

## The Impacts of Culture and Religion, Ethnicity, Politics and Poverty on Ethnic Violence in Plateau State of Nigeria

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**Dol:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n14p657**

### **Abstract**

*Every ethnic nationality has got its own culture and cultural attributes by which the ethnic nationality is known and identified. The inter-play of these cultural attributes as religion or belief system, norms or rules of behaviour, language, history and artefacts, etc. gives rise to politics and determine the nature of the political process in the society, and also the level of pauperization of the people. This paper examines the concepts poverty, culture, politics, religion and ethnicity and how they have fuelled ethnic violence in Plateau State of Nigeria. The paper finds out that violence in the region is caused by the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities and cultures in the region; and the struggle for power and dominance between the cultures and ethnic nationalities within the region. These struggles create poverty through the destruction of human and material resources; and human and capital flight from the region. The poverty in turn causes anger, frustration and deprivations which further fuels the crises in the region and turns the crises into perpetual cycles that cannot end. The conflicts and violence therefore appear as liberation struggles by the native or indigenous population against the dominance of an alien population in the region. The paper therefore suggests the convocation of a sovereign national conference for the various ethnic nationalities in the country to discuss the basis on which the various ethnic nationalities can continue to remain under the authority of a single national government as the crises in the region affect the entire nation.*

**Keywords:** culture; religion; ethnicity; politics; poverty; and violence.

### **1. Introduction**

Every ethnic nationality has got its own culture and cultural attributes which consist of three major things viz: behavioural patterns; artefacts or man-made objects by which the culture is known and identified; and belief systems such as religion, the moral and the civic codes of the society. (Akwara, 1998; Leeds, 1978). The inter-play of these cultural attributes as religion or belief system, norms or rules of behaviour, language, history and artefacts, etc. gives rise to politics and determine the nature of the political process in the society and also the level of pauperization of the people or poverty amongst the people.

Politics, culture, ethnicity and religion are therefore so interwoven that their separation in any given society is always difficult but culture, religion and ethnicity in a multi-cultural setting as Nigeria, determines the nature of politics

played in the society. For instance, the assertion of religious authority over secular political authority for a society that yearns for western democratic governance undermines the legitimacy of the state and the fundamental human rights of the citizens; and the assertion of secular authority over religion in a society where some people such as the religious elites want to cling onto political power through religious dogma will certainly question God's authority over the people on earth and undermine the power and authority of God's representatives (the religious elites) on earth (Elandi and Adel, 1994; Lewis, 1994).

Ethnicity, political and religious conflicts in Nigeria are generally caused by struggles for power, natural and economic resources, religious evangelisation, migration, and state and empire building processes by migratory ethnic nationalities (Ifemesia, 1965; Aderibigbe, 1965; Tamuno, 1965; Mangut, 2012). Because religion formed part of the basis for state formation process in northern Nigeria, it is extremely difficult to differentiate religious conflicts from ethnic and political conflicts in the middle-belt region in particular and the country in general. And the nature of politics (social relations) played within the region causes the pauperization of the people which in turn sets off cycles of conflicts within the system. Politics therefore is at the centre of all ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria. If politics is played within modern rules or stipulated norms of behaviour, and the political leaders are responsible and accountable to the people they lead, it would have reduced ethnic and religious conflicts in the country and also the level of poverty amongst the people.

As a result of the internal contradictions within the state which started with the state formation processes and internal colonization of some ethnic groups by the others within the Nigerian society for local commodities of trade especially slaves and other products to be sold in external markets; and the acquisition of the raided ethnic nationalities as new territories or colonies; and the external colonization of the African regions by the Europeans and the Arabs which did not respect the natural ethnic boundaries of the various ethnic nationalities they met; the homelands of most ethnic nationalities ended up being multi-ethnic and multi-cultural due to the influx of populations that accompanied the colonial occupations.

Because the colonised ethnic nationalities became multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, ethnic conflicts, religious and political conflicts became endemic in the regions. And these accentuated the poverty levels in the regions. These problems were made more acute because the members of some ethnic nationalities exclusively control the economic and political processes in the region, and usurped the democratic dividends that would have accrued to the indigenous ethnic groups thereby causing anger, frustration and violence between them and members of the indigenous ethnic groups. For instance, the middle belt region<sup>1</sup> was considered politically, religiously and economically by the core north and the British as part of Bauchi and the British took advantage of this to take over the Jos tin mines through a treaty signed by the Royal Niger Company with the Emir of Bauchi. (Abubakar, 2007; Ayuba, 2012). The Uthman dan Fodio's jihads did not actually unite the north (Undiyaundeya, 2012), but led to a loss of identity and resources by the natural indigenes of the conquered ethnic nationalities, and antagonism between them and the Hausa/Fulani in their midst (Akwara and Ojoma, 2013).

With the growth of democracy, democratic institutions and education, some of the members of the dominated or "internally colonised" ethnic nationalities begin to question their memberships to the larger political community; they question why they should cooperate with the other ethnic nationalities in the country and or, see themselves as belonging to one nation with the others (national integration) when their slots of national resources are being taken over by "non-indigenes" in their midst, and why the other ethnic regions are developing at their own expense by harnessing the natural resources found in their ethnic regions (Sobowale, 2013; Torulagha, 2013). They therefore see the poverty amongst their peoples as a result of an internal colonization of their ethnic origins by other ethnic groups and fight to liberate themselves from what they consider as an internal colonization of their ethnic regions.

