

Historical Analysis of Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria, 1990-2013

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Abstract:

Conflict is as old as human race. Since the creation of the country called Nigeria, there has been debate on the issue of peaceful coexistence among the different ethnic groups and between the two major religious groups, Christians and Muslims. This paper explored ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. There are many research work has been carried upon on the issue of Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria but the implications of these on the girl-child is limited. It is on this premise that this research is based. Ethnic issues are the bane of the different conflicts in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study intends to undertake a critical investigation of the ethnic conflict. The significance of this study therefore cannot be overemphasized because there cannot be development if there is no peace. However, the entrenchment of the democratic rule in 1999 brought a ray of hope for the citizens. Sadly, democracy has failed to completely unite the people of Nigeria; this is evident in the scores of ethnic conflicts in different parts of the nation.

Keywords:

Ethnic; ethnicity; conflicts; ethnic group

I. Introduction

Democracy is defined as the continuous process of promoting equal access to fundamental rights. In lieu of this, Ake argued that the struggle for democratic culture that can bring about real development in Nigeria is the one sustained by economic and political development based on centralization of power, and reliance on indigenous communities to provide some refuge from the centralized state. (Duyile & Oyewale, 2021) Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation. The ancient units in Nigeria has evolved over the ages of different historical experiences in different geographical regions, into a modern and complex heterogeneity of groups and cultures. These diverse nations with different languages and ideologies has been brought together under a single umbrella described as a "mere geographical expression". (Awolowo, 1947). It is worthy of note that almost six decades of political independence and over hundred years of "marriage", the nation is still being confronted with the challenges of national unity. (Duyile, Nwachukwu, Ediagbonya, & Pelumi, 2020). Nigeria is undoubtedly a country with a great political and economic potential in the developing world. It is a country with many peoples with diverse cultures. In terms of population and geographical spread, the major cultural groups of Nigeria are the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Ibibio, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Nupe and Ijaw. (Duyile, Ediagbonya, & Buhari, Infrastructural Growth and Development in Nigeria, 2020) In 1960, Nigeria became a self-governing state with Sir Tafawa Balewa as the inaugurating Prime Minister and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe as the President. Nigeria became a Republic in 1963. The country inadvertently ran into a civil war in 1967. The process of reconstruction and rehabilitation was partially successful after the end of the war in 1970. The littoral space of Nigeria can be seen in terms of its internal and external waters. The

internal waters are the rivers and lakes body within its territorial land space. The external waters are the Seas and Oceans within its border environs. It's not a matter of rhetoric or hearsay that basic infrastructure in Nigeria is in a semi-comatose state, and this can be traced to the events during the colonial times. The colonial impact on infrastructure was exploitative. (Duyile, *The Nigerian Marine Department Contribution to British Colonial Economy*, 2016). The British intention of developing infrastructure in the land space called Nigeria was to exploit the minerals in the soil and transport the agricultural produce for onward seafight to Europe. For instance, a Nigerian Navy Commander, Akinfemi Duyile (hydrography department), said that "even though the Bakassi and the fishing settlements historically belong to the Obong of Calabar," (Duyile, *Nigeria-Cameroon Bakassi Peninsula Crisis: A Retrospect of Nigerian Technocrats Views Prior to the Court case at the Hague*, 2015) Nigeria don't even a territory it created and ethnicity is associated with land and kindred.

As observed by Malam Abubakar Imam, "We despise each other, we call each other ignorant. The south is proud of its western knowledge and culture – we are proud of our eastern culture. (Alegbeleye, 2014) To tell you the plain truth, the common people of the north put more confidence in the white man than in either their black southern brothers..." (Alegbeleye, 2014) This is an apt description of the scenario of the early years of the nation. Conflicts in are not new to human societies, they are as old as human history because they have been in existence in all areas of human endeavour since the beginning of history. But that co-existence has not always been without stress, tension and sometimes violence. Nigeria has a long history of ethnic conflict. Since the emergence of the recent democracy in the country in 1999, the nation has witnessed series of violent clashes.

A country that is enmeshed with ethnic crisis cannot but experience monumental loss of lives, maiming, destruction of property worth billions of naira. This study therefore examines the implications of ethno-communal conflicts on sustainable development and recommends measures towards managing it in order to ensure rapid socio-political and economic development of Nigeria. From 1999- 2013, the country had witnessed many violent inter-ethnic conflicts.

