

Ethnicity, Religion and the future of Nigerian Democracy

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Abstract- Nigeria's ruling elites are guilty of deliberately promoting the social fragmentation that creates, feeds and reinforces religious and ethnic identities to the exclusion of civic and national identities throughout the democratization process of the country. This situation breeds mutual distrusts and tensions culminating into frequent ethnic and religious violence, which leads to the wanton destruction of lives and property and doubts over the future of democracy and even the future of the polity. This paper is a critical attempt to analyze the challenges ethnic and religious politics poses to the continuing existence of the Nigerian Nation-State and its democracy. The paper contends that ethnic and religious differences are not the problem per se, except for the manipulation of these identities by the political juggernauts and the fertile ground unemployment, poverty, injustices, inequitable distribution of resources leading to uneven development in the country. The colonial ideology of divide and rule inherited by the post-colonial state has been identified as the root cause of the problem. Thus, the paper argues that unless the challenges of ethnicity and religion are grasped and adequately addressed, it could tear Nigeria apart, serving sectarian religious and ethnic interest.

Index Terms— Ethnicity, Religion and Democracy

I. INTRODUCTION

No one is likely to dispute the fact that one of the major challenges to the future of democracy and the democratization process in Africa has been ethno-religious confusions and sentiments, leading to violent conflicts. Therefore, there is an intimate relationship between the ethnic and religious question, as far as the future of Nigerian democracy is concerned. The reason being that, the extent to which democracy can flourish and be sustained is inextricably tied to the nature of ethno-religious relationships between the various ethnic and religious groups in the country, and how they are applied in the political administration of Nigeria. Unfortunately, however, the nature of ethno-religious relationships in Nigeria has been too pathetic and in dire need of attention, reconsideration, and in fact, redirection. This is because Nigeria's nascent democracy has experienced so many setbacks, marked by perpetual conflict, bitterness, mutual distrust, clashes of the mind, presentiments and apparent deepening animosity between Muslims and

Christians, and among the different ethnic groups that make up the country. Thus, a discourse on the heating ethnic and religious realities in tandem with the future of Nigerian democracy becomes imperative.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The fact that concepts are historically determined and produced makes a conceptual clarification of the concepts of ethnicity, religion and democracy imperative. Since the mid-20th century, both ethnicity and the term ethnic group have been used to describe certain types of identity and affiliation, although without consensus about what they actually mean. While some scholars have sought to define ethnicity in the broadest terms possible, others appeared to be restrictive in their definitions. The definition of ethnicity from broadest terms is conceived in the light of the following features:

Common geographic origin; migratory status; race; language or dialects; religious faith or faiths; ties that transcend kingship neighbourhood, community and boundaries; shared traditions, values and symbols; literature, folklore and music; food preferences; settlement pattern, and institution that specifically serve and maintain the group; an internal sense of effectiveness; and an external perception of distinctiveness (Thernstrom et al 1980:Vi).

Thus, ethnicity is seen as a broader concept than "tribe" and religion is also seen as inclusive of ethnicity. However, the basic problem with the above definition is that it sees ethnic groups as completely distinct, enjoying some degree of biological purity. The claim to biological purity has no basis in human history. This is because, ethnicity as a concept is complex and fluid, and not as static as this definition captures it. Any attempt at a clear distinction amounts to creating a pretext for separatism, which is by no means in the interest of Nigerian democracy. According to J.S. Jimada, Nigerian ethnic identities and cultures were and are fluid overlapping categories with no one group being strictly distinct; any attempt at complete distinction would appear misleading (Jimada, 2002:1). This explains the difficulty in making any kind of distinction between some Edo speaking people from

the Yoruba, or some Nupe groups from Yoruba speaking people, and the Ibibio from some Igbo speaking people.

