

**Inter-Ethnic Violence in Nigeria; 1999-2007.**

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**Abstract**

Ethnicity has continued to pose serious problems in Nigerian politics and society in spite of various efforts to eradicate it or at least reduce its frequently of occurrence This study is designed to examine Inter Ethnic Violence in Nigeria; quotations were made from past and present authors. For the purpose of the research, it is sub-divided into five chapters. Chapter one is on the background of study, which includes statement of problem, objectives of the study, research questions, hypothesis, justification for the study, scope of the study, definition of terms, and theoretical framework. Chapter Two focuses on literature review, while chapter three is on methodology, initial scoping phase, cross referencing, and study areas. Chapter Four focuses Inter-ethnic Conflict in Nigeria, and chapter five focuses on summary, conclusion and recommendation. This paper through secondary sources and in-depth analysis reveals that inter-ethnic violence has political and economic effects. It is generated from conditions of contested claims over access to or control of scarce resources. Inter-ethnic violence poses challenge to national and social development processes that makes it necessary for special attention.

**Introduction**

Based on the following points, it is important to stress that inter-ethnic conflict from whatever perspective one looks at it is inevitable. It is obvious that conflict is a natural phenomenon in human Society, and varies from society to society, community to

community and has its origin in the many aspects of the cultural life of the people. There are many sources of conflict; inter conflict derived from the families, the individual in the family had the right of the protest showcasing announce over many things. This could be over property inheritance, inter personal relations and marital situation matter Wade (1956:308) and Max Gluckman (1956:10-105) have demonstrated in their works, how conflict originated from the family.

Based from the economic point of view, conflict could even cut across cultural boundaries of the world, land encroachment, territorial, house sequestration, trade imbalance, and nonpayment of tributes or loans, can be identified as most of the causes of conflict in the society. Chieftaincy tussle are prevalent in the society, and have their origin from the time immemorial, especially from the inevitable of competing forces to the royal throne particularly when the norm and customs have being relegated to the background, or when there is a misapplication of customs and traditions which is not in line with other ethnic communities.

Ethnicity has continued to pose serious problems in Nigerian politics and society in spite of various efforts to eradicate it or at least reduce it's frequently of occurrence. Unitarism, regionalism, the creation and proliferation of states, ethnic balancing, federal character, National Youth Services Corps, federal unity colleges and various formulas for revenue allocation secession, the imposition of a two party system, the proliferation of local government areas, government by grand coalition (power sharing, Multi-party democracy, various forms of military rule, numerous constitutional conferences, relocation of the federal capital out of Lagos, and Official and non-official exhortations for national unity and inter-ethnic tolerance have all failed to improve the situation. Obviously, the ethnic phenomenon has been properly understood. Consequently, it cannot be adequately tackled. Therefore, a different perspective on ethnicity needs to be formulated as a basis for further action in this issue.

During the colonial era, Nigerians sought to resist the oppressive state by embracing new identities. Overwhelmingly, they embraced primary identities such as ethnic identity. This was because of the generalized and cultural nature of the threat posed by state violence. Such threats demanded the crystallization of the self holistically, a function most adequately performed by primary identities. However, although this resort to primary identity is a logical response to the threat in question, it was by no means a relevant one. Since the threat was an oppressive power, it couldn't have been met without power, without engineering through political power, fundamental changes in economy, society and cultural experiences. But ethnic identity which the threat elicited was a static identity

that was not conducive to framing a serious political project or mounting a political movement of the spread and depth required by the threat. Unfortunately when the struggle against the threat (state violence) was waged, it was against other ethnic groups (wrong enemies) rather than the rampaging undemocratic colonial state.

Once ethnic conflict thus emerged, it sooner or later revealed its unique and ugly character, namely it is all consuming, violent intensity, ethnic identity, like all primary identities involves crystallizing the self holistically. Its claims are totalistic and ethnicity presumes to articulate all signifying interest and to encapsulate the whole ways of life. Thus ethnic conflict is necessarily intense because those involved in it are inclined to believe that they are defending their own ways of life. Mobilization into such conflict is easy because ethnicity has the symbolic capacity of defining the totality of an individual's existence, including embodying fears, hopes and sense of the future. Actions that undermine the group strike at the heart of the symbolic may not be directed at them personally.

