigeria (NPN) also used the popular slogan, 'One Nation, One Destiny' to underscore the importance it then attached to building the country into a united and prosperous nation.

As part of efforts to operationalize this belief in a one-united-Nigeria, two clear methods stand out as being used by the government to manage ethno-religious disturbances in the country. These are the coercive and the judicial methods, (Dike, 2006). The coercive method involves the deployment of troops while the other method was the use of the judicial system, These two methods, Dike contended, have not been effective, given the continued escalation of such conflicts in the country. They have in reality only served to worsen the situation. Particularly, the coercive method has failed apparently because it involves a lot of shootings and, more often than not, innocent citizens are the victims. This type of conflict management strategy, apart from instilling fear in the citizens, does not include extensive mediation as the military officers do not seem to possess the expertise required to quell such conflicts.

The second method used is the judicial method in which perpetrators of violence of whatever form and magnitude are apprehended and arraigned before the court to face justice. However, this method has also failed to yield the required result because it has brought the victims more sorrow than expected relief. It is affected by poor logistics and therefore takes time and often does not receive the required cooperation by the parties involved in the conflict (Omorogbe and Omohan, 2005) cited in Nwankwo, (2015). As Oladele (2004) puts it, the prolonged pretrial detention of members of ethno-religious organizations remains a serious problem in Nigeria. The judicial system often is incapable of providing detainees with speedy and fair trials.

It was the apparent failure of the above two defensive measures to yield the necessary results or rather the need to combine them with other preventive and more proactive measures that led the government to adopt other measures like the establishment of:

1. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, through Decree No 24 of May 22, 1973 as amended in 1993 and made part of Section 315 of the 1999 Constitution, which affords the youths as the potential leaders of the country, the opportunity to live, work and interact with other Nigerians whose cultural, linguistic and religious heritages are alien to theirs (Ojo, 2009). In doing that, the youths are compelled to learn, understand and imbibe the ways of life of their host communities which they are expected to carry as they take up leadership positions in future.
2. The Federal Character Principle (FCP), which is defined as the fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence. This policy was created to give a sense of belonging to the various segments that make up the polity by ensuring that no section or part of the country is left out in the scheme of things.

3. The adoption of the Principle of Rotational Presidency, which, though not enshrined in the constitution, would, in the opinion of its promoters, bring about a sense of belonging among the different ethnic groups that make up the country. This is because the geographical zones into which the country has been divided will each have an opportunity to present candidates for the highest office in the land, thereby increasing their stake in the corporate oneness of the country, (Iyanda and Bello, 2016).
4. The movement of the federal seat of power from Lagos to Abuja- The intension behind this was to create a new federal capital that is a symbol of unity and nationhood, a seat of power that will be fairly of equidistance to the various parts of the country.
5. The increased attention to the Niger Delta region through the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the allocation of 13% revenue to the principle of derivation. This was intended to turn around the environmental degradation and the developmental deficit in the region which has often led to youth restiveness in the area.
6. The National Language Policy
7. The establishment of unity schools.
8. The secularization of religion, which permits freedom of worship as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (Amali and Jekayinfa, 2013).
9. The creation of States and Local Governments: In the period immediately preceding the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, then Military Head of State, in order to strengthen federalism in Nigeria, which was battered by late Gen. Ironsi's Unification Decree, resorted to the creation of more states out of the existing four regions then. It was therefore to strengthen the federal government and let the people look up to it as the real government of Nigeria that the regional governments were taken to the slab of sacrifice in 1967 where twelve (12) states were created which, thereby curtailed the domineering influence of the major ethnic groups in the country, (Onifade and Imhonopi, 2013).
10. Granting of registration only to political parties with national spread.
11. The inscription of the pictures of Nigeria's foremost nationalists and political leaders like the late (Dr.) Nnamdi Azikiwe, late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, late Sir Herbert Macaulay, late Sir Ahmadu Bello, late Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, late Gen. Murtala Ramat Mohammed and late Chief Alvan Ikoku in some of the country's national currency.
12. The promulgation of the Land Use Decree, which was done to vest all lands in a state on the governor of the state who holds it in trust for the people and by virtue of this, is enabled to allocate any land to any citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his state of origin.
13. Introduction of a uniform Local Government System in the country.
14. Institution of a National Policy on Education: Akpan (1990), submitted that for Nigerian Universities to serve as effective instruments for cementing national unity, they should, among other things, admit their students and recruit staff on a broad national basis, develop teacher and student exchange programs to promote both inter-university communication and knowledge of the country, institute a compulsory first year course in the social organization; customs; culture and history of the nations and its peoples.
15. Proclamation of a Constitution: Ayeni-Akeke, (2008) included the existence of a constitution as one of the nation building mechanisms in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. In his view, a constitution promotes a sense of community among members of a political system, particularly in societies with diverse groups. Where a constitution is a product of collective deliberations, its contents or provisions tend to be distillations of the rules, interests and aspirations of the various groups that make up the state.
16. Running a Presidential System of government: Citing Suberu, and the 1979 Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), Oni and Ayomola (2013), also included the resort to a presidential system of government as one the mechanisms for promoting national unity. According to them, the existence of a bicephalous executive common with the parliamentary system of government is not only meaningless in the light of African experience but also fails to provide a clear physical point of loyalty and thus is disruptive in practice. The clashes inherent in the system produce instability in government

