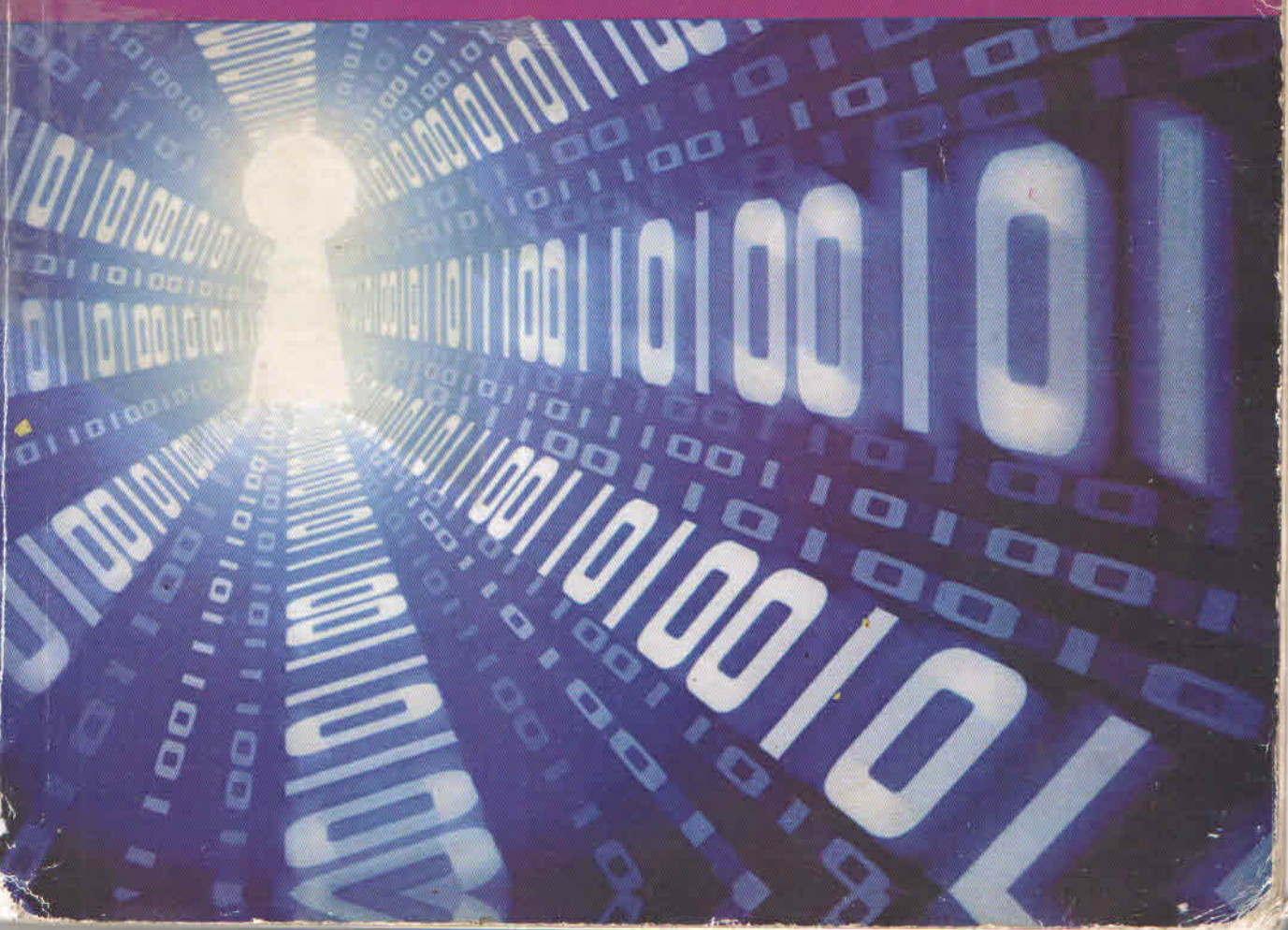
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DIMENSIONS AND DRIVERS OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Ethnic conflicts pose serious challenges to human security and national stability in Nigeria. The 'amalgamation' of the Northern and the Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914 and it accompanying unification of various ethnic and religious groups has impacted on the relationship of different groups with several ethnic conflicts ravaging the country. Specifically, the study sought to find answer to the dimensions and drivers of ethnic conflicts and its management in Nigeria. This descriptive study relied on secondary data. Findings revealed that, the major drivers of ethnic conflict are perceived marginalization, ethnic rivalry, growing number and potency of ethnic militias and the proliferation of small arms in the country. It was recommended that the challenges of ethnic conflict would remain inevitable unless the principles of federal character in Nigeria are justifiable.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Conflict, Drivers, Nigeria, Unity, Government

