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## Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria: A Need for True Federalism

**ABSTRACT:** Nigeria is one of the major democracies in African continent. It is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. There are different identities and segments in this society. To call it a diversified society would not be wrong, a society with different religions, cultures, and languages. Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity in Nigeria. This paper is a new attempt to relook the significance and relevance of true federalism in Nigeria. To examine how far the State machinery and political institutions had been successful in accommodating different interests of various identities. Major democracies are based on the rule of law and protection of human rights that should be taken into consideration at the first level. Only true federalism and decentralization is a way forward to create balance and accommodation among different identities in Nigerian society. Nigeria needs good institution which could be successful in maintaining good governance. Therefore, disfunctional political system reform and restructuring for maintaining social justice with all without any discrimination. A true federalism and true democracy can be used as a real panacea of ethnic conflict. In summation, it can be said that shaping and sharing of powers could be also better option for creating a peaceful and prosperous in Nigeria.

**KEY WORDS:** Ethnic conflict, federalism, true democracy, decentralization, national integration, and peaceful and prosperous in Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

*Conflict, including ethnic conflict, is not unavoidable but can indeed be prevented. This requires, however, that the necessary efforts are made. Potential sources of conflict need to be identified and analyzed with a view to their early resolution, and concrete steps must be taken to forestall armed confrontation. If these preventive measures are superseded by a sharpening of the conflict, then, an early warning must be given in time for more rigorous conflict containment to take place (Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 2000:95).*

Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously – some would say violently – contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country. The issues that generate the fiercest contestation include those that are considered

fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state, over which competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner-take-all strategies. These include the control of state power, resource allocation, and citizenship. As a consequence, deeply divided states tend to be fragile and unstable because almost by definition; there are fewer points of convergence and consensus among the constituent groups than are required to effectively mitigate or contain the centrifugal forces that tear the society apart.

Thus, disintegration, secession, civil strife, civil war, minority agitation, and violent conflicts, all of which would normally be considered aberrant to “normal” state formation, are quite common threats or actual occurrences in divided states. It is not surprising, therefore, that divided states have devised some of the most innovative and

delicate systems of government. Most states practice some variant of the federal solution, with the emphasis on political accommodation and inter-segmental balance. This emphasis has made it necessary and expedient to adopt instrumentalities that mitigate the effects of majoritarianism, as well as promote inclusion, equity, and distributive justice between the different salient groups. Yet, and despite the precautions taken, divided states remain perennially unstable and many survive on the brink of collapse and disintegration.

### **NIGERIA AS MULTI-ETHNIC COUNTRY**

Nigeria is one of the most ethnically complex countries in the world with more than 250 ethnic groups within a population of 150 million; it is also Africa's most populous country. The four main ethnic groups are the Hausa (21 percent), the Yoruba (21 percent), the Ibo (18 percent), and the Fulani (11 percent). The Hausa and the Fulani are in the north, the Yoruba are concentrated in the west, and the Ibo live in the east. Further complicating ethnicity in Nigeria is politics and religion. The northern part is dominated by Muslims; and the southern and eastern regions are populated mainly by Christians. The petroleum wealth is located in the predominantly Christian Ibo region of the east. The southeast and the Hausa have ruled the country for most of its history and controlled the military regimes. The Yoruba of the west blame the northerners for the country's political and economic problems.

The *ethnicization* of politics for purposes of constitutional experimentation has turned out to be a powerful obstacle to the working of Nigerian federalism. Because Nigerian federalism is based on ethnic and not geographical diversities, it has tended to exacerbate centrifugal forces in the country. This study examines the ethnic conflicts caused by the introduction of *Sharia* law in the northern state of Nigeria. Data were collected through qualitative in-depth interviews of key informants.<sup>1</sup>

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After gaining independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria was under military rule for approximately 30 years. The military rule in Nigeria sacrificed the rights of the country's people and in many cases abused the power of government. Nigeria had six changes of government during the era of the military rule during which it dealt with a huge amount of violence and corruption during the rule of the different Presidents. The violent military rule also led to the Nigerian Civil War which ended in 1970 (Albert, Eselebor & Danjibo, 2012:415-434).