In Nigeria today, the political process is characterised by ethnic violence and malpractices because of the absence of national identity and integration caused by multiplicity of ethnic nationalities, religious and cultural differences in the region. These ethnic, religious and cultural differences also dictated during the indigenous state formation periods which areas were to be raided for slaves, areas to be traded with, evangelised, or to be attacked and occupied as colonies. Slave raids for instance were carried out outside the raiders ethnic origin and this caused conflicts between the raiders and the raided (Mangut, 2012).

Then, trade and evangelisation and quest for natural resources also led to attacks and occupation of raided regions (Mangut, 2012; Onwubiko, 1976; Ifemesia, 1965; Aderingbe, 1965; Tamuno, 1965). This exercise of control over the raided regions started the internal colonization process of one ethnic region by the other which could also be seen as an indigenous state formation process. This saw the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms in what came to be the modern day Nigeria.

The raids and occupation affected the history, culture, language and religion of the raided ethnic regions as the raids encouraged what Mangut (2012) called "spontaneous immigration" from the raiders' ethnic regions to the raided ethnic regions. Thus the raided ethnic regions had a natural indigenous population (natural indigenes or the natives), and a migrant settlers population (the non-indigenes and aliens). This factor alone accounts for the multiplicity of ethnicity nationalities in each ethnic region in Nigeria. Thus Nigeria's history is replete with histories of origin. Somebody came from somewhere and no one is from nowhere – an issue that complicates the ethnic, religious and political conflicts in the country.

This indigenous state formation process started an integration of the various ethnic nationalities in the new states through inter-ethnic marriages, unifying religious and cultural practices and co-option of some of the natural indigenes into leadership positions (Abubakar, 2007) where this would not disrupt the power system in the new states or kingdom or empires as they were called (Ofoegbu, 1976; Mangut, 2012). Most of these kingdoms and empires could not stand the test of time as some of them were over-run by stronger kingdoms or got torn apart by internal contradictions. Thus, some states or empires lasted longer than others. This state of stability and instability amongst the indigenous Nigerian societies continued until the arrival of the external colonizers - the Europeans and the Arabs.

Some religious groups especially the Muslims in Nigeria still believe that the state formation process is not over until the entire nation is Islamized and politically controlled by the Islamic Hausa/Fulani oligarchy. This is exactly why the middle-belt region in Nigeria where Usman Dan Fodio's jihad was checkmated by the Joksans, the Tivs and other ethnic nationalities within the Middle-Belt region has witnessed more ethno-religious and ethno-political conflicts than all other parts of the country put together.

The relationship between ethnicity, religion, politics and poverty has not always been a cordial one in almost all nations of the world where both realms are headed by entirely different elites. As Elandi and Adel (1994) observed, people all over the world are alarmed about the latest development in religious practices all over the world – the rise of religious fundamentalism or religious nationalism. This rise of religious fundamentalism or religious nationalism, coupled with a rise in ethnic chauvinism or ethnic nationalism undermines the legitimacy of governments, democracy and good governance; and impoverishes the people rather than raise their living standards. The poverty thus caused by poor governance, ethnic and religious conflicts manifests as violent crimes, kidnappings, and terrorism; which in turn makes the political process very violent and prone to irregularities. These affect and disrupt cordial inter-ethnic relations, lead to poverty due to the destruction of human and material resources and human and capital flight from the region; and undermine the development and progress of the human society.

In some nations where religious fundamentalisms are absent, religion becomes a source of peace and humanitarian concern. But if present, it becomes an instrument of provocation, persecution, domination, exploitation and intimidation; and has been at the centre of many bloody ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria especially in the middle-belt region and in the core northern states of Nigeria. And these wars or conflicts leave behind them tales of woes and losses in human and material resources that are unquantifiable in monetary terms and pauperizes the people in the country.

It is therefore questionable as to what extent these incessant ethnic, religious, cultural and political conflicts that characterize the Nigerian society as political, ethno-religious and ethno-political conflicts would lead to democratic governance and better lives for the people. Does the gloss of ethno-religious beliefs and practices over to the nation's political process engender or endanger the growth of democratic beliefs and practices and higher living standards for the citizens especially in the middle belt region or do they lead to the pauperization of the people in the country? And how can cultural, religious and political practices be reconciled to guarantee the institutionalization of an enduring democratic order in a multi-ethnic society as Nigeria to guarantee a better life for the citizens? These are issues for discussion in this paper.

## 2. Statement of Problem

Given the impoverishment of Nigerians by the incessant ethno-religious, ethno-political conflicts that characterise the Nigerian nation, especially in political processes in the middle-belt region, it is questionable as to what extent these incessant conflicts can lead to democratic governance and better lives for the people. Does the gloss of ethno-religious beliefs and practices over to the nation's political process engender or endanger the growth of democratic beliefs and practices and higher standard of living for the citizens especially in the middle belt region or do they lead to further violence and the pauperization of the people in the region? How can cultural, religious and political practices be reconciled to guarantee a better life for Nigerian citizens in the region and guarantee the institutionalization of an enduring democratic order in Nigeria? These are the questions to be addressed in this paper.