Introduction

Nigeria has been troubled by persistent incidence of inter-communal conflicts throughout its history as an independent state, and the problem is largely perceived to have grown worse and defied resolution. Since the end of military rule in 1999, millions of Nigerians have lost their lives in several clashes along ethnic, religious and other inter-communal lines. Conflicts between communities have been worse by prejudicial actions that reduce millions of Nigerians to second-class citizens identified as "settlers" or "allogenes" who cannot trace their ancestry alongside the so-called "indigenes." Nigeria is a very complex multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual society (Banqura and Nakamura, 1999). In spite of the ugly history, Nigerians never negotiated the terms of their co-existence as one nation. After more than fifty-six years of independence, the nationality question and deep structural issues, such as ethnicity, federalism, good governance, free and fair elections, fair

and equitable revenue allocation, security, state police and inter-relationship amongst the different nationality remain unresolved' (Punch 2 September 2012). The country has been described as a mere geographical expression, meaning that there are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are ''English'', ''Welsh'', or ''French''. The word ''Nigerian'' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who are living within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who don't (Awolowo 1947). The need for a national dialogue to 'resolve the issues have never been more pressing', because the general state of the federation is disturbingly unhealthy.

Most scholars disagree on why and how ethnic groups were formed and why it sometimes led to violent conflicts and how to prevent it but agree on the basic essential factors of ethnic groups. This is because intra and inter-communal conflicts are associated more with the lack of development than ethnicity. In other words, there is nothing wrong with the country's ethnic diversity. However, if the challenges are cross-cultural or multicultural, different opinions should be considered for discussion from the very beginning. Nigerians should, therefore, not be defensive about their country's ethnic multiple. On the contrary, it is something they should be pleased with, because diversity improves human relationship. Based on secondary data, this study is descriptive in nature. It discusses the way in which Nigeria has managed ethnic conflicts in an attempt to make sense of the prevailing climate of agitation.

Brief historical background

The 'amalgamation' of the Northern and the Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914 and its unification of various ethnic and religious groups have impacted on the relationship between different nationalities. Long before the beginning of colonial rule, kingdoms sought domination over each other. For example, Benin kingdom, in the 15th century had superiority over some nationalities in the fringes of modern time Northern Nigeria, including Igala and Nupe-speaking community which by their fragile nature were forced to pay tributes and tolls as subordinates to the Benin king. The kingdom also controlled the South and took pleasure in ruling over many Yoruba nations: Ondo, Eko (Lagos) and Ekiti. Similarly, Oyo monarchy before its diminishing power exercised large influence in the whole of western region of Nigeria. Oyo's control also extended to Ilorin, Igala land, Nupe land and Ebira land (Ikime, 1985).Therefore, the connection between the Edo and Yoruba prior to colonialism was marred with mutual suspicion and subsequently resulted in cold war.

In the North, Kano ascended to power at the decline of Gobir while Kebbi and Kororofa oppressed Kano and Rano to upgrade their authority and power and it was under the supreme power of Kebbi that the Northern states witnessed the highest level of disintegration. It however took the intervention of the Islamic jihadists led by Othman dan Fodio several decades later to forcefully unify the Hausa-speaking states under the Islamic religion (Balogun, 1980: 217).The Southern part of the country which seemed to have a uniform composition,