The aggressive and murderous ethnic militiaman may believe that his very existence is threatened by the perceived injury to his ethnic group. In other words, ethnic conflicts are really about human dignity, a signaling that group members are alive and wish to remain so. Thus, ethnicity is quite easily mobilized and manipulated.

In Nigeria, a negative decimal in the fourth republic is the phenomenon the inter ethnic conflicts that has produced many post-conflict communities in Virtually all the geo-political zones of the country, (Aninasawun, 2007).

This is not limited in occurrence to any particular geo-political zone at urban and sub-urban sittings. Infact, the six geo-political zones of Nigeria provide a tapestry of types of conflict. In the north there are intermittent conflicts in the contests of region and hosts-settlers. The crises in the North Eastern region in the name of Boko Haram, cannot be regarded as inter-ethnic conflict but insurgency, because of what the group are demanding, rather it can be regarded as religious conflict. The middle belt region battles protracted and conflated issues of citizenship or indignity with land matters that conflate with contest for political power. The Niger Delta offers the most challenging case. . This is due to the mutation of an initial plea for state and corporate attention to intractable and organized system of hostage taken, destruction of properties and destruction of lives. Issues of borders disputes still resonate in the south region while urban violence is still feature in some south western states. The Nigerian state as the custodian of peace and unity usually intervenes during and after conflict but this has not produce any sustainable

peace going by the necessary bestiality of this conflicts with the underline causes either mutating or remaining unchanged, (Aninasawun, 2007).

### **Understanding Ethnicity/ Ethnic Groups**

Ethnicity, according to Nnoli (1980: 5-7), is a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by communal character of their boundaries. In Africa, language has clearly been the most crucial variable. The relevant communal factor may be language or culture or both. Bah (2003: 6-6) states that for ethnic groups inhabiting the same state, the interaction is frequently characterized by competition for resources, power, and the assertion of cultural identity. Stabbert and Welsh (1979: 132) recommend that an ethnic group should be defined in the broadest terms as a group that is bounded off from comparable groups or population categories in the society by a sense of its difference which may consist in some combination of a real or mythical ancestry and a common culture and experience. Smith (1991: 2) gives taxonomy of six main attributes of ethnic community as follows: a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, association with a specific home-land, and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population.

Scholars like Osaghae (1994, 1998), Richmond (1978), and Young (1979), distinguish between the insecretive primordial nature of ethnic group membership and the instrumentalist paradigm of ethnicity. To Adekanye (2003, 1997), communal groups whose competitive interactive interaction produces ethnicity are called ethnic groups. Prejudice and discrimination characterizes ethnicity.

### **Impact of Inter-Ethnic Violence On National Integration**

In the search for solutions to ethnic conflict in Nigeria it is necessary to take into account these five phases in the history of ethnicity in Nigeria. What is common among the causative factors across the five phases? Obviously, it is not the cultural differences among the various ethnic groups; it is not their geographical interests, or their social and economic interests. In the final analysis, it is the degree of repression by successive Nigerian regimes from the colonial to the present time. Such repression during the colonial times prepared the ground for ethnic identity. The difference among Africa countries on the ethnic question arises from the degree to which this emergent identity has been manipulated by the colonialists, the African anti-colonial leaders, and the degree to which the repression of the colonial times have been nourished by the repressions of successive African regimes.

Therefore, ethnic conflict resolution must, more than anything else, find ways and means of eliminating these repressions. It must also provide a framework that ensures that the manipulation of ethnicity through divide and rule policies, other forms of manipulations, as well as domination of ethnic minorities by ethnic majorities is drastically reduced if not totally eliminated. Above all, the politicians should encourage no political framework that panders to the search for personal privilege and advantages. This search has clearly been the motive for ethnic manipulations and the use of divide and rule strategies as well as violence in relations among ethnic groups.

Only a truly democratic political system in which policy formulation and implementation are governed by an unwavering concern and search for dialogue, consensus building and commitment to the interests of the people in their individually and collectively is capable of resolving the ethnic question in Nigeria. This is the system usually identified with good governance. It is based on a strong belief in the people. Views, and widespread participation are all crucial for responsible and responsive government. Citizen involvement is characterized by a sense of shared responsibility in public policy, ordinary people have strong voices in the political process, and there are opportunities to hear diverse views and take them into account in policy formulation and implementation.