In May of 1999, a democratically elected government was sworn into power. As per the constitution of Nigeria, it was divided into three divisions of the executive, legislature, and judiciary. Special powers and laws are also framed for the local government. The legislative powers were vested in the hands of the National Assembly, which comprised a Senate and a House of Representatives. The Senate consisted of 109 members who are elected for a term of four years. The House of Representatives consists of 360 members, elected from each of the assigned constituencies of the country for a period of four years. The Senate and House of Representatives were presided over by a Speaker and Deputy Speaker, elected by the members of the House. One vital aspect of the current Nigerian political system is that the executive powers of the government lie in the hands of the President who is also the Head of State, the Chief Executive of the Federation, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federation of Nigeria.

The Nigerian judiciary consists of a Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and a Federal High Court. It is also important to note that each state in Nigeria has a High Court, a *Sharia* Court of Appeal, and a Customary Court of Appeal. The Chief Judges of these courts are appointed by the Advisory Counsel of the National Judicial Council. The objectives of the legal system in Nigeria are to settle conflicts of the Nigeria citizenry in a civil manner, that is,

and interpreting the data related to the political conditions in Nigeria. However, all contents in this paper becomes our responsibility academically.

without having to resort to violence and corruption. The legal system is also there to protect the rights and freedom of the citizens. Finally, it is to serve in the election process when elections come around. Turns of events saw that all the lofty objectives of the Nigerian constitution had not materialized. Nigeria has had to deal with a huge amount of abuse of power and unfair political and legal systems. This had led the country into a downward spiral of corruption, violence, and poverty; and ultimately a totally failed country economically, politically, and in terms of legal standards (Nnoli, 1980:289).

For this state of affairs, a respondent of this study, Zamfari, a polygamous politician and traditional leader or king who had his first degree in Economics from the Nigerian Poly-Techniques in Kaduna, offers the following explanation:

[...] if the system and implementation of power in our present country had been the same during the earliest fathers and leaders who fought for the independence, there would have been any thing called one Nigeria. The country as seen today is due to power ambitiousness or [...] power intoxication for the national resource [...]. This has caused the adherents to live daily in lies, mistrusts, manipulations of the constitutional laws in order to acquire wealth wrongly through corruptions. Every political leader, elite, or candidate is stepping out only to be legitimized into power and whence in power, there comes their reality twist and turn decisions. Twist and turn are what characterize every average government seat, and they even vowed either to kill (as experienced in so many of them previously), or cause violent actions and statements, or to change rules and laws to fit their evil ambitions. That is not the kind of politics we saw or was born into before [...]. The politics I first embraced in my early years was full of honours, integrity, and never selfish in character. It was a rule of law [...] not injustice (cited in Elaigwu, 2005).

Why has ethnicity continued to pose serious problems for Nigerian politics and society in spite of various efforts to eradicate it, or at least attenuate it? Unitarism, regionalism, the creation and proliferation of states, ethnic "arithmetic", ethnic balancing, federal character, National Youth Service

Corps, federal unity colleges, various formulas for revenue allocation, secession, the imposition of a two-party system, the proliferation of local government areas, government by grand coalition (power sharing), the policy of WAZOBIA, multi-party democracy, various forms of military rule, relocation of the federal capital, numerous constitutional conferences, and official and non-official exhortations for national unity and interethnic tolerance have all failed to improve the situation. Obviously, the ethnic phenomenon has not been properly understood. Consequently, it cannot be adequately tackled. Therefore, a different perspective on ethnicity needs to be formulated as a basis for further action in this issue area.

