

A Historical Analysis of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Evidently, a significant number of developing nations exhibit ethnic diversity. The presence of a variety of ethnic groups within a given society has the potential to result in heightened levels of civil unrest. Nigeria's National Question is widely regarded as one of the most intricate in the world, owing to the country's vast array of over 250 ethnic groups and the presence of approximately 120 distinct languages. The colonial authorities, under the guise of promoting ethnic harmony, deliberately and methodically divided the diverse Nigerian populace, thereby fostering a conducive environment for inter-group strife. The diverse composition of the nation leads to a proclivity among its constituent groups to prioritise local awareness over national awareness. The present study employs content analysis as its research methodology to investigate ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. The study also analysed the underlying factors that give rise to ethnic conflicts within the nation and delineated potential avenues for their amelioration juxtaposing between the old and new dimensions.

Keywords: Ethnicity, History, Conflict, Nigeria, Causes and Prospect

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that ethnic conflicts pose a significant hindrance to substantial development in Africa, owing to the adverse consequences associated with the topic under consideration (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006). Drawing on Nigeria as an illustrative case with a plethora of over 300 ethnic groups, the multifarious contests and animosities among these diverse ethnic groups have been attributed to the impact of colonialism. Despite the attainment of independence, the influence of ethnicity did not wane. Instead, it was utilised as a metric for evaluating the extent of one's contribution towards national development, particularly in the allocation and distribution of power and resources (Osadola, 2012).

A significant proportion of developing nations exhibit a high degree of ethnic diversity. For a considerable duration, the social sciences discipline exhibited a tendency to disregard the stark reality of ethnic identity. Increasingly, there is mounting evidence suggesting that certain factors may have a negative impact on economic performance. The reportage of armed conflicts in Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and other sub-Saharan African nations during the 1990s has sparked apprehension regarding the potential of ethnic divisions and intersecting religious and racial allegiances to impede the advancement of economic and political growth across Africa. According to Kamla-Ra (2006: 101), from a particular perspective, it is believed that the military's decision to annul the democratic transition programme in 1993, following the presidential elections, was driven by ethnic considerations. Similarly, the Nigeria Civil War lasting for 30 months (1967 – 1970) was caused by ethnic rivalry, resulting in senseless killings (Osadola & Asiyanbi, 2022). The presence of a variety of ethnic groups within a society has the potential to result in heightened levels of civil unrest. The aforementioned perception is cultivated through a combination of specific instances of inter-ethnic violence depicted graphically, as well as a broader correlation observed across multiple incidents. Africa exhibits the highest degree of ethnic diversity and is also characterised by the highest frequency of civil conflicts.

The urban setting provided by the colonial masters in Nigeria is considered to be the birthplace of modern-day ethnicity. The British colonial administration purportedly pursued a mission of unifying the ethnically diverse Nigerian population, but in reality, they deliberately and methodically implemented policies that resulted in the separation of the various ethnic groups (Osadola, 2012). This approach ultimately fostered a conducive environment for conflict. The diverse composition of the nation leads to a proclivity among its constituent groups to prioritise local identity over national identity (Jacob, 2012). In 2000, the International Foundation for Elections Systems-IFES conducted a comprehensive survey of public opinion in Nigeria on behalf of the United States Agency for International Development-USAID. The survey revealed that ethnicity is the most dominant form of identity among Nigerians. Approximately 48.2% of the Nigerian populace opt to identify themselves with a "ethnic" label (Osinubis, 2006: 3).

The emergence of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria and Africa at large can be attributed to various factors such as the limited availability of political resources, cultural diversity, religious differences, and the militarization of ethnicity, among other factors. These conflicts are of significant importance and cannot be disregarded (Osadola, 2012). Hence, it is evident that pragmatic approaches are imperative to address these issues. The present study employs content analysis as its methodology to investigate ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. This study also analyses the impact of ethnic conflicts on the nation's pursuit of cohesion and identifies potential areas for remediation (Osadola, 2012).

The subsequent portion of this document is segmented into three distinct sections. The second section of the paper delves into an

analysis of the underlying factors that contribute to the emergence of ethnic conflicts within the Nigerian context. Section three of the document delineates the diverse ethnic conflicts and their current state in Nigeria, whereas section four culminates by proposing recommendations to mitigate ethnic tensions within the burgeoning democratic framework of Nigeria.

Causes of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria is plagued by a range of issues, including the spectre of ethnic cleansing. The impending arrival has been duly indicated (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006). This manifests as a rising trend of inter-ethnic violence. The visual depiction may resemble that of a horror film, featuring a pregnant woman with disembowelled remains, a man without a head, and deceased children who perished due to malnourishment, among other similar instances. This statement pertains to reality rather than fiction.