### 3. Theoretical Orientation

The search for “natural identity” or “national identity” by an ethnic nationality in a polity signifies the presence of a conflict between the group and some other groups in the society, so also is the lack of integration and progress in a polity, and the quest for equity and fairness in resource allocation in the society. It signifies a feeling of denial, exclusion, and marginalization of the group by the other ethnic nationalities in the region. It is a psychological disposition. The theoretical orientation of this study will therefore take the psycho-cultural perspective (Agara and Adekunle, 2012).

From this psycho-cultural theoretical perspective, whenever a polity is inhabited by many ethnic nationalities, there is bound to be conflicts which arise from the domination and exploitation of one ethnic nationality by another or the fear of exploitation and domination. The domination and exploitation or their fear is located in ethnic and cultural differences among the groups; and ethnic and cultural differences provide the basis for group identity, solidarity and interaction within and amongst the groups. Thus, conflicts are further fuelled by histories of discrimination, deprivation and marginalization (denial of access to power, economic resources and privileges) based on ethnic identity in the polity.

The search for ethnic identity therefore is conditioned by the state of mind of the affected ethnic nationalities. For instance, the call for resource control, fiscal federalism; a discussion of the national question; formation of ethnic militias by ethnic nationalities; introduction of sharia law in the northern states of the country signify the absence of national integration in Nigeria and are manifestations of the psychological dispositions of the people involved in the crises. The Niger-Delta crises that pitched the ethnic militias in the Niger-Delta against the national government and the current Boko-Haram insurgency in Nigeria question the legitimacy of the Federal Government of Nigeria are also manifestations of the psychological dispositions of the people. They further fuel the fire for ethnic, religious, cultural and political crises which further impoverish the people; and there is the need for these issues to be addressed by the authorities.

### 4. Conceptual Definition of Ethnicity, Culture, Religion, Politics and Poverty

#### 4.1 Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a political concept and denotes the expression of ethnic sentiments or ethnic nationalism. It involves the practice of ethnic ideology which enables a group to exploit natural differences in nationality for specific purposes. As Igwe (2004) pointed out, it is an outward-looking chauvinistic attitude towards one's nationality and cultural group with a correspondingly suspicious and hostile attitude towards others, especially those held to be in competition with one's own ethnic group.

Ethnicity manifests in the political, economic, cultural and religious processes of a country and is propagated by the family, economic groups, and political groups in the labour process. As Nnoli (1989) and Ismagilova (1972) noted, it is determined by the size of a linguistic group, location of the group, strength and cohesion of its leadership, the nature and leadership of under-privileged classes, foreign influences and dominant ideology.

Ethnic conflicts had been in existence in Nigeria before the advent of colonialism just like religious conflicts had been. Ethnic wars were fought over natural resources, farmlands, grazing lands, water supply, fishing rights, hunting rights, items of trade such as slaves, ivory, gold, etc. Later, religious beliefs and power positions became issues keenly contested in and across the length and breadth of the country, leading to wanton destruction of lives and property across the country and pauperization of the people (Ifemesia, 1965; Aderibigbe, 1965; and Tamuno, 1965).

The multiplicity of ethnic nationalities in the Plateau State due to the “spontaneous migrations” that followed the colonisation of one the region by the Hausa/Fulanis, during the indigenous state formation periods; and the influx of divers populations into the region due to the development activities that accompanied the British colonial administration in the region, there has been incessant ethno-political and ethno-religious conflicts in the region – a struggle for power and dominance all geared towards the economic survival of the groups.

#### 4.2 Culture

Culture has been defined by Coleman (1958) and Verba (1968), (Akwara, 1998) as the distinctive pattern of behaviour, symbols, artifacts, ideas and values of a human group. It also refers generally to the objective constellation of traits and pattern, which differentiates one human group from another. Anthropologists define culture as consisting of three basic elements: human behaviour, artifacts (such as signs, buildings and all man-made materials), and belief system (such as religion, moral and civic codes) of the people.

Since culture consists of these three basic elements named above and differentiates one human group from another, one is bound to have more than one culture in a multi-ethnic nation as Nigeria. Nigeria has about 400 ethnic groups each having its own culture or way of life that differentiates it from the rest. These are manifested in their languages, food behaviour, artefacts, house types, dressings, technologies, objects of arts, songs and belief systems.

The Belief System (religion) is the social philosophy (ies) or thought (s) that guide human action in any given society. These could be in the forms of myths, rituals and ceremonies or religion. What the people believe in, that forms part of their very existence is their belief system. The belief system is often manifested in all other forms of culture discussed above i.e. in their behavioural pattern and their products, and are often depicted on objects or symbols which are easily recognized by the members of that very society. These objects or symbols act as objects of unity and integration. These give order and meaning to their lives and are jealously safeguarded. These beliefs guide their social relations and actions. The very thought of a group could be shown also in other abstract or artistic works as songs, music, dance, festivals and literature.

