ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Nigeria’s political history is replete with unresolved and unsettling ethno-religious fracas and largely impotent panels to determine their causes with a view of preventing future occurrence when conflicts have not occurred, or have somehow abated; associated tensions have remained high, with all the attendant negative consequences on the socio-political and economic development in the country. Under the current democratic epoch, competitive partisan political activities are being used as avenue through which groups are mobilized, identities rigidly reinforced, often infused with excessive religiosity, violent youth gangs and militants are formed and armed, and ethnic tensions and conflicts thereby facilitated. This is not to say that expressions of ethno-religious identities always results in violence. The paper conceptualizes ethno-religious identities and analyzes the causes, extent, magnitude and implications before narrowing down to specifics. The paper concludes by suggesting how to curb ethno-religious problems in Nigeria in order to promote good governance.

Keywords: Good Governance, Conflicts, Ethno-religious Identities, Clashes of Civilization and Nigeria.

Introduction
According to Thomson (2007:59), ethnic and religious mobilization can often be found at the heart of political competition. As with all social cleavages; fault lines within societies form along these identities, creating opposing interests. These differences of interest, in turn, offer themselves to potential or occasionally violent, conflict.

No state, for example, is devoid of ethnic influences. Notions of ethnicity and nationalism during the 1940s, for example, helped tear Europe apart in the twentieth century. More recently, in the 1990s, similar sentiments have brought devastation to the Balkans, the Great lakes and the Horn of Africa, Mano River and Nigeria respectively.

This is not to say that expressions of ethnicity and religion always result in violence. Such desires and demands are usually channeled peacefully through political institutions, just like other clashes of interest within the polity. An Ethno-religious identity is not specifically within Nigeria. This paper argues that ethno-religious identities are not necessarily a hindrance to peaceful government. Often these two social identities act as a powerful counterbalance to state power; serving as a useful way for civil society to mobilize politically.
According to Jega (2002:35), Democracy can be said to be like a seed: essentially, what you sow, you reap in abundance. So, it is, that one of the ‘dividends’ of democracy, which Nigerians have reaped since the transfer of power from the military to civilians on May 29, 1999, is the rising spates of ethnic, religious and communal conflicts, with devastating consequences on lives and property. The genetically engineered seeds of ‘democracy’ planted by successive military regimes, under dubious transition to civil rule programs have now grown to a mature crop for harvest. It seems as if decades of bottled up anger under military rule has suddenly exploded and found expression in violent ethnic, religious and communal conflicts, in the context of the little democratic space, which has opened up since May 29, 1999. For example, no less than 40 violent ethno-religious and communal clashes have been reported since the Obasanjo government came into power about eight years ago. Many lives and property worth millions of Naira have been lost as a result of these. Furthermore, Nigerians now spend much energy trying to redefine their ‘national’ identity as a consequence of the emotive feeling and perceptions, which these clashes have engendered.

Though Nigeria’s history is replete with unresolved and unsettling ethno-religious conflicts and fracas and largely impotent probe panels to determine their causes with the view of preventing future occurrence, none has exposed the seeming artificiality and fragility of Nigeria as the recurrent upheavals in Plateau State have done. The November 28, 2008 Jos North Local Government Area is no more different until 2001, Jos wand indeed the entire plateau state, was an oasis of tranquility, untainted by the lurid creature of ethno-religious stryes synonymous with many Northern states. Since the return to democracy in Nigeria, the political leaders of Nigeria are like men driving Lorries that has lost its breaks and steering wheels.

When conflicts have not occurred, or have somehow abated, associated tensions have remained high, with all the attendant negative consequences on the socioeconomic and political development in the country. Instead of democracy yielding peace, stability and security to lives and property, it seems to have yielded a return, full circle, to the spate of ethno-religious conflicts and violent eruptions, which characterized military rule, especially the tail-ends of Generals Babangida’s and Abacha’s popularly acclaimed inglorious reins. Those who have profited from mobilizing negative passions and igniting the embers of ethno-religious conflagration in the past are at it again, evidently in full swing, mobilizing negative ethnicity, religious bigotry and intolerance, whipping sentiments and pitching one ethno-religious group against another.

Under the current democratic transition, competitive partisan political activities are being used as avenue through which groups are mobilized, identities rigidly reinforced, often infused with excessive religiosity, violent youth gangs and militants are formed and armed, and ethnic tensions and conflicts thereby facilitated. As the elite pursue zero-sum political engagements, all means, including violent ones, are used to achieve selfishly and narrowly defined ends. It appears as if no lesson has been learnt from our reckless, militaristic, authoritarian, intolerant and violent past by our leading political actors. In these circumstances, there is no doubt that democratic consolidation and sustainability in Nigeria are being threatened, and that it would require a concerted effort by all stakeholders to deescalate ethno-religious tension, drastically reduce the sources of conflict, and prevent or, at least, speedily contain violent eruptions.