The municipality of Warri, which has a long-standing history in the oil industry, experienced a surge in violent conflicts among previously harmonious communities. The detonation has resulted in both physical and psychological wounds. Several of the observable marks were deceased bodies and charred residences that had been reduced to mere empty structures. The urban thoroughfares exhibited a barren appearance as commercial establishments ceased operations and individuals evacuated the municipality in a state of alarm. The aforementioned event resulted from inter-ethnic conflicts involving the three constituent groups of Warri, namely the Ijaws and Urhobos on one side and the Itsekiris on the other. The magnitude and intensity of the devastation are highly concerning, as evidenced by the significant loss of life and property. The inter-ethnic hostility observed among these groups is not a recent phenomenon; rather, it is a persistent issue that is progressively escalating in occurrence (Osadola, 2012).

In Ondo State, a violent conflict reminiscent of the Warri mayhem ensued between the Ijaws and Ilajes, resulting in significant loss of life and property. In the majority of instances, entire villages were demolished. Similarly, the situation remains unchanged even in the riverine regions such as the agricultural settlements of Aguleri and Umuleri located in Anambra State. The longstanding issue of territorial dispute is not a recent development. Occurrences were recorded in the years 1933, 1964, and 1995. The 1999 incident escalated to a hazardous level, resulting in the destruction of numerous lives and properties, due to the utilisation of advanced weaponry (Osadola, 2012).

Throughout Nigeria, there exists a growing trend of ethnic violence, exemplified by various conflicts such as Ife/Modakeke, Ogoni and Andonis, Sagamu, Kano, Zango-Kataf, Jukuns/Tivs, among others (Anugwom, 2000). These occurrences are not independent, but rather exhibit interconnectivity. The emergence of these phenomena can be attributed to influential social and economic factors.

Poverty

One significant factor, which holds considerable influence, is the escalating level of poverty, characterised by unemployment, declining infrastructures, and other related indicators. The root cause of these conflicts can be attributed to the underlying crisis of underdevelopment. The prevalence of poverty is a significant contributing factor, leading to a competition for scarce resources. The majority of these communities exhibit living conditions that are comparable to slums. Numerous industries are ceasing operations, resulting in the consequential loss of employment opportunities (Anugwom, 2000). This has led to a significant challenge for many households in terms of sustaining their basic needs. The region lacks access to potable water, adequate road infrastructure, proper medical facilities, social infrastructure, and quality educational institutions. Environments of this nature elicit emotions such as fear, distrust, hatred, frustration, anger, and the like. Given the prevailing conditions, it is convenient to assume that the removal of other ethnic groups would suffice to meet the needs (Jacob, 2012).

As per the findings of the 1996 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey released by the Federal Office of Statistics, a mere 10% of the Nigerian population can be categorised as not impoverished. The remaining 90 percent of the population is categorised as either "core poor" or "moderately poor". When viewed within its broader context, the observation reveals the stark truth of a country where a mere 11 million individuals can be classified as "living", while the remaining 99 million are more aptly characterised as the "living deceased" (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006).

Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Nigeria has presented its inaugural Human Development Report on Nigeria, which vividly illustrates the country's ranking in terms of human development. Nigeria's position in the Human Development Index was found to be 137th out of 174 nations, placing it behind other countries with low levels of human development. The presented graph depicts the human development index (HDI) value of Nigeria, which is recorded as 0.400. Nations whose Human Development Index (HDI) value falls below 0.5 are classified as having a low level of human development (Anugwom, 2000).

Manipulations

These factors are known to create conditions that are conducive to ethnic conflicts. The ruling class is aware of the divisive nature of ethnicism and utilises it as a strategy to maintain the perpetual fragmentation of the working class and to distract them from the actual challenges they face, namely the crisis of Nigerian capitalism. Furthermore, the strategy of "divide and rule" is not a singular occurrence (Anugwom, 2000). It serves as the preferred destination for the global elite. The ruling class has deliberately implemented a policy that enables them to maintain their power and perpetuate the oppression and exploitation of the impoverished working masses (Anugwom, 2000).

The utilisation of ethnic distinctions is indicative of the ruling elite's apprehension regarding the Nigerian proletariat's capabilities

and their potential for solidarity, which transcends ethnic boundaries. Under adverse social circumstances, the deliberate manipulation of ethnic consciousness can result in intermittent outbursts of ethnic conflicts. This phenomenon can also be interpreted as an indication of the ruling class's failure to cultivate authentic solidarity among the populace. This statement affirms the correlation between capitalism and ethnic violence, suggesting that the presence of the former necessitates the existence of the latter. Nevertheless, it is widely recognised among the labouring classes of diverse ethnicities that they are being subjected to the same oppressive forces. Did the workers who participated in the protest led by Adams Oshiomhole against the 3.5 and 2.5 million Naira furniture allowance allocated to Senators and legislators respectively exhibit ethnic homogeneity? Did the population not encompass various ethnic groups? It can be argued that the forces responsible for the oppression of the working masses in the Niger-Delta region are also responsible for the oppression of other ethnic groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Ibo, Yoruba, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Ilaje, and others. It can be argued that instances of smaller ethnic groups being subjugated by dominant ethnic groups do exist. The phenomenon can be traced back to the historical subordination of less developed nations by more advanced nations. Both phenomena are deeply ingrained in the societal class structure, specifically within the framework of the capitalist economic system (Anugwom, 2000).

