

Inter-Ethnic Crisis in Nigeria - The Warri Experience

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Abstract

This study investigates the inter-ethnic crisis in Warri metropolis and drew inferences from other Nigeria as well as from other African societies. The crisis pattern is situated under the public realm violence, using various scholarly opinions in analyzing this brand of pent-up inter-ethnic crisis. Although the study examined some of the ways of managing ethnicity within the context of the democratization process in Nigeria, the underlying thesis however, is that the democratization processes by its very nature of mobilizing greater participation and placing the question of control of state power and resources upper most in the political agenda (i.e., sharing and distribution), exacerbate ethnic conflicts and tensions that leads to crisis and therefore make their management a critical matter, not only for the success of the democratization process, but also for the survival of the state as a whole. Firstly, the study set out to clarify the nature of inter-ethnic crisis, their consequences, and the need for their management by examining certain elements which complicates ethnic crisis and makes difficult its management. There is the fact that although, inter-ethnic crisis exists at the individual, groups and subgroup levels, its management however, is usually based on the group level. Secondly, the study pointed out that although, ethnicity is analyzed as a public realm phenomenon, but it is also vibrant in the private realm. A direct result or corollary of this is the fact that in addition to inter-ethnic crisis being situational; it can also be disaggregated into political economic, socio-cultural and religious dimensions etc. The study attempted to analyze how these dimensions of ethnicity tie-up together to reinforce the

politically relevant ones that leads to crisis situation. Then of course, the study formally examined those forces at work with which ethnic crisis are usually recursive or replayed, such as the variables of class conflict, competition for scarce resources, uneven development, fear of dominance by one ethnic group and unequal benefits etc. Thereafter, it proceeds to look at ways in which ethnic crisis impact on the society hence making their management imperative. Empirical dates were derived mainly from Warri metropolis amongst the three major ethnic groups viz, Izon, Urhobo and Itsekiri with comparative notes from other ethnic groups in Nigeria that have undergone different forms of inter-ethnic crisis that is familiar. Though general statements were made, but contextual differences and the effects they bear on managing inter-ethnic crisis are recognized and examined through devoted descriptive analyses.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Crisis, Political Economy, Warri Experience, Democratic Process

Introduction

In Nigeria, inter-ethnic crisis have remained one of legacies and an Achilles-heel of the post-colonial inter-ethnic groups. There are two analytical dimensions to these crises pattern. Firstly, that which followed independence when the emergent elites applied ethnic weapon as the most viable strategy in competition for state power. For instance, Sub-Saharan African states at independence beginning from the 1950s experienced these crises but it proved to be most disruptive in Nigeria, Congo and Sudan etc., where there were outbreak of civil wars. Secondly, the experiences of the Late 1980s and early 1990s showed the other dimension of the crisis. This phase witnessed the resurrection of suppressed old conflicts in shaper forms and the emergence of new and more complicated crisis. Togo, Benin and Tanzania etc., that were assumed to be free from ethnic crisis, were not spared in this phase.

This resurgence was due to democratization and economic restructuring in these states and has given room for a pent-up tensions and conflicts and by extension crisis to be released. It can be argued therefore, that the conflict which led to the civil crisis and virtual destruction of Nigeria, Somalia, Liberia, Rowanda and Angola etc., where the civil wars had clear ethnic undertones would not have occurred had inter-ethnic conflicts were managed properly.

In the views of Connors (1972), Morrison and Stevenson (1972), they agreed that the consequences of ethnic conflicts, whether in Africa or elsewhere, could be "nation-destroying."¹ Nigeria in this instance, as a multi-ethnic society and indeed a country of great diversity, possessing a multiplicity of landscapes with over 250 cultural cleavages and languages, effectively and equally presents diverse hazards thus has tried to devise

ways of coping with inter-ethnic conflicts that will lead to outright crisis such as the introduction of federalism, federal character principle, zoning or rotational system, solutions to minority problems, party politics along ethnic lines, inter-ethnic linkages, local autonomy and or revenue derivation/sharing formula etc. It can be argued that no country can afford the risk or luxury of allowing inter-ethnic crisis a free reign or ignoring it without attempting an approach to cope or manage it using some universally popularized prescriptions or formula. Elaiwu and Olorunsola, (1983), argued that:

"Nigeria has learned from its own experience or has concluded, however reluctantly and expensively, that coexistence and accommodation between the tendencies towards state coherence and predisposition towards ethnic self-determination are necessities."