This contribution attempts to highlight what is required to be done, policy-wise as well as practically, by both the government and all the other stakeholders, so as to find a way out of the heavy cost of potentially violent ethno-religious and communal conflicts, which characterize present day Nigeria. But first, it conceptualizes ethno-religious identifies and analyses the
causes of ethnic tension and conflict, discusses the extent and magnitude of these on national cohesion and good governance, before specifically narrowing down using specific case studies. The paper concludes by suggesting how to tackle these problems in Nigeria.

Clarification of Concepts

Identity Politics

Political identification is the connections in the minds of an individual between how that person defines himself or herself and an organization, group, philosophy or other reference point. In short, transnationalism is multi-faceted and has the potential of unifying or dividing an entity.

At the level of policy makers, this anxiety was articulated by Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the United Nations Organization in his 1997 Annual report. He lamented the rise of negative form of identity politics and their potentially explosive consequences. He stated among other things, that:

*This particularistic and exclusionary form of identity politics has intensified in recent years within and among nations…. It is responsible for some of the most egregious violations of international humanitarian law and in several instances of elementary standards of humanity…. Negative forms of identity politics are a potent and potentially explosive force. Great care must be taken to recognize, confront and restrain them lest they destroy the potential for peace and progress that the new era holds in store (The Guardian, 1997:8; Jega, 2003:11)*

Jega (2003:14) has articulated the resurgence of politics of identities in the following form. The concept of identity has long been used in social anthropology and psychology, especially by structuralists and post-structuralists, and has gained particular currency in the post-modernist literature. As a socio-political concept, “identity” has both an individualist and a collective meaning. In any case, it can simply be defined as “a person’s sense of belonging to a group if (it) influences his political behaviour” (Erickson, 1968:57). It is said to be “always anchored both in physiological ‘givens’ and in social roles’…” (Erickson, 1968:63) Its attribute comprise “commitment to a cause”, ‘love and trust for a group”, “emotional tie to a group”, as well as “obligations and responsibilities” relating to membership of a group with which a person identifies. According to Pye (1962:124) “those who share an interest share an identity; the interest of each requires the collaboration of all”. Thus, ordinarily, identities serve as rallying and organizing principles of social action within the civil society, and in state-civil society relations. They inform and guide political behaviour, and they add dynamism to political conduct in the context of plural societies (Parry and Moran, 1994). In the context of state-civil society relations, they also serve as a check on the potential excesses of the state. Hence, Parry and Moran have observed that “in advanced societies… what is as significant as overriding national identities are the multiple identities which go to make up plural societies” (Parry and Moran, 1994:275). Such physiological givens as gender and age, and sociological characteristics as ethnicity, nationality, religion, kinship relations, or even workplace affiliations can, and often do, create a basis for identity. Identity is not only about individuality and self-awareness, but also and especially about identification with, and commitment to, shared values and beliefs, in a social collectivity into which a person belongs. At any given time, a person may have multiple identities, each of which may always have some bearing on his or her political conduct and social roles in society. Thus, as Adesina noted, where identities are concerned, an individual is Janus-faced.

However, the question of which sort of identity has the most significant impact or bearing on a person’s behaviour is the critical issue, and a subject of theoretical speculation. It is
significant that while identities are more or less fixed, identity consciousness is dynamic. Hence, mobilization, provocation and agitation are central to the formation of a requisite identity consciousness which, in turn, is critical to identity-based politics.

The formation or construction of identity space, according to Larsh and Friedman (1992:336), is the “dynamic operator linking economic and cultural processes” in modern societies. In competition or struggles over societal resources, especially in situations of scarcity, collective demands tend to be predicated and organized on shared interests, which in turn and to be hinged on either physiological ‘givens’ or, as is more often the case, on shared socio-cultural identities. Thus, what can be termed as identity politics is nothing more than, to use Joseph’s phraseology, “the mutually reinforcing interplay between identities and the pursuit of material benefits within the arena of competitive politics” (Joseph, 1987:52).

Identity politics, in other words, is basically “politics either starting from or aiming at claimed identities of their protagonists” (Calhoun, 1994) in national political struggles over access to the state and to avenues of accumulation. It involves the mobilization of identity consciousness in order to create a mass base of support for the ruling classes, and the elite generally, in their factional struggles in the accumulation process. Also, identity politics connotes a relatively high degree of the subjective entering into politics.

Nationalism grows from the sense of community and turns it into “a principle of political loyalty and society identity’ (Gellner, 1995:2). Nationalism does this by merging the three concepts of state, nation, and nation-state in a way that is personally related to citizens (Rourke and Boyer, 2003:88). The transformation occurs when individuals (a) “becomes sentimentally attached to the homelands,” (b) “gain a sense of identity and self-esteem through their national identifications,” and (c) are “motivated to help their country” (Druckman, 1994:4). This merging of the three concepts means that nationalism is an ideology that holds that the nation, embodied in its agents, the sovereign nation-state should be the paramount object of the political loyalty of individuals (Rourke, and Boyer, 2005:88).