The purported demand for self-determination by certain ethnic groups' ruling elites is ostensibly aimed at consolidating their power. Under a capitalist system, the improvement of the working class's condition in said regions is unlikely to occur. The provision of a "country" to exploit will solely benefit the ruling class of this group (Anugwom, 2000). The notion that a utopian state can be achieved by segregating different groups is a fallacious concept, akin to the false promises made by early nationalists during the fight for autonomy.

Self Determination

The Aguleri-Umuleri conflict involves communities that share a common history, culture, language, and geographical proximity, and who coexist as farmers and share a common identity. The population exhibits cultural homogeneity (Anugwom, 2000). If Biafra had come into existence, they would have shared the same territory. The aforementioned assertion is applicable to the conflict between Ife and Modakeke. They would have also been constituents of an Odu'a republic. However, these communities commonly referred to as "brothers" have been engaged in prolonged conflicts aimed at complete annihilation. This represents a solitary facet of the intricate requisites for self-determination (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006).

Moreover, the incorporation of diverse ethnic groups is a significant aspect. Contemporary society is characterised by a notable absence of homogeneity in residential areas. The entities in question are not distinctly demarcated from each other by an impenetrable physical barrier akin to the Great Wall of China. Various ethnic groups are distributed throughout the urban areas of Nigeria, engaging in gainful employment, commercial endeavours, property ownership, entrepreneurial pursuits, and intermarriage, among other activities.

The complex character of the national question has been further compounded by these population movements. Therefore, the matter of self-determination necessitates careful consideration. One possible inquiry is how to establish an Ijaw republic by connecting the different riverside shanties of Ajegunle, Arogbo, Warri, and other locations. The proposition in question is deemed unfeasible given the current circumstances, specifically those under a capitalist system. The confinement of self-determination within the confines of capitalist society may result in ethnic cleansing of significant magnitude (Anugwom, 2000).

The statement posits that the objective is not to impose a union of individuals but rather to counteract any bourgeois nationalistic impact on the labourers' movement. It aims to thwart any efforts to divide the labourers' movement based on ethnic distinctions, thereby uniting the oppressed and the oppressors. Marxist ideology advocates for the protection of the autonomy and self-determination of all nations, linguistic communities, and cultural groups. This outcome can solely be achieved within the framework of a concerted effort towards the eradication of capitalism and the implementation of socialist reforms in the societal structure (Jacob, 2012).

The defeat of capitalism can only be achieved through a collective effort of the workers and youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria. This entails a united front of workers from various ethnic groups such as Ijaw, Itsekiri, Yoruba, Hausa, Ibo, among others, who must join forces to combat their shared adversary - the capitalist class from all ethnic groups (Anugwom, 2000). The challenges faced by the Ijaw, Itsekiri, and other masses are inherently interconnected with the struggle of Nigerian workers. The attainment of success is contingent upon the unification of these groups. A cohesive working class engaged in a struggle against the capitalist class would incorporate within its agenda the entitlement of diverse ethnic groups to self-determination within a Socialist Federation comprised of the Nigerian populace.

The ongoing challenges are a clear outcome of the capitalist crisis. The aforementioned reflects the resolute nature of marginalised strata in seeking resolution to their predicaments (Jacob, 2012). The challenges faced by the working class are unlikely to be resolved by a capitalist Odu'a republic, a capitalist Ijaw republic, or any other similar entity, particularly given the intensifying capitalist crisis.

Deepening Crisis

Empirical evidence suggests a connection between social conflicts based on economic disparities and inter-ethnic tensions. In times of heightened class struggle, ethnic consciousness is supplanted by class-consciousness (Anugwom, 2000).

The existing crisis within the capitalist system is anticipated to exacerbate. The ongoing crisis is likely to impose its weight on the Nigerian working class, as has been the case in the past. Under the capitalist regime, individuals are unable to escape the confinement of low wages, joblessness, and interethnic conflicts (Asiyanbola, 2010). The exacerbation of this crisis is anticipated to have an impact on labourers from diverse ethnic backgrounds and will progressively present socioeconomic concerns to the majority of the workforce. The suggested Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which is the most recent addition to a series of unsuccessful commissions, as well as the implementation of Local Government councils in every locality, are unlikely to effectively address the fundamental issues of contemporary Nigeria within a capitalist framework (Asiyanbola, 2010).

The current state of capitalism has reached a point of stagnation. There is no visible beacon in the forward direction. There is no discernible ideology that possesses the ability to unify and motivate the populace. The phenomenon in question erodes the emotional and spiritual well-being of individuals, and aims to undermine, fragment, and debilitate them through the promotion of ethnic identity. The assertion is made that the working class is the only group capable of guiding humanity towards a brighter future, away from the current state of capitalist barbarism. In order to accomplish this task, it is imperative to have a political organisation that possesses the ability to unify the labour force and marginalised sectors of diverse ethnicities in their endeavour to revolutionise the societal structure in accordance with socialist principles. In contemporary times, the alternatives presented to the human race are either socialism or barbarism. The diverse inter-ethnic conflicts represent a distressing manifestation of the potential consequences of capitalism in the absence of a revolution (Jacob, 2012).