It is when these elements of culture are over-zealously guarded and or, expressed that it engenders conflicts and crises within the system. It leads to ethnic chauvinism or ethnic nationalism which instead of creating national integration, leads to national disintegration. This is why most ethno-religious and ethno-political conflicts in Nigeria have cultural undertones in the country. It is the checkmating of this ethnic expression of cultural values by other ethnic nationalities that threatened the peace and security of the society and often leads to conflicts and crises endemic in the middle-belt region.

#### 4.3 Religion

Religion has been defined by Kegley and Wittkopf, (2004) as a system of thought shared by a group that provides its members with an object of devotion and a code of behaviour by which they can ethically judge their actions. As a system of thought or belief, it provides its members with their main source of identity. This identification with, and devotion to a religion, Kegley and Wittkopf (2004) maintain, springs from the natural human need to find a set of values with which to evaluate the meaning of life and the consequences of their choices. Religion therefore is the belief in the supernatural and the practices sustaining that belief. It is the ultimate superstition and a level of consciousness mostly centring on good and evil; God and Satan; gods, spirits, and deities. It arises from historical, socio-economic and political factors in a society. (Igwe, 2004);

Religion was the basis for the invasion, occupation, migration into, and political administration of the ethnic nationalities by others in the northern region of Nigeria and this included the middle belt region of the country. It was the basis for the creation of emirates and the appointment of emirs in the various emirates in the northern region of Nigeria, and only the aliens that accompanied the occupation populations or armies and who had the requisite religious, cultural, and political skills were appointed as emirs or chiefs over the indigenous local populations. With the growth of modern democratic institutions and its principle of self determination, the indigenous populations have the basis for the assertion of their local autonomy. The assertion of local autonomy results into revolts, violence, ethno-religious and ethno-political conflicts in the region and these conflicts lead to the destruction of lives and property, and human and capital flight from the region. These further impoverish the people.

#### 4.4 Politics

In every society, everyone would want to have his way, to act as he likes; if given the opportunity to act without due consideration for the consequences of his actions on others. Since every one cannot be allowed to have his way or act as he or she desires, one's desires often conflict with those of others. The conflicting desires of men give rise to politics which according to Leeds (1978) involves "any extensive use of power, rule or authority within society", and power being seen as the "capacity to influence the behaviour of others by the threat of the use of force, sanctions and rewards". This power has to be acquired either through legal means as in all "rational" democratic regimes; brute force as in totalitarian (military) regimes; or by tradition as in traditional societies; (as in Thailand) or charisma as in traditional societies (Webber, 1958); as was the case of Ayotela Khomeini of Iran.

In order to acquire and exercise power in any given society, competition takes place between groups and individuals, as to determine who would exercise leadership roles, and between groups, as to whose values or ideas would have precedence in society. In the competitive process, politics comes to be seen as Leeds (1978) puts it, "a system of establishing ground rules whereby conflicts within society are resolved and governments are chosen".

Since governments are chosen to reconcile conflicts, every issue in society is bound to be politicized when decisions are made on it by the government, or when it involves the use of state power. Thus, a man's love affair or marriage will be a political issue if she drags the man to court over their incompatibility of disposition or over their inability to agree on certain fundamental issues in their relationship, and decisions on those issues instead of being taken by them (the couple), are now taken and imposed on them by the government. However, it must be noted that political questions will always vary with time and place, issues and those involved. Commenting on the political nature of the state, Max Webber was quoted by Robert Dahl (1963) as saying that "a state is political in so far as the enforcement of its orders are carried out continually within a given territorial area by the application and threat of application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff".

The focus of interest of politics therefore, as Robson (1954) pointed out, is on "the struggle for power, to gain and retain power, to exercise power and influence others and to resist that exercise". The focus of interest of politics therefore ranges from the performance of governmental functions, to the interaction between individuals (and groups) in any given society, with politics being seen as an aspect of human behaviour within an environment. Dahl (1963) saw politics as "the authoritative allocation of values in a society. It lays emphasis on the making and execution of policies within any given society; and has come to include the political processes involved in the making and execution of the policies, and the attainment of societal goals through these processes.

Politics does not only concern the institutional framework or rules in a state, but according to Raphael (1976), involves the "structures and processes of the legislative, executive and administrative bodies and other institutions of the state; and deals with the behaviour of groups and individuals in matters that are likely to affect the workings of the government". And the politics has to be democratic.

The growth of democracy and democratic institutions in the country has led to the emergence of new indigenous political elites who now challenge what may be called a "theocratic-feudalism" that had dominated the political administration of the middle-belt region for more than a century and that was imposed on the indigenous population by the Hausa/Fulanis of the core north. The theocratic-feudalism has not delivered a good measure of democratic dividends to the people in the region rather; it alienated most of the indigenous population from the democratic and political processes. With greater participation of the indigenous population in the political process in contemporary times, the old theocratic feudal elites are fastly losing their political relevance in the political process and now challenge the new elites. These challenges and counter challenges are seen as ethno-religious and ethno-political crises and violence that characterise the geo-political zones.

#### 4.5 Poverty

The perception of what constitutes poverty has evolved historically over time and varies among nations in magnitude and in scope. Since it varies among nations, universally accepted definitions have become very difficult to emerge. Thus, there are as many definitions of the concept as there are scholars writing on the issue. But there are universally accepted indicators of what constitutes poverty and these indicators categorize and explain the concept. These indicators categorize poverty into absolute poverty, relative poverty, and material poverty.