were known to be disintegrated. For instance, the Ibibio and Efik were frequently at loggerheads, while the Itsekiri and Urhobo had ceaseless conflicts. The fissiparous tendencies between ethnic nationalities in these areas were taken advantage of by the colonial master as a divide-and-rule strategy in order to establish control and supremacy over the natives. Therefore the unification of 1914 was a dream come true (Osaghae, 1991) because it was in line with the sole desire of exploitation and administration of the colonial powers. In this case, the unity of over 250 cultural groups to that extent was "unity by a rope of sand" (Folarin, 2012a; 2012b). That is why Hailey (1955), described Nigeria as a 'notoriously precarious lumping together of peoples of separate identities' (Emerson, 1960). What later became Nigeria was a colonial project of creating an idea for their administrative benefits. In other words, the colonial authority only forced the different ethnic groups of Southern and Northern Protectorates into one entity without the consent of the diverse groups.

The origin of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can therefore be traced back to this undemocratic and autocratic colonial action. When the colony was ripe for independence, different political parties took ethnic colouration. The Action Group (AG) was a socio-cultural group of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* (Yoruba), Northern People's Congress (NPC) was a cultural group of Northern Peoples, while a South Eastern Movement (Igbo) and the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons changed to the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). Ethnic unions that changed into "national" organisations were the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and Northern Elements People's Union (NEPU) which fought for the ruling of the centre (Taiwo, 2000). The UMBC, was unsuccessful because of the conflicts among the Birom, Igala, Jukum, Idoma, Nupe and Angas and so on, whose interests the party stood up to protect. However, in spite of the frequency of ethnic conflicts from 1966 till date, ethnic influence remains visible through political appointment, party formation, election and resources allocation. The propositions and concepts such as rotational presidency and geopolitical zones, appear to be more reasonable ways of probing ethnic politics.

Conceptual clarification

The definition of ethnicity has remained the most controversial in social science. It is generally referred to as loyalty or attachment of a group either as a social, political and economic entity, or a cultural community. According to Smith (1991: 21) the qualities of an ethnic group include a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific 'homeland'', and sense of solidarity for the significant sectors of the population. Similarly, Kasfir (1976: 26) suggests four ways of identifying ethnic group. These include language, culture, traditional political organisations and territoriality. Precisely, members of an ethnic group must share a common culture, language and tradition and occupy the same territory.

Ethnic nationalism has played a great and lasting role in modern history

and it will continue to design the 21st century. Ethnic identity can serve as a potential counter-hegemonic force to the centralisation and domineering forces of the nation-state as well as of hegemonic ethnic groups. Groups are assigned membership ordinarily but also mostly influenced by myths of common ancestry, race, language, religion, territory and culture. What is important is that a group is categorised or classified as having a common identity that differentiates it from others. It is this categorisation by the appropriate authorities such as the state, intelligentsia and religious institutions, affirmation or recognition by others and often setting in motion processes of self identification (Ukiwo, 2005).

In spite of the negative view in which most authors writing on the present day ethnicity in Africa cast the phenomenon, some have correctly identified the various identities to be of a great value in the reconstitution of the civic order. Nigerians must find ways of regulating the country's large ethnic fingers to build a very strong national fist to maximise the country's full potentials. Consequently, ethnicity is not so much a matter of "shared traits or cultural commonalities", but the outcome of the mutual effect between self-identification and external categorisation (Brubaker *et al*, 2004).

Theoretical framework

The study is guided by the Structural Functionalist theory which is prominent in the work of August Comte (1798-1857), and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). The theory is concerned with the need for order and integration in social life if the disorganization caused by the political, social and economic changes of that time, and the individualism of mankind are to be overcome and controlled. Thus society came to be seen as a superior force endowed with moral authority to coerce men. In other words, structural-functionalism explains how different sections of a society hold together and operate as a whole. The implication is that we must examine the structure of a society, and the pressures it generates, if we are to understand the behavior of any individual or group within that society. The major emphasis is therefore on the totality of a society rather than its constituent parts which are examined only in so far as they contribute to the maintenance of the society. Functionalism views society as a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. The basic unit of analysis is the society, and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole. Structural functionalism theory is relevant to the study of ethnicity because it proposes a condition that predicts whether the society will be peaceful or violent. If the society is structured in an unjust manner, individuals within such society might be frustrated and aggressive.