As observed by Onodugo et. al. (2015), Ethno-religious conflicts with their multi-dimensional consequences has been an obstacle to progress, economic prosperity, and political stability and over –all socio-economic development of Nigeria because of its destructive nature. (Onodugo, Amujiri, & and Nwuba, 2015) Ethnicity is a social phenomenon that is manifested in interactions among individuals of different ethnic groups within a political system where language and culture are the most prominent attributes. Ethnicity is natural in almost all societies made up of more than one ethnic group. Ethnicity can be defined as a social formation predicated on culturally specific practices and unique symbols (Osaghae, 1992). Alegbeleye (2014), defined ethnicity as a situation in which individuals in a particular ethnic group consider themselves or are considered by others to have common affinity which distinct them from other groups in the society. (Alegbeleye, 2014)

Ethnic conflict is a concept that is difficult to define and perhaps, more difficult to comprehend. Conflict between ethnicities is a phenomenon that has occurred for ages and is not peculiar to Nigeria. Several scholars have taken issue with the term 'ethnic conflict' (alternately 'ethnic war' or 'ethnic violence')—loosely defined as political or social conflict involving one or more groups which are identified by some marker of ethnic identity. Conflict has been viewed in many different ways by various scholars. Historically, attempts

have been made by researchers to conceptualize conflict and one of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict regards conflict as” ... a struggle over value and claims to scarce, status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals” (Onodugo, Amujiri, & and Nwuba, 2015).

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Causes of Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

Several scholars have suggested that competition for scarce resources is a major factor to ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. In a country with diverse ethnic groups like Nigeria, there are competitions for the scarce resources of the nation.

As observed by Lake and Rothschild, (1996) ethnic conflict is a sign of a weak state or a state embroiled in ancient loyalties. (Lakes, (1996) In this case, states act with bias to favor a particular ethnic group or region, and behaviors such as preferential treatment fuel ethnic conflicts. It can be attributed to many factors, and they come different dimensions. (Lakes, (1996) As observed by David & Popoola, some of the factors are:- colonial legacy, boundary disputes, struggle for power and resources, struggle for citing of local government headquarters or government institutions, failure of the traditional model of conflict resolution, poverty, perceived lack of sincerity and fair play on the part of government, manipulation of the elites in the society, ethnic intolerance and religious intolerance (Ojo, 2014).

Otite(2000), highlighted ten major factors that causes ethnic conflicts which are the following:

- Disputed Territorial Claims: Farmers and pastoralists, fishermen and pond owners etc have clashed throughout Nigeria over con uses or exploitation of land and water resources. The problem of land resources as a factor in ethnic conflicts has been a major issue between communities and ethnic groups. All pieces of land in Nigeria belong to one ethnic group or the other, thus propelling ethnicity and ethnic conflicts.
- The Imperatives of culture- bound occupation: As observed by several scholars that interactions of a group’s heritage, ecology, technology population movements, and physical environmental resources, members of certain ethnic groups have learnt to survive on certain occupations in which they have also achieved some preserve. For example, cattle rearers in need of pastures in the northeastern and northwestern areas of the country have engaged in violent conflicts over the limited and scarce land pastures for their animals with farmers over the crops and farmland destroyed by animals. There has been loss of life and property from these ethnic violent clashes.
- Scarcity of Resources: Resources are minimal and scarce in the nation that is blessed with over 10 million people and thus stiff competitions are on the political and economic spheres. There are inter-ethnic and intra ethnic conflicts in the race for political positions.
- Multiculturalism and strategic Use of symbols: Symbols have a strong connection to the culture of the people. Ethnic symbols are protected as a common heritage of the community or ethnic group. So any perceived disregard or humiliation for the culture of any ethnic group had led to conflict. A good example is the Hausa and Yorubas in Sagamu in 1999.
- Religion and Ethnic Conflicts: Ethnicity conflicts hardly happen in isolation or in a vacuum, but it mingles with other variables such as religion and class. In Northern Nigeria however, the two concepts are so interwoven to the extent that conflicts between groups in the region tend to be quickly interpreted as ethnic or religious conflicts. Experiences from the past have shown that most violent conflicts result from interplay of ethnic, religious, political, socio-economic and cultural differences. For example, during ethnic conflicts volatile conflicts areas in the northern Nigeria like Kaduna or Kano, an Igbo

Muslim or Yoruba Muslim may not be regarded as a Muslim by the Hausa neighbor but seen as from a different ethnic group.