The restrictive perception of ethnicity defines ethnic group as an involuntary group of people who share the same culture or the descendants of such people who might identify themselves and/ or are identified by others as belonging to the same involuntary groups (Wsebold, 1979:25). This view aptly sees ethnicity as either an accidental or incidental identity, which people either confer on themselves or others conferred on them by virtue of culture, traditions, norms and values. The restrictive approach also presupposes the need to differentiate religion from ethnic group. This approach appears more compelling, though not without misgivings. This is because ethnicity is a category used in identifying people in the light of some peculiarities, whether real or imaginary. But, the fact of the matter is that the concept of ethnicity changes as things are changing, and will continue to change. Although the issue of territoriality (geographical realities), and a political society consisting of disparate groups and affiliation by language are given prominence in the definition of ethnicity, they do not necessarily imply a shared tradition of origin, relation by blood and same migratory status.

The belief in spiritual beings exists in all known societies throughout history. This indicates that man is by nature religious, irrespective of the spiritual being they submit to. The eminent sociologist [Durkheim](#), in his seminal book "[The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life](#)", defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things (Durkheim, 1915:10). By sacred things he meant things "set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, and all those who adhere to them". Sacred things are not limited to gods or spirits. In Nigeria, however, Christianity and Islam have been given much prominence as the major religious bodies, without given due consideration to other religious bodies, thereby causing discontentment among traditional worshippers. On the contrary, a sacred thing can be anything; be it a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood etc. According to Herbert W. Armstrong, religion is the worship of, and service to God/gods or the supernatural or man's relation to his creator (Armstrong, 1985:8-9). In general, religion involves one's conduct, principle, way of life, concept of the hereafter and one's way of valuing most comprehensively and intensively. Hence, religion cannot be limited to man's relation with spirit/gods/God, because it also determines the relation of its adherents with others who are either "believers" of such faith or "unbelievers". This is what makes the practice of the different religion in Nigeria very important to the future of democracy. For they either unite the people or disunite the people, depending on how it is understood, interpreted or misconstrued.

On the whole, ethnicity and religion have something in common; shared interest, objective and claim to separate identities. Thus, they are often intertwined and frequently mutually reinforcing. Indeed, like language, traditions and values, religion is one of the key building blocks of ethnic cultures. Therefore, for some groups, religion and ethnicity are integrally connected.

Democracy is a government by representation, whereby political sovereignty is vested with the people. It can also be seen as a system of government in which the will of the majority of the people takes precedence; or a government elected by majority of the people. Democracy is built on the

equality of citizens; the freedom of these citizens to associate with one another for the realization of their ideals and the defense and promotion of their interests; and the freedom of these citizens to choose between the different political platforms of various political parties and candidates, and see to the actualization of the platforms they have voted for, if their choices win (Usman, 2004:1). This is only possible if the citizens are well informed about their country, their governments, their circumstances and the various interests contending in the various parties. Undoubtedly, harmonious co-existence and co-operation among the various ethnic and religious groups that make up the democratic setting is a pre-requisite to deriving the dividends of democracy.

III. DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN NIGERIA

The basis for religious differentiation has been laid since the pre-colonial period of Nigerian history; British colonial domination only accentuated it with the imposition and consolidation of ethnic politics to serve its imperial objectives. The centuries of contact between the Northern part of the country with Muslim North Africa through trans-Saharan trade, the agency of the Kanem-Borno empire prior to the 19th century and the Sokoto Caliphate since the 1804 made the area predominantly Muslims. The Southern part of the country on the other hand is predominantly Christian with however, substantial Muslim population (Mohammed, 2014:11). This is partly due to their prolonged contact with European influences dating back to the 15th century, and the influence of the Sokoto Jihad that had far-reaching impact on the South Western region of the Yoruba and also parts of the Edo speaking people. In much of human history, religion and politics have gone hand in hand with each having its own history of theocracy. Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire and remained for so long; as for Islam, the phenomenon of Islamic "state" has survived into modern times and is a subject of debate in Nigeria (Kukah, 1993: Vii). Thus, the question of the relationship of religion and politics is an inevitable and important one. No matter how brilliant, captivating and promising it may be, those calling for their separation must come to terms with this historical fact. No wonder, even nations which make full separation of religion and politics, find many ways in practice to act against their principles.

