
Ethnicity, Monopolistic Closure, Shifting Inuendoes of Language and Restiveness: A Historicization

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ABSTRACT: *Languages spoken by the agglomerating ethnic groups in Nigeria instanced monopolistic closures. These closures were political, linguistic, socio-religious and settlement patterns. Regarding settlement patterns, Nigerians from particular ethnic groups tended to aggregate to live in defined patches of urban centres. For instance, are the Hausa quarters (Ama Awusa) or the Gariki in Igboland; Sabon Gari (where peoples from Eastern Nigeria or, particularly, the Igbo lived in Kano) in Northern Nigeria; the Munchi (from Tivland or the Tiv) in the Middle Belt of Nigeria; the Omumini ajaokuta (those who could eat stone without drinking water, referring to the Igbo) in Yorubaland; and Ndi ofe manu, referring to the Yoruba by the Igbo. There were equally day-to-day spoken monopolistic closures, such as "I bi Warri pikin" (I am a Warri youth) and "Ima kwa ndi anyi bu" (Do you know who we are by Igbo youths). Individuals and groups used their spoken languages to create barriers and monopolistic closures through voiced innuendoes against perceived, real or imagined marginalization, which became rife when the majoritarian and minoritarian concepts were blown out of proportion by Nigeria's political elite. A worst-case closure manifested after the Biafra-Nigeria Civil War, when the Igbo, a hitherto majority group in the then Nigerian tripod of the Igbo, Huasa/Fulani and Yoruba majoritarian(s) umbrella became drowned into a minority through a gang-up of all the minority groups in the South-south and the South-south east. Ever since, the Igbo cried out to be marginalized. The paper concluded that the events in the political and socio-*

economic landscape of Nigeria were ethnically and politically motivated; and clinically underpinned by languages and their speakers. The paper was written with primary sources while secondary sources served subsidiary and complementary purposes.

KEYWORDS: Youth, ethnicity, languages, monopolistic, minoritarians, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, innuendoes and closures.

INTRODUCTION

The travails of Nigeria in her march towards consolidating nationhood since winning independence from the British in 1960 have been closely related to her ethnic contents and primordial sentiments. It has also hinged on the ethnic dispositions observed through their spoken languages which, in turn, often consciously and unconsciously evolved monopolistic closures. This paper x-rays the usefulness and the disastrous ends to which languages have been put, especially, towards a sustaining peace and security; and the corporate image of Nigeria vis-à-vis the youths and development. This is against the background that language(s), cultures and the innate faculties of the speakers and practitioners (of these languages) are inseparable.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and, therefore, a multi-cultural nation, with the multi-ethnic impacting heavily on the others. Nigeria is peopled by more than three hundred ethnic groups that had evolved into distinctive culturalities since the pre-colonial period. It has equally spawned into a nation-State where recourse to the distinctiveness of the agglomerating 'traditional' ethnic nationalities, such as Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Edo and the Izon, among others, is usually called to the fore. It is natural in Nigeria for these distinct linguistic and cultural groups to want to know "what is in it for us" vis-à-vis its disparateness.

These primordial sentiments and the often resort to them have unconsciously become "constitutionalized" into the peoples' psyche that have been voiced through speeches. Some commentators have argued that it was the political engineering of the British colonialists that put Nigeria into this sentimental mess. In the bid to optimally reap the benefits of colonialism, which was the major motivation for engaging in colonization, it did not matter what would become of the Nigerian nation in the event of 'freedom' after the forceful scrambling together of different ethnic nationalities. Nigeria has often been referred to as the "House" built by Sir Frederick Lugard.

After decades of remonstrations and beating the 'colonial dead horse', what have we done to redress this administrative mistake in the "House Built by Lord Lugard"? It is, indeed, abstruse and recondite to continue bandying about the historical event of colonialism which has come and gone, although replaced by neo-colonialism and, presently, embellished in globalization. At the dawn of 'freedom' from the politics of colonialism, Nigeria's nascent

elite quickly capitalized on ethnic discontents where they existed and incited them where they did not exist, all in the desperation to win elections. The resulting unbridled ethnicity underpinned by spoken languages became the denominator for cohesion within the Nigerian State. Loyalty since “freedom” from colonialism has been to the agglomerating ethnic groups, identifiable as speakers of specific languages from those of others, than to the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

In fact, the languages spoken by the different ethnic groups in Nigeria make a mockery of the concept of, or the word marginalization. In actuality, the cry and hue of marginalization by ethnic groups do not reflect the structures or facts on ground. The Igbo, for instance, are seen virtually and practically in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria, from the south to the north, and from the east to the west, doing business and erecting infrastructures more than their landlords. Yet, they cry about being marginalized. Far from Igbo nationalism, Igbo property in Northern Nigeria (Newswatch Magazine 2012) alone was valued to run into trillions of Naira in 2012, not to beam searchlight on the oil tank farms in Apapa in Lagos State which a good percentage is owned by the Igbo. It does seem then that it is the Igbo language and not the people that are marginalized. As a National Youth Service Corp’s member in the 1983/1984 service year in Benue State, the Chief, Mazi Kalu Usim, of Adikpo village where I served was Igbo from Ebem Ohafia in the Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State. The Igbo, like the British, have been accused of engaging in internal colonialism against the other ethnic contents of Nigeria.