- Ethnicity, Class and Ethnic Conflicts: Ethnic consciousness is prevalent in Nigeria. The National class interests are insignificant when the choice of identity is involved in important issues of individuals or community. The upper or middle social classes in Nigeria are known to have used ethnic coloration to mobilize the people for support to positions of power and to foster ethnic conflicts. This tendency of not establishing the boundary between ethnic, religious, cultural or political issues especially during 4 moments of conflicts and violence has for want of a better expression been captured by some scholars as “ethno-religious conflicts” or identity conflicts.
- The Structural basis of Ethnic Conflicts: The pluralism of a nation makes it susceptible to conflicts. The conflicts are as a result of limited access to political, economic and scarce resources. Thus, ethnic conflicts are not inevitable in such multiethnic societies as Nigeria.
- Internal Colonialism: The different ethnic groups has unequal population size and access to political authority.
- Unintended Consequences of Political Development
- External Forces

Thus, from the points highlighted above, the causes of conflict in the country can be explained from many perspectives. Scholars have offered multiple explanations for the ongoing violent ethnic conflict in Nigeria. The literature presented will shed light on the extremely complex relationships that underlie the animosities that have catalyzed the nation. The paper will consider general theories that offer additional explanations. Specifically, it will examine Stuart Kaufman’s theory of symbolic politics of ethnic war and how it applies to the different ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. (Kaufman, 2001).

2.2 Historical Analysis of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

The history of ethnic conflict in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial and post-colonial era. Ojo observed that the colonial tripartite division of Nigeria prevented a Nigerian nationalistic movement, manipulating geographical boundaries to reinforce separation between ethnic groups and transforming ethnicity into an identity by which to gain political power; this structure along with other administrative decisions emphasized ethnic nationalism and regional politics, resulting from significant uneven development within each region. (Ojo, 2014)

Nigeria is a pluralistic society; culturally, politically, ethnically, religiously and otherwise. Nigeria as a nation state has had and continues to have its own share of ethnic conflicts. The Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria continued even in the new democratic dispensation. President Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military Head of State became a democratically elected President in 1999. Despite the change in government, conflict continues to escalate, as various ethnic groups demand a political restructuring. However, it should be noted that, with the renewed attempt at entrenching democracy, agitations for political and economic spaces has accelerated between and among the various ethnic groups in the country, thus making these conflicts inevitable.

The Itsekiri-Ijaw violence in the Delta; the resumption of the Ife-Modakeke communal violence; the menace of Odu’a Peoples’ Congress (OPC) and the accompanying violence in Lagos and Shagamu areas; the formation of the Arewa Peoples’ Congress (APC) and the Igbo Peoples’ Congress (IPC); the MASSOB different attempts to resuscitate Biafra; the Sharia crisis and the demands for a confederation; the South-South demand for the

control of its resources; and all the recent interethnic/ religious conflicts in various states across the country are all part of the bubbles of the Nigerian federation.

According to Ojo (2014), “the systemic forceful unappealing catastrophic and uncongenial institutionalized querulous cementation of divergence caste artificially orchestrated and certificated by the British colonialism mainly to ease the challenge of onerous task in socio-political milieu of Nigeria has underscored sore Achilles heel engraved with irrevocable creation of indelible pauperization of Nigerian political web consequent in a state of passivity and fait accompli. (Ojo, 2014)The incompatibility of multi-diverse ethnic configuration has fueled the acidulous ember manifestation of rigmarole, cataleptic, catatonic and chaotic political arrangement of Nigeria while identity politics becomes a prodigious threat to the sustenance of Nigerian.” (Ojo, 2014)

The result of this unholy union have resulted in the continuous state of disunity, political instability, general insecurity of lives and property, mutual suspicion and distrust among the diverse ethnic nationalities that make up the geographical entity called Nigeria. In line with the above, Adetoye and Omilusi (2015) observed that *Nigeria is not a nation*.

III. Result and Discussion

Analysis of Ethno-Communal Conflict in Nigeria

Over the past couple of decades, Nigeria has witnessed series of ethnic conflicts which have left in their trail blood-bath and wanton destruction of properties. Some of these conflicts are tabulated below.