and society which endangers national unity. It was to avert this disintegrative tendencies associated with the parliamentary system in a multi ethnic and multi religious Nigeria that the 1979 and 1999 constitutions adopted the presidential system of government which is believed to contain a seed of unity in pluralistic societies. The separation of the position of Head of State and Head of Government as practiced in Nigeria's first republic was seen as incompatible with the unity expected in a multi ethnic society. This explains why the framers of the 1979 and 1999 constitutions moved away from this bicephalous to a monocephalous arrangement in which the Head of State and Head of Government were combined in one person- the executive president- thus bringing the incessant wrangling between the occupants of the two offices, who in most cases, come from different groups, to an end. Section 30(2) of the 1999 Constitution specifically stated thus: There shall be for the Federation, a President, who shall be the Head of State, the chief executive of the federation. By this prescription, the personality of the president is seen as a symbol of the nation, being looked upon by all sections of the federation as a leader representing all the segments and strata of the society, Oni and Ayomola, (2013).

17. Nkwachukwu, cited in Ojo (2016), added Human Rights Approach as another classical approach to ethnic conflicts management in Nigeria. According to him, this approach sees the enactment of a Bill of Rights, with its guarantee of equity, liberty and non discrimination in the constitution as a major way of allaying the fears of the minorities and reducing the scope of discrimination against them.

18. Other mechanisms include: The Amalgamation policy of 1914, The Nigerianization Policy, National Festivals of Arts and Culture, National Sports Festival, National Football League, as well as other sporting competitions, (Edosa, 2014).

Spotlight on some of the steps for Nation building:

In spite of all the legal, institutional and policy steps to reduce ethno-religious tensions, foster oneness and promote a spirit of nation building among Nigerians, the country still lies on a hotbed of ethnic and religious pathway. Centrifugal tensions, resource control and self determination, ethnicity-based identity politics and religious cleavages still envelope our national consciousness. This is apparently due to the failure of most if not all the policy and legal mechanisms adopted over the years to bring Nigerians together. Experts are of the view that some of the policies are fraught with numerous shortcomings.

For instance, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, which was initiated to enhance interaction among the nascent educated elite in the country by providing them with the opportunity of living and serving in some developmental capacities in States other than their places of origin so that they could better understand the cultures, perhaps the language and general lifestyle of their host communities, has been fraught with ethnic considerations, favoritism and partiality in the posting of corps members, exposure of these youths to security risks (as was seen during the 2011 General Elections where many corps members of southern descent were butchered by some angry northern youths), corruption and misappropriation of funds.