Ethnic Conflicts and Their Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria exhibits a cellular-like behaviour, whereby it undergoes repeated sub-division resulting in the generation of numerous replicas of itself. The country now known as Nigeria came into existence in 1914 through the process of amalgamation, which involved the merging of the Northern and Southern regions. During the pre-independence era, the British colonial government fostered communal sentiments among diverse ethnic groups. The entity in question actively sought out opportunities to disseminate the myth and propaganda that significant physical, historical, traditional, ethnic, religious, and political barriers separated them from one another. The diverse ethnic groups within the nation have exhibited tendencies towards exclusivity and endogamy, accompanied by a significant degree of tribal self-interest, animosity, and antagonism towards each other. In the context of Nigeria, the concept of ethnic group has undergone a transformation from being an inherent characteristic to becoming a self-identified construct as a result of colonialism. The genesis of a shared consciousness among ethnic groups can be attributed to inter-ethnic rivalry over limited resources, which has led to ethnic strife (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006).

At the time of Nigeria's independence, the country was partitioned into three regions, each of which was predominantly inhabited by a major tribe or ethnic group that accounted for approximately two-thirds of the regional populace. Specifically, the North was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, the West by the Yoruba, and the Eastern Region by the Ibo. The residual populace in every locality comprised several marginalised ethnic groups that possessed distinct customs and dialects (Carroll and Carroll, 2000). The Edo people, Ijaw, Ibo, Itshekiri, and Ishan peoples were deemed significant in the Mid-Western part of the Western Region. Similarly, the Ogoja, Calabar, Ibibio, and Rivers people were considered important in the Eastern Region. Additionally, the Kanuri, Tiv, Idoma, Jukun, Nupe, Bachama, Biron Angas, and other Middle-Belt peoples were recognised as significant in the Northern Region (Asiyanbola, 2010).

Despite the division of the nation into thirty-six states by successive governments with the intention of mitigating ethnic tension and fostering development through the promotion of unity in diversity, inter-ethnic competition remains prevalent.

In recent years, Nigeria has experienced a surge in violent ethnic conflicts, which has escalated in recent months, resulting in the loss of numerous lives and displacement of thousands of individuals. Across various regions of Nigeria, neighbouring communities have engaged in violent conflicts with each other, citing deep-seated animosity and longstanding rivalries as justification for their destructive actions. These areas include Warri in the South, Zango-Kataf and Kafanchan in the North, and Aguleri-Umuleri in the East, as well as Ife-Modakeke in the West. Although ethnic divisions frequently separate opposing groups, some of the most severe conflicts have arisen between individuals belonging to the same ethnic group. For instance, the Igbo ethnic communities of Aguleri and Umuleri in Eastern Nigeria and the Yoruba of Ife and Modakeke have engaged in intense fighting. In the majority of instances, ethnic conflicts are entrenched in longstanding disputes.

The fear of domination, which developed in the minds of minority groups, coupled with inter-ethnic suspicion among the majority group helped to prove the fact that Britain our colonial masters and even Nigerians recognized the fact they are not people. This assertion is illustrated by the fact that Sir Arthur Richard (1948) said,

"It is only by accident of British suzerainty which has made Nigeria one country socially and politically, and there are deep differences between the major tribal groups".

In similar vein, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1967) said,

"Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerian' in the same sense as there are 'English' or 'Welsh' or 'French', the word Nigeria is only a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not".

Zangon – Kataf Crisis

Zango-Kataf is a locality situated in the South-eastern region of Kaduna State, Nigeria, approximately 230 kilometres distant from

the state capital, Kaduna. According to Akinteye et al. (1999), the community is geographically located within the coordinates of Latitude 90N and Longitude 80S, and comprises approximately fifty self-governing villages. The Zangon-Kataf community is situated in the Southern Kaduna zone, which has been characterised by a volatile position in the inter-group conflicts and tension that have occurred in Northern Nigeria during the twentieth century (Carroll and Carroll, 2000). The region has encountered intricate conflicts, at times characterised by physical aggression, and predominantly taking on an ethnic nature. Interconnected with these inquiries are concerns regarding equitable treatment, the status of citizenship, communal entitlements, and the principles of social democracy. The aforementioned events have occurred within a rural area that can be likened to a microcosm of Nigeria, as it comprises approximately forty distinct ethnic groups.

Prior to the 1990s, the majority of the current Christian populations, who are now predominantly situated in Northern regions, adhered to traditional African religions. According to Kazah-Toure's (1999) findings, the region comprises a Muslim populace, predominantly consisting of the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. Despite being a minority in the area, this population holds a majority status at the regional and traditional levels.