The amalgamation of 1914 brought about the union of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and even multi political culture under a single politico-administrative unit. This single politico-administrative unit marked the formation of modern Nigeria. The divisive colonial policy of divide and rule reinforced the pre-existing differences amongst the people of Nigeria with its emphasis of separateness, in order to obstruct the process of integration among the people that is capable of culminating into a united front against colonial domination. For instance, while the British allowed the inhabitants of Zaria city to remain within the city walls, others from the North were encouraged to settle in Tudun Wada, and those from the South to settle in Sabon Gari (Tukur, 1979:68-111).

The democratization process of Nigeria can be traced to the Clifford's constitution of 1922. Being the first constitution in Nigeria, it was significant in the introduction of the elective principle—a central element in the practice of democracy the world over. This is because, it introduced for the first time an elective principle in the country when three seats in the central

legislative council was allocated to Lagos and one to Calabar. This stimulated the formation of National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923 to contest the three seats allocated to Lagos, and the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) in 1934 founded by H.O. Davies, Dr. J.C. Vaughan, Dr. Kofo Abayomi, Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikwe and Obafemi Awolowo which later transformed into Nigerian Youth Movement in 1936. Although the colonial state was not responsive to Nigerian public opinion conveyed by these two pioneering parties, it however, ushered in the beginning of party politics and the move towards representative government in Nigeria despite the fact that the executive council still remained a British dominated sphere (Herskovits, 1982: 16). It is important to emphasize that the above analysis is not a celebration of colonial domination as avowed critics of colonialism who perceived the colonial experience as a one-arm bandit may think. On the contrary, it is simply the historicity of the democratization process of Nigeria, drawn from every manifestation of the feature of democracy since the colonial period. Moreover history in principle and practice must shy away from xenophobia.

The importance of the elective principle was shared by Adejumobi (1998:46) when he noted that:

Political decolonization process in Nigeria was marked by the extension of the franchise and scope of representative institution.

In fact, it was on the platform of political party and the representation they enjoyed that the struggle for the country's independence was expressly articulated and achieved.

However, the introduction of three regions and the subsequent regionalism that ensued with the Richard constitution of 1946 had a paradoxical consequence for the democratization process of Nigeria. In the first place, it consolidated the platform for representation at three regions, and on the other hand, the democratization process experienced tremendous setback due to the increasing consciousness of regional identities and ethnic differentiation and exclusion. Thus, ethnicity probably became an issue in Nigeria from the 1940's. J.S. Jimada observed that:

Before colonialism, ethnic differentiation was not a primary issue for socio-economic and political relations. The period from 1951 for instance witnessed unprecedented inter-ethnic struggle for power. Cultural groups that had hitherto played the role of providing for the welfare of their members achieved political significance overnight. At any rate these ethnic groups now supported their leaders in the quest for political power, which often led to conflicts, antagonisms, and violence within and outside the regions. This was largely due to the uneven development that occurred between regions and urban-rural development during the colonial period (Jimada, 2002: 2).

His argument is based on the fact that all the nationalists' parties in colonial Nigeria especially from the 1940's were ethnic based, despite being united for the common course of Nigeria's independence. For instance, the Action Group (AG) was a Yoruba party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC) started as a national party before it became dominated by the Igbos and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) a Hausa/Fulani political party. Thus, apart from the struggle for independence, they may have covertly worked to undermine the strength and effectiveness of each other, in order to control the centre after the attainment of independence. It was this historical reality in the democratization process of

Nigeria cum the struggle for independence that consolidated ethno-religious politics in Nigeria, which the country is yet to recover from. The immediate expression of this divide was the Kano riot of 1953 which brought the North and the South into direct confrontation over the appropriate time for independence, and the subsequent attempt by the North to secede from the country in order to exist separately from the South.