In the words of Huntington (1996:125): in the new world, however, cultural identity is the central factor shaping a country’s associations and antagonisms. While a country should avoid cold war alignment, it cannot lack an identity. The question, “which side are you on?” has been relegated by the much more fundamental one, “who are you?” Every state has to have an answer. That answer, its cultural identity, defines the state’s place in world politics, its friends and its enemies. Identity issues are of course, particularly intense in cleft countries that have sizable groups of people from different civilizations.

Politicians invoke and publics identify with “greater” cultural communities that transcend nation state boundaries, including “Greater Serbia”, “Greater China”, “Greater Turkey”, “Greater Hungary”, “Greater Croatis”, Greater Azerbaijan”, “Greater Russia”, Greater Albania”, “Greater Iran”, and “Greater Uzbekistan” (Huntington, 1996:128).

Transnationalism springs from two sources. A global interaction is one; the degree to which economic interdependence, mass communications, rapid travels and other modern factors are interwining the lives of people around the world. Human thought is the second source of transnationalism. The philosopher Rene Descarates posited in Discourse on method (1657) that intellect is the essence of human being. “I think, therefore, I am”, he wrote. People can think abstractly, can conceive of what they have not experienced, and can group ideas together to try to explain existence ad to chart courses of action (Rourke and Boyer, 2003:106-107).

Some streams of transnational thought are referred to as globalism, cosmopolitanism or some other such encompassing word. Other transnational movements such as religion and gender
have limited focus. Transnationalism is conceived here to include a range of loyalties, activities, and other phenomenon that connect humans across nations and national boundaries.

**Ethno-Religious Conflict**

Ethno-religious tension or conflicts according to Jega (2002:35) can be described as a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic group and another, or generally amongst ethnic groups, in a multicultural polity such as Nigeria, is characterized by a lack of cordiality, by heightened mutual suspicions and fears, by quarrelsomeness and by a tendency towards violent confrontations. A community experiencing ethno-religious tension is, literally, on the verge of a violent eruption, and perpetually insecure and unstable. Any minor misunderstanding involving members of two or more different ethnic groups could have a catalytic effect and push things beyond the precipice. There are two major types of sources of this category of tension in Nigeria, namely that associated with the character of the relationship between the so-called ‘settlers’ and their ‘host’ community; and that associated with perceptions of how kinsmen are being treated in distant locations, which attracts reprisal attacks or sentiment.

Nigeria is undoubtedly one very tense country, insofar as ethno-religious relationships are concerned. A combination of interrelated crises has stretched the bonds of unity, the fabrics of nationhood, as well as the ingredients of citizenship identity, very thin, to a potentially snapping point. Although the incredible resiliency demonstrated by Nigerians has somehow prevented the dismemberment of the country, the tension hangs in the air like thick clouds, such that, for example, a mere argument between two traders of different ethnic backgrounds in a market in Kano has been known to ignite widespread violent conflict. This tense context of national development is undoubtedly one of the major problems that have to be concretely solved in order for Nigeria to forge ahead and develop, both economically and political in the 21st century.

To be able to concretely solve a problem, one has to understand and analyze its underlying causes holistically, in all their ramifications. There are many causes of ethno-religious tension and conflicts in Nigeria and quite a number of them are actually interrelated.

Ordinarily, it is difficult, although not impossible, in a pluralistic society to promote a strong bond of citizenship while at the same time accommodating socio-cultural diversity (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000). What role the elite play is largely responsible for success or failure in this endeavour. In the case of Nigeria, complicating factors, such as the convergence of religious value-orientations with ethnic differences have combined with the greedy disposition of the elite, as well as their deliberate and willful manipulations, to make things much more difficult to manage and/or contain; indeed to heighten mutual fears and suspicions of the ‘other’, to reinforce perceptions of domination and marginalization by the ‘other’, and to erect rigid barriers to cordial and peaceful inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-communal relationships. In this respect, and in a comparative context, the Nigerian elite seem to be grossly deficient of an enlightened self-interest.

**Understanding the Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the turbulence of the religious scene during the epoch under study fuels the associated agitation in the political arena, especially in the context of growing fears over political domination and religious freedom. Muslim fundamentalists and activities express concern and fear over what they consider to be the dominance of Christian culture, westernization or secularization of Nigeria. The only politics they recognize is Islamic politics, guided by the Quran and Sunnah in an Islamic state. As Falaki (1988:22) posited:

*It is incompatible with Islam, therefore, for a Muslim to pledge support to any political party of a non-Islamic platform or to yield to a non-Islamic government*
of alien origin and aims. The ruler is not a sovereign over the people. He is a representative employee chosen by the people and derives his authority from his obedience to the law of Allah.