Language, Definitions, Concepts and Twiches

Since this paper is contextualized around the role of the English language and, broadly, languages could play, it becomes imperative to conceptualize language. Appropriately, language would be conceptualized from the socio-linguistic and functionality perspectives. This is precisely so because a people’s language reflects their concerns, values and activities; and *de facto*, the collective mind of the speakers of that language or the linguistic group (Obiukwu and Ogwudile, 2022, 2). Language is the verbalization of human activities which spawned from signages to spoken forms (Acholonu and Okoko, 2021: 31-42). Spoken forms imbue human beings with life and power; and are anchored in what are to be encoded and decoded usually referred to as communication. The usefulness to human society and the monopolistic closures thereof vis-à-vis the information to be disseminated and received, give meaning and credence to a linguistic community which ought to be affected/influenced by what are communicated.

Over the years, right from the period of signages, man has been linked to others through languages; and in the process has conveyed ideas meant for specific actions and/or reactions. In essence, language becomes the regulation and control centre for the speakers who are schooled from infancy in decoding what have been encoded. Language, contextually, in relation to the speakers of other languages, becomes a mirror through which the world of the speakers can be viewed. Regarding what are encoded and decoded, the real world of speakers of particular languages have been unconsciously built into, and

progressively on, the habits which have indirectly resulted from the nuances of the languages of the groups or their speakers. Again, it affects the speakers' ways of interpreting the events in their environment and withal. These deductions have instanced ecology on languages, therefore, their speakers.

The socio-linguistic theory and hypothesis portray a high degree of openness and, indeed, a window through which the cognitive process is viewed, but it could be viewed differently from the original conception vis-à-vis the environment and cultural influences resultant from decoding the disseminated (encoded) information.

The mention of a particular language immediately brings to the fore the nuances of its speakers, on the one hand, and makes it easier appreciating the nuances, on the other. The nuances of the speakers of languages also influence the processes of encoding and decoding which have been described as ethnographic twitches (Acholonu and Okoko). This then anchors a monopolistic closure occurring within the ecology of the speakers of that language. Certain usages of languages often couched in innuendoes have implied different meanings to speakers of such languages and who have often, too, reacted to the consternations of non-speakers, differently and, even, violently. Rehearsing the positions of J. Hamers and J. Biane (2000, 2) the role given to language depends solely on the function the language is expected to perform. In essence, the misunderstandings, mistrusts, youth restiveness, insecurity and developmental milestones, inclusive of monopolistic closures, are akin to languages and their speakers (Obiukwu and Ogwudile, 3).

Primordial Sentiments, and the Integrative and Disintegrative Factors

The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in Nigeria by the British was the arbitrary lumping together of disparate and non-linguistic ethnic units. This was made obvious at the non-homogenization and/or divide-and-rule policy of the British during colonial rule. Generally, the socio-political and, indeed, the behavioural patterns in new independent African States were pervaded by the stultifying aura of conceptual ambiguity and by the constant use of terms, such as "nation", "nationality" and "nationalism" (Clifford Geertz, 1973: 255-257), and by extension the efforts in "nation building". At independence, it dawned on the political parties and leaders that they had to deal with both immediate socio-political and economic needs, on the one hand and the curbing of primordial sentiments, on the other. These obviously exacerbated instabilities. The political elite, although most benefitted from the sentiments in order to win elections, had to contend with centuries-old traditional loyalties, post-independence petty jealousies and ethnic prejudices (S. Harrison, 1956: 3).

The need to evolve a lingua franca for Nigerians from the myriad spoken languages of the amalgamated ethnic nationalities was the underpinning factor for social dissensus. This was evidenced in Anthony Enahoro's outburst in the House of Representatives in 1956 when he insisted on the non-adoption of any of Nigeria's languages as lingua franca. Enahoro's summation hinged on the fact that should the need of a lingua franca become

generally accepted it would definitely not be his ethnic Urhobo language. Was it passed in the legislature, it would have meant subsuming the cultures, history, individuality and the sub-nationality of the ethnic groups whose languages were not adopted (Harrison). Otherwise, Nigeria would have been organized like India along linguistic lines putting its political unity in jeopardy with more than 300 distinct ethnic languages. Lord Lugard who amalgamated the diverse ethnic units had pondered over the possibility of churning out about 300 nations out the numerous ethnic groups in present day (2023) Nigeria. Reacting to the Indian example (Geertz, 1973), Nehru had said:

The problem that opened ... in such wide astonishment is phrased in linguistic terms, but the same problem phrased in a wide variety of terms is, of course, literally pandemic to the new states, as the countless references to “dual” or “plura;” or “multiple” societies, to “mosaic” or “composite” social structures to “states” that are not “nations” and “nations” that are not “states”, to “tribalism”, “parochialism”, and “communalism”, as well as to pan-national movements of various sorts demonstrate.