Upon gaining independence from the British in 1960, Nigeria continued to grapple with unresolved inter-ethnic conflicts and contradictions. The establishment of the post-colonial order was predicated upon pre-existing socio-economic and political frameworks. The structures and processes responsible for producing conflicts have persisted without significant alteration. According to Kazah-Toure (1999), ethnic conflicts were destined to persist as a component of the historical process. The historical narrative of Southern Kaduna primarily revolves around the habitation and resistance of diverse ethnic communities against the emirate system, which was enforced in the region through the British colonial policy of indirect rule. The aforementioned challenges have persisted in diverse manifestations, culminating in exceedingly violent confrontations in Zango-Kataf in 1992. The conflict between the Zango Hausa and the Kataf community transcends the disagreement regarding the location of their marketplace. A prolonged dispute regarding land ownership has persisted between the parties involved. According to the Kataf, the land inhabited by the Hausa people was originally their own, and the Hausa were merely considered as settlers. The oral tradition of the community is readily recounted, tracing back to 1967 when Mele, an itinerant Hausa trader from Niger, was granted a parcel of land in the central region of the town to establish a permanent residence following numerous years of trade relations with the locals.

Mele was subsequently accompanied by his relatives, as per their account. Therefore, the appellation Zango-Kataf, denoting a transit camp in the Kataf language. However, the Hausa community refuted the assertion made by the Kataf community, asserting that their claim is baseless and lacks credibility. The Kataf people encountered them at that location. According to Hausa tradition, Zango-Kataf was originally known as Zango-Katabiri. The Katafs arrived and gradually encircled the area, ultimately resulting in a change of name. The contentious matter of land ownership is deeply ingrained in the emirate system that is currently operational in the region. In this particular system, the Emir of Zaria retains control over the predominantly Christian communities and chiefdoms located in the southern region of Kaduna state. Currently, with the exception of Jama'a Kagoro, Jabba, and Marwa, the more than eighteen chiefdoms situated in the southern region of Kaduna exhibit allegiance to the Emir. During Islamic festivals such as Ed-elkabir, Ed-el fitri, and Ed-el Maulud, the district heads demonstrate their respect and loyalty to their emir. According to Dent (1995), a Kataf individual expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional system of land ownership in the region, citing its favouritism towards the Hausa community as the underlying cause of the conflict between the Zango Hausa and Kataf people. The Kataf ethnic group expresses grievances regarding their perceived subjugation by the Hausa ethnic group.

Ife – Modakeke Crisis

Ife is widely recognized as the oldest dynamic state formed by the Yoruba. Ile-Ife, the capital city, has the reputation of being one of the longest continuously inhabited centres south of the Rivers Niger and 4⁰ 55'E (Adediran, 1992). Ife lies between latitude 7⁰ N and 7⁰ 35'N, longitudes 4⁰ 20'E, covering an area of 1846km² (Jeje, 1992).

The Ife-Modakeke crisis is one oldest intra-ethnic conflict in Nigeria; it has been going on for more than a century and is still claiming lives (Albert, 1999). Following the collapse of the Oyo Empire towards the end of the 18th century and subsequent Muslim invasion of the northern fringes of the Yoruba country in the opening decades of 19th century, an influx of refugees fled southwards looking for secure abodes and dependable means of subsistence. Many of these refugees from old Oyo settled in towns and village on the outskirts of Ile-Ife, tremendously swelling the populations of such communities like Ipetumodu, Moro, Yakoyo, Edunabou and others (Albert, 1999).

With time and as a result of further disruptive civil strife, many moved into Ile-Ife itself living in the different wards of the ancient city (Olaniyan, 1992). Finding a lasting solution to the Ife/Modakeke intra-ethnic conflicts has, indeed, been an onerous task. Infact, the crisis has defied all peace agreements in the last one hundred years. Consequently, thousands of lives and property have been lost over the years (Akpan-Ekong, 2000). Various reasons have been responsible for the Ife – Modakeke renewed crisis. Among them are land ownership, rent over land and the question of local government for Modakeke. For instance, the August 1997 violence was sparked off by the location and relocation of headquarters of the Ife – East local government council.

The ultimate objective of the separatist sentiments has always been the creation of a separate local government for Modakeke. Indeed, the issue of a separate local government has been central to Ife – Modakeke relations and was certainly prominent among the concerns in the civil disturbances of 1981. It was both a cause and a suggested solution at the same time. The political parties exploited the issue, the local propaganda fed on it, oral and written evidence at the inquiry into the disturbance harped on it. When a separate local government was not created for them, the Modakeke felt profoundly betrayed and cheated (Albert, 1999). The Ife

opposed the creation of a separate local government for Modakeke with determined vehemence, fearing loss of their land; they would rather have the Modakekes evacuated. Other issue that becomes part of the history of the relations between the two communities also became important (Olaniyan, 1992; Akpan-Ekong, 2000).

From the foregoing, in my own view, Nigeria is not yet a United Country. There is inter-ethnic distrust and destructive rivalry. Claude Ake (1992) said, "if not addressed soon, when there is still a chance, that unity can be salvage, we will all be losers, prevailing illusions notwithstanding, Nigeria can only be held together by negotiated consensus not force".

Contemporary Dimension of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

The present-day manifestation of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria encompasses a multitude of factors that contribute to the heightened tensions and confrontations among diverse ethnic groups (Jacob, 2012). It is imperative to acknowledge that Nigeria is a nation characterised by its diversity, encompassing more than 250 distinct ethnic groups. In analysing the present-day ethnic conflicts within the country, several factors have emerged as influential contributors (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006).