Another issue worth discussing is the statement credited to Chief Francis A. Nzeribe, which appeared in a Christian newspaper The Leader Published in Owerri. In an interview which appeared on its May 30th, 1987 edition, Nzeribe was quoted as saying:

*Christianity and Islam will be the underlying factors in the 1990 elections...time has come for the Christians to be political...Rome and Canterbury cannot afford to fold their hands again because Christians...have realized in a hard way that Islamization of Nigeria is the target of the Muslim World (The Leader, May 30, 1987 and Ibrahim and Ibrahim, 2003:75).*

Christian fundamentalists and activists are concerned mainly with what they regard as the threat of Islamization of the county, imposition of Sharia on non-Muslims and the use of state resources to subsidize Muslim activities.

Elaigwu (1977:7) in an address to the North Baptist convention in Kano called on Christian organizations in Nigeria to become more politically conscious, thus:

*They should start participating in political activities in order to infuse the Christian ideals of charity into politics...Christians must radicalize their churches for more socially beneficial purposes. The Christian must stand up boldly and speak out against social and political wrongs whenever they are found in the society (Ela-Igwu, 1977:7).*

Infact, for Rev. Wilson S. Sabiya: to entrench the Sharia Court in the constitution is to legalize the inferiority of non-Muslims and the superiority of Muslims.... The claim therefore, the courts cannot be used as instruments of evangelism is totally false. The Sharia is Islam and Islam is Sharia. Sharia is a total way of life; it is evangelism (Sabiya, 1979:48).

The battle seemed to center on perceptions of the imposition of identity on the other or at least maintaining one’s ground. This hegemonic contest also involves an interpretation and reinterpretation of events and history in Nigeria. Even the “theological space” is in contest, as seen by the attempt of the Christian and Islamic activist groups to project themselves as the pure and the faithful, unlike the others who are seen as nominal or syncretic (Ibrahim and Ibrahim, 2003:85-86).

The late Mallam Aminu Kano, a leading political and social reformer, observed in 1976-7 at a seminar that “Nigeria seems to be a good fertile ground for religious conflict because of its oil resources, big Muslim Population and its Christian elite” (Kano, 1977:7). A few years after this observation, there was the Maitasine intra-religious (Muslim) crisis in Kano in December 1980, and in Kadauna, Gombe, and Yola in 1982, 1984 and 1985 respectively (Ibrahim and Ibrahim, 2003:89). Also, ethnic-regional identities have equally become problematic in Nigeria because they have been associated with perceptions of discrimination and inability of some groups to exercise certain rights and civil liberties. The main issues have been the control of political power in general, and specifically, control of the armed forces, the judiciary and the bureaucracy. There is also the question of the control of economic power and resources (Ibrahim, 2003:63 and Kirk-Greene, 1975:19).
Fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the physical fear of discrimination, of domination, it is the fear of not getting one’s fare share, one’s dessert. In a situation such as the one described above, the youth, elite and even key political figures identified themselves with ethno-religious movements and issues. The level of corruption exacerbated by harsh economic conditions and the skewing of the spoils of office for only those in the corridors of power made many people retreat back to the mosques and churches as alternative modes of economic survival and political expression of opposition and protest. This, however, was not done in any systematic or organized way. Ethno-religious movements helped in providing some social welfare services to the followers and have also become a means of accumulation (Kare, 1994 and Ibrahim, 2003:90).

The response to the state to ethno-religious revivals and military has been in terms of repression. But ethno-religious movements can help keep the society peaceful, depending upon the agenda of the ethnic and religious leaders. In the words of the President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence, Muhammed Sa’ad Abubakar:

To our youths here and elsewhere, take the pursuit of knowledge as your personal companion in the Journey of life. Knowledge empowers, liberates and helps us to live successfully and fulfilled lives devoid of fear and prejudice….knowledge also helps us to acknowledge the common values we share, the respect for human life and dignity, the imperatives of helping and assisting our neighbours and the responsibility of shunning vices and evils, and contributing our quota to building a humane, decent and caring society (Nnadozie, 2009:A9).

Ethno-religious activism in Nigeria is not likely to be transitory; rather it is likely to be an enduring phenomenon. Eskor Toyo might, thus, be right in affirming that Nigerian nation exists. What it lacks at the moment is a really patriotic, broad-minded, principled, enlightened, humane and honest leadership (The Guardian, 1996:2) and Ibrahim, 2003:64).