James S. Coleman (1986: 425-426) perceived the Nigerian State as portraying five different typologies of nationalism, all at once, within its boundaries. Political development in Nigeria was characterized by the adoption of varied dichotomizing terminologies, such as the Northern, Western, Midwestern and Eastern Regions; and “Group” and “Cultural” units, such as the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF). Presently (2023), the “Geopolitical Zones” platforms which were evolved by a former Nigerian Vice President, Alex Ekwueme, hold sway. The quest for independence and nationhood, and the need for the “Nation” to command overriding loyalty over loyalty to the ethnic groups became drowned in the claims of both the majoritarian and minoritarian units within Nigeria. The new “modern” State of Nigeria became driven simultaneously by two obviously and powerfully opposed motives, namely:

- i. The need for the agglomerating ethnic groups to be identified and recognized as integral and responsible agents in a Nigeria whose wishes, acts, hopes and opinions “matter” in the run-up to building an efficient and dynamic modern state (Rupert, 1960: 95-96); and
- ii. That the aim of ethnicization is practical. It is a demand for progress within the agglomeration in order to enhance their standards of living; participate more effectively in the political order and enjoy greater social justice; and beyond that, play and exercise parts in the larger arena of world politics (I. Berlin, 1958: 42).

The two motives, which seemingly are diametrical opposites, are equally intimately related. This is against the background that a truly modern (multi-ethnic) State has, unarguably, become the platform for its citizens to stake claims to personal/ethnic significance: which are the demand to exist and to have a name vis-à-vis resistance to the humiliating sense of exclusion, especially, from power by more vociferous ethnic groups.

In another sense, in as much as the agglomerating communities have constantly striven for recognition in the Nigerian commonwealth, it has been a quest that was, and still is, anchored in diversity that eventually enhanced both their recognition and integration into the “multiple” nation State, positively or negatively: Grappling at Nigeria’s mono-cultured revenue source – hydrocarbon oil. The Igbo have always been perceived as having circumscriptive tendencies that are not hidden in their innate abilities at persistence in adapting to, and utilizing opportunities found in all, nooks and crannies of Nigeria.

However, Geertz (1973) espoused the perspective that the categorized motives, aims and objectives for national integration could never be the same. Essentially, the ethnic groups, *ab initio*, originated from different territorial patches; and responded equally to different beliefs and values’ pressures. The tension that arises consequent on the daggers-drawn relationships between them has been one of the central driving forces in the national evolution of the new Nigerian States, as it is, and, at the same time, one of the greatest obstacles to its evolution and integration. This is so because of the economic, political and social goals and trappings which compel the quest by them for recognition within a “steadily accelerating sovereign state”. The peoples’ attitude in a disparate situation as in Nigeria is enhanced when their sense of self “remains bound up in consanguinity, ethnicity, language, locality, religion, or tradition”. The multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic populations as a result of their quests “for what is in it for them” began to accept the inherent natural diversity of the agglomerating units as the substantial content of their ethnic individuality. It was, therefore, observed by Geertz (1973: 258-259) that:

To subordinate these specific and familiar identifications in favour of a generalized commitment to an overarching and somewhat alien civil order is to risk a loss of definition as an autonomous person, either through absorption [or circumscription] into a culturally undifferentiated mass or, what is even worse, through a domination by some other rival ethnic, racial or linguistic community that is able to imbue that order with the temper of its own personality.

Members of multi-ethnic states (inclusive of their leaders) have always been aware of the full possibilities for social reform and material progress which they intensely desire and are determined to achieve by a heightened assertion of themselves in a pluralized Nigeria. Consequently, the doggedness towards becoming recognized, which became more visible and were to be seen to matter by the other agglomerating ethnic groups in a modernizing and dynamic State tended to create divergences, especially, in the political processes. The desire to align these units over the years towards peace and unity has flushed out further terminologies, such as statism, federal character, quota system, federalism and nation-building, among others.

Conceptual Clarifications as *Raison d'être*

Unarguably, the ethnic groups in the new nation states of Africa have been plagued by mistrusts and suspicions of each other arising from primordial attachments. These usually come to the fore at instances of the allocation of revenues and creation of States and local government councils. These attachments have over the years impacted on the habits, attitudes and approaches of the agglomerating units as a “given” or, more precisely, “as cultures which are inevitably involved intrinsically into matters that become the assumed “givens” of social co-existence. As surmised by Geertz (1973: 258-259), these are exacerbated by a sense of feeling of contiguity and kin connection consequent on the fact of having “been born into a particular religious community”, such as in the Muslim Hausa/Fulani; “of a people speaking a particular language or even a dialect of a language; and a people observing particular social practices”. Consequently, the congruities of blood relations, speech, customs, behavioural patterns and belief systems have had imperceptible and overpowering effects on the people or agglomerating ethnic groups. In as much as interpersonal relationships may differ from person to person and/or from group to group, people have often been bound to each other in order to achieve a common interest, enhance personal affection and, largely, for practical necessity. It flows from a “sense of natural - some would say, spiritual affinity than from social interaction” (Geertz, 1973: 258-259).