The orientation of this type of governance is to empower the people to use the political system to improve their lives. It involves a structured interaction in which the rulers work with and through the organisations of the people. The rulers respect and trust the people, listen to them, have faith in their ability to understand the political process, relate with them on the basis of justice, equality and mutual benefit, and collaborate with them in their daily struggle to improve their lives. In this relationship with the people, the rulers go beyond individualism to co-operation, beyond having consent taken to having people actually give it, and beyond voting without the people actually exercising electoral influence.

In this type of governance, the rulers must show concern for the removal of the constraints on the poor. This is because good governance is not advanced by giving the vote to the people while remaining indifferent to the crippling constraints of poverty. Poverty enables the leaders to exploit the dependence of the big men in their communities, manipulate parochial identities and get away with bribery and intimidation. In such a condition voting becomes merely a metaphor for powerless and exploitation and elections become bondage. Similarly, rulers must devote effort to fighting against defeatism, docility and opportunism among the people. The need to relate to one another on the basis of mutual respect borne out of a sense of equality and justice is crucial to good governance. Those

who do not take human dignity seriously cannot promote or benefit from good governance, nor can they take democratic claims of others seriously, for these claims are ultimately about human dignity.

Under good governance, rulers exercise power in accordance with widely accepted rules and principles. Among these are the principle of transparency and accountability. Transparency expresses the equality of the ruler and the citizen, while accountability expresses the principles of justice and collaboration in their relations. Furthermore, justice and equality demand that the ruler should respect the rule of law. With good governance, no one is subjected to the whims and caprices of another, to repression or to any form of inhuman treatment. The politician does not intimidate or bribe the people in order to obtain their political support. Instead, the two constantly consult with each other in order to give and receive advice. Finally, the linkage between the rulers and the ruled suggests an end to ethnic and religious strife, and other forms of sectional politics in a system where good governance prevails. Respect for the people anywhere is respect for the people everywhere. This is contrary to inciting one people against another for any reason what so ever. It is also contrary to lack of civility in relations among politicians in the political process. All politicians serve one people or another, each of them deserves respect. This is not to suggest that political difference and criticism are out of place in good governance. This is far from it. In fact, political differences and criticisms are essential ingredients in the search for the best means of improving the lives of the people. Without genuine democracy ethnic violence will persist and even intensify.

Nnoli is of the views that colonial incursions exploited and compounded inter-ethnic relations in Africa (1998:417). He pointed at colonial influence in countries like Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Cote'dvoire, Zimbabwe where colonial powers utilized the segmentation of ethnic groups to their advantage. The divide and-rule policies of colonial administrators assured the docility of different ethnic groups and thus shielded them from the menace of insurrection. In other words, it was feasible to divide ethnic groups and pit them against each other so that they could focus their energies on fighting one another rather than on overthrowing colonial governments. This was also the strategy utilized by the former apartheid regime which held sway in South Africa until early 1990s.

Ethnicity can be a viable tool for national integration if it is used positively because no two ethnic groups are the same in terms of endowment and resources. When such different groups come together to contribute their peculiar advantages to the polity for the benefit of all, there is bound to be mutual benefit.

### **Cases of Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria 1999-2007**

Some inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria as characterized by the impact of globalization and the multinational corporations. This impact implies tripartite hostility of an ethnic group toward the government, hostility toward the multinational corporations, and hostility towards neighbouring ethnic groups. Under-pinning these conflicts are the requirement by globalization that governments in Nigeria and elsewhere facilitate the profit-making and transnational activities of the multinational corporations in Nigeria, this has meant providing abundant land, ignoring pollution requirements and in general, permitting these companies to neglect their corporate social responsibilities to the communities where they operate. All this is often done without consulting the local communities or reaching a consensus with them.

This state of unilateralism generates opposition among ethnic groups especially over how to share the benefits or burdens of the activities of these foreign companies. The situation on the Mambilla Plateau in the 1950s is illustrative. This plateau is considered to be one of the most fertile areas among the designated agricultural belts of Nigeria. Minority ethnic groups, notable the Mambilla, Benson, Kamba and Kaka, are the indigenous inhabitants of the area. However, Hausa-Fulani migrants had also settled there as farmers and cattle rearers. The land question in the area changed dramatically in the 1980s because foreign and local companies, including Lever brothers, the Savannah Sugar Company, and the Nigeria Beverages Company, had moved there. Each of the company mentioned above acquired about 2,000 hectares of the best land (African Concord 14 June 1983). Under these conditions of severe state and company repression coupled with the havoc done to the environment and means of livelihood of the people, ethnic identity was inevitably crystallized.