According to Jega (2002:36), Critical to understanding these, is an appreciation of the nature and character of the postcolonial state in Nigeria. Many scholars (e.g.: Graf, 1998; Forrest, 1993; Joseph, 1987; diamond, 1986; etc.) have identified capitalist rent seeking; patrimonialism and prebendalism as the major characteristics of the postcolonial Nigerian state. Some have even fancifully refereed to the Nigerian state as a ‘rogue state’ (e.g. Joseph, 1996). These characteristics have combined with one another, and with many others, in complex dynamics, to undermine the Nigerian state’s capacity to discharge those fundamental obligations of a modern state to its citizens, such as socioeconomic provisioning, guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms, ensuring law and order and facilitating peace and stability as preconditions for growth and development. Those who have presided over the state have tended to personalize power and privatize collective national resources, while being excessively reckless in managing the affairs of the nation. Indeed, the state has become the prime mover of capitalist development and class formation, with all the associated contradictions that this is wont to spew up. As noted elsewhere, in Nigeria:

The ruling class derived both its origin and wealth from the state, around which it gravitates, using every available means to secure power and access. Hence, in the competition and struggles for state power, especially in the period of economic crisis, identity politics become heightened and tend to assume primacy. The state tends to resort to politics of identity for its legitimation, while those excluded tend
to resort to identity politics to contest this exclusion. The state, thus, is projected as the critical variable in identity transformation, and the resurgence of identity politics (Jega, 2000:19)

Given this situation, elite contestation for political power and capture of the state is characterized by cutthroat competition in a sort of zero-sum game manner. Sentiment is mobilized; ethno-religious and communal identities are negatively massaged and manipulated so as to achieve selfish and parochial objectives. Identity consciousness in itself, and its varied forms, are not major problems in plural societies. However, they become a problem when they are mobilized negatively and used as platforms on which political action is organized, as well as when, as Ibrahim has observed, “they become, or are perceived as, objectives around which discriminatory practices and unjustified use of violence are organized” (2004:41; Otite, 1990).

Thus, in the context of the overbearing character of the postcolonial Nigerian state, greed, selfishness, parochialism, pettiness and irresponsible conduct by those who are supposed to be leaders have been major causal, or at least catalytic, factors of ethno-religious tension and conflicts. For example, these leaders pursue self-serving objectives in the power game and in the process of accumulation, and tend conflate these with, and project them as, a part of an ethno-religious or regional group agenda. While doing this, they also make unguarded, if not irresponsible utterances, which deepen existing ethno-religious divides. The hypes they make are popularized by the mass media they control, which further engender fears and suspicions. Their lack of transparency and good governance reinforces both the reality and perceptions of discrimination and marginalizing of one group by another.

Another major factor according to Jega (2002:36), which has helped to nurture ethno-religious tensions and conflicts, is poverty. The onset of economic crisis in Nigeria in the decade of the 1980’s, which was accompanied by the introduction of structural adjustment programme (SAP) by the Babangida regime, gave rise to a profound crisis of legitimacy of the postcolonial state Olukoshi 1993; Fadahunsi and Babawale, 1996; Jega, 2000). SAP was acclaimed to have, not only structurally adjusted the Nigerian economy to the requirements of global capitalism, but also created mass poverty in Nigeria.

As noted elsewhere:

The incidence and magnitude of poverty has increased dramatically in Nigeria since the 1980’s, with the result that about 67% of Nigerians are decisively entrapped in conditions of acute poverty. Poverty has ravaged communities and families, it has torn the moral fabric of society, and it is now threatening the country with violent eruptions. Most of the recent violent ethno-religious and communal conflicts can also be explained by poverty, joblessness and intense competition over scarce resources and services both in the urban and rural contexts. The mass of unemployed youth in both the rural and urban areas of Nigeria need little motivation or mobilization to partake in riots and ‘reprisal attacks’, given the inducement or ‘opportunity’ for looting that often accompanied these. Thus, poverty and joblessness, especially amongst the youth, are important casual and facilitating factors in violent conflicts. Such objective economic conditions nurture the subjective conditions of frustration and aggression, which create conducive atmosphere for violent conflicts to erupt (Ayoade and Jega, 2000).
Thus, mass poverty served to condition the minds and attitudes of Nigerians and made them susceptible to elite manipulation and mobilization of negative identities. As the state became unable to satisfy basic needs of the people, they in turn withdrew from the sphere of the state, into ethno-religious and communal cocoons, with heightened sensitivity to the roles of the ‘others’ in their marginalization and immiseration (Jega, 2000).

**Extent, Magnitude and Consequences of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Selected Cases**

There has been a phenomenal increase in tension and rise in violent ethno-religious conflicts since May 29, 1999. Estimates place the number of violent incidences throughout the country at more than forty. The most destructive and violent of these conflicts occurred in cities, such as Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Ibadan and Jos, as well as other places like Shagamu, and parts of Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Bayelsa and Delta states. The loss of lives has been estimated in billions of Naira. The psychological and emotional scars are inestimable, and are bound to take long to heal. The totality of the material and non-material costs are profound, and they impose a heavy burden even on a country as resilient and resourceful as Nigeria.