Primordial attachments have enhanced allegiance more to the ethnic groups than to the Nigeria nation. The allegiance to the nation-State has remained vague, intermittent and routine in spite of the Federal government’s efforts at enhancing allegiance to it through the principles enshrined in the nations’ constitution, organized ethical reorientation, the use of coercion and ideological exhortations. Primordial sentiments have assumed rural-urban dimensions as a result of persons of differing ethnic groups migrating to urban centres. The ethnic groups have realized the practical advantages of engaging in wide-ranging patterns of social integration beyond their traditional microcosmic boundaries which remaining secluded within their rural boundaries could not usually have produced or permitted. In essence, it has enhanced interethnic competitions away from ethnic bases and biases to urban places, thereby, creating civil/municipal sentiments. This realization has put in check such referrals as race, language and religion, among others, as basis for membership in a multi-ethnic nation in favour of “what is in it for us”. It is now a combination of primordial and civil sentiments, the later serving as template for those in the urban centres relaying information for developmental purposes back to their rural bases. In the contention of some commentators, such as Rupert Emerson (1960), James S. Coleman (1956) and especially Clifford Geertz (1973), there is a crystallization of a direct conflict between primordial and civil sentiments. Peoples from various ethnic groups who now live in urban centers belong to their ethnic (development) unions as well as professional unions from which platforms they operate to lay bare their misgivings. The combination of primordial and civil sentiments gives to the factors variously referred to as ethnicism, parochialism and communalism an “ominous and deeply threatening quality” in addition to all the other serious and intractable problems that the new states face.

Primordial ties must not, however, be confused with class, party, business, union and professions relations since their activities cannot threaten governments to a large extent in their quest for recognition and assertion. This is unlike the activities of ethnic groups that are (traditionally) self-standing and maximal (agnate or cognate) social units. The disaffection arising from civil-oriented organizations is often economic and intellectual; and not that based on ethnicity, language or culture which “could threaten partition, irredentism, and/or mergers”, among others. Comparatively, “civil discontent finds its natural outlet in the seizing, legally or illegally, of the state apparatus” while “primordial discontent strives more deeply and is satisfied less easily” (Geertz, 258-260).

Evidently descriptive, primordial ties are subsumed under assumed blood ties (or quasi-kinship), ethnic, language, religion, region and customs. In as much as the primordial ties could be politicized, there are concrete patterns of diversity and conflict that exist in the new states. Seemingly routine exercises in political ethnography, the ties are communalistic and poses challenges to the existence and integrity of the civil state. Disaffection is latent and often concealed in the enduring self-standing and maximal structures that are in a continuous quest for primordial identifications. These have equally and, oftentimes, metamorphosed into explicit political forms in the bid to improve social conditions identifiable units. The need to ameliorate unfavourable social conditions manifested in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which became two-pronged: the Niger Delta versus themselves (the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo); and between them and the Nigerian State in militancy.

The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria asserted themselves in the immediate post-independence period and were killed in their numbers as a result in a ‘genocidal’ pogrom in Northern Nigeria. This snowballed into the Biafra-Nigeria Civil War that lasted between 1967 and 1970. Contextualized to this paper, that there are no strifes or that conflicts have not erupted, do not imply the absence of primordial ties exhibited in sentiments. Rehearsing Geertz (1973: 261-303):

The fact that the Indian minority in Malaya has not so far posed a very serious threat to the viability of the state does not mean that it might not do so if something odd [favourable condition] happened to the world price of rubber or if Mrs. Gandhi’s hands-off policy towards Indians should be replaced by one more like of Mao’s toward the overseas Chinese.

In summation, primordially-biased solidarities identified as ethnic groups and speakers of particular languages pervade the landscapes of new African States. As has been variously stated, the quest for independence led to a somewhat progressive unification of diverse elements into an intensely solidary opposition to colonial rule for as long as it lasted. However, in the case of Nigeria, there increased tension between her primordial groups in the last years of dependency over who would take-over from the departing colonists. What

obtained during nationalism were efforts simply made to defy a foreign authority and, for the time being, gain independence. Yet, although in line with the colonizing concept of optimal maximization and reaping of the resources of colonies, the British left a potholed political arena and concomitant ethno-regional hostilities. To some minority communities, the feverish negotiations during nationalism in both Lagos and London were in their perception simply to create a *modus vivendi* among the majoritarian Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups.