S/N	Year	Crisis
1.	30/05 to 9/06/ 1999	Warri Communal Clash in Delta State.
2.	18/07/1999	OPC and Hausa traders in Sagamu.
3.	25/11/1999	OPC and Hausa traders in Lagos.
4.	25/01/2000	Communal Clash in Brass LGA, of Bayelsa
5.	2/02/2000	Boundaries dispute between communities in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States.
6.	March 16, 2000	Clash between people of Eleme and Okrika in River State
7.	May 18, 2000	Clash between local farmers and Fulani cattle rearers in Saki, Oyo State.
8.	June 23, 2000	Communal Clash between the people of Offiong and Oku-Iboku of Cross River State.
9.	21/07/ 2000	Ijaw and Urhobo in Delta
10.	16/10/2000	Igbo and Hausa traders at Alaba Rago, Lagos.
11.	11/12/ 2000	Resumption of Ife -Modakeke communal violence.
12.	12/05/2001	Ijaw and Itshekiri violence in Delta state
13.	12/07/ 2001	Ethnic violence in Nassarawa.
14.	07/09 -17/09/ 2001,	Hausa and Fulani conflict in Jos
14.	2/02/2002	Yoruba and Hausa at Idi- Araba Lagos.
15.	26/02/ 2002	Communal Clash between Apprapum and Osatira in Cross River
16.	Feb. 2004	Yelwa, Shendam and Wase in Plateau state
17.	2009	Kala-Kato ethnic crisis
18.	2010	Jos crisis in Plateau state

Source: Adapted from Adeyemi, Ethno-religious conflict (2006)

There are many dimensions to the different ethnic Conflicts in the nation such as. Resource exploitation, corrupt elites and colonization all play a part in the conflicts. The overall context of the violence outlined above has to be located in the manner in which minority and majority relations have been conducted in the recent past, and the manner in which different ethnic groups perceive the past blinded by the ethnic tensions of the present. To a certain extent, the emergence of ethnic politics can be understood in the context of colonialism and some colonial practices and policies put in place by the British Government during colonialism. From the very start of colonialism, the British introduced an extremely divisive and parochial form of limited representation based on economic status, ethnicity and political preference. However, this system has in many ways survived to date, and is the precursor of the current ethnic conflicts. The growing propensity of protracted ethnic conflicts is potentially destructive to the extent that if nothing is done it can compromise the corporate existence of the country. So far, there appear to be no singular phenomenon in the history of Nigeria that shows the inability of the various identities to live together peacefully and pursue the goal of development than the regular occurrence of this monster called ethnic conflict. What the country is experiencing is a recurring spate of violence that is deeply rooted in mutual suspicion and hatred among the various ethnic and groups in the country. The aftermath of these violent conflicts bears destruction, physical and mental devastation, death, maiming of people, destruction of property and economic stagnation, disruption of the educational development of northern Nigeria with frequent closure of schools during crises. The nation's diversity has continued to threaten its progress and even its existence. This is because of our orientation of non-commitment to the ideal of the nation but rather to our various ethnic identities. This is reflected in the frequent occurrence of ethnic and other violent conflicts that have afflicted the country since independence and particularly in the past two decades. These phenomena threaten the country's fragile democratic institutions and impede its socio-economic growth by diverting much needed funds from development initiatives to military and counter insurgency activities as well as to re-building destroyed infrastructure. The political process in the country is also influenced by ethnicity, religion and sometimes caste in that socio-cultural markers such as ethnicity and religion often play a vital and even strategic role.

A number of factors have contributed to the incessant occurrences of ethnic conflict in Nigeria. Thus, from the different conflicts tabulated above, the causes of conflict in the country can be explained from many perspectives. Scholars have attributed the causes of these conflicts to various factors like struggle for land resources, traditional authority, competition for economic and political spaces, clash of values and way of lives, religion and ethnicity and religious manipulations.

Poverty and unemployment, Failure of the government security intelligence and law enforcement agencies in bringing the culprits to book, Northern Nigeria's tradition for carrying out Jihadist Islam. The imposition of Sharia Law in some northern parts of the country, Lack of understanding of what the Islamic faith preaches and Indigene and Settler Controversy. (Egwu, 2001)

IV. Conclusion

These children were raped, forced to watch the murder of other family members, and then often killed. These conflicts have had enormous negative consequences on the girl-child. The conflicts on ethnic grounds have smeared the relationship of all the ethnic groups against each other. There is mutual suspicion between the different parties. Ethnic and political conflicts seem to have strong implications for the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria. This fear was expressed by the statement of former Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo while declaring a State of Emergency on Plateau State after the 2004 violent conflicts. According to him, "...violence had reached unprecedented levels and hundreds had been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes on account of their ethnic or religious identification." He further observed that schooling for children was disrupted and interrupted; businesses had lost billions of naira and much more property destroyed. If the Nigeria leaders were to be proactive in their approach, many conflicts in the country could be avoided. There is the need to adopt an active policy of conflict prevention. However, conflict prevention would be the most proactive and holistic resolution policy. If we worked collectively to stop the spread of hatred and violent ideologies then atrocities such as those that are occurring in recent times, then maybe world peace could actually be an attainable goal.

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