The fallout from the mega ethnic groups jostling for power was the emergence of ethnic minority groups who were marginalized in the struggle for state-power in the First Republic (Dudley, 1990:70). As a result, the first republic saw the formation of United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) to represent the interests of the minority ethnic groups, under the dynamic leadership of J.S. Tarka. Others include Borno Youth Movement (BYN) and the Niger-Delta Congress (NDC) representing the Niger-Delta region. This was because of the perception that the political destiny of an individual is intrinsically and exclusively linked with one ethnic group and to an extent, religious identity. With a coalition government of NCNC and NPC at the centre under a parliamentary democracy, ethno-religious sentiments and presentiments spread like a wildfire and brought the First republic to an abrupt end. The reason behind the collapse of the first republic was the perceived preponderance of the Northern region, particularly the Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups (both in size, population, and number of seats occupied at the federal level), which the other ethnic groups considered as the machination of the British and the greatest threat to the stability and survival of the federation (Uyanne, 2012). The collapse of the first republic was thus a product of ethnic politics that started since the colonial period and gained more momentum in post-colonial Nigeria. It was as a result of this perceived ethnic structural imbalance that parliamentary democracy collapsed in Nigeria, ending with the first military coup d'état in January 15, 1966, which the plotters said was meant to restore sanity to the country.

However, the coup itself was the product of the divisive forces of ethnicity and regionalism that bedeviled the First republic democracy. The sectarian nature of the coup soon became palpable as majority of the victims of the coup were prominent Northern and Western political and military leaders such as Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, S.L. Akintola, Brigadier Zakari Maimalari and Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun, among others. Ironically, no Igbo political or military leader was killed. This provoked a backlash leading to the counter coup of July of the same year, led by Northern elites seeking revenge on the first coup generally believed to have been led by the Igbos. It is pertinent to note that these two ethnic political squabbles culminated into a bloody civil war, in which the Igbo dominated Eastern Nigeria tried to secede from the Nigerian federation and establish a new republic under the name of Biafra. No doubt, this was a momentous event that threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian Nation-State.

In an attempt to surmount the above problems, the military government reviewed the geo-political structure of the country (Uyanne, 2012). Initially, twelve states were created out of the former three regions, while additional structural changes increased the number to nineteen. The change from Westminster parliamentary democracy to the American presidential democracy was considered the major structural reform in order to overcome the challenges of the first republic.

Unfortunately, however, ethnic and religious politics continued unabated, which explained why the second republic suffered the same problems of the first republic. The reason for this failure is not far-fetched. All the five political parties that dominated the scene were upshots of the first republic ethnic based political parties. For example, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was an upshot of NPC with its base in the North, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), an upshot of the (AG) whose base was in the West, the National People's Party (NPP) was also an upshot of the NCNC with its base in the East, Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) was an upshot of Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), and the Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP) was an upshot of the BYN. Although the NPN won the election in what was describe as a "moon slide", it was rejected by the UPN who believed the election was marked by irregularities, especially the mathematical confusion of what actually constituted the two-third majority of nineteen states (Suleiman, 2010:34). Their protest was ignored, which only increased the tension between the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. By 1983, Nigeria's second democratic dispensation vanished into another period of military dictatorship, due to several damages resulting from corruption, ethno-religious squabbles and electoral irregularities.

Against this backdrop, it was thought that multi-party system may have been the brain behind the failure of Nigerian democracy, because it failed to generate enough solidarity among the various ethnic groups that make up the country. In a bid to curtailed ethnic politics in Nigeria, the Babangida administration narrowed the party system to a two-party system, registering the Social Democratic party (SDP) and the National Republican Conventional (NRC) as the legitimate parties to contest the June 12, 1993 election. The electoral process which went well and saw M.K.O Abiola of the SDP defeat Tofa of the NRC in an election widely described by international observers as free and fair was annulled by the Babangida administration. The significance of the June 12 to the democratization process in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Firstly, it for the first time brought about a free and fair election in Nigeria. Secondly, it reduced the ethno-religious ferment in Nigeria as Abiola won in Kano, Tofa's home. Thirdly, it became one of the very sensitive developments in the political history of Nigeria that threatened the corporate existence of the country. This is because; the annulment was met by stiff resistance by the Yorubas who saw it as a deliberate attempt by the Hausas to deny one of them his right as a way of consolidating Northern hegemony over Nigeria. This led to the formation of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) by Michael Ajasin and later under Abraham Adesanya, all seeking the breakaway of Yorubas from the Nigerian federation.