Social and Political Instability; and Primordially-Biased Restiveness

It is a well-known fact that the British ‘hammered Nigeria into existence’ politically during her colonial activities between 1861 and 1960. The height of Britain’s political engineering attained a crescendo at the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates. This involved bringing together several hundreds of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups and communities at different levels of political and social development (Okonjo, 1974: 5). The amalgamation of 1914 created the environment for the gestation of animosity among Nigerians which was made manifest soon after ‘flag’ independence in 1960. The political parties that were formed prior to 1960 reflected ethnic and regional orientations and colourations. The Igbo dominated the National Council for Nigeria and the Camerouns (later National Council of Nigerian Citizens, NCNC); the Yoruba dominated the Action Group (AG) and the Hausa/Fulani dominated the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC).

On their part, Nigeria's ethnic minorities expressed fears of becoming circumscribed by the majority-rated ethnic groups. This culminated in the setting up of the Willink Commission in 1957 to address the fears of the minorities (Okere, 2001:2). As evidenced by the various constitutional conferences that preceded independence from 1945, 1951, 1954 to 1960, the Nigerian statehood was hammered on the anvil of compromise. Mistrust and fears among the political and opinion leaders did not reflect any serious intention to have a Nigeria where allegiance to the nation would supersede loyalty to the ethnic group. For instance, nationalist leaders in the 1940s made intemperate utterances which have continued to resonate and affect socio-political stability in Nigeria. In 1944, Ahmadu Bello, the Sultan of Sokoto who later became the Premier of Northern Nigeria, insisted that a united Nigeria could only be feasible if Southern Nigerians accept to become Muslims. Similarly, Tafawa Balewa who became Nigeria's Prime Minister posted that Nigerian unity was an illusion (Coleman, 1976:361), while Obafemi Awolowo, the political mogul of Western Nigeria, perceived “Nigeria as a mere geographical expression and an appellation to distinguish between those who live within Nigeria and those who do not” (Awolowo, 1947:47-48).

It was comments like these that laid the foundation for national politics in Nigeria. The opinions of our founding fathers were thus, inimical to peaceful coexistence and national unity (Ota, 1999:12). The leadership of Nigeria as far back as the 1940s had, therefore, evolved from an ethnocentric perception of the country (Ojukwu, 1992:55).

Causes of Instability in Nigeria

Instability is not peculiar to Nigeria. Every nation has its own share of the problem. While some have achieved relative political stability and enjoyed economic development and international respectability, Nigeria is still to find a lasting solution to hers. In this segment of the essay, we shall bring into focus some of the easily identifiable causes of political instability in Nigeria. The causes of instability which are essentially political whereby the North which had numerical advantage sought to secure guarantees against domination by the South. It also refused to support the motion for independence by Southerners in the then House of the Representatives in 1956 because of the belief that the South which had obvious educational and economic advantages, will inherit the political structures and institutions to be left behind by the outgoing British colonial officials. The constitutional developments in Nigeria also weakened the Civil Service through its regionalization by the Lyttleton Constitution of 1951. The tinkering with federalism also heightened ethnic particularisms which came to dominate the psyche of the average Nigerian, and loyalty to the Nigerian state became a mere slogan. Of particular importance, contextualized to this paper, is ethnicity which is the major social cause of instability in Nigeria.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity, rehearsing Abner Cohen (1974: 4) refers to, "...a strife between... ethnic groups in the course of which people stress their identity and exclusiveness". In other words, ethnicity results when there is an intense interaction between ethnic groups. In the Nigerian situation, colonialism reinforced ethnic sentiments by creating a leeway for some ethnic groups to have easy access to power while others became disadvantaged thereof. Ethnicity created imbalances in Nigeria's political system. For instance, the North, in spite of its relative educational and economic backwardness has continued to determine the direction of the political pendulum, therefore, threatening political stability. Ethnicity has become so salient in the direction of disintegration rather than integration in Nigeria. That is probably why U. O. Eleazu (1977: 7) observed that:

One basic problem (among many) in the Nigerian political system is that the basis of association of... various ethnic nationalities is always being called into question; subsidiary to this is the question of developing political instrumentalities that are congruent with any agreed... basis of association

Yet, there is no gainsaying the fact that ethnicity does not always assume a centrifugal posture. It can become an integrative factor if there are acceptable ground rules which could serve to ensure a greater value congruence among Nigeria's over 300 ethnic nationalities. To rehearse Mercier (1965: 486), "Ethnic diversity can, in many different ways, contribute to unification or be utilized toward that end". Thus, tendencies toward social and cultural pluralism need not necessarily weaken a nation. After all, there is strength not only in unity but in diversity as well, and these factors are neither incompatible nor irreconcilable.

However, ethnicity in Nigeria has contributed to political instability because of the tendency of our leaders to place mediocrity over merit in appointments and promotions in government establishments. The “quota system” and “the federal character” were designed to promote mediocrity rather than merit. When a qualified Nigerian is denied the opportunity or employment and promotion on the basis of his/her ethnic origins, the resultant frustration invariably threatens national unity.