The Ogoni ethnic group is one of the smaller ethnic groups that inhabit southeastern Nigeria in the Niger delta region of Rivers state. Over the last decades, they have become a symbol for minority ethnic groups in their struggle for a fair and just use of national resources. In the spirit of federal character, the Ogoni have staked a claim, direct and unequivocal claim over the resources produced in Ogoniland. For them, it is the only way to justice and equity for themselves and other minorities like them. The problem posed by this demand is serious because Ogoniland is one of the nation's petroleum is mined in the homelands of small minority groups. It just happens that the Ogoni have articulated their demands most clearly and created the best organization for pursuing them, like the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP).

Post conflict communities may be described as communities perpetual conflicts. These are communities that very prone inter conflict because of some reasons. Some of these reasons may be cultural, economic, political, regions or conflation of all enumerated. An example of this is Takum in community in Taraba State, Stephen (2007) reports that peace has taken a flight from the community for the pass thirty years. This is because of an intractable inter conflict between kutebs and Tivs. Social effects: The social consequences of the ethnicconflicts are often enormous and cannot be easily quantified, especially the psychosocial ones. Most of the Victims of these incidences are left homeless, landless, destitute, injured, dead, abused, to mention but a few of the atrocities resulting from the menace. The immediate and real consequences of the clashes are often felt most at personal and family level. There is always loss of security in the clash-phone areas as civilian take the law into their own hands, targeting perceived enemies. As a result of insecurity, there is always indiscriminate lose of human life. Many people often sustain physical injuries while some others are traumatized. The state of insecurity often interferes with the day to day socio-economic and political undertaking within the areas where conflict take place.

**Political effects:** Inter Ethnic conflict trigger the ethnic politics. Over the years, various communities experienced the rise of ethnic insurgences and tensions which if left to continue eventually turn into ethnic hatred and violence as witnessed in Arian Ikwuano Abia State with their neighbouring Akwa-Ibom State, Onicha Ngwa with the Akwa-Ibom and so many other places. It leaves the impression that politics and political parties are vehicles of ethnic sentiments and interests. Although the common ideology especially among leaders of different ethnic groups is national democracy, reality is ethnic democracy for their supports that is closely related to ethnic nationalism, sectarianism and other forms of parochialism.

**Economic effects:** The total economic impact of inter ethnic conflict in affected areas is not easy to quantify. There is often gigantic waste of human and resources. Clashes usually have lasting consequences that will continue to alter economic development for many years after its end. One overall observation that emerges from a study of the economic consequences the recent clashes in Benue State with Fulani herdsmen is the fact the economic consequences go far beyond the available statistics. Much of the destruction worked to the economic advantage of the perpetrators of the violence and their close aides. Generally, the clashes allowed some groups of people and individuals to capitalize on the insecurity to usurpland or purchase it at throwaway prices from the victims who had no choice than to sell it or otherwise lose them. In a state insecurity, agricultural activities are often disrupted. In most cases, crops are either destroyed or abandoned because of the widespread violence caused by insurgencies.



There were other subsequent economic problems related to ethnic such as food insecurity, disruption of work on farms, industries and public sector institute of private property, land grading, destruction of transport and communication infrastructures, diversion of economic resources from consumer products of military and security and hardware or their misallocation and unexpected expenditure, inflation and fluctuation in prices among others. As a result of ethnic insurgences in various parts of the world, thousands of families lost a lot of personal and household possessions at their houses, farms, shops and other business premises are destroyed or looted.

### **Ethnicity as a threat to National Integration**

According to Clifford Geertz (1963), the democratization of political life resulted in class politics and ethnic politics. The artificial character of newly- created states after decolonization, their lack of a tradition of civil politics, absence of a national market, and the absence of a well - developed class system resulted in the primacy of ethnic politics. Gradually, ethnic politics became a mobilization force at par with class politics. Professor Chinua Achebe has described the Nigeria-Biafra war as a war that was precipitated by the bile of ethnic hatred and created a clique of military class and political adventures that ruined the country.