Following the above argument, Osaghae (1994), stated that:

"Nigeria's large number of ethnic groups, inequalities among them in size, resources endowment, education and access to state power and resources, her highly developed and factionalized indigenous bourgeoisie, make her ethnic situation perhaps the most complicated in Africa. "³

In the Nigerian context, this is perhaps part of the explanation for inter-ethnic crisis. Colonialism brought different and diverse ethnic groups together into a peripheral capitalist formation thereby building new and competitive notions of ethnic development. The new territory of Nigeria is almost all artificial with boundaries that stretches across varied communities and paid scant attention to the myriad of kingdoms, Monarchies, chiefdoms and other societies on the ground. Most of which encompasses scores of diverse group that share no common history, culture, language or religion etc. Some of these societies were even formed across great divides between the desert regions of the Sahara and the belt of the tropical forests to the South, throwing together Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in latent hostility. But all endured to form the basis of the modern state of Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Colonialism and its government in Nigeria brought a myriad of changes especially in the areas of road building and railway construction etc, in an attempt to stimulate economic growth of the colony and make it self-supporting. New pattern of economic activity were established and Nigeria became significant exporter of agricultural commodities such as cocoa, cotton, groundnut and palm produce etc.

In the highlands of Eastern and Southern Nigeria, European settlers acquired a huge landholding, laying the foundation for large scale commercial activity with mineral wealth of the regions attracting their attention, particularly petroleum product (oil), as a result of the industrialization in Europe and America. The mineral richness of the Southern region of Nigeria when first discovered was described as 'a veritable geological scandal'. Nigeria was found to possess not only a profusion of agricultural products (cocoa, groundnut and palm produce etc), but oil which is a valuable mineral. Colonial rule was expected to last for longer number of years, but it turned out to be only an interlude in Nigeria's history, lasting for little less than 60 years as a result of rising tide of anti-colonial protests and insurrection, hence the European government handed over their Nigerian territory to independence movements. Colonial legacy included a framework of schools, medical services and transport infrastructure, etc. But western education and literacy programs transformed Nigeria's societies with an emergence of a few modern economic developments most of which were confined to coastal areas, islands and urban cities. While much of the interiors remained underdeveloped, remote and cut off from contact with the modern world. Moreover, while European government departed, foreign corporations owned by Europeans, retained their hold over business empires built up over half a century such as exploration, mining and production of mineral wealth, particularly petroleum products.

Independence era beginning in 1960 prompted much jubilation and enjoyed world's applause. Nigeria seemed to hold so much promise and its leaders stepped forward with renewed vigor, energy and enthusiasm to tackle the tasks of development. However, the honeymoon was brief, and it is important to note that the new federation of Nigeria was not a nation, as such does not possess the ethnic class or ideological cement to hold it together. Thereby, as the momentum to oust colonial rule subsided, older loyalties and ambitions came thrusting to the fore, and often exploited by political leaders for their own ends. Nigerian leaders became more preoccupied with gaining a monopoly of power, preferring to rule through a system of patronage to enforce their control, instead of erecting or building institutional framework for peaceful co-existence amongst and between- the diverse profusion of cultures. Ruling elites seized every available opportunity to enrich themselves by looting state assets and community's commonwealth at will thus leading to lost decades in internal conflicts, mismanagement and corruption with the aftermaths of crisis situation.

This historical account according to Nelson and Wolpe (1970) "heightened existing conflicts and produced new ones among the groups."⁴ Nigeria's historical and structural antecedent intensified this competitive nature of inter-ethnic crisis which was produced

by the practices of the colonial authorities. These practices introduced uneven development among inter-ethnic groups in their entry into critical areas of the Nigerian society, notably, public jobs, admissions into schools, especially institutions of higher learning and distribution of state resources etc. These constitute the core of the issues of inter-ethnic crisis. At times, political administration and its issues are based on ethnicity, especially when the colonial authority decided to indigenize some organs of government. This deliberate colonial policy affected the continued inter-ethnic relationship in Nigeria. As Kirk-Greene (1980), succinctly put it:

"This fatal legacy of colonialism has continued to affect inter-ethnic relations especially because of the rampant abuse of power by government officials to fill positions with their kinsfolk.'^o

The focus of this study is 'the Warri experience of inter-ethnic crisis.' Inter-ethnic crisis can be classified into two aspects, mainly, the public realm inter-ethnicity, which involves crisis related to the determination of who gets what, when and how, and the private realm inter-ethnicity which does not necessarily involve state or government intervention due to the fewer number of private sector development in Nigeria. However, the inter-ethnic crisis of note, are those belonging to the public sector realm. Anyway, it is of note that inter-ethnicity in both realms are recursive.

The concern in this study is with the public sector realm inter-ethnicity and of note are the crisis variant ones, like those which led to the Warri inter-ethnic crisis involving the Izon, Urhobo and Itsekiri. Therefore, the study shall proceed to examine the intervening variables in the crises; such as the causes of increased wave of violence between the three major ethnic groups in the area; struggle for land ownership; fear of an Itsekiri over lordship over the other ethnic groups; struggle for royalties and employment opportunities provided by oil companies; and the relocation of a local government headquarter from Ogbe-Ijaw, an Izon community to Ogidigben in Itsekiri land, etc.

After Nigerian's independence, especially after the Nigerian civil crisis, the Warri crisis assumed and became more frequent and violent. Political, economic and social factors are adduced to be responsible for this wave of virulent violent inter-ethnic crisis in Warri Metropolis. Therefore, this study is interested in raising a critical platform on which a valid theory of ethnicity and crisis in Nigeria can be discussed in the light of the imperatives towards peaceful resolution techniques.