The Federal Character Principle has also come under fire by experts lately because, laudable as the policy is, there was a yawning gap between intent and actual result of the policy. It has been criticized for introducing crass mediocrity into the public service, weak at fighting ethnicity, open to executive discretion and manipulation. It is thus seen as engendering instability rather than building trust. In the words of Ayoade (1998), it suffers from a faulty philosophical premise. The snag is that the policy subverts the principle of justice and fair play to the individual citizen. It sacrifices national progress and development on the altar of ethnic sectarianism as mediocrity takes' precedence over meritocracy in the conduct of public affairs. It has created more problems for national unity than it has solved. A principle that robs Peter to pay Paul cannot make Peter and Paul one. The principle discriminates against one group and favors another (Ayoade, 1998; Adeosun, 2009).

As regards the movement of the federal seat of power from Lagos to Abuja, Ojo (1998) argues that, both the politics and administration of the new federal capital territory have not been helpful. The arrangement is so haphazard that the Chairman and some members of the committee that recommended the new capital have openly lamented that the essence of the new capital has been jettisoned. The whole essence of the concept of a new federal capital territory as a symbol of unity and nationhood has been completely put into abeyance. In a nutshell, it appears that Abuja is organized as "a revenge project" because some northern elements see it as belonging to the north.

The Unity Schools Policy as a strategy of nation building has its own problems. For instance, it has led to discrimination of children from the so-called educationally advantaged states to give preference to students from the so-called educationally disadvantaged States thereby killing merit at the altar of mediocrity.

2. CONCLUSION

In view of the findings of this paper, the conclusion arrived at was that the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and the consequences they portend are ominous and enormous. It appears that most the policies created to curb ethno-religious tensions in the land and by extension engender nation building are each characterized by one drawback or the other. Right from amalgamation policy through Constitution making, NYSC scheme, federal character principle to the movement of the seat of power from Lagos to Abuja, the story is the same. Where the policies are not wrongly conceived from the beginning, their implementations have been found to be far from meeting the intentions of the formulators.

It is also noted that rather than abating with the passage of time, ethnic and religious disturbances in the country is increasing by the day. The current destabilizing activities of the dreaded Boko horam and the Fulani herdsmen are cases in point. No country, no matter how homogenous in its make-up, will ever make meaningful progress at nation building or grow into a vibrant world economic power if it cannot reign in ethnic and religious disturbances in its jurisdiction.

3. RECOMMENDATION

After going through the meaning, nature, history causes and the effects of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria as well as the steps already taken to quench the fire of ethnic and religious disturbances so that the wheels of meaningful nation building can move fast, but without success, this paper is making the following recommendations:

1. An in-depth expert study of the remote and immediate propellers of ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria should be conducted with a view to discovering holistically the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Government should sponsor an independent study composed mainly of highly technical personnel with competences in culture-dependent conflict identification and resolution do the study. This will help to put to rest the endless and often times confusing list of possible guess work on the matter that currently exist in the literature.
2. Government should review its current approach of classifying all ethno-religious sentiments in the country as trouble making and dismemberment seeking. This will be done all with the view of identifying when such sentiments are borne out of genuine latent or manifest injustice.
3. Since ethno-religious conflicts in the life of a nation has serious negative consequences, it is important that all such cases (whether at their latent or manifest stage) are given the prompt attention that they need so as to save government and its people of the serious consequences that go with any belated step. A case in point is the sad but well known story of the abducted Chibok school girls and the case of little and forgotten Miss Leah Sharibu in northeastern Nigeria, whose continued retention in captivity has been put at the doorstep of government's initial delay in initiating action.
4. It is strongly recommended that some of the laughable and ludicrous policies crafted to promote inter ethnic and inter religious harmony among the various groups in the country (which, as hoped, would help to engender national cohesion), should be discarded while those that need to be retained, should be reinvigorated. While the NYSC scheme should be fine-tuned to meet its initial objective, the FCP should be run in such a way that should not allow the sacrifice of merit at the altar of mediocrity.
5. The long canvassed 'wazobia' lingua language policy should be rolled out as part of building a bond oneness among Nigerians. Since most Nigerians see English language a foreign language and so find it difficult to imbibe it, the 'wazobia' common language option should be availed to reduce our areas of differences through language.

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