The presence of political competition plays a substantial role in the manifestation of ethnic conflicts within the context of Nigeria (Osadola, 2012). In the Nigerian context, the influence of ethnic identity on politics is significant, with politicians frequently capitalising on these identities to garner support and strengthen their political foundations. In Nigeria, it is common for political parties and politicians to employ a tactic known as identity politics, wherein they seek to secure support by appealing to particular ethnic groups (Jacob, 2012). They strategically utilise ethnic affiliations, sentiments, and grievances as a means to mobilise voters based on ethnic divisions. This approach has the potential to result in the polarisation of ethnic groups and exacerbate the existing divisions between them. Political competition in Nigeria often exhibits a prominent feature of vigorous power struggles among diverse ethnic factions. Political offices, such as the presidency, governorships, and other positions of influence, frequently become the subject of competition based on ethnic affiliations. The escalation of power struggles has the potential to heighten ethnic tensions, as various groups vie for authority and political representation within the government. Political actors frequently employ the strategic manipulation of ethnic sentiments and stereotypes to further their own political objectives. These individuals have the potential to instill fear, disseminate stereotypes, or construct narratives that depict members of different ethnic groups as adversaries. These manipulations have the potential to intensify pre-existing ethnic divisions and contribute to the escalation of conflict. The phenomenon of ethnic groups being marginalised or excluded from political power has the potential to exacerbate conflicts. When ethnic groups perceive a systematic denial of their access to political offices, resources, and decision-making processes, it can engender grievances and a perception of injustice, thereby fostering ethnic tensions and conflicts (Jacob, 2012).

Political competition frequently reaches its zenith during electoral periods, thereby potentially instigating violent confrontations that align with ethnic divisions. In certain circumstances, it is observed that competing factions within ethnic communities may employ violent means as a strategic approach to secure an advantageous position or safeguard their interests in the context of electoral processes. These conflicts may lead to casualties, forced migration, and damage to infrastructure (Agbu, 2000). The allocation of political favours and privileges along ethnic lines has the potential to exacerbate societal divisions and fuel conflicts. The disproportionate allocation of political appointments, contracts, and benefits to particular ethnic groups has the potential to engender resentment and animosity among individuals who perceive themselves as marginalized (Osadola, 2012). Efforts aimed at addressing the influence of political competition on ethnic conflicts necessitate the promotion of inclusive governance, the mitigation of identity-based politics, and the establishment of equitable conditions for all ethnic groups. The aforementioned objective can be accomplished by implementing electoral reforms, enhancing the capacity of democratic institutions, facilitating interethnic dialogue and comprehension, and cultivating a collective national identity that surpasses ethnic divisions (Jacob, 2012).

The management and allocation of resources play a crucial role in the manifestation and escalation of ethnic conflicts within the Nigerian context. The nation possesses a considerable array of natural resources, such as petroleum, natural gas, minerals, and arable land (Osadola, 2012). Nevertheless, the allocation and management of these resources have been a subject of dispute among various ethnic factions. Nigeria is recognised as a prominent global producer of oil, with oil-generated revenue serving as a significant fiscal resource for the government. Nevertheless, the management and allocation of oil revenue have been a subject of significant disagreement (Oyekanmi, 2000). Certain oil-producing regions, such as the Niger Delta, perceive a lack of equitable benefits derived from the exploitation of their natural resources. The aforementioned circumstances have resulted in instances of discord between various ethnic groups residing in the regions where oil production takes place and the governing body at the centre. Land is a highly prized resource that often serves as a catalyst for ethnic conflicts. Nigeria exhibits a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, each characterised by distinct land ownership systems (Carroll and Carroll, 2000). Regrettably, conflicts arising from disputes pertaining to land boundaries, ownership, and access frequently manifest in a violent manner. Conflicts emerge when ethnic groups perceive encroachments upon their land rights, particularly in areas characterised by limited land availability or significant demand for agricultural or developmental objectives.

Ethnic conflicts can arise as a result of disparities in access to economic opportunities that are linked to resources. Certain ethnic groups hold the perception that they are experiencing exclusion from economic activities and development initiatives linked to the exploitation of resources (Osadola, 2012). The perception of marginalisation has the potential to exacerbate ethnic tensions and conflicts, as different groups vie for access to economic benefits and opportunities. The extraction of natural resources, specifically oil and gas, has resulted in significant environmental degradation in certain areas, notably the Niger Delta (Oyekanmi, 2000). The

adverse effects of land pollution, water pollution, and ecosystem degradation have had a detrimental impact on the livelihoods of indigenous communities, who constitute a significant portion of the affected population. The occurrence of environmental degradation has resulted in the emergence of protests and conflicts among the affected communities, the oil companies, and the government (Jacob, 2012). The correlation between control over resources and political power is frequently observed, and the competition for resource control has the potential to exacerbate ethnic conflicts. Certain ethnic groups, who hold the belief that they possess authority over specific resources, such as regions that produce oil, may pursue increased political self-governance or assert their control over the revenues generated from these resources. The pursuit of political power and autonomy can give rise to conflicts between these factions and the governing authority (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010).