According to Ikime (1977), in the last decades of the 19th century, Warri Metropolis did not exist as a territorial unit but emerged as a metropolis in the 20th century as "a collection

of independent Ijaw (Izon), Urhobo and Itsekiri settlements, separated from each other by stretches of unoccupied lands."⁶

Politically, economically and socially, the Itsekiri were more organized than the Izon and Urhobo ethnic groups, this is as a result of the political and economic power they asserted under the leadership of Nana of Itsekiri, then governor of old Benin River under the colonial authority. The headquarter of Itsekiri was at Ode-Itsekiri otherwise known and called 'Big Warri', and according to Moore (1970), the Big Warri was, "situated on an island within the creeks, four miles from Warri Metropolis."⁷ It was at this headquarters, in the words of Sagay (1973), "that the Itsekiri made their contact with the Europeans, first the Portuguese and later with other European traders."⁸

The Benin River north of Warri metropolis attracted the interest of the European traders within the 18th to the late 19th centuries, wherein the Itsekiri acted as middlemen due to the fact that their settlement spread along the Benin River, especially between the European traders and the hinterland people.

In the light of the prevailing economic and political circumstances at the time, according to Ikime (1977) and Alagoa (1976), the Izon ethnic group who were found settled on the bank of Warri River to the north east of Ode-Itsekiri, with others (i.e, Oporoza, Gbaramatu, and Egbema, etc.), setting north-west of Ode-Itsekiri along the Benin River became easily supplanted by the Itsekiri as a result of poor organization of the trading relations between the Izon and the Europeans in the western Niger Delta⁹. According to Obioma (1979), the Urhobo occupied an area west of Ogbe-Ijaw, which otherwise was an Izon settlement, notable among them was the Agbassa and Okere etc.¹⁰ This urhobosettlers, settled towards the east and north respectively along west of Ogbe-Ijaw. Moore, (1970), in his argument, maintained that:

"By the last decade of the 19' century, trading activities declined along the Benin River. Attention thereafter shifted to the mouth of the River Forcados. It was this shift of trade from the Benin River that helps Warri to grow into a metropolis. ""¹¹

Accordingly, Warri development as the commercial nerve centre and the provincial headquarter occasioned migration of other ethnic groups, viz., Itsekiri, Izon, and Urhobo, etc., and thus saw to its growth into a metropolis in which the other ethnic groups (the Urhobo and Izon), agitated for a share of the political and economic control, hence the beginning of the crisis. There was a conflict, the Urhobo and Izon, argued that 'the status and territorial expansion of Warri, as a small trading settlement, had changed to that of a metropolis in which other ethnic groups had established their territorial control. Therefore, all the

component ethnic groups that promoted this development of Warri trade centre into Warri metropolis should have equal share in its political control.

On the other hand, the Itsekiri disagreement and claiming sole control over the area in which the Warri trading centre was located originated from their total and complete political control especially as the colonial authority preferred to deal solely with the Oluof Itsekiri as the only historically recognized and visible traditional authority in Warri metropolis. However, the coming together of these ethnic groups in Warri metropolis brought about a new relationship notwithstanding the extent to which they were firstly separated from each other by stretches of unoccupied lands, but as they clustered in Warri metropolis than as it used to be the case, the problems and issues of inter-ethnic and group relations began to emerge and some of these issues, thorny as they may be include according to Tuedor's oral interview in 23/8/2014;

- a. Political appointment of the Itsekiri into government positions to the exclusion of the other ethnic groups.
- b. The right of control over Warri lands.
- c. The derivation formula for royalties and employment opportunities provided by the oil companies operating in the area; and
- d. The relocation of local government headquarters from Ogbe-Ijaw an Izon community to Ogidigben in Itsekiri land.¹²

There was the fear that the major ethnic groups in Warri metropolis (i.e, Izon, Urhobo and Itsekiri), are labouring under the fear of political and socio-economic domination of one ethnic group thus gave rise to the question of what option is crisis situation in resolving the agitated issues of political control and socio-economic dominance of one particular ethnic group over the others? And how can inter-ethnic crisis provide an enabling environment for the oil companies operating in the area and the government to evenly develop the area? Therefore, the factors responsible for the continuous and frequent crisis in Warri metropolis and the social value of the crisis in the light of what it intend to encourage or discourage in Nigeria will stimulate the necessary reaction of Nigerians, particularly Warri indigenes, towards the incidence and implications of inter-ethnic crisis and also motivate the Nigerian government to cultivate crisis management strategies that will promote peace and cordiality among inter-ethnic groups as well as significantly motivate the government interest in sorting for a lasting solution to the frequent and violent inter-ethnic crisis in Nigeria.