The new perspective on ethnicity moves away from this manner of thinking instead, it focuses attention on the relationship between the state and ethnic groups. The state in Nigeria has historically been engaged in a phenomenally aggressive accumulation and projection of political power. During this process established and independent communities are deprived of their autonomy, and status and power hierarchies in these communities are destabilized. Furthermore, state policies have sometimes led to the loss of traditional means of production such as the loss of land and water resources to dams or pollution from petroleum and other manufacturing companies. Structural changes in the economy have also exposed large numbers of Nigerians to external shocks as for instance those caused by periodic changes in the terms of trade against primary crop producers. All these changes are brought about essentially by coercion and by a power structure, during colonial and times of military rule that was perceived to have no legitimacy.

One of the numerous reasons for the adoption of a federal system of government by countries is to provide an enabling platform for extraordinary diversities and the multi-ethnic groups that exist in such federations. Nigeria is a country of extraordinary

diversities and complexities. This complexity is a reflection of avalanche of ethno-cultural and religious groups co-habiting the territories and intricacies of interaction among these various ethnic groups. Nigeria's ethnic composition is estimated to be between 250 and over 400. Nigeria has since independence been marked by varied ethnic crisis. Ethnic and cultural pluralism has become the hallmark of the country federalism.

However, the type of federalism, the country is operating, has given rise to the various endemic ethnic crises in Nigeria. Violence, in whatever form, is inimical to the attainment of goals of federalism. In federal system of government, certain forms of crises are frequent; this includes political and constitutional crises that bother on the exact division of power and responsibility between the federal and state governments. Another common form of conflict is that between states and federal interests, or between the interests and aspirations of different ethnic groups in the country. In some federations, the entire jurisdiction is relatively homogeneous and each constituent state resembles a miniature version of the whole. This is known as "Congruent Federalism"; on the other hand, incongruent federalism exists where there are distinct ethnic groups like Nigeria.

In all the crises inherent in a federal system of government, ethnic violence is a serious problem because it hinders sustainable national development. It is also divisive and hinders unanimity of purpose and goal attainment. It's very pertinent to mention from the very outset that ethnic problems prevailing across the globe are really good topic on which the research could be done. If this problem of ethnicity will not be taken into account, then, definitely its repercussions and ramifications would be hazardous and dangerous. The main approach which is needed to be adopted in this dilemma is the process of devolution and decentralization of power to the different ethnicities.

Ethnic violence and ethnic conflicts creates internal disturbances within the country, it is

more dangerous in form and in its nature. It can be said that alien attack could be easily tackled, but this problem of ethnic conflict is very tough to control. It needs a soft policies and healing touch policies in order to remove the violence (Pummel, 1976:223). This study has given importance to the principle of federal autonomy and devolution of power to all identities and segments of the Nigerian society without any distinction and chauvinism only, then, the problem of ethnic violence could be remedied. When ethnic violence will be removed by the policy maker's only, then, peace can be established and development and advancement will come into the Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular. This study has a tremendous significance as far as the issue of ethnic conflict is concerned in the Nigeria.

## **ETHNIC CONFLICT**

Nigeria has over four hundred ethnic and many sub ethnic-groups' that formally were existed independent of each other before the advent of colonial power in the country. Colonialism led to the creation of artificial boundaries with attendant coercion which eventually led to the development of ethnic consciousness, thus ethnicism became part of the country's federal arrangement. The colonial administration, through the constitution, bequeathed on the country ignited ethnicism and tribalism, since then, the different governments that ruled the country either civilian or military had not only grappled with this problem, but had indirectly exacerbated it through their resolution efforts.

During colonial era, the British adopted political and administrative policies of divide and rule that mobilized and manipulated the ethnic consciousness that eventually emerged from the violence of the colonial state. The British policy on divide and rule initially adopted ethnicity and sectionalism to confront the nationalists and to maintain colonial authority and power in the British enclave. The British colonialists also did everything to further disunite the Nigerian people. They spread the propaganda that Nigerians did not have a common distinct



identity attributes with respect to political independence. The British colonial policy in Nigeria was to secure the rights of each ethnic group to maintain its identity, individuality, and ethnic nationality.