The consequences of all these are best imagined. A part from loss of lives and property and the emotional trauma that accompany these, the persistence of ethno-religious tension and conflicts has resulted in declining national cohesion and identity, undermining of legitimacy of the state and considerable loss of confidence on the machinery of government. Vital issues of citizenship persistently contradict, and conflict with, notions of ‘indigeneship’, which are based on ethnic and communal identities. As a result, the debate on the National Question has remained as relevant and impassioned as ever in the history of Nigeria, of course with dire results. (Jega: 2002:38)

Specifically, on 9th November 1999, Oro cult members attacked the Hausa/Fulani Muslims in Shagamu (Ogun State) over the former’s traditional rites. Then on December 2008, another conflict broke in Taraba state between the Jukuns and the Chambas. One general characteristic of ethno-religious clashes in Nigeria is that they seem to either start from higher institutions of learning or are led by students of higher institutions, or members of the elite class who have attained a higher level of education or place in society. The Sharia issues in Zamfara, Niger, Kano, Sokoto, Yobe and Borno States in 2000 are cases in point (Mohammed, 2005: 157).

According to (Mohammed, 2005), the perceived marginalization of the Northern Political Class by the Obasanjo Administration was accentuated by the government’s inability or unwillingness to protect lives of Northerners living in the southern parts of the country. The killings in Shagamu, Lagos and the Aba since 1999 and the government’s ambivalent response shook their confidence in the government and the Nigerian state. The swift military response of the same government to similar developments in Odi and Zaki-Biam, was seen as evidence of the government’s selective justice. The Islamic preachers consistently cited these instances to whip up sentiments and fan the members of ethnic and religious hate. These are, indeed, conducive factors for the revival of Sharia and its transformation into a vehicle for both regional and Pan-Muslim identity.

Mohamed (2005:158) adds that there are two main groups with interlocking relationships involved in the Sharia Project. They are the political class who are engaged in a campaign of manipulation and obfuscation and their intellectual avant-garde, the Izala Preachers. The latter, unlike the traditional Ulama, encourages its members to engage in partisan politics with a view to influencing public policy. They believe that Sharia is a phenomenon whose time has come. It is their activism and the inability of the people to counter their activities that is responsible for
the apparent success of the Sharia Project. Once the Zamfara Sharia Project was achieved, all governors in the North were under pressure to embrace Sharia as non-compliance is tantamount to unbelief. The Islamic Preachers now appropriated the right to define Islam.

Sectarian Carnage broke out in the political capital of Northern Nigeria, Kaduna on Tuesday, November 26th, 2002. The cause of the orgy was a sectarian protest against the botched miss world contest and a story published by a national daily THISDAY, considered blasphemous of the Holy Prophet Mohammed.

The three-day riots claimed over 200 lives in Kaduna metropolis, according to unofficial sources, and consumed countless property, including many places. Cars and other valuables became cuboids of coal in the conflagration that is gradually becoming the trademark of Kaduna, but which shockingly crept to Abuja; and exposed its vulnerability to the ghost of primordial hostilities which Nigerians have been trying, these past years, to exercise (Oshunkeye and Mumuni, 2002:25).

Ethno-religious crisis has become the hot issue in Plateau State since 2001. Hardly a year passes without mind blowing cruelty by perpetrators. But for months now, Jos North has remained the centre of this gruesome act; the two feuding groups, the Hausa/Fulani settlers and their host, the indigenous Berom group. Indeed, behind the façade of electoral dispute between supporters of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigerians People’s Party (ANPP) on which the Jos mayhem was originally anchored, analysts and of course the worrying gladiators agree that the issue of land and the right to posses and employ it as a religious/political bargaining chip is the base of the problem. This, they posited is majorly the fulcrum on which the November 2008 carnage and similar ones in the past rest.

Whereas the Beroms and other non-Hausa/Fulanis in Jos not only as settlers but usurpers, the later on the other hand see themselves as bonafide indigenes and indeed owners of Jos North; according to them, having lived there for centuries and in the spirit of ethnic and religious affinity and consanquinity, other Hausa/Fulanis in the North have most often spoken in tandem with their kith and kin in Jos nay Plateau State. For example, Umaru Dikko, in his interview in the Daily Sun of Monday, May 31, 2004 and Mohammed and Bala in their recent writings – “Jos: A Historical perspective”, share the thesis that Plateau State belongs to the Hausas.

Hear Dikko: “There are some misguided people in Plateau who think they are aborigines. But they are not; some of them come from Kobbi. They don’t even know their history”. Then his verdict: “The Hausa/Fulani were in Plateau before many other tribes arrived. So, if it is in the spirit of first come, first serve, the Fulani should have a first place before most of the tribes there (Onyemaizu, 2008:23).