Methodologically, this study shall be carried out using the primary and secondary sources of data gathering. The primary source will involve interviews and discussions consisting

of literate and illiterate citizens drawn from various categories of people/professional living in the Warri metropolis via, the stratification technique. In it, the interpretivist approach which places the burden of proof on the researcher's narrative ability will be adopted. In other words, this is to use the activities of the day as instrument of analysis. To be adopted also is the historical descriptive analysis which shall give an insight to the pre-modalism of the inter-ethnic groups under study, using the simple percentage to accept or reject the hypothesis as the case maybe. The secondary data collection shall entail information from textbooks, newspaper, magazines, and journal, articles etc., consulted in course of the study.

The scope of the study shall cover but not limited to Warri metropolis. Information shall be collected from especially, Izon, Urhobo and Itsekiri ethnic groups involved in the crisis and their adjoining communities, the Niger Delta Region and the Nigerian society to understand the forces at work in the inter-ethnic crises in Nigeria with particular reference to the Warri experience. The scope shall also extend to the oil companies and government agencies that form a segment of the area.

Definition of Terms

In this discourse, the keywords that need apt explanation are evidently the concepts of ethnicity, crisis and political economy because they are day to day occurrences in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. And this does not suggest that scholar's view about what they mean and what they often point to are the same. In fact, the absence of valid theories on the essential character of inter- ethnic crisis have in one way or the other been responsible for the stymied progress often witnessed in the resolution of such inter-ethnic crisis in Nigeria.

ETHNICITY: In contemporary debate on the nature and character of ethnicity, what readily comes to mind is the offer of pre-theoretical examples such as culture, language, region, religion, territory and myth of common origin? According to Otite (1990),

"Every ethnic group has a primordial character which distinguishes them from others."¹³

In other words, there is an agreement that ethnic groups in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa are primordially rooted, dating back to the pre-colonial days. The reason why these pre-theoretical examples of ethnicity often force themselves on us is due to the fact that there are problems in defining what the concept is. To aid our thinking and to fix our attention in something empirical, these pre-theoretical examples are often mentioned and

cited as first hand materials in the definition and theorizing ethnicity. Furthermore, there is nothing inevitable about ethnic crisis or any other situation involving individual groups. Every student of ethnicity knows that the fact of multi-ethnicity, no matter how complex it may be, does not by itself produce crisis. In other words, it is unusual to find people tearing themselves apart simply on account of belonging to different ethnic groups. This fact of ethnicity is aptly summarized by the 'situationality thesis' led by Okamura(1981).

"That ethnic crisis ensues in situations where present conditions under which competing actors -as individuals, groups or classes-find the ethnic resources expedient. "¹⁴

Over the years, attempts have been made by scholars to ensure conceptual clarity and focus of the meaning of ethnic idea. Such brilliant attempts are those of Edmund Leach (1954) and Frederick Barth (1969), tagged the 'structuralist approach.' They emphasized the importance of structure in defining ethnicity than cultural factors. However, the conceptual foundations of this analysis produced counter theories. Prominent in this direction are the works of Edward Shils (1957:45) and Clifford Geertz (1963:57) tagged the 'Pre-mordiarlist approach.' These approaches emphasized the importance of culturally distinctive characteristics, such as myths of origin, ritual, religion or genealogical descent in distinguishing peoples from one another.

Arising from these conceptual standpoints, other scholars like Charles Kayes (1976), posited that "a reconciliation of these opposing views can be achieved once it is agreed that the primary defining characteristics of ethnicity is culture." Obviously, this reasoning especially if evaluated in the light of the claims of the 'premordialist', can be seen that the basic function of ethnicity is to bind the individual to a group with the claim that an awareness of a common identity constitutes its principal feature. In all, ethnicity tends to be constructible as the feeling or consciousness of belonging to a group that shares certain common socio-cultural elements and traits.

Crisis:

Significantly, 'crisis' is spreading gradually to affect all parts of human society, the manifestation of its pervasive phenomenon cut across the political, social and economic dimensions as well as other spheres of human existence. The ramified form of crisis starts at the individual and group level with a chance of its extension to the larger society. The fact here remains that at the individual and group level, they experience pressures arising from the demands placed on every role they significantly play in the

society or ethnic group they belong. In most cases, crisis is taken to be synonymous with conflict. Mike Oquaye (1995), associate crisis with conflict as he states that:

"Conflict is a sequence of interaction between groups in society, between groups and governments, and between individuals. The causes of such interactions, the methods employed and their consequences may lead to conflict connoting crisis. Conflict evokes feeling of tension, fear and insecurity within the state. "

Structurally, crisis is differentiated from conflict because crisis goes beyond the occurrence or the manifestation of conflicts. It is a truism that crisis cannot be said to be in existence without a prior manifestation or existence of conflict, but the fact remains that a state of crisis is what comes after a persistent manifestation of moments of conflict. Crisis denotes a turning point, either for good or bad after series of conflicts.

In this case, what one need to explore more into is the political economy of the groups involve in a crisis situation to be able to understand the state, nature and description of crisis in a particular area. And to do this, is to look at the views of some of the proponents of political economy thesis to be able to grasp the forces at work.