Manifestations of Instability

Over the years, instability in Nigeria has manifested in several ways. These include but are not limited to, ethno-religious conflicts, militancy and terrorism but also military intervention in national politics and electoral violence. The onus on this section of the paper is to examine the ethnic-based reasons that incite and enhance instability, such as languages and their speakers vis-à-vis their impact on the unity of Nigeria.

Ethno-religious conflicts:

Political tensions and instability have also found expression in ethno-religious conflicts, especially between adherents of Christianity and Islam. The sequence and sordid nature of these conflicts have continued to raise very grave concerns on the future of the Nigerian state. In the 1960s, the then Northern Premier, Ahmadu Bello, is said to have mounted a series of campaigns to convert non-Moslem groups (especially traditionalists) in Northern Nigeria. This frightened the Christian elements in that region, but Bello continued the campaigns until the 1966 coup d'etat which resulted in his death (O. E. Okeke, 1998: 107)

After the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War (1967 - 1970), a controversy over a proposal to include a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal in the recommendations of the Constituent Assembly set up to prepare a new constitution resulted in a boycott of the proceedings of that Assembly by Northern Nigerian delegates. But at the dawn of Nigeria's fourth experiment in democratic governance, the Obasanjo administration permitted the introduction of Sharia law in some northern States, such as Zamfara, Kano, Sokoto, Katsina and Niger. The existence of Sharia law in these states is inconsistent with the guarantee of rights under the 1999 constitution.

Most importantly, by making the legal prescriptions, injunctions and punishments under the Koran enforceable in Nigeria, it was tantamount to the adoption of Islam as a State religion (Nwabueze, 2001; 21). This move appears to have exacerbated ethno-religious conflicts which had, in the 1980s and early 1990s assumed worrisome dimensions. Regrettably, today, churches and Christians have become targets of Islamic fundamentalists in the northern parts of Nigeria. The continuing carnage in Plateau state has ethno-religious basis or roots.

Electoral Violence

The quick and high-yielding dividends of politics in Nigeria have made the quest for political offices a do-or -die affair. Electoral violence here refers to the various forms of anti-social activities that often played out during the conduct of elections. These have

manifested in every attempt at democracy in Nigeria, with the possible exemption of the short-lived Third Republic. In 1962, the former Western region erupted in an orgy of violence which led to the declaration of a state of emergency in that region by the federal government.

Similarly, in the Second Republic (1979 - 1983), allegations of vote rigging by supporters of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and those of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in Ondo State led to violence that claimed many lives and the burning and looting of property worth millions of Naira (Ejitu N. Ota, 2004: 4). The Fourth Republic (1999 till date) has had its fair share of electoral violence as well. Ballot box snatching and the killing of political opponents have not abetted.

Militancy

Militant groups have proliferated in various parts of Nigeria. In Yorubaland, there is the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC), in the Niger Delta, we have a multiplicity of militant groups, such as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), the Egbesu Boys and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), among others. The emergence of these groups is a function of pervasive corruption, ethnicity, utter neglect and indifference to the lot of the ordinary Nigerian. It is also a reflection of the rot and decay in the political system.

This culture of militancy could be traced to the many years of military rule. Armed with guns, soldiers and the Armed Forces, generally, gave the erroneous impression that might is right. As rulers, they looted the national treasury with impunity and transformed corruption into a national pastime. The various civilian administrations not only built upon the foundation of militancy, corruption and ineptitude which they inherited from their military predecessors, but also took these vices to unprecedented heights. Today, violent crimes are common-place because of the insensitivity and selfishness of the ruling elite. Power has, therefore, continued to issue from the barrels of the guns, notwithstanding the exit of the military from national politics.

Terrorism

Political instability in Nigeria has resulted in the emergence of terrorism in the country. Suicide bombings by members of the Islamic fundamentalist group, Boko Haram, have assumed very alarming dimensions. Targeting mostly Christians in the northern parts, this dreaded sect's actions have continued to question the wisdom of the Babangida regime in surreptitiously registering Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Islamic Corporations (O.I.C) (formerly Organization of Islamic Countries) in 1986. Its activities have also cast aspersions on the decision of the Obasanjo-led civilian administration (1999 - 2007) in allowing the introduction of Sharia law in some States in Northern Nigeria at a time when there is an explicit provision in the constitution on the secularity of the Nigerian state.

Although religious extremism, which manifests in acts of terrorism, has obvious economic and cultural roots, the political basis of terrorism is the most important. That is why it has been observed that, “one effect... of terrorism is to psychologically torment innocent victims of this act with a view to compelling governments to listen, as it were, to the terrorists” (Ejitu N. Ota, 2012: 132). Examples of terrorist acts that have been attributed to the Boko Haram sect include the 2011 attack on the United Nations House in Abuja, the December 25, 2011 bombing of a church in Madallah, Suleja, the attack on media houses in Abuja and Kaduna in April 2012 and the bombing and killing of scores of worshippers in a church at the Bayero University, Kano in April 2012. These attacks have resulted in the death of scores of Nigerians and have affected the country’s international image. There are currently in vogue banditry, kidnapping and herdsmen activities.