Absolute poverty means the inability of a person or group to provide the material needs for physical subsistence and protection of human dignity. These materials are food, clothing, shelter, water, health services, basic education, transportation, and work because the persons or groups do not have jobs or income. Relative poverty on the other hand is the inability of certain sections of the society to satisfy their basic needs as well as other needs; while material poverty is the absence of ownership control of physical assets as lands, and all other resources that land produces or that subsists on land as birds and animals and mineral resources. Finally, poverty could be spatial – rural poverty and urban poverty (UNDP, 1996).

Poverty is an abject state of being, in which an individual is incapable of utilizing resources around him to improve himself or herself economically, socially, politically or otherwise. It could be due to lack of opportunities for education which is basic to any human development. Poverty could occur as a result of indolence or misinterpreted religious beliefs (Chigbo, 1996). It could also be a state of the mind or a psychological disposition that places the individual in question in want, materially and spiritually. Materially, it involves the want for food, clothing and shelter. Spiritually, it involves want of peace of mind, the spirit and the inner man.

According to Okoronkwo (1996), poverty ordinarily stands for a situation whereby one cannot meet average requirements. Any situation under which one cannot afford a good meal at any given time is real poverty. One is poor when one cannot plan for tomorrow because he or she has failed for today. Poverty means a man's inability to afford

decent food, shelter, clothing and recreation (Jolaosho, 1996). Poverty entails the absence of the basic requirements essential for the survival and comfort of man. It is hunger and starvation. It is squalor and it is the non-availability of basic medicare.

Poverty therefore is about the absence of the basic necessities of life for any person or a human group. A Somalian elder was quoted as saying that "all development activities are about human beings. The first human need is water. It is the first thing needed to live. Without it, a plant, an animal or a baby dies. Second is food. Without enough of it, life is miserable and short. Third, once water and food are won, is health otherwise the human being becomes sick. Fourth is education, once a human being has water, food and health, he needs to learn new horizons and unlock new possibilities. And there is the fifth – peace and order. Without these, none of the four basic needs can be sustained (UNDP, 1996). All the ethno-political crises in the Plateau State destroy lives and property and cause untold hardships for the people. The psychological pains of the losses lead to reprisals and confrontations which further escalates the violence and losses in the state.

## **5. The Interplay of Religion, Culture, Ethnicity, Politics and Poverty in Conflicts in Plateau State of Nigeria**

The problems created by ethno-religious conflicts in the political process in the Middle-Belt region in particular and Nigeria in general manifest in the poverty among the peoples. Religion is the most noticeable cultural attribute in Nigeria outside language. Religion formed the basis upon which the Fulanis invaded the Hausa homelands and established the Sokoto Caliphate and all other emirates all over Northern Nigeria. The Fulani jihadists in Nigeria were on a state and empire building adventure; and in search for greener pastures or economic resources (Onwubiko, 1973). Religion also served as a forerunner of colonialism from the coast as it paved the way for the British to overrun the southern coastlands, exploit its economic resources, abolished the peoples' traditions and socio-cultural practices, and implanted Christianity. The people therefore became religious before their unification into the modern Nigerian state in 1914 by Lord Lugard. Without the colonization of one ethnic nationality by the other in Nigeria, and the subsequent colonization by the British, and the attendant unification, the present day Nigeria could have been anything but modern day Nigeria. Thus, religion became destructive in the politics of the country due to ethnic and religious differences.

These ethnic and cultural differences also dictated during the indigenous state formation periods which areas are to be raided for slaves, areas to be traded with, evangelised, or to be attacked and occupied (colonized). Slave raids for instance were carried out outside the raiders ethnic origins and this caused conflicts between the raiders and the raided (Mangut, 2012).

Then, trade and evangelisation and quest for natural resources also led to attacks and occupation of raided regions (Mangut, 2012; Onwubiko, 1973; Ifemesia, 1965; Aderingbe, 1965; Tamuno, 1965). This exercise of control over the raided regions started the internal colonization process of one ethnic region by the other which could also be seen as an indigenous mega-state formation process. This saw the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms; and intensification of anger, hatred and ethnic dislikes, prejudices and conflicts.

Raids and occupation affected the history, culture, language and religion of the raided ethnic regions as the raids encouraged what Mangut (2012) called "spontaneous immigration" from the raiders' ethnic regions to the raided ethnic regions. Thus the raided ethnic regions had a natural indigenous population (natural indigenes or the natives), and a migrant settlers population (the non-indigenes and aliens – some being the colonialists). This factor alone accounts for the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities in each ethnic region in Nigeria. Thus Nigeria's history is replete with histories of origin. Somebody came from somewhere and no one is from nowhere – an issue that complicates the ethnic and religious conflicts in the country. Since each ethnic nationality has a history, culture and other identifying attributes, hatred became endemic in the society.

This indigenous state formation process started an integration of the various ethnic nationalities in the new states through inter-ethnic marriages, unifying religious and cultural practices and co-option of some of the natural indigenes into leadership positions (Abubakar, 2007) where this would not disrupt the power system in the new states or kingdom or empires as they were called (Ofoegbu, 1976; Mangut, 2012). Most of these kingdoms and empires could not stand the test of time as some of them were over-run by stronger kingdoms or got torn apart by internal contradictions. Thus, some states or empires lasted longer than others. This state of stability and instability amongst the indigenous Nigerian societies continued until the arrival of the external colonizers - the Europeans.