Political Economy:

Political economy, according to Ryndina M.N, (1980), is concerned with the social relations between people in the process of production. In it, he explained that the theory studies the economic laws governing the production and distribution of material benefits in human society at various stages of development. As well as the laws of social changes, transformation and development in society. In this regards therefore, "political economy is an approach to economic issues that recognizes the importance of other noneconomic social facts."¹⁶ It uses any set of techniques which are appropriate for the problem at hand and always maintain the history of relevant ideas and events as a background to understanding them.

Political economy, according to Ake (1981), draws attention to the dynamics of the social world, which view the world as a system in terms of continuity and relatedness. The approach in Ake's view is a systematic account of the interactions of various elements of social life, especially economic structure, social structure, political system and the belief system of society. Hence, it serves as a useful tool for the study of society as it treat problem concretely, rather than abstractly and to this end help to identify false and biased assumptions.¹⁷

The relevance of the political economy approach to this study cannot be over emphasized in view of the fact that it is apt in the explanation of social relations amongst and or between people, groups, the economic laws as well as the structure of society in its transformation and development at various stages. To put it exactly, the political economy approach exposes the dynamics of the social contradiction that exist in Nigeria's inter-ethnic groups especially the Warri crisis. These theoretical assumptions above have helped to provide a caveat for the explanation to the background of inter-ethnic crisis in Nigeria and also the positions, views and demands of the ethnic groups involve in crisis especially the Warri experience.

The objective of this study is to determine the factors responsible for the continuous and frequent, Warri crisis. To ascertain what determine the social value of the crisis in the light of what it intend to encourage or discourage in Nigeria. To also determine to what extent the intervening variables in the crisis situation interact to stimulate or hamper development in the area. It will be proper in this instance to attempt a brief definition of terms especially of 'ethnicity and crisis', by taking into account some related scholarly opinions on the subject matter and issues as it concerns the study, which will provide a working knowledge of the terms in question and will be of immense assistance to properly assess the co-existence of the variables and the degree of influence one could have on the other in producing the centrifugal power force that ignite inter-ethnic crisis in Nigeria and the Warri experience in particular. Following that, inter-ethnic crisis in this study shall be taken to mean the same thing as inter-ethnic conflict or inter-ethnic violence.

The question here is, are there inter-ethnic crisis, conflicts and or violence in African societies? A critical survey at existing body of literatures and works on the political economy of African states especially Nigeria, reflects the view that the answer is a resounding yes. There are reasons for this although studies in other related fields have rather neglected issues of conflict that are ingrained in domestic variables to produce crisis situation in African societies and such studies have often taking the State-centric approach in the analysis of crisis in Africa as their starting point.

Even though this may not be entirely false, the disturbing fact is the spate of not locating domestic variable and factors as a plausible condition for the analysis of crisis in Africa. One of the often neglected variables is the concept of "ethnicity", which is induced by Weber's unimportant consideration of the concept of ethnicity, but it is undisputedly clear that in the light of recent developments in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, the Weberians opinion on the idea of ethnicity will require a critical review. The problem of

ethnicity and inter-ethnic crisis is more acute in Nigeria and few African countries like Cameroon, Uganda and Sudan etc. Naturally, one would ask that, why is ethnicity more intense in some countries? Why does it tend to be violent in some societies? In what follows, using the available indicators, some of the major points of explanation to the above postulation include:

- a) The number and configuration of ethnic groups in a given society;
- b) The history of conflicts of such society;
- c) The relationship between ethnic conflicts and other conflicts;
- d) The character of ethnic demands and interest articulation;
- e) The extent of legitimacy of ethnicity and management model;
- f) The balance between economic and political control; and
- g) The degree and nature of decentralization of government structures, etc

In the view of Maynes (1993), "animosity among ethnic groups is beginning to rival the spread of nuclear weapons as the most serious threat to peace that the world faces". Empirically, Maynes view can be seen in the face of recent developments across the globe. As Boulding (1979), would say, "there are over 5,000 ethnic minorities in the

entire world. This is besides major ethnic groups in the world. "

Welsh (1993), argued that of the "over 180 states in the world, about 9 to 11 percent are ethnically homogeneous" implicitly, most of the states in the international system are heterogeneous in character and given this, it is tempting not to accept the opinions of the 'Minorities At Risk project', (MRP), that "competition and struggles between ethnic groups have characteristically and notably induced 70 percent of crisis in the world, after the end of the cold war." In fact, the study conducted by Luc Van de Gooret al., (1996), on the nature of political conflicts, their reflection reveals that Africa have about 23 percent of such conflicts and they added that, "they all have ethnic agenda and criteria woven around their occurrence."

In this regards, the perception of the nature of ethnic groups determines and defines whether there are ethnic conflicts or crisis. To those who contend that there are no ethnic conflict or crisis, their views are that political, economic, psychological and cultural indices are prime factors to the causes of hostility between ethnic groups, which means that emotional application of these factors arouses deep seated anxieties, fears and insecurities which in most cases result to acts of aggression, violence and outbreak of crisis. In other words, this meant that the absence of those emotional factors that brew tension between ethnic groups have the potential capacity to douse conflictual situation among the ethnic groupings that will lead to eventual crisis.