The colonial state in 1910 promulgated the Land and Native Rights Ordinance which proclaimed that all lands in the north, as native lands, to be controlled and administered by the colonial governor who eventually manipulated the law to limit the number of southerners migrating to the north. The colonialists believed that the southerners were capable of undermining the alliance between them and the Fulani ruling class that they deemed crucial to colonial enterprise in Nigeria.

In 1945, ethnic violence erupted in Jos between the Igbo community and Hausa. In the conflict, the colonialists manipulated Igbo-Hausa animosity to the colonial advantage. In 1949, the British colonialist also fanned the embers of ethnic hostility by manipulating elections in favour of some sections of the country and against another. The colonialists favoured the Native Authority administration in the North, protected it from radical nationalist influence from Southerners. The creation of the country, called "Nigeria" by Britain in 1914, has led this nation to over fifty years of conflict, violence, and massive bloodshed.

In fact, since political independence in 1960, the Nigerian federation has been torn apart by wars conflict and bloody ethnic violence. The most famous of these disputes was the thirty-six months old civil war (1967-1970); the cause of the war was an attempted secession bid from Nigeria by the three Eastern states. In fact, the domination of the sizeable North and dissatisfaction of the Igbos of Eastern region culminated in the civil war (Falola & Okpeh Jr., 2008:24-25). In addition, the prolonged military rule in the country brought the use of brute force to suppress ethnic agitation and violence. The military also used repressive and coercive measures in form of obnoxious decrees, arbitrary arrest, and detention without trial and killing of ethnic leaders under false pretext. Despite all

the repressive actions, ethnic conflict kept on reoccurring in the Nigerian federation. This violence created political chaos and instability and brought the country on the verge of political collapse (Fawole & Ukeje, 2005:21-39).

Nigeria presents a complex of individual as well as crisscrossing and recursive identities of which the ethnic, religious, regional, and sub-ethnic (communal) are the most salient and the main bases for violent conflicts in the country. This is both from the point of view of the identities most commonly assumed by citizens, especially for political purposes and the identities often implicated in day-to-day contestations over citizenship as well as competitions and conflicts over resources and privileges. To emphasize the inter-connectedness of ethnic, regional, and religious identities; and the fact that they are often mutually reinforcing, they are sometimes compounded or hyphenated as ethno-regional and ethno-religious. The latter references have historical, geographical, and political origins. They evolved from the old regional structures of the Nigerian federation, where identities were shaped by leaders of the dominant ethnic groups – Hausa/Fulani in the Northern region (predominately Muslim), Igbo in the Eastern region, and Yoruba in the Western region – that exercised some form of hegemonic control over the regions.

As a result, ethno-regional identities were, and continue to be, used as shorthand references to the dominant ethnic groups acting as regional "hegemons". This is the sense in which conflicts among the three dominant groups are generally referred to as ethno-regional. With the division of the country into six semi-official geo-political zones in the late 1990s, which not only have ethnic referents but have also gained currency in the political lexicon, the usage of ethno-regional categories is likely to expand, but so far the old regional references remain dominant. Nigeria provides a rich terrain for exploring the relationship between institutional designs and conflict management.

The following issues have been particularly pertinent in the Nigerian context: the relative

impact of democratic constitutionalism and military authoritarianism on inter-ethnic outcomes; the role of federal design in the accommodation of cultural pluralism; the relative auspiciousness of presidentialism and parliamentarianism under conditions of ethnic fragmentation and socio-economic underdevelopment; the tensions between integrative and accommodative responses to the challenges of national unity; the duality and complementarity of formal and informal ethnic conflict management practices; the impact of state expansion on inter-ethnic relations; and the possible elements of an agenda of institutional reform for democratic conflict management. The Nigerian experience shows the importance for both ethnic conflict management and democratic development of a vertically and horizontally balanced system of federalism, of formal and informal strategies for national integration and ethnic accommodation, and of autonomous institutions of political restraint (Narayan & Petesch, 2002:85-112).