Plateau indigenes are, however, not treating their opponents’ claims of ownership of Jos with kid gloves. In a series of newspaper advertorials, they have sought to perforate the Hausa/Fulani claims about Jos. For example in its reaction to the November 2008, Jos crisis, a group that calls itself, “The Plateau Indigenous Development Associations Network (PIDAN), last two weeks published an advertorials in select news papers where it dwarfed the Hausa/Fulani thesis on the Jos question, especially as regards ownership of the city.

In January 9, 2009 advertorial in Daily Independent Newspaper, PIDAN shot down the Hausa/Fulani claims thus: “if those would be taken into consideration, it goes without saying that the Hausa came to Jos as recent as in the 1900s, that is less than one hundred Years ago” (Daily Independent, 2009:A4-A5).

On 30th September 2005, all hell broke loose, following the publication of some cartoons of Prophet Mohammed by Jyllands-Posten, a Danish newspaper. Since then, the world has not
known peace, as violent protests continue to rock the Muslim world and beyond. Demonstration took place in more than twelve countries including Nigeria where youths burnt Norwegian and Danish flags and embassies in Beruit, Damascus, Iraqi and Saudi Arabia. The cause of the matter was that the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, published the cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammed as a bomb-laden terrorist. In Maiduguri, Potiskum and Katsina States, Christians were killed while their Churches and properties were raze. Indeed, more human lives have been lost in Nigeria over the cartoon than the rest of the World put together.

Trouble started shortly after Moslem Ulamah, under the umbrella of Borno Moslem Forum, addressed a public rally on the personality of Prophet Mohammed at the Ramat Square Maiduguri, into a large pool of blood. The arsonists chanted war songs from the venue of the rally and took any Christian they saw, burnt over 40 churches and destroyed properties belonging to Christians in the Maiduguri metropolis.

Of course, the Igbo who were worst hit by the mayhem, carried out reprisal attacks on Northern in Onitsha, Awka, Enugu and Aba. It was, therefore, not surprising that economic activities were grounded in Maiduguri and surrounded cities and states. Many shops that survived the rage of the riots were shut with many traders from the Southeast fleeing to their states of origin for fear of being killed.

Mukwuzi and Agbo (2006:25) add:
...Moslem fanatics in neighboring states of Yobe, Bauchi and Gombe states attacked the fleeing traders in transit. In one particular instance, the traders were ordered out of a bus owned by Young Shall Grow Motors in Potiskum and beaten before being allowed to continue their journey. But the overall outcome was grislier, as over 50 Christians were reportedly killed in Bauchi, Potiskum and Gombe states.

In a state wide broadcast, Governor Ali Modu Sheriff of Borno State said the North was fueled by lawless people to satisfy their political ambitions. While sympathizing with those who lost their loved ones and property, the governor promised that his government would deal decisively with culprits.

Normalcy has returned to Takun Local Government Area of Taraba State, where the Jukun and Ketub ethnic groups clashed two days after Christmas. Both groups clashed over Adere, the Jukun traditional regalia. A Ketub allegedly removed Adere from a Jukun woman dressed for a wedding. The Jukun retaliated. There was blood bath and destruction of property worth millions of naira. Many of the Kuteb and Jukun were displaced. The Jukun-Kuteb crisis has a long historical foundation that if both tribes refuse sheathing their swords, there would be no peace and development in Takum.

One of the most unfortunate results of these crises was its bringing to the fore-front religion and ethnicity as determining factors of where one may live. The question of who is an indigene or settler is an incorrect way of dealing with identity or understanding heterogeneity. It is also ironic that self-determination and the liberation of Hausa/Fulani or any other minority groups from their “emirate” oppressors is seen in terms of the creation of new chiefdom or state for them.

**Implications of Ethno-Religious Conflicts on Good Governance in Nigeria**

USAID/ORT (2001:7) posited in her report that Nigeria appears to be a nation in chaos, a nation at the brink from the religious conflicts in the North and the Middle belt, to ethnic violence in the South West, and to the low-level guerilla warfare in the Niger Delta, the defining
characteristics of Nigeria over the last decades has been conflict. Nigeria is a country that often seems on the verge of collapse and places like Lagos appear to be little more than managed anarchy, but somehow, the country stays together and keeps going ahead.

As one perceptive Journalist puts it:
Nigerians from all walks of life are openly questioning whether their country should remain as one entity or discard the colonial borders and break apart into several separate states. Ethnic and religious prejudices have found fertile ground in Nigeria, where there is neither a national consensus nor a binding ideology. Indeed, the spread of virulent strains of Chauvinism in Nigeria is part of a world wide phenomenon playing out in Indonesia, the Balkan, the former Soviet Union, and a host of other African nations (Maier, 2000:XX).

Horowitz (1985), Ross (1993) among others has classified the nature of disputes in federal societies into two broad categories:

(a) Those arising from its constitutional provisions and
(b) Those arising from societal configuration and contending goals of dominant social forces.