On the other hand, the proponents of ethnic conflict contend that the nature of these crisis stems from an irreconcilable posture with regards to what is of symbolic value to the ethnic groups in question. Accordingly, these symbolic values cluster around issues of sociocultural and traditional values of the people which are hardly compromised and the uncompromising nature of these symbols often lead to conflict especially where one is valued symbolically over the other. For example, in the case of the Warri crisis, according to Ireyefoju, (1999);

"Another crisis was created when the inaugural meeting of the Traditional Rulers Council was summoned at the Olu's palace. In addition, the Itsekiri insisted that Itsekiri should be the official language in their meetings. The traditional rulers of Izon and Urhobo origins insisted that a meetings place not subject to the overall dominance of the Olu should be provided. And that English should be the official language at the councils' meetings. When the Government rejected their demand, the Izon and Urhobo traditional Rulers refused to attend council meetings.

A close examination to this crisis situation in Warri metropolis indicate that the Izon and Urhobo were labouring under serious fears of the Itsekiri domination, hence the violent and frequent clashes over range of issues that degenerate to crisis.

According to Obinaju (1995), Nigeria has witnessed crisis from time to time since its independence, these include those within and outside ethnic institutions. Crisis according to Odigbo and Udensi (1996), has been defined as 'a turning point in life'²³ while the Oxford Advance Learners' Dictionary defines it as a 'time of difficulty, danger and anxiety.

The concept of inter-ethnic crisis refers to a critical point in the life of an individual, group, state, nation state and ethnic nationality etc, in which an important decision need to be taken to improve a critical situation or address an impending danger. Inter-ethnic crisis in any setting, society or group has been known to be detrimental to development and progress especially when it involves youths of the contending groups like the Warri experience involving three major ethnic groups (viz, Itsekiri, Izon and Urhobo), co-existing in the Warri metropolis.

Against the backdrop of this replete literature of the causative of inter-ethnic crisis in Nigeria, this study is specifically focused on the critical examination of factor responsible for the frequent and violent inter-ethnic crisis in Warri metropolis and to delineate the

social value of the crisis which inadvertently affect the assessment of what the incessant, intermittent and violent inter-ethnic crisis in Nigeria, particularly the Warri issue will offer.

Causes of Inter-Ethnic Crisis, the Warri Experience

The interest of this study is to identify those factors that are responsible for the continuous inter-ethnic crisis in Warri metropolis, and how, if any, could the crisis situation aid or destroy development both independently to the respective ethnic groups involve in the crisis or collectively to Warri as the metropolitan centre of Delta State in Nigeria. The assumption of a frequent and violent outlook or dimension of the Warri inter-ethnic crisis since Nigeria's independence and of note after the civil war in Nigeria has been classified as political, economic and social wave of violent clashes in Warri metropolis.

However, from the information gathered so far in course of this study, it appears that the wave of frequent and violent clashes in the area is often seen as an overflow of years of accumulated grievances, aggression, deprivation, failed expectations, domination by one ethnic group over the others, etc. It was discovered in relation to the above that an innocent action by one ethnic group is often and always misinterpreted to mean a premeditated action, an offence or affront on another group. A case in point is when in 1993, the Urhobo attacked an Itsekiri carnival, wherein lives and properties were destroyed.

Another experience was that of 1997, where the Urhobo Protested against and made preparations to attack another Itsekiri carnival, while the Izon attacked an Itsekiri boat regatta. According to Ifediora, (2001) and Ireyefoju (2000), the police force was compelled to restrict the carnival to the Itsekiri area of Warri metropolis. This police restriction was extended to other ethnic groups like the Agbassa Juju of Urhobo. This was done to ensure equal treatment, peace and security in Warri metropolis. But the implication was that the action brought to the fore the ethnic nature and character of the crisis which was not to the best interest of peace and security in the area and above all the inter-ethnic relationship of the co-existing ethnicities.

As stated above, the first conflict that triggered the Warri crisis is economic factor. Economically, Warri area of the Niger Delta was an export outlet for palm oil and kernels during the colonial era. Thereafter, the discovery of petroleum oil brought the development of petroleum industry into Warri metropolis which also opened the gate way of Warri to other oil prospecting and producing companies and their subsidiaries and as a result, since the 1970s, crude or petroleum oil which sustains the economy of Nigeria

became the most important commodity in Warri with its attendant commercial network such as prospecting for oil, influx of settlers and royalties accruing from oil mineral activities etc, which according to Ifediora (2005) "brought increased intercourse between the ethnic groups in Warri area."