### **FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

The term "federalism" has been used in a variety of contexts over time. Indeed, the extent of terminological and conceptual abuse has obscured its meaning. Like the "democracy", federalism stands to mean different things to different people. In principle, by federal concept is meant that idea of organization of state whereby a compromise is achieved between concurrent demands for union and for territorial diversity within a society, by establishment of a single political system within, which general (Central) and regional (State) governments are assigned coordinate authority that neither level of government is legally or politically sub-ordinate to the others. Federalism, thus, is a method of dividing powers so that the central and regional governments are each within a sphere, coordinate, and independent.

Federalism as a system of government emanates from the desire of a people to form a union without necessarily losing their various

identities. It is an attempt to reflect the various diverse, social, political, cultural, and economic interests within the frame work of a broader national unity. To K.C. Wheare (the doyen of federalism), *"the federal principle is the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each within a sphere co-ordinate and independent"* (cited in Elaigwu, 2005:326). To be more clear, federalism provides a constitutional device for bringing unity in diversity by harmonizing the opposing forces of centripetal and centrifugal trends in a country for the achievement of common national goals.

Only true federalism can provide possible agendas for promoting or enhancing stable, peaceful, and democratic in Nigeria. A true federalism could be the real panacea to the hindrances of national building process in Nigeria. Federalism could be used as an instrument for creating balance and harmony in divided societies such as in Nigeria. To observe militarism and force is not a good option to be adopted rather a power sharing approach where justice will be done with all identities and segments of society (Ugwuoju, 2012:11).

The problem of acrimonious existence among the diverse groups and interests in the federation of Nigeria leading to mutual distrust and inter-community conflicts has become perennial and endemic in the nation's body politics and has militated against the political stability of the country since independence. The fear of domination one ethnic group or section of the country by another; and national question of who gets what and how the national cake should be shared constitute a major factor of this problem? This situation seriously hampers efforts at national integration as it applies to the building of a nation-state out of the disparate ethnic, geographic, social, economic, and religious elements in the country. The doctrine of federal character was formulated and put into use by the government to address and hopefully mitigate this problem so as to ensure a peaceful and integrated Nigeria (Ihonvbere, 1994).

This suggests that the political arrangements must be such that group interests are fully taken care of for to qualify as democratic. It is no wonder Lijphart has cause to describe his political model as “concoctional democracy” which recommends three cardinal principles for accommodating group interests in plural societies: (1) that government has to comprise a grand coalition where all main segments of society are represented; (2) that the decision-making process must be based on the mutual veto principle; (3) that it must not only recognize but respect segmental autonomy (cited in Amuwo *et al.*, 1998:191-210).

What remains is, for Nigeria, to devise ways of achieving stability so as to bring about development and advance the well-being of its people. This stability, it is argued can be achieved under an equitable arrangement for everybody and every group in the society. The proper implementation of federal character can create equity among the Nigeria society. There is no doubt in saying this that federalism is the real guardian and protector of national integration and national progress. Only through the true federalism, a strong nation can be built otherwise to achieve nation building will remain only dream.

Mahatma Gandhi says: *“When there will be righteous in the heart, there will be harmony in the home; when there will be harmony in home, there will be order in the nation; and when there will be order in the nation, there will be peace in the world”* (cited in Mu’azu, 2009:115). It is an irony that today diversified nations lack national unity where as the unity is strength for them. Harmony and cooperation among the different groups could be built when state machinery will respect every identity equally without any discrimination. Because it is very important for any state, to work for the progress of all people. If political institutions will work only for a particular community or group, then, definitely, it will give birth to secessionism and separatism in that state which cannot be easily controlled. Therefore, federal balancing is very important principle of making a strong nation (Mu’azu, 2009:116-17).