### **Ethnicity and Race**

Around 1900 and before the essentialist primordialist understanding of ethnicity became predominant, cultural differences between peoples were seen as being the result of genetically inherited traits and tendencies (Banton, 2007). In 1950, the UNESCO stated that the race question signed by some internationally renowned scholars of the time (including Ashley Montague, Claude Levi, and Gunnar, Myrdar, Julian Huxley and others) was rejected and concluded that national religious, geographic, linguistic, and cultural groups do not necessarily coincide with racial groups and the genetic connection with racial traits. Because serious errors of this kind are habitually committed when the term "race is used in popular parlance, it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of ethnic groups (Metraux 1950).

According to Eric (1982), races were constructed and incorporated during the period of European mercantile expansion and ethnic groups during the period of capitalistic expansion. To call oneself, Jewish or Arab is to immediately invoke a clutch of linguistics, religious, cultural and racial features that are held to be common within each ethnic category. Such broad ethnic categories have also been termed macro-ethnicity (Seidner, 1982).

### **Colonial Roots of Ethnicity**

Nnoli and some other scholars who have researched into ethnicity maintained that the colonial strategy of operation in Africa was to divide ethnic groups and pitch them against each other so that they could focus their energies on fighting one another rather than engaging in confrontational activities which will disturb the colonial governments while they were preoccupied with exploiting the resources of their colonial possessions. Colonialism created some sort of favouritism and class divisions, which affected group relationship.

### **Ethnicity and the Tactics of Divide and Rule**

The first type of ethnic conflict in Nigeria is the product of the political or administrative policy of divide and rule that mobilized and manipulated ethnic consciousness. The first to do so were the colonialists. They manipulated the ethnic consciousness that emerged from the violence of the colonial state. As a political line, the colonial policy of divide and rule first used ethnic and regional sectionalism to curb Nigerian nationalism and to maintain British colonial power.

### **Ethnic Conflicts and the Struggle of Ethnic Minorities**

A new phase of ethnic conflicts emerged with the control of some government power by Nigerian political leaders. The latter followed in the foot-steps of the colonialists. In their political tutelage under colonial rule, Nigerian politicians not only imbibed the policy of repression but also the art of political manipulation, as well as the technique of divide-and-rule. As far back as 1948 and well before their assumption of governmental powers, such political manipulation of ethnicity nearly led to a violent eruption in the capital city of Lagos. At this time, Nnamdi Azikiwe's political opponents were frightened by his power to ruin them not only politically but also financially through branding them as political stooges of imperialism. The resultant resentment against him spilled over to his Igbo co-ethnics whom Azikiwe had also been cultivating politically. Azikiwe's critics accused him of ethnic chauvinism and the glorification of the Igbo and their achievement to the neglect of the progress of other groups. In fact, some Yoruba leaders accused him of assassinating the character of prominent Yoruba's and began mobilizing the Yoruba community against him; at the same time as his Igbo supporters mobilized the Igbo community behind him. Consequently, Igbo - Yoruba tensions mounted, leading to the formation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and therefore, the inauguration of a period of Cold war in Lagos between the two groups. During the course of this war, virulent and intemperate ethnic slurs and retaliatory remarks were freely and frequently made (Coleman, 1858, 341-343).\

## Conclusion

Inter-ethnic violence poses challenge to national and social development processes that makes it necessary for special attention. Consciousness and agitates are seen as political expressions of a group, which comes to the fore once a group perceives an action of segregation against it from another group. In relative deprivation, a group is been deprived of something that will improve their wellbeing or deliberate actions aiming at preventing others from enjoying what they are entitled to. This invariably connotes derail, discrimination and repression.

People whose boundaries may be loosely or lightly defined distinguish themselves from other people through the knowledge of ethnic identity. Ethnicity is understood as a social process, as the moving boundaries and identities which people either collectively and individually draw themselves in their social lives mainly in the urban society where they find themselves. From the forgoing, it is clear that ethnicity contributes to conflict in any society. Conflict is a clash of interests between and among parties. Inter-conflict can occur at the family, community and beyond community levels. Inter-ethnic conflict is a conflict between ethnic groups often as a result of ethnic nationalism. Ethnic conflicts are manmade. It is generated from conditions of contested claims over access to or control of scarce resources. In essence, the more the frequency of group and individual interactions in a multi ethnic society, the more the likelihood of ethnic conflict.

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