The European colonization of Africa did not go unchallenged. Almost all indigenous societies in Nigeria offered one form of opposition or the other to colonialism (Hassan, 2012; Magezi, 2012, Ayuba, 2012; Kums, 2012). The colonial state was therefore a conquest state because military force was used to pacify the colonised states and societies. It was

therefore founded on force, violence or threat of the use of force with the sole aim appropriating the colonised peoples' lands and what the land produced. It acculturated the peoples' values and world outlook (Yadaki, 2012).

Ethnic and cultural differences were not taken into consideration in the administration of the colonized ethnic nationalities by the Europeans and the dominant or ruling elites in the states at the time of European conquest were recognised as in the North and the Middle-Belt and even substituted at the expense of the natives. They were empowered at the expense of the natural indigenes without regard for their origins or population. And this disrupted the integration of the various ethnic nationalities that was going on before the arrival of the Europeans. This has made most ethnic groups not to submit themselves to be ruled by men of other tribes, races or religion because they believe that doing so implies submitting to oppression, degradation and exclusion from the moral community as inferior groups or persons whose opinions, attitudes and values do not count. Therefore integration became very difficult and ethno-religious conflicts and pauperization of the people continued.

All ethno-religious conflicts in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria have been products of power struggles. The most recent Jos crisis where the Jos North Local Government election turned into an ethno-religious crises because the Hausa/Fulani settler (moslem) population failed to win the local government elections in the area and in some other local governments as Boko and Langtang where they had been in control before the elections point to the fact that struggles for political power have been the root causes of the conflicts. Though the other local government areas in the state remained peaceful but the Hausa/Fulani settlers in Jos North Local Government decide to riot against the election verdict and became violent. The Hausa/Fulani elites in the area believed that they were robbed of victory in the election because they are moslem minorities in the predominantly christian Tiv enclaves and reacted violently against the indigenous christian Tiv population. The Tivs did not take the attack lightly and retaliated. The violence that ensued left several people dead (The Nation, 29 Nov. 2008); and houses and property worth millions of Naira were burnt and destroyed.

The indigenous Tiv population has always resented the imposition of Hausa/Fulani settler elites on them by the Northern elites and felt the need for a change. They want to be represented by their own people and to have their own share of the national cake given to their natural indigenes, and they expressed their franchise. The Tivs cited the case of their being represented by Hausa/Fulani settlers in the region with the appointment of Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki Nakande (a Hausa/Fulani settler) as a Minister of State for Information under the platform of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) – a slot that would have gone to an indigenes Tiv; the representation of Jos in the then Northern House of Assembly by Alhaji Nakande's father; and the representation of Jos by Alhaji Inuwa Ali (Turakin Jos) in the House of Representatives in 1979-83; these men are all Hausa/Fulani settlers in Jos (Hameed, 2009). Democracy involves the representation of a group by a member of the group, and not by an alien to the group.

The representation of the indigenous majority Tiv population by the minority Hausa/Fulani settlers in the middle-belt region was made possible by the control of the then Northern Region by the Hausa/Fulani Islamic, feudal oligarchy that emerged after the jihads. This has always caused resentments among the indigenous Tiv population that has always sought for opportunities to reverse the anomaly. The opportunity for a change came in the local government elections in Plateau State and the indigenous Tiv population that dominated the Peoples Democratic Party in the State defeated the Hausa/Fulani settler population of the All Nigeria Peoples Party. The victory set the stage for a bloody crisis that claimed lives and property. Democracy involves respect for majority opinion and decision.

The crisis that ensued became too bloody that the Plateau State Government decided to embark on a massive deportation of some of the Hausa/Fulani settlers to the core Hausa/Fulani States. The Tivs justified the actions of their governor and political leaders saying that it is extremely impossible for a Tiv to contest an election in any predominantly Hausa/Fulani State in the country what more representing the Hausa/Fulani in the National Assembly or taking a Hausa/Fulani slot of national appointments (Hammed, 2009).

As the crisis got bloodier, the Plateau State Governor ordered the law enforcement agencies to shoot at sight anyone involved in the crisis (*The Nation*, Nov. 30, 2008). The death toll was high and majority of the casualties were Hausa/Fulani settler elements as shown by the report presented by the Human Rights Watch to the Justice Bola Ajibola Panel that investigated the crisis. The head of the Human Rights Watch admitted under interrogation before the Justice Bola Ajibola Panel that he received the names of the 128 Hausa/Fulani casualties in the crisis from the Chief Imam of the Jos Central Mosque (Pam, 2009). The involvement of the Chief Imam and other Islamic leaders in the area in the compilation of the list shows the extent of the involvement of moslem leaders in the political crises in the region and goes to buttress the claims of the indigenous Tiv population that most of the crises in the region take religious undertone because that is the only way the Hausa/Fulani group gets the listening ears of the Federal Government and the support of other Hausa/Fulani elites within the corridors of power all over the country. And emerging facts show that the crises are the handiwork of well organized Islamic terrorist groups whom the governments have ignored (Emeruwa, 2004;



Okumo, 2004; Ogunro, 2004).