Ireyefoju (2000) op. cit. argued that these companies pay royalties and rent on land and properties. The Olu of Warri, (an Itsekiri), receive the royalties from most of the companies as it is the only recognized traditional/political authority in Warri.²⁵ The Izonand Urhobo ethnic groups could not as a matter of fact benefit from the oil companies either in terms of award of contracts, employment nor royalties, even when exploration and exploiting activities for crude or petroleum products are being carried out in their respective domains. This deliberate impression of not participating in the economic benefits associated with and accruing from oil related activities triggered up different dimensions of agitation especially from the youth angle of these ethnic groups. They organized themselves into pressure groups for the demands of their perceived rights and privileges. They articulate as their objectives, the protection of rights, socio-economic and political interest of their respective enclaves etc. The activities of these bodies most times constitute a flash point of the Warri crisis because they always almost bring militant and insurrection character in their demands, such as outright attack on premises, properties, installations and personnel of the companies (ie, hostage taking). To further buttress the point, according to an oral interview granted by R. Tuedor, a community leader of the Itsekiri extraction in 23/8/2014. That in the year 2000, bunch of Izon youths attacked a chevron boat carrying the company personnels, for failure to pay what the youths described as royalties due their communities". In the process, one of the supervisory personnel of the company an Itsekiri, Panicked and jumped into the river and drowned. The Itsekiri took the incident as an attack on one of them. They in turn attacked some Izon communities and destroyed lives and properties. This action was against an oil company by youths, but it was given an ethnic connotation which after all resulted in inter-ethnic crisis in Warri.

Still on the economic flank to the Warri crisis is the collection of market levies in Warri metropolis by the local government authority. Mainly, there are six principal markets. The ethnic groups claim that the markets were built by them through individual and ethnic community efforts but were located within the administrative jurisdiction of the Warri South Local Government Council. The council periodically collects levies from the market as a source of revenue generation (IGR) for the council administration. This act of the Itsekiri dominated council, according to them was a source of friction between the ethnic groups in Warri and was therefore perceived and interpreted as an act of inter-

ethnic antagonism. However, the actions of the other ethnic groups (Izon and Urhobo) gave rise and credence to the claim by the Itsekiri of being oppressed, and Government, an uncommitted observer to the crisis tends to harbour sympathy for the Itsekiri in what they regard as the unpleasant experience with the other ethnic groups in Warri.

Politically:

This is perhaps the most serious and important factor responsible for the inter-ethnic crisis in Warri. Political benefits and consideration has since the colonial days created heated tension, acrimony and conflict among the Urhobo, Izon and Itsekiri, in Warri. It cumulated in the early days of Nigeria's independence but climaxed to an outbreak of outright crisis in March 1997. This 1997 explosion could be understood against the backdrop of the build-up from the 1960s. The diverse and numerous issues ranging from political party alignment, elections into political offices, voting strength, appointment into political positions, employment into public jobs as well as private sector employment, etc. The activities, actions and counter actions that played themselves out in the crisis as induced by economic, and socio-cultural and political consideration cannot be over emphasized because it is the core of the crisis.

Socio-cultural factor is another important feature responsible for the inter-ethnic crisis in Warri. The socio-cultural outlook of note played out at the celebration of the coronation anniversary of the Olu of Warri, which was organized in 1980 and a carnival was introduced to commemorate the occasion. As the ceremonies progressed, according to Peretomode (2002), the Itsekiri were alleged to have sang songs interpreted by the other ethnic groups as arrogant, uncomplimentary and insensitive of the claim to Warri by other ethnic groups, as a result, the Urhobo attacked the carnival and regatta, interpreting this song which is indicating the Itsekiri public claim as the sole owners of Warri as provocative and arrogant.²⁶

Another socio-cultural factor of note behind the crisis is perhaps the activities of youths in Warri and its environs among others. What their activities causes or are able to cause in one ethnic community is often reciprocated by a similar and opposite action in other ethnic communities. Onwo (2014), in an oral interview, observed that "the above crisis situation created by the youths in Warri and its environs, translate into inter-ethnic violent crisis when the youths of one ethnic group make their demand on individuals of another ethnic groups".²⁷ For example, the June 1999, Urhobo-Itsekiri crisis was because of the monetization by Okumagba youths on Itsekiri traders in Okere Market whom they alleged refused to pay a Levi tagged 'Ground fee'.

The Social Value of the Crisis/Findings

On the question of what is the social value of the crisis that is making some people interested in the continuation of the crisis, the response in the main time with regards to the findings are that:

- a. Some people believe the crisis give them the social and political relevance they cannot obtain in any other way.
- b. Some leaders are merely using the youths to acquire land rights for themselves in Warri metropolis.
- c. The Warri crisis is being championed by the off-springs of the ethnic leaders who pioneered crisis in the colonial times, because of the economic, social and political gains which, over the years, had occurred to their families as a result of crisis in the area.

In all, the nature and features of the crisis as observed above points to the fact that the Warri inter-ethnic crisis is masterminded by various ethnic leaders who have rigidly stocked to the claims of their respective ethnic groups. This posture of the ethnic leaders has made it difficult for government intervention, for if they do, it will be often misinterpreted by the ethnic groups as an attempt to impose one ethnic group on the others. Whatever is the cause, reasons and or benefits that certain persons, groups or communities seem to derive out of the frequent and violent inter-ethnic crisis in Warri especially the extortive character of the youth's activities etc, it must be noted that the effect on the socio-economic and political fabrics is devastating and thereby have lost its social value. The crisis has successfully forced many oil prospecting companies and their subsidiaries out of Warri metropolis to other cities where they can find peace in other to protect their personnels from being taken hostage and escape from the high cost of meeting the financial demands by the youths.