This development paved way for a National Interim Government (NIG) which gave way for another round of military dictatorships under General Sani Abacha/Abdulsalam Abubakar, which lasted until 1999. The return to democracy in 1999 though significant, started on a faulty foundation. It was significant in the sense that, it ushered in a period of 15 year uninterrupted democracy in the political history of Nigeria. The foundation of the process was faulty in view of the fact; ethnic consideration was given prominence in the whole process rather than wider choice of candidate as the tradition of democracy demands. As the *Wall Street Journal* (1999)

reported, 'General Abubakar has rigorously controlled the election process, banning independent candidates and critics said the army wants to see who wins the elections before deciding on what powers the president should have. Obviously, the whole process was meant to appease the Yoruba ethnic group over the annulment of Abiola's electoral victory. This informed the choice of the two candidates, Olusegun Obasanjo and Olufalaye: both from the South-West, and of Yoruba ethnic group.

For as the saying goes, "what is good for Peter is also good for Paul". The completion of Obasanjo's two terms came with the call for power shift-this time around in the interest of Northern Nigeria. President Olusegun Obasanjo, a product of such settings had no option but to repay the good will he enjoyed from the political elites of Northern Nigeria. Thus, the presidential election of 2007 continued on ethnic footings, with the two major candidates Umaru Musa Yar'adua and General Muhammadu Buhari, all from northern Nigeria. This pattern in the democratization process tends to justify and legitimize ethnic politics. For it creates the basis for continuous agitation by minority ethnic groups which have not been represented by the apparent paradigmatic power shift, rather than satisfying the democratic yearnings of Nigerians based on the inclusion of all. Hence, the nature of the transition to civil rule in Nigeria has been one where the government creates parties for the people, designs and plans their manifestoes for them, funds them, foist certain candidates on these organizations and invites the people to join them so as to crystallize their democratic quest. Thus, a climate of political exclusion, alienation, and robbery of the fundamental right of the Nigeria peoples are evidenced in the democratization process.

More disturbing is the fact that the process has been further marred by myriads of religious crisis that shows no sign of coming to an end. Examples of these religious crises include but not limited to; the Sharia crisis of 1976-1979, the Shagari regime religious crises of 1979-1983, Kano riot of December 18-29 1980, burning of churches in Kano (October, 1982), the Buhari regime religious crises of 1983-1985, the organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) crisis of January 1986, Ahmadu Bello University religious crisis o June 1988, Kano riot of October 1991 and the Obasanjo's regime Sharia crisis of 1999-2004. Obviously, the destructive consequence of ethno-religious politics in Nigeria and the threat it poses to Nigerian democracy is beyond reasonable doubt.

IV. THE PRESENT REALITY

While many Nigerians have the right to be cynical, demoralized, even frustrated about the state of affairs, there is also a cause to cheer up! Democracy has for the very first time endured uninterruptedly for a period of 15 years in the history of the country and with some of the benefits of democracy at practically all the three tiers of government; Nigerians have a say in the affairs of the state, a right they can wield to their advantage if not taken lightly. However, the credit tends to end their and perhaps unnoticed by many due to the daunting challenges facing the polity, which undoubtedly overshadows the strides of democracy in the given period. This is because Nigerians are finding it increasingly difficult to co-exist with one another, due to the devastating lingering ethnic and religious sentiments and crises challenging the state and its attendant grave social, economic, political and humanitarian catastrophe of global proportion. This situation is heightened

by the socio-economic predicament in the country acting as a fertilizer for further ethno-religious divides.