Marxian scholars argued that socio-cultural differentiation is not an adequate reason for ethnic devotion and conflict, just as biological differences are not enough reasons for the development of racism. Ethnicity is a notion influenced up by missionaries, colonial administrators and colonial anthropologists for divide and rule and to dominate the colonies. It lacks a significant value because it ignores the strong effects of colonial capitalism on the class formation in Africa. African societies undergo significant changes due

to the struggle of African classes for the domination, state of production and state power. Therefore, it is better to study exploitation, structures of domination, repression and dependence whose elimination is critical to the transformation of African society in a way that integrates all its various elements, groups and cultures.

Managing ethnic conflicts in Nigeria

The claim of ethnicity by different groups poses a threat to peace and stability but the presence of ethnic groups is not enough reason to incite conflicts, genocide, wars, and secession. However, the rate of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria has become extremely alarming in Nigeria's fourth Republic in which the country experienced an outbreak of over forty inter-communal or ethnic conflicts, while some of the existing ones had gained additional strength. For instance, the frequent manifestation of inter-communal conflicts in Nigeria is best illustrated in the conflict between Hausa and Yoruba in Shagamu in Ogun State (1999), Zango and Kataf in Kaduna State (1994), Jukun-Tiv in Wukari Taraba State (2001), Andoni-Ogoni in Rivers State (Ikelegbe 2001). Evidently, ethnic conflicts have become so rampant that one could argue that Nigeria is threatened with disintegration. Several factors can be responsible for ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.

The first factor has to do with the existence of ethnic militias most of which are created from the youths of the different ethnic groups. These groups of ethnic militias normally assign themselves to the authority of promoting and supporting the interests of their respective ethnic youths against the state or different groups. In some part of Nigeria ethnically-minded people have hired the service of militias, most of which are established from the youth of the different ethnic groups. This has resulted in unguided killing of members of other ethnic groups. Other factors include carelessness of the principle of wide public participation, over-concentration of the control of the nation's resources at the centre, and frequent cry of marginalisation by different ethnic groups in Nigeria with the hostile rivalry by each group to control the centre. Ethnic identity can serve as a potential counter-hegemonic force to the nation-state-as well as hegemonic ethnic groups. However, due to the negligence of the rules of large public participation in public affairs management in the country and the overconcentration of the control of the resources at the centre, presently the cry of marginalisation is high and against the three largest ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa). This manifestation of high inequality led to the proliferation of ethnic militias in the different geopolitical Zones in the country.

Cultural and Religious Intolerances is another factor worth mentioning. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a diverse cultural heritage. The country has a population of about 160millions with not less than 250 ethnic groups. After several years of military dictatorship, Nigeria found herself again in the mainstream of civil governance. While this development was seen by some people as an avenue to explore dividends of democracy, it was an opportunity to express grievances (Adebanwi, 2014). Religion is traditionally associated with the role of preaching the moral principles and rules that are expected to govern societies and

their members (Alamu, 2004). Surprisingly, many politicians now hide under the guise of religion to perpetuate political mayhem against their opponents who in most cases are of either opposite religion or ethnicity (Chukwulozie, 1986).

Ethnicity is a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups and that ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The understanding within the state has promoted the formation of innumerable parts of sub-nationalism and persistent scuffle which have largely increased since the return of democracy in 1999. Unfortunately, it has become very hard to know the real demands by these forces on state and outright criminality and mayhem. Nigeria is experiencing the rise of conflicts borne out of various agitations by a plethora of movements purportedly representing, and seeking to protect, their ethnic, and political or religious interests in a country which appears incapable of providing the basic welfare to its citizens. For instance, the phenomenon of Boko-haram is a sign of cultural and religious intolerance that is capable of destroying the unity of the country. Also cultural intolerance is best illustrated by the attitude of the Eastern Region under the cover of Biafra Republic that attempted to break away from Nigeria (1967-79). Despite the failure of this attempt at secession, the agitation is still on-going and Nigeria has never been at ease.