This relocation in itself has created more unemployment issues, which has the combined effect of hampering development and the socio-economic life in Warri metropolis and further deepen the poverty rate against the development of the communities.

Conclusion

The outcome of this study is that the inter-ethnic crisis that engulf the Izon, Urhobo and Itsekiri ethnic groups in Warri over the years have a touch of manipulation as a result, commentators have observed the havoc the crisis is wrecking on the Nigerian nation generally and Warri in particular and have advanced series of solution to the crisis. In other words, many of the crises that are branded as ethnic in nature are strategic and manufactured by the dynamics of the system. To start with, the fact that in Africa

ethnicity has been subjected to a whole lot of politicization such that its peculiar nature seems to be unknown. This agrees with the views of the constructivists who argues that ethnicity and its different manifestation in African social life are manufactured: Crawford Young (1983), meant this by classifying ethnicity as "ethnic contextualism, situationalism and circumstantialism."²⁸

Furthermore, it is this attributes inherent in ethnicity that Urmila Phadmis (1990), branded as 'ethnic contractionism, expansionism and flexiblism.'²⁹ In Nigeria, ethnicity and crisis arising from them have been objects of political manipulations to achieve desired economic advantages and political desires. Most of all, the predisposition towards interpreting social crisis as ethnic ones, are induced by what is regarded as an attempt in economic marginalization of groups.

Finally, in Nigeria ethnicity needed a more scientific study as an existing social category that transcends the excessive mythology often given as clues to understanding African ethnic formation. More precisely, the absence of a functional socio-political system to take care of the needs of the population is an apt explanation for the political manipulation that ethnicity particularly in Nigeria is facing.

The frequent and continuous fighting, killing and destruction of lives and properties make the crisis look intractable and lack solution. But in a closer observation to its causes, one found out that the warring ethnic groups of Izon, Urhobo and Itsekiri are in dear need of solutions to end the crisis and a lasting peace in Warri metropolis. It is in this light that Chief E.K. Clark, a spokesman for the Izon ethnic group reacted to a fresh hostility in Warri in the vanguard newspaper of (4/8/2003: Page 26), his words;

"We strongly appeal to these evil doers, or 5 columnists, to desist from these evil actions. We must give peace a chance. Let us have peace because a majority of these Ijaws, Urhobo and Itsekiri who are suffering today, do not understand why we are fighting and what we are fighting for. Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo should forget the past and meet together to find a solution to these problems without involving the government. Such a meeting will be our mini-national conference, and we must be prepared with the spirit of give and take. Enough is enough. "³⁰

From the foregoing, it can be seen that all the issues in contention would be rationally examined in the spirit of give and take, as such, this study feels that this appear to be an acceptable condition to all the ethnic groups, therefore, proceed to make the following recommendations:

1. All the warring ethnic groups in Warri metropolis should be summoned to a forum to discuss their common problems and agree on steps to take towards achieving a lasting peace.

The ethnic leaders in Warri should discourage violence in their respective domains and refrain from the issuance of inflammatory, arrogant and disrespectful statements as well as hate speeches especially in the media. According to Okperva(2000),

"The Nigerian media, through its sensational reports, very often incite one ethnic group against the other, and sometimes distort facts. "³¹

3. Government should act with renewed vigor and zeal to disarm the youths who as a result of the proliferation of arms and ammunitions in the area as a result of the crisis, have equipped themselves with provocative instruments to sustain the violence, thus must adopt a stiff and prohibitive measures against arm runs and illegal possession of firearms.
4. The youths who had been used for extortive activities such as cash and sharing of compensation packages from oil-spillages as well as hostage taking over the years should be reoriented to a better profitable economic life that will meet the approved societal values, standards and norms, where they will re-channel their exuberant energies.

So far, this study has demonstrated the ability and ingenuity to understand the importance of peaceful co-existence and crisis resolution techniques in a complex society as Nigeria. It stems and derives heavily from our theoretical construct on the concepts of inter-ethnic crisis. It is argued that the idea of inter-ethnic crisis stands very crucial to the understanding of conflict and violence, particularly in Nigeria and generally in Africa. The study also contends that the inability of the government to accommodate the diverse differences within and between the ethnic groups as well as the stakes and status of the elites and citizens, have in very many ways impinged the historical process of ethnic formation and nation building. The manipulative tendencies of the political elites in adopting an exclusive patronage approach to economic welfare and socio-political rights of the citizenry are also another source that pre-disposes crisis. Therefore, if the recommendations enunciated above, are implemented, crisis situations in Nigeria and in Warri particularly will be properly understood and tackled and the trend of frequent and violent inter-ethnic crisis will be completely discouraged in Nigerian Society.

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