Emerging literature points to the fact that the collapse of social institutions and the failure of the economic system to generate sufficient means of livelihood for people is an explanation for youths' increasing involvement in conflict and war situations all over Africa. In Nigeria, national security is threatened when unemployed youths are involved in conflict situations such as religious and ethnic crises. For instance, the ethnic militancy in the Niger Delta and the Islamic insurgent terror group Boko Haram are spearheaded by youths, majority of whom were/are unemployed and poor. At the very least, there is a correlation between economic hardships (occasioned by poverty and unemployment) and those taking part in the orgy of violence or violent disorder taking place in this country (2013:3-4). As roots of violence and insecurity tend to be complex, sometimes people resort to violence when they feel oppressed, discriminated against, socially isolated or economically deprived. Some researchers hold that poverty and inequality trigger violence (Awake 2012). According to Awake (2012), about 90% (percent) of all violence-related deaths have occurred in the world's less prosperous nations; and the poorer neighborhoods of cities are often high-crime areas; and according to Akande and Okuwa (2009), youth unemployment and poverty are playing a major role in African conflict experiences including Nigeria. Thus, prevailing socio-economic environment is enticing youths to turn to war, crime and violence as a means of livelihood.

It is usually argued that social behavior in Africa is so diverse, so inconsistent, and so fluid that it is nigh impossible to classify or treat it with any amount of consistency. However, Archie Mafeje debunked this notion insisting that:

I am inclined to think that the problem in Africa is not one of empirically diversified behavior but mainly one of ideology, and specifically the ideology of tribalism. European colonialism, like any epoch, brought with it certain ways of reconstructing the African reality. It regarded the African society as particularly tribal. This approach produced certain blinkers of ideological predispositions which made it difficult for those associated with the system to view these societies in any other light (Mafeje, 1971:253).

His argument is in tandem with Karl Marx who in 1845 wrote:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx and Engels, 1965:64).

The above arguments by these two scholars of repute found full expression in the present reality of Nigeria. The present reality suggests that the major problem confronting the Nigerian polity and the future of democracy is basically ethno-religious ideology and the destructive sentiments it breeds that are manifested in the economy, social and political life of the country. On the part of the Nigerian ruling elite, it is a ploy or distortion they use to conceal their exploitative roles. It is an ideology in the original Marxist sense and they share it with their European fellow-ideologists, through the constant

manipulation of ethnicity and religion in the interest of their firm grip on power. If anything, it is a mark of false consciousness on the part of the supposed ethnic and religious groupings, which subscribe to an ideology that is inconsistent with their material base and therefore unwittingly respond to the call for their own exploitation.

Although corruption has been rightly identified as one of the major challenges confronting the nation's democracy, it is instructive to note that ethnic and religious sentiment is doing worse than corruption; for it has provided corruption the foothold to thrive in the country. For instance, political support is strictly based on ethno-religious sentiment irrespective of the corrupt tendency of the candidates in view. On several occasions, people make efforts to shield corrupt individuals of their ethnic and religious group like in the case of Tafa Balogun and Bode George among numerous others (Nasiru, 2013). The January 1, 2012 fuel subsidy removal is another potent manifestation of ethno-religious sentiments in Nigeria. While majority of Nigerians massed out in opposition to this government policy, majority of the people in the Niger-Delta argued that such a solidarity from the various sections of the country was stage-managed by the opposition party mainly from the Northern part of the country against the presidency of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Southerner. This assumption is devoid of logic as it was premised on conspiracy theory, which neglects the economic consequence of the policy on the poor masses of the country. Furthermore, while the recently concluded Local Government elections in Kano won by the All Progressive Congress (APC) was declared free and fair by the party and its supporters of predominantly Northern and Muslim population, the Ekiti election won by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was described as a rigged election by the same opposition party, APC. Hence, a free and fair election in this perspective is the triumph of the APC, while those of other parties tantamount to flawed electoral process.

It suffices to say that in a polity where sincerity, integrity, ability, probity and transparency are worthless and ethnic and religious interests overrides national interest; the future of democracy is dim. This explains the number of crises across the nation, propelled and fuelled by ethnic jingoist and religious bigots, who promotes hatred for one another amongst Nigerians for their selfish interest and political opportunism.