The Way Forward

The section of the paper is devoted to proffering solutions on how Nigeria could eradicate or at least reduce those factors or conditions that have created political instability. Without any fear of contradiction, one can boldly say that the Nigerian state would continue to perch on a dangerous precipice unless and until these factors or conditions are tackled with a tenacity of purpose. Emotions have to be divorced from reasons and concerted efforts should be made by the government, traditional rulers, politicians, religious leaders, civil society groups, and the entire citizenry to attack frontally the threats posed to the Nigerian state by political instability.

Among the suggested approaches towards ensuring political stability, economic progress and harmonious inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria are the following:

1. Addressing the National Question;
2. Civic education;
3. Achieving regional economic parity;
4. Creating a national history, culture and ideology;
5. Balancing political power;
6. Satisfying the citizens' basic human and material needs;
7. Enthroning the rule of law.

The National Question

What has come to be known as the ‘National Question’ in Nigeria acquired meaning and became a nuisance as a result of British colonial rule (Afigbo, 1999: 8). Colonialism resulted in enclave development, a situation where social amenities and economic opportunities were concentrated in the few urban areas. There were struggles and competition for access to these scarce but desirable amenities and facilities. Over time, these struggles and competitions which were initially between the indigenous groups and the settler elements, led to inter-ethnic hostilities (Ejitu N. Ota, 1995).

Today, the ‘National Question’ has come to mean the composition of the Nigerian State and the dynamic problem of how relations between the ethnic groups should be ordered in a way that each would have equal access not only to political power but also in the equitable

distribution of national resources. It also seeks to address issues relating to ethnic minority interests, citizenship and the local government (G. B. N. Obiekwe, 2010: 113-114). If these issues are robustly and dispassionately debated and addressed, political instability will be minimized.

Unfortunately, the ‘National Question’ has been over-politicized. While political leaders and academics from Southern Nigeria are fully in support of the convocation of a sovereign national conference to address the issues in the national question, the Northern Nigeria oligarchy and politicians have come to perceive the call as a subtle means of emasculating them politically and economically. They have continued to resist any and every move to address the ‘National Question’. But it is imperative to convoke a sovereign national conference that will allay the fears of marginalization and address issues relating to resource control and fiscal federalism.

Civic Education

It does appear, from all indications, that there has been an unwarranted neglect of our educational system to instill national identity and awareness in young school children. In their critical school years, Nigerian school children can develop an emotional attachment to their country and this will invariably provide the foundation for their unflinching loyalty to the country. It is, therefore, advisable that citizenship education, including the civic ritual of singing the national anthem, reciting the national pledge, exposure to credible, selfless and committed national political leaders as well as the studying and tolerance of the traditions and cultures of other ethnic groups be encouraged in our pupils and students.

The failure to make greater use of the educational system to inculcate national pride and loyalty could be blamed on the inherited colonial pattern of education which, because of its missionary orientation, stressed religion, character training and academic subjects based on European syllabia. Yet, the ways and manners which our political, military, religious and even traditional leaders have conducted themselves in their private and public lives, leave much to be desired. In the words of Justice Kayode Eso (2007, B8):

The first quality of leadership is he who learns to be wrapped by ethics and selflessness. He serves, not counting the cost, and he is irrevocably like the old sage, committed to the truth unto death.

Unfortunately, our leaders have not shown good examples that could be emulated by the young ones. This must change if patriotism must be encouraged in our youths.

Creating a National History/Culture and Ideology

The study of history as course or academic discipline at the secondary and tertiary levels has suffered untold neglect in the hands of our policy-makers. One of the main satisfactions of history is the presentness of the past. A sound knowledge of a country's past, including

her struggles and triumphs, is a necessary stimulant for national cohesion. Conversely, de-emphasizing a nation's glorious past will tantamount to a denial of a bright future. Let us not forget the admonition of Fafunwa (1974:13) that:

History is to a people what memory is to the individual. A people with no knowledge of the past would suffer from collectively amnesia, groping blindly into the future without guide-posts of precedence to shape their future course.

Similarly, there is a compelling need for an articulated ideology, one that would provide the requisite framework for national cohesion. Our political system has failed woefully in this regard. Political parties are formed without any discernible ideological bent. What they present to the electorate are merely vague statements of principles intended to achieve not long-term national goals but personal gains.

Achieving Regional Economic Parity

If genuine national Integration is to be achieved in Nigeria, government should step up efforts to encourage balanced economic and educational development. Unless genuine efforts are made to achieve balanced growth, disparities in regional economic development will inevitably mean that certain ethnic groups in the country will continue to prosper while others will feel marginalized. The problems of this objective include the spending of revenues generated from one region on the development of others while the revenue-generating region remains impoverished and neglected. This was the situation that gave rise to militancy in the Niger Delta.