In order to comprehensively analyse the role of resource control as a factor in ethnic conflicts within Nigeria, it is imperative to establish fair and just resource allocation and revenue-sharing mechanisms. The implementation of transparent and inclusive policies pertaining to resource management, resolution of land disputes, and protection of the environment is of utmost importance. Promoting interethnic dialogue, negotiation, and cooperation, alongside the implementation of sustainable development practises, can effectively mitigate tensions and diminish conflicts associated with resource control (Agbu, 2000).

The presence of marginalisation and inequality constitutes noteworthy aspects within ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. The inequitable allocation of power, resources, and opportunities across various ethnic groups has resulted in the emergence of grievances, tensions, and conflicts. Certain ethnic groups perceive themselves as being marginalised in relation to political representation and participation. The individuals hold the belief that their voices are insufficiently represented in the processes of decision-making, resulting in feelings of exclusion and frustration. The perception of political marginalisation has the potential to exacerbate ethnic conflicts, as various groups engage in competition for political power and influence. Ethnic group-based economic disparities are a contributing factor to the emergence and perpetuation of conflicts (Oyekanmi, 2000). There exists a subset of individuals who experience a sense of marginalisation with regards to economic prospects, encompassing areas such as employment, entrepreneurial endeavours, and the ability to obtain credit and access markets. The presence of restricted opportunities for education and skills enhancement serves to intensify the state of economic marginalization (Agbu, 2000). Ethnic conflicts may emerge when certain groups perceive themselves as experiencing economic disadvantages or systematic exclusion from economic resources and developmental opportunities. The presence of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be attributed to the unequal distribution of resources, encompassing land, minerals, and public infrastructure (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006). Certain ethnic groups hold the belief that they have been deprived of equitable access to resources and development initiatives. Conflicts between ethnic groups can intensify as a result of disputes pertaining to resource allocation, specifically in relation to the distribution of oil revenues or land. Certain ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by the inadequate provision of social services and infrastructure. The presence of unequal access to quality education, healthcare, water, electricity, and transportation exacerbates sentiments of marginalisation and inequality. Ethnic conflicts may emerge when certain groups perceive a disparity in the attention given to their fundamental needs and rights in comparison to other ethnic groups (Carroll and Carroll, 2000).

Ethnic conflicts persist as a result of historical injustices and perceived disparities in power and resources that have endured over time. Interethnic tensions are fueled by longstanding grievances resulting from land disputes, forced displacement, and the enduring impacts of colonialism. If historical grievances are not effectively addressed, they have the potential to resurface and perpetuate conflicts. Efforts to mitigate ethnic conflicts in Nigeria necessitate a collective endeavour to foster inclusiveness, equitable access to opportunities, and the pursuit of social justice in order to address marginalisation and inequality (Jacob, 2012). This encompasses the adoption of policies aimed at promoting fair and equal representation and engagement in political processes, tackling economic inequalities through inclusive strategies for economic growth, and delivering high-quality social services and infrastructure to all ethnic communities. In order to effectively mitigate ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, it is imperative to prioritise the resolution of historical grievances, facilitate constructive interethnic dialogue, and cultivate a collective sense of national unity and shared identity (Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006).

Religious disparities constitute a pivotal aspect of ethnic hostilities in Nigeria, specifically within the context of the Christian and Muslim factions. It is imperative to acknowledge that religious conflicts in Nigeria do not invariably correspond to ethnic divisions; however, they frequently intersect and augment the intricacy of conflicts in the country (Agbu, 2000). Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping identity in Nigeria, where the northern region is primarily inhabited by Muslims, while the southern region is predominantly populated by Christians. The intertwining of religion with ethnic identities gives rise to conflicts that frequently manifest themselves along religious lines. In certain instances, individuals predominantly establish their sense of self through their religious associations, thereby fostering the notion that ethnic conflicts stem from religious disparities (Carroll and Carroll, 2000). The intersection of religious disparities and political power struggles has the potential to give rise to conflicts. Political actors occasionally utilise religious affiliations as a means to garner backing and secure a competitive edge during electoral processes (Jacob, 2012). The exploitation of religious sentiments has the potential to foster divisions and exacerbate conflicts among diverse religious communities, particularly when there is a perception of political bias towards one religious group over another. Religious disparities have the potential to give rise to conflicts pertaining to social and cultural customs (Agbu, 2000). Conflicts can potentially emerge when a religious faction perceives the practises or beliefs of another faction as incongruous or menacing to their own religious norms. Tensions may arise as a result of various factors, including but not limited to interfaith marriages, religious conversion, religious education, and divergent interpretations of religious texts (Oyekanmi, 2000).