It is pertinent to note that the conventional economic wisdom of these ethnic and religious groups competing for scarce resources and the political scientist hypothesis of conflict arising as a result of allocating the scarce resources can no longer hold water. This is largely because it seems to provide a scientific and rational justification for what would otherwise appear for what it is-sordid, self-aggrandizement (Usman, 1987:18-19). He further observed that "in our country the basic resources of labour, land, water, fauna and flora are far from being scarce, but abundant in an almost absolute sense, and that; the various politicians believed to be struggling for the allocation of the scarce resources are instead cooperating fully, as they have the same interest of manipulating religion and ethnicity to the detriment of the ignorant poor (Ibid: 20-21). This is because they are living in the illusion of being represented by their avowed ethnic and religious champions.

Akin to Usman's perspective, Ebere Onwudiwe (2004:1) opined that the near coincidence of religion and ethno-regional settings has caused some analysts to indict ethnicity as a main

cause of ethno-religious crises. This may be only indirectly true. Of course, in some large urban centres there are scatterings of ethnic neighborhoods, especially in low income areas. Ethnic differences between the impoverished inhabitants of such neighborhoods are frequently exploited by unscrupulous political, ethnic and religious elites. The resultant communal friction, frequently exacerbated by such social conditions as population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government, is what is usually described as ethno-religious conflict. However, it appears that they are more rooted in multiple socio-economic factors rather than in ethnic and religious causes alone. Therefore, crafty politicians, of whom there is no scarcity among the Nigerian ruling class, have on several occasions readily exploited the nation's ethnic and religious divides for personal political gain.

V. CONCLUSION

As a result of the perennial manipulation of ethnicity and religion by the political elites of Nigeria, objective reality has become very difficult to disentangle from subjective perception, almost as the same way as concepts in history and the social sciences are hard to purify of all ideological connotations. As such, Robert Kaplan, a percipient Afro-pessimist and noted observer of global affairs has suggested that Nigeria is one of those complex societies where a 'dilution' or even a 'crack-up' in the next decade and half is to be expected (Cited in Onwudiwe, 2014:4). Until recently, many Nigerians would have quarreled with this prediction. But with the incessant ethnic and religious crises, this may no longer be the case. The country's view of itself is undergoing serious change. Some Nigerians are calling for a national conference where all nationality groups will negotiate the terms of association with each other under the national umbrella. This is because of the growing conviction that the frequent mayhem and carnage periodically unleashed by ethnic and religious groups give the call for a sovereign national conference a certain urgent potency. For instance, Ayo Obe, a former president of the Nigeria's Civil Liberties Organization argues that "if the proposed Sovereign National Conference led to the break-up of Nigeria, that may not be a tragedy: the tragedy is the history of the country since independence, and the paralysis that has continued to stunt true national emancipation in the years of ersatz and fast vanishing democracy" (Obe, 2004). The question is can Nigeria survive the formidable threat ethnicity and religion posed to the future of democracy and the polity? Or, can one simply hope that the incidents of religious and ethnic crises are intended rehearsals for a future shock?

The objective reality is that ethnic and religious differences are not peculiar to Nigeria alone but to the entire world. Whereas other parts of the world like the United States have exploited their differences as a source of strength and diversification, it has only been exploited as a weapon of mass destruction in Nigeria. Similarly, complete distinction as advocated by ethnic and religious chauvinist is a myth that only serves sectarian and separatist ideology by political opportunists seeking to carve out a political haven. It has no basis in the actual complex historical processes that produced and is still producing the people that make up the polity through migrations, mingling and intermingling. In fact, even among people of common ethnicity and religious identity, certain cleavages features prominently due to variations in

perception and interpretation. This is a lesson which Nigeria must learn.

Finally, disintegration is not the solution as recent events in Sudan and elsewhere has shown, so needless to circumvent democracy. The corporate existence of Nigeria can only survive if measures are taken to surmount the manipulations resulting in ethnic and religious violence. These measures include but not limited to the questions of national identity, national integration, the issues of the legitimacy of authority, rule of law and the transformation of Nigeria into a true political community. There is also the need to develop a workable blue-print to achieve economic management, broaden educational opportunity, ensure food security, reduce poverty, ensure security of lives and properties, tolerance and harmonious co-existence, promote economic growth, fight corruption, provide employment and equal opportunities for all, instead of the efficient looting of treasuries by those in authority.

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