During the military era, most federal government projects, including the iron and steel complex and projects executed by the defunct Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) were concentrated in the northern parts of Nigeria. Yet, the level of poverty is higher in the North despite the fact that greater period of Nigeria's 62 years of independence has seen Northerners ruling the country for more than forty years. The Boko Haram menace is a function of the Northern elite's failure to develop the region and the frustrations of the youths there in Kanuri and Fulani ethnic contentions vis-à-vis caliphal and religious ascendancy.

Balancing Political Power

The distribution of political power is an essential ingredient in any genuine efforts at balancing pluralistic pressures against the need for national unity. The federal arrangement was adopted by the British as a means of containing the ethnic diversities in the country. But the intrusion of the military resulted in the adoption of a lopsided unitary form of federalism. Under the unitary federal arrangement, political power became the preserve of the North especially during the long years of military rule so much so that Sokoto State adopted the embarrassing slogan of "Born to rule".

Balancing political power has remained a problem in Nigeria and has become emotive essentially because of the absence of any form of political philosophy among our leaders and policy makers. When political power is centralized at the federal level, the authorities and status of political leaders from outside the region and ethnic group of those dominating the centre may become threatened. Separatist agitations might erupt in violent forms.

Satisfying the Citizens' Basic Human and Material Needs

Chapter 11 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) section 16, sub-section 1 provides that: The state shall, within the context and ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution:

- i. Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy; and
- ii. Control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice, and equality of status and opportunity.

In sub-section 2 (d) of the same constitution, the Nigerian State pledges to commit its policy towards ensuring that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled, are provided for all citizens. The government, unfortunately, has not lived up to its constitutional commitments. Greed, selfishness and corruption are some of the explanations for this failure. Other reasons include ethnicity, nepotism and outright wickedness on the part of the leaders, be they military or civilian.

In spite of her abundant human and natural resources, Nigeria is today ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world, with over 60% of her citizens living below the poverty line. The country today accounts for 23% of global malaria burden, and tops the infant mortality table (The Nation Newspaper, 2012: 45). One way out of this quagmire is for governments at the federal, state, and local government levels to adopt policies that will bridge internal socio - economic inequalities. Such policies must seek to satisfy the basic human and material needs of the citizens and eradicate or at least reduce poverty among the populace, (Ejitu N. Ota, 2004:186 - 202).

Enthronement of the Rule of Law

The rule of law is the legal principle that regular law must be supreme to arbitrary powers, that is, that every citizen is subject to the ordinary (constitutional) law of the state. It is also known as the supremacy of the law, and envisages a scenario where two things are obtainable, namely, (1) that everyone respects the law, and (2) that the law has to be obeyed collectively and individually by both the citizens and the state. Impliedly, the rule of law means that not only will there be no exercise of arbitrary power, but also that the fundamental rights of citizens must be protected as provided for in Chapter IV of the 1999 constitution. The government's relationship with the citizens is also bound by the constitution which is the supreme law of the land (1999 Constitution as amended).

Political instability thrives where the rule of law is not followed. As the Nigerian case has vividly and amply demonstrated, non-adherence to the principles encapsulated in the concept of rule of law is an open invitation to anarchy. To curtail political instability in Nigeria, therefore, the wanton breaching of the provisions of the constitution by highly placed citizens of the country must be tackled. Otherwise, the ethos of militancy and brigandry occasioned by decades of authoritarian military rule may continue to threaten Nigeria's political development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Instability in Nigeria is man-made, not divine. Other societies like the United States, India, the United Kingdom, and indeed every modern state, is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multicultural. Yet, they have greatly reduced incidences of socio-political violence in their countries. The persistence of this malady in Nigeria is a reflection of the failure of leadership and often the latent primordial self-perpetuating and maximal ties. Nigerians are about the easiest people to govern if the requisite political will could be invoked to address the pertinent and persistent issues that have tended to divide rather than unite her more than 300 ethnic nationalities. Nigeria's political and socio-religious elite will stop at nothing inciting ethnic language biases and religious sentiments in order to win elections. These have made Nigerians strange bed fellows.

In the words of Ellah (1983: 1):

We owe our own posterity a duty to ensure its economic and political survival under worthwhile, respectable conditions inferior to none anywhere on the globe. To this end, our most fundamental pre-requisite is an adequate state and national organization or framework in which every individual citizen will be enabled to attain the highest excellence of which he is capable, so that he can contribute his best socially, politically and economically towards our national advancement.

Such a framework should be one that will address the lingering agitation for a conference to address the 'National Question' and which should seek to satisfy the basic human and material needs of the citizens. By so doing, it will contain and indeed exterminate those conditions that are germane to the gestation, sustenance and persistence of socio-political instability in Nigeria underpinned by ethnic wrangling for recognition and participation in the commonwealth. Indeed, as has been rightly observed, "Without peace no meaningful social programmes can be undertaken; without justice, social order is constantly threatened" (Chinua Achebe, 1983: 24).

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