As the crisis spread to new areas, the Plateau State Government intensified the deportation of the Hausa/Fulani settlers to the core northern states because the Hausa/Fulani settlers in Plateau State could not trace their ancestral roots to any community indigenous to Plateau State or the middle-belt region (Igidi, 2009; Aminu, 2009). This triggered off an uproar by the Hausa/Fulani elites all over the country, Retired General Jerry Useni- the Chairman of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), a Hausa/Fulani socio-cultural group spoke out in condemnation of the deportation (Agbase, 2009). The deportation according to Kawu (2009) introduces a new dimension to the politics of indigenes versus settlers and warned that if the deportation is not reversed, it would give a new definition to Nigerian citizenship. The most noticeable thing about the condemnation is that it comes only from the Hausa/Fulani elites whose political and religious interests are served by the settler elements in the middle belt region. The natural indigenes of the middle-belt region and the southern region want politics to be divorced from religion.

The Tivs and indeed all other ethnic groups in the Middle-Belt region of the country strongly condemn the colonization of one ethnic region by the other and see such acts as incompatible with democracy. This has also made many Nigerians to call for a discussion of the "national question" to put an end to the internal colonization and the exploitation of one ethnic region by the other that has been going on in the country for centuries. Nigerians in the Niger-Delta region for instance are predominantly Christians. They strongly believe that the exploitation of the natural/mineral resources in their region benefits only the predominantly Moslem north because the Moslem north has been in control of the nation's political processes since colonial era to the present and no corresponding development projects have been carried out in the region that provides more than 75 percent of the nation's resources. A discussion of the "national question" perhaps, will bring to an end, the Niger Delta crises and all other ethno-religious conflicts in the country today. If the Niger-Delta region had been a predominantly Hausa/Fulani Islamic enclave, the crises in the region may not have been there, or could have taken a different shape altogether.

Democracy involves the rule of law and the due process. If any other rule is substituted for the rule of law, then there is the absence of democracy. The introduction of Sharia Law in the northern states by state governors with extreme religious orientations brought about an unprecedented abuse of the rule of law and the due process of law in those states where sharia have been introduced and enforced. The penal code that had hitherto guided law and order in the region was relegated to the background and non-conformists to the Sharia Law got maimed and abused by the Sharia Law Implementation Squads popularly known as "Hisba" in the northern states of Nigeria.

The problem with the mixture of religion and politics has been that it has always done by people who are intent on occupying positions of power and authority in the country without question, people who do not want anyone to challenge their authorities; and people whose spiritual and moral standards are far below the requirements of what is necessary to faithfully and truthfully implement divine legal injunctions on earth, otherwise a Danish Newspaper cartoon which Muslims around the world considered blasphemous of Prophet Mohammed has no business in causing an ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. The cartoon led Muslims to attack Christians, and churches were burnt and many Christians were killed; and recently, another Islamic fundamentalist group the Yusufiya (Boko Haram) has been attacking innocent Nigerians, and destroying their businesses all over the northern states of the country in their protest over western education, western medicine and secular political administration in Nigeria (Ola, 2009; Sun, July 30). It also has been bombing innocent Nigerians all over the country till date. Religious fundamentalism therefore endangers democracy and cannot make for an enduring democratic order in a multi-ethnic country as Nigeria. Rather it impoverishes the very people it ought to protect and improve their lots by its destruction of lives and property.

## **6. Measures Taken to Combat Ethno-Religious and Ethno-Political Conflicts in Nigeria**

The various governments in Nigeria have adopted varying measures to combat ethno-religious and ethno political conflicts in the country, and most of these measures have not been effective hence the persistence of the problems in the country especially during political and regime transition periods and agricultural periods in the middle-belt region. The measures adopted so far have been: the establishment of administrative commissions of inquiry into the conflicts (Orjiakor, 1981, Blitz, 1965). Secondly, is the creation of autonomous ethnic regions (states and local governments) for some ethnic regions where such creation would reduce the ethnic conflicts and advance the ethnic interests of the creators of the autonomous ethnic regions (Ikejiani and Ikejiani, 1986; and Ellah, 1983). Thirdly, is entrenchment of the "federal character principle" in the constitutions of the country under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy. The use of the federal character principle as a means of solving ethnic conflicts endemic in the Nigerian political process was introduced in 1979 under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in the

1979 Constitution and in all other subsequent constitutions. The federal character principle aims at making it difficult for the government or any of its agencies to be dominated by any one ethnic group in the country by insisting that the composition of the government of the nation, or any of its component states or local government councils, and or, their agencies shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect or recognize the pluralist nature (ethnic diversities) of the country and or its component states, local governments and agencies. It should be in such a way as to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all peoples of the country. Such composition must reflect the "federal character".

The federal character principle however fell short of solving ethnic conflicts and problems endemic in the polity during political and regime transitions because it failed to give equal opportunities to all Nigerians or ethnic regions to produce in turns, the occupants of the highest political seats in the country. This would have eliminated the ethnic crises and violence that accompany the struggles for such posts in the country. This simply means that the members of the minority ethnic groups would be accommodated in government only in the places where the majority ethnic groups want them to be; and since politics is a matter of majority votes, the minority will always remain out of power. So the federal character principle falls short of solving ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. As Achebe (1983) noted, it has led to the creation of a "cult of mediocrity" because incompetent persons get these power positions due to their ethnic origins, religion and other undue considerations. And this has also led to the mismanagement of the nation's economy and corruption among political office holders. This has really affected the development of democratic governance in the country.