Extremist organisations may exploit religious disparities as a means to incite acts of violence and advance their ideological objectives. Nigeria has experienced the emergence of extremist organisations, namely Boko Haram and militant factions within the Fulani herdsmen, which have employed religious justifications to rationalise acts of terrorism and violence. These groups specifically focus on religious institutions, communities, and symbols, thereby exacerbating interreligious conflicts (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). The presence of religious disparities has the potential to intersect with economic variables, thereby intensifying conflicts. In certain cases, there exists a correlation between economic disparities and religious divisions, resulting in the perception of economic marginalisation experienced by specific religious communities (Jacob, 2012). These grievances have the potential to cultivate an environment conducive to conflicts and exacerbate religious divisions. Religious tensions in Nigeria are influenced by historical events and experiences. The historical era of colonisation and the subsequent division of the country into regions with a Muslim majority in the north and a Christian majority in the south have had enduring effects. Interreligious conflicts can be influenced by the resurgence of historical injustices, such as land disputes or the marginalisation of specific religious communities (Jacob, 2012). To effectively tackle the issue of religious disparities within the context of ethnic conflict in Nigeria, it is imperative to prioritise the advancement of interreligious discourse, the cultivation of comprehension, and the emphasis on common values and principles that facilitate peaceful cohabitation (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). Key measures to be undertaken include the promotion of religious tolerance, the guarantee of equitable rights and safeguards for all religious groups, and the active combatting of extremist ideologies (Osadola and Asiyanbi, 2022). These steps are essential in the mitigation of religious conflicts and the facilitation of harmonious relations within the nation (Jacob, 2012).

Conclusion

The state in Africa is neither neutral nor an arbitrator: “it is itself a focal point of competition, an actor in the conflict”. This way “great ethnic conflict has usually been caused by the capture, or apparent near capture, by one group of control over the centralized state, and the dangers of dominance this has foretold” (Osaghae, 1994).

In Nigeria, peace hangs by a thread. Democratization appears to have woken long-suppressed feelings among the hundreds of ethnic nationalities in the country. Now rivalry between groups is usually intense. Some are pushing for greater participation in the running of the affairs of the Nigeria state, while others clamour for greater autonomy. Quite often, groups have resorted to violence, fighting brief wars to settle primordial scores (Omuabor, 2000).

For instance, the Ife – Modakeke crisis and the Zango-Kataf crisis that are used as case studies in this study fits the assertion of fighting brief wars to settle primordial scores among other causes. The problem of building a nation from a collection of ethnic groups is one, which most nations of Africa face today. Nigeria is a plural society, defined by cultural-institutional diversities of the ethnic groups of various populations, and with people practicing three main religions (Christianity mainly in the South and Middle Belt, Islam mainly in the North, and traditional religion in every part of the country).

There have been various statements about the extent of Nigeria’s ethnic pluralism, from the two hundred and fifty mentioned by colonialist, and even half that number by superficial observers, to the figure of three hundred and seventy four ethnic groups. Admittedly, Nigeria is a very complex country with the behaviour and relationships of individual and groups determined by imperatives of cultural symbols and strategic social institutions. Different people are predisposed to conceptualize political and economic resources and the access to them in divergent ways through their own coded lenses (Otite, 1999).

Ethnic conflicts are means of identifying the imperfections of a plural society, and of suggesting remedies to remove or solve the problem of inequality, marginalisation, exploitation, internal colonialism, and the misuse of majoritarian democracy and national government (Otite, 2000). Owing to the fact that the roots of ethnic conflicts are not being tackled, cosmetic solutions, such as the creation of more local government councils and chiefdoms, lead to the emergency of new minorities and more agitations. Even within the same ethnic group there are class contradictions, and their primordial political game deepens conflicts along clan lines. In the case of Ile-Ife in Osun state, the Modakeke claims to the ownership of their settlement and farmland have been strongly resisted by the Ooni (Royal king of Ile-Ife) and the people of Ife. Also, ethnic claim over new local government council headquarters and new markets are a source of conflicts, for example, Zangon-Kataf and Tafawa Balewa towns in Kaduna and Bauchi states respectively. There is also the Warri crisis involving ethnic Ijaws and Urhobos versus Itsekiris, Tiv-Jukun crisis, Aguleri-Umuleri crisis, and Hausas and Yorubas of Sagamu in Ogun state among others. At 52, Nigeria has come a long way. Its ability to survive as one political entity is the best evidence of its resilience, if not total national unity. Few emerging nations could not have taken the knockings Nigeria had taken these past fortyone years and still be a country. In actual fact, the post-independence political history of Nigeria is more or less how Nigeria has since tried to grapple with the problem of how best to accommodate the competing socio-political and ethno-cultural problems of its people. In a recent lecture, Anyaoku (2000), former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth said “There was a time when some of us were idealistic enough to think it is possible to wish away essential differences between the component ethnic groups of our country (Nigeria) and mould a truly united Nigeria out of it without taking account of its plurality.

But experience in this and many other countries show that this is neither possible nor indeed desirable. It shows further that for national unity to become truly nurtured beyond the limits of rhetoric and realized in a way that generates genuine patriotism among the citizens, there has to be minimum of openness and accountability in the governance system. And an accountable government should mean a democratic government freely and fairly elected by the voters. It should also mean a democratic government that

recognizes the importance of reaching units of a pluralistic society". Since Nigeria has now democratized, solving inter or intra-ethnic conflicts in the country are now left for the present government and Nigerians in general to address.

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