As Crommelin (2001:439) rightly observed as regards the first category: “the distribution of power provides a variety of disputes, between levels of government, between governments at the same level, and between governments at the same level, and between people(s) and a government (or). All such disputes, however, involves basic issues of constitutionalism: definition and enforcement of limits upon governmental authority. The latter arises from the configuration of federal society and sharing of positions among ethnic groups in a society.

It is disturbing how many commentators and observers have viewed the ethno-religious problems across Nigeria with analytical levity. Some commentaries simply assume that once the constitution clearly and proactively defines citizenship, the problem of these flashpoints would be solved or ameliorated. These issues go beyond constitutional issues no matter how brilliantly one tries to obliterate the dichotomy between settlers and indigenes.

Also, since the Nigerian leaders failed to weld a nation out of the many nations in Nigeria, those nationalities were bound to reinforce their sacred attachment to ethnic boundaries. Those boundaries have today ossified. According to Onyemaizu (2009:23)

The Hausa/Fulani, critics say, are not only unwilling to integrate into societies outside their local environment where they live, but also quite often exhibit territorial and expansionist tendencies…it is a habit peculiar to the Hausa/Fulani to rename wherever they congregate, outside their own locality for a transaction in cattle and other livestock, “Garki”, which in Hausa suggest settlement. Okonkwo cites places in Enugu, Abuja, Okigwe among others as where Hausa/Fulani have such enclaves outside their own environment.

Again, the step(s) taken by the Federal Government to bring the crises under control have unfortunately worsened the suspicion some minority groups entertained against the majority group. Writing on the Jos probe panels controversy, in his “palladium” Column in the Nation of Sunday, January 4, 2009, Akintola (2009:56), observed thus: “we must remember that analysts who seemed to have queued behind settlers in the Jos crisis have ignored the salient fact that it was precisely the Hausa/Fulani of the North who at first kicked against oneness and sameness”.

Umaru Dikko is however not pretentious about Hausa/Fulani stock’s desire to conquer Nigeria if the need arise. In 2004 Daily Sun interview, he bared his mind thus:
Let everybody know that if any tribe in Nigeria, and I make no limit, any tribe in Nigeria, thinks it can fight the Hausa/Fulani; it is wasting its time. Because our tribe is not only in Nigeria, we extend right from Sudan, Cameroon, up to Gambia. If we blow our horns and call on our tribes’ men, they will descend on Nigerian and take it over…. We will call on our tribesmen across the world, they will descend on Nigeria and we should take over the whole country (Onyemizu, 2009:25).

Analysts see correlation between the reported importation of gladiators from Niger and Chad Republic during the Jos Crisis against the backdrop of the Dikko threat. Furthermore, the ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria also illustrated very vividly the inexistence of a crisis management team in Aso Rock (the Presidency). For example, in Plateau State, the recent Jos Crisis shows how deeply the state is polarized. Even the ordinary constitution of Panels to investigate the crisis have elicited deep suspicious and distrust to the point that both the Federal government and the State constituted different panels.

Indigenes and settlers have vowed to ignore both Federal and State Panel respectively. It is not certain whether after the legal battles relating to the powers of settling up panel of inquiry are resolved both camps to the crisis would respect the law.

**The way forward**

Ethnic and religious sentiments are, not the sole foundation of political relationships of Nigeria. They intermingle with other social considerations such as class, ideology and gender among others. Ethnicity and religion have been particularly relevant, however, to the structure of post-colonial Nigeria. Many analysts have advocated and spoken in favour of Euro-American models of federalism that brought the new French and American Presidents to power. The examples, though desirable are inappropriate by the peculiar nature of the United States for example, the concept of citizenship, for instance, was bound to be different from that of Nigeria. Judging from the manner Nigeria was formed, it was impossible to have defined citizenship in the way that could elicit the kind of results coming out of France and the United States. In Nigeria, our attachments to land, language and culture is strong that the founding fathers had to tread softly (Akinlotan, 2009:56). One possible way out is for Nigeria to craft a constitution that would help us live together as a nation.

Again, to attain the Euro-American model of citizenship and federalism, Nigerians and leadership requires some ingenuity, skills, patient, diplomacy and statesmanship. This is only achievable if the various tiers of governments consult each other (Cooperative federalism) to iron out differences before violence and disagreement erupt.

There is a need for governments, ethno-regional and religious groups to adopt preventive diplomacy and early warning system as mechanisms for attaining peace. To attain this objective, courses pertaining to conflict, and conflict management should be included in all the tiers of education where Nigeria diversities should be emphasized.

It is apt to conclude by positing that “it is not, as is often believed, cultural, linguistic or religious heterogeneity that is dangerous for civil peace, it is the refusal to accept this heterogeneity” (ISS Round Table, 2002:24).
**References**


*The Guardian*, October 24, 1996