The next method adopted by the political elites themselves rather than the government as solution to ethnic conflicts during political and regime transitions is the "zoning" of key political posts in the political party to certain ethnic regions or ethnic nationalities before the elections. Since this method is not guaranteed or enshrined in the nation's constitution, adherence to it has become difficult, troublesome and another source of ethno-religious and ethno-political crises in the country.

Finally, military expeditions are sent to the ethnic regions in conflict to give military solutions to the conflicts as were the cases with Odi in Bayelsa State; Zakibiam in Benue State; the Jos crises in Plateau State; the Wukari Crise in Taraba State, the Jukun/Tiv crises in Tarabe State; and the Boko-Haram insurgency in Borno, Jigawa and Adamawa States. These measures above and military expeditions have not however produce lasting solutions rather they give a truce between periods of violence and crises in the affected regions across the country.

## **7. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

Most ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are outcomes of foreign influences – colonization and unification of disparate peoples into a country by colonial forces without due consideration for their ethnic diversities. The unifications led to social mobilization and the creation of new social classes or what Deutsch (1961) called the "new marginal men", and whom Nnoli (1989) referred to as "educated and insecure elites" who have resorted to organizing collective ethnic support to ensure their successes in the competition for national posts and resources because they have either failed to achieve, or, the available national institutions have failed to accommodate them and their ethnic interests.

The same social mobilization via education created what Nnoli (1989) called "middlemen minorities" who took advantage of the unification of the various ethnic nationalities into a country called Nigeria, to venture out of their ethnic regions for business ventures (this is particularly true of the Ibo ethnic group in Nigeria. There is a popular saying that wherever you do not find an Ibo-man, no one lives there. - just leave the region). In their host ethnic regions, they became ethnic minorities and targets for all forms of ethnically motivated attacks because of their business acumen.

Finally, ethnic conflicts are endemic and rampant in the country because of the multiplicity of ethnic groups in the country. It is estimated that Nigeria has more than 400 ethnic nationalities and linguistic groups (Murdock, 1959). This is too much for a single country. It is extremely difficult to have 400 or more ethnic nationalities under a roof without conflicts each day. With the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities in the country, it is extremely difficult to achieve a "unity in diversity" without a consensus or negotiation.

Nigeria is not a country; it is merely a geographical expression. It is evident that ethnic conflicts in Nigeria took a national outlook with the formation of the Nigerian state by the British. Simply put, it was the colonization of Nigeria that halted indigenous state formation processes in the present day Nigeria, and set the stage for ethnic conflicts which have characterized the country's political processes and militated against the development of stable democratic governance in the country. Ethnicity and cultural differences as religion, history have become potent forces in politics. They were the basis for the formation of nationalist movements during colonial era in Nigeria (Coleman, 1963), and the basis for political party formation, membership and support (Sklar, 1963).

Ethnic conflicts are endemic in Nigeria because of the absence of national identity and integration. The absence of

national identity and integration is due to the internal colonization of some ethnic nationalities by others during the indigenous state formation processes (empires building and kingdoms) which was halted by the external colonization of the kingdoms and empires by the Europeans.

The external colonization aborted the integration processes going on in the empires and in some places created status reversals which deepened the integration crises. It also amalgamated ethnic nationalities into un-integrated nation-states where the search for lost ethnic identity and integration started all over again after independence.

The amalgamated ethnic nationalities did not consider their ethnic differences during the search for nationhood or national independence in Nigeria, as the Nigerians saw the external colonizer as a common enemy. On independence, their ethnic differences manifested since the ethnic nationalities did not sit to discuss on what basis they would continue to be one indivisible and united country. Having been elude by the dividends of democratic rule – good governance, responsible and accountable leadership, functional infrastructural facilities, peace and security and exploitation of one ethnic nationality by another; each ethnic nationality now searches for its local identity and autonomy which it does through its local ethnic militias and terrorist groups; and challenge of the legitimacy of the central government.

While some ethnic nationalities are calling for a discussion of the national question in a national sovereign conference (Iyaji, (2000)), other ethnic nationalities are opposed to it. It has become very necessary to address the issue in a sovereign national conference because of the deepening ethno-nationalism in the country as they have become more or less, wars of internal decolonization.

The federal government in Nigeria should put in place measures that would help to create confidence in the people that the government really cares for them. The government should be responsible and accountable to the people. It should respect the rule of law, reduce poverty as it cannot be eradicated; provide functional infrastructural facilities; improve on the security situation in the country, and punish those who violate national laws irrespective of their positions in the society.

## 8. Note

When we talk of the Middle-Belt region in Nigeria, what comes to mind is the Plateau State and or, the Benue State of Nigeria. The use of the term middle-belt in this paper will therefore refer specifically to the Plateau State of Nigeria in particular; and the adjoining states of Benue, Nassarawa, Adamawa and Taraba in general.

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