## **ETHNICITY AND DEMOCRATIZATION**

Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity in Nigeria. This claim is supported by the fact that both in competitive and non-competitive settings, Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity. Indeed, according to the authoritative 2000 survey on “Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Nigeria”, ethnicity “is demonstrably the most conspicuous group identity in Nigeria”. Thus, the survey found that almost one-half (48.2%) of Nigerians chose to label themselves with an ethnic (including linguistic and local-regional) identity, compared to almost one-third (28.4%) who opted for class identities, and 21.0 percent who chose a religious identity. In essence, close to two-thirds of the population see themselves as members of primordial ethnic, regional, and religious groups (cited in Suberu, 2009).

In other words, *“Nigerians tend to cluster more readily around the cultural solidarities of kin than the class solidarities of the workplace”*. What is more, “religious and ethnic identities are more fully formed, more holistic and more strongly felt than class identities” as evidenced in the fact, according to Y. Bangura, that:

[...] whereas those who identify with religious and ethnic communities are almost universally proud of their group identities [...] those who see themselves as members of a social class are somewhat more equivocal about their pride. All of this is not surprising, considering that ethnic formations are perhaps the most historically enduring behavioural units in the country, and were further reinforced by the colonial and post-colonial regimes. There is also the fact that ethnic identities and boundaries, including myths of common origin, are fluid and subject to continuous construction and reconstruction. The case of the Ikwerre in the Rivers state is a good example of the problematic definition. They were Igbo before the civil war, but have since re-defined themselves to be a separate group. Migrant and dispersed groups that have somewhat become distant from the original group constitute another category of problematic classification: should they be regarded as part of the original group or as a different group? (Bangura, 1988:33-50).

In the final analysis, it is clear that ethnic diversity cannot be defined only in terms of categories employed by linguists and ethnographers. There is also the whole dimension of self-definition by members of the group and outsiders, which is a much more important determinant of so-called "ethnic-based behavior". As much as possible, therefore, the objective diacritic, which many scholars emphasize, should be consistent with the "constructed reality", self-ascribed identities, or "imagined communities" of members of the group and outsiders to be valid. This is one useful way of assessing the validity of the various estimations (Glazer & Moynihan eds., 1981; Okpu, 1989; and Anderson, 2003).

Historically, ethnic identities in Nigeria have been summarized into the two broad categories of majority and minority groups. Although unequal size and population are essential to this differentiation, its origins lie more in the power configurations of the former colonial regions in which the large groups – Hausa/Fulani in the North, Igbo in the East, and Yoruba in the West – held sway. This is all the more important because prior to the creation of these regions, there were no major or minor group distinctions in the country. However, with the regions came a "core" comprising the major group and a "periphery" made up of numerous "small groups" or minorities. The creation and multiplication of states and local government areas (the number of states has increased from 12 in 1967 to 36 in 1996) which have replaced these broader regions has led to the emergence of new majorities and minorities; but, the old historical contexts remain, especially with regard to the major groupings. This is one of the things that has ensured the continued political relevance of the old regions and of the "historical minorities", which remain both regional and national in scope (Ojo, 2006:314-325).

While the category of majority groups remains intact, a number of scholars have identified important distinctions and

reconstructions within the ranks of minorities that, in fact, show that there are inequalities among minorities. Ekeh has moved from differentiating "marginal" or dispersed minorities such as the Ijaw and Ebira (cut from their kith and kin in other regions) from other minorities, distinguishing between "historically dominant minorities" which were powerful overlords in the pre-colonial and colonial periods (Ijaw, Bini, Efik, Itsekiri) and "political minorities" which were marginalized and excluded both from power in the regions and the overall national power grid. See, for example, Ekeh in 1972 and 1996 for this progression (Okpu, 1989; Elaigwu, 2005; and Suberu, 2009).