In view of the continuous ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, it is sensible to examine strategies that have been used to resolve such conflicts in the past, and why such methods are replete with lapses. Important issues that relate to resource control, representation, policy frameworks, and the direction of state are causes of many conflicts. Given its enormous resources and power, the state is the greatest authority for addressing conflict. Nevertheless, the post-independent state has been characterised by domination, authoritarianism, rulership personalisation, and parochial purpose. In fact, many studies have shown that the state and its agencies are biased, partisan and express preferences in their attitude towards religious and ethnic conflicts. Therefore, the practice of the state power has been represented by mismanagement, corruption, predation, profligacy, ethical collapse in many areas of public life (Ikelegbe, 2003: 54). Prolonged limitation of ethnic, political and social groups from participating in political action, suppression of religious and ethnic minorities and devotion to community, region and section spread throughout governance.

The ineffectiveness of the Nigerian state to protect human lives and property of people in the country is reflected in the inadequacy and failure of the present day conflict management strategies and particularly, the failure of the Nigeria state in the management of conflicts.

Different studies have shown that the state has had a tendency toward greater suppressive and coercive solution and are against substantive dialogue and negotiations. Undoubtedly, the Nigerian government's effort at managing conflict is not suitable enough as it continues to be coercive and dismissive of local involvement. Various government interventions such as the creation of new states, curfew, propaganda, judicial panel, compensations, punishment and granting of amnesty to stop the escalation of

conflict are far from ending ethnic conflicts. By the ill-conduct and non-responsive reputation of its intelligence and security agencies, the state is neither effective nor devoted in its reaction to conflicts (Ikelegbe, 2001). In most cases the state's intervention is a fire brigade kind of response that is to send soldiers to keep or restore artificial normalcy. Despite the enlarging visibility of the Nigeria police and the military in handling of internal conflict, the structural causes of violence are not addressed. Although, they have been used to postpone many cases of violence, their interventions usually get to the violence scene after a large loss of lives and esteemed property has been recorded.

However time focus would affect the successes of conflict management activities. Likewise the attitude of the military whom are usually mandated to 'shoot on sight' especially when the state is involved in the conflict, has manifested in several cases in the Niger Delta particularly the Adoni and Ogoni in River State. Indeed, the Nigeria military are responsible for the manipulation of ethnic divisions, indiscipline, nepotism, corruption, and promoting political instability. Their claim of stabilisers and modernisers was considered to be false. Besides, setting up of commissions and panels whose results or reports do not lead to the basis for remedial resolutions appear as a form of window dressing. Also, the use of formal litigation methods in prosecuting those involved in the court of law always lead to prolong crises through adjournment appeal and counter appeal. Obviously the instrument of state creation has helped to foster unity through federation and give a sense of belonging to various communities and people but due to unjust demarcation of boundaries, unfair location of local government headquarters or state capitals, the same instrument has been used to create ethnic conflicts. As a result of the inability of the Nigeria State to safeguard lives and property of the people in the country, considerable number of people in Nigeria have however subscribed to unofficial methods of conflict management, which include prayers, charms, vigilante, militancy, socio-cultural organisations in forms of communal solidarity in their attempt to manage violence conflicts in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Ethnic conflict occurs as a result of the denial of the basic needs of identity, equality, security and autonomy combined with the authoritative roles of the government. This paper has argued that the way of managing ethnic conflicts is not good enough as it has remained forceful and dismissive of local involvement. Until the issue of human right protection, economy recovery, resource control, general welfare of it citizens and security are addressed, groups conflict in the state will be unavoidable. It may be necessary to state that reference to ethnicity is not enough to stimulate violence, but poverty, economic underdevelopment and struggle for resource control provoke ethnic conflicts. For a nation to survive and have peace there is need for order and integration in the social life if the disintegration caused by the political, social and economic changes of that time and the individualism of mankind are to be surmounted. Thus, society came to be seen as a superior force endowed with moral authority to coerce

men, and how a society holds together and operates as a whole. It is during the early warning symptoms of ethnic conflict that interventions are very important, because it is a very clear transitional periods between the starting of the escalation of conflict and sudden occurrence of violence.

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