Osaghae, on the other hand, has pointed to the multiple characteristics of minorities and identified categories of powerful national minorities made up of: historically dominant minorities, which have been influential national actors; northern and southern minorities; and religious minorities, all of which have unequal access and opportunities in the power and resources arena. Finally, in the struggles for more equitable access to power in the 1990s, it became fashionable and expedient for several non-minority groups, including the Igbo and some Yoruba sub-groups, to redefine themselves as "minorities" in view of their alleged marginalization and exclusion from power and resources. Such redefinitions have not, however, changed the historical context of the majority-minority cleavage (Hammerstad, 2004:1-12).

There have been other important developments in the domain of ethnic politics. The creation of more states and local government areas has led to an expansion in the domain of salient identities but, at the same time, there has been a concentration of contestations and conflicts around local issues. This has provided the impetus for the sharpening of communal identities and conflicts, which have manifested in conflicts between "indigenes" and "non-indigenes", "sons-of-the-soil" and "migrants", and "settlers" and "non-settlers". The resultant system of discriminatory citizenship has deep historical



roots as we shall analyze below, however, the phenomenal rise of communal conflicts beginning from the 1990s can be partly attributed to: shrinking state resources and the attendant recourse by groups to communal resources on the one hand; and, on the other hand, to a number of state policies, interventions, and omissions, including the neglect and abuse of police and security bodies, that are supportive of discriminatory practices. Those who profess their love for democracy have always been afraid of plurality (Ihonvbere, 1995).

This is one of reasons why the ancient Greek, “inventors” of democracy, excluded the “weaker” sex and the “barbarian” race from political participation. This antipathy for plurality was carried over into the “age of liberty” as evidenced by the belated extension of suffrage in liberal democracies. J.S. Mills voiced this concern when he argued that democracy would not survive in a plural society (cited in Bratton, 2007). These fears trailed most of the plural African countries at the eve of independence as some countries adopted one-party systems in order to preserve democracy and build the nation.

Nigeria is one of the few African countries that retained a multi-party structure, even though *de facto* one party rule persisted in the regions and states. In the wake of “the resurgence of democracy” from the mid-1980s, several analysts warned that democratization would ignite ethnic conflicts (Tamuno, 1995; and Falola & Okpeh Jr., 2008:24-25). This warning came at a period when scholars and renascent civil society were advertising democracy as a liberator from dictatorship and violent conflict. Some analysts referred specifically to the fact that liberal democracy, which privileged individual rights and disregarded group rights, was not suitable for the African context where group rights are emphasized (Tamuno, 1995; Ihonvbere, 1996; and Falola & Okpeh Jr., 2008). Thus, some efforts were made to assuage the fears of impending doom.

Far from being prone to generating ethnic conflict, democratization is actually an antidote to those

things, which promote ethnic identity and what passes for ethnic conflicts in Africa. What are these causes? The most important is the character of the post-colonial state in Africa [...] its power over economy and society is enormous, arbitrary and it is largely privatised. For all, but a few of its citizens, it is alien and remote, uncaring, and oppressive [...] many of them have turned away from the state and given their loyalty to sub-national formations (Hammerstad, 2004).

As Emeka Ugwuoku (2012) argued that most of the conflicts that erupted in post-military period in Nigeria have been linked to the state in one form or the other. Since the state is regarded as an obstacle to democracy and ethnic harmony, it has become expedient for scholars to advocate significant state retrenchment. For instance, 'Okwudiba Nnoli has advocated the devolution:

(O)f state power from the centre to regions and divesting the state of its economic enterprises and holdings, and their privatization and/or commercialization. A great deal of ethnic conflict has emanated from the struggle over the location of these enterprises, recruitment of their personnel, and the use of their resources. This divestment would allow impersonal market forces to assume control of the allocation of resources of these enterprises. And it is clear from the Nigerian situation that whenever such market forces are in control, the distribution of the national cake follows the lines of relations of production (class) rather than ethnic lines (Nnoli, 1980:289).

It remains to be seen whether decentralization and economic liberalization will stem ethnicity. There are no studies of the incidence of ethnicity in the private sector though it is common knowledge that decentralization, through the creation of states and local government councils, has generated ethnic conflicts in some parts of the country. Clearly, there is need to investigate the impact of decentralization and economic liberalization on ethnicity as recent conflicts in the country have been triggered by issues of representation, chiefdoms, and access to jobs, rents, and markets at the local level. Existing studies have looked at these issues holistically.

In order to get a sharper picture, it is important to look at different aspects of liberalization. In this regard, one area that

might be illuminating is the study of the impact of the deregulation of wages, which led to a marked increase in wages in some sectors, on inter-ethnic relations. The need for such a study is underlined by the fact that the resurgence of ethnic conflicts since the mid 1980s coincides with the introduction of the policy, which offered lucrative emoluments to workers in the federal public service and the oil sector among others. There are strong indications that perceptions of horizontal inequality and the resultant ethnic rivalry have centred on contestations over control of these lucrative sectors (Kataria, 2007:1-29).

Ethnic and religious identities in themselves do not create conflicts; it is the politicization of these identities. Such identities become problematic when access to opportunities in the political system, in terms of power and resources, are dependent on membership of a particular ethnic or religious group, as well as when the state is relatively weak in terms of its capacity to protect its citizens and provide for their basic needs (Birner, 2007:10).

The Nigerian experience, as it relates to ethnic and religious conflicts, has become a major phenomenon as politics is defined along ethnic and religious fault-lines. Drawing from our analysis of the role of the state and its institutions in the management of ethnic and religious diversity in Nigeria, it is obvious that the interests and goals that all the groups pursue are rooted in the quest for access to power and opportunities via patronage and clientilism, which can only be gotten through the use of the machineries of the state and in the process the privatization of violence as well as the manipulation and mobilization of ethnic and religious sentiments are often being used by the political elites. In the final analysis, genuine efforts should be made to focus on strengthening institutions rather than individuals. This is in line with the clarion call by the United States of America's President, Barak Obama, during his address to the Ghanaian Parliamentarians, that "*Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions*" (cited in Ugwuoku, 2012:11).

Nigeria's current travail is not unconnected with her extreme pluralism as a deeply divided society coupled with the manifest mismanagement of her federalism. The structure of the country's federalism from the outset, as observed by Gana, vitiated a primary requirement of functional federalism. It is obvious that the complexities of Nigeria can only be addressed by the practice of true federalism (Suberu, 2009). True federalism means devolution of powers and retention of very high percentages of revenue coming from the different states. The issue of national integration and nation-building should be given paramount consideration by government. There is the need to evolve a coherent policy and ideology of national integration and nation-building instead of the ad-hoc solutions to the problems confronting the Nigerian federation.

Nigeria has not been able to abide strictly by the constitutional provisions guiding the true practice of federalism as a result of the drift from one crisis to the other since independence. Also the constituent parts of Nigeria have not strictly adhered to the intrinsic principles of federalism in the relationship of the various tiers of government. The search for political stability has been long and tortuous; and the country is yet to find the map road to stability. The unrests and widespread disturbances in many parts of the federation are attributable to issues of fiscal federalism, ethno-religious matters, and related issues which must be thoroughly and critically examined within the context of federalism. Nigeria should aim at fashioning out a political culture that will downplay, if not totally eliminate feelings of mistrust, deep-seated animosity that exists among the various ethnic groups in the country, and also examine the issue of perceived domination of some sections by others.

One of the many ways of doing the above is to operate a political culture that will promote equal opportunities for all Nigerians. If the country must progress, Nigerians must cultivate progressive habits and take steps that would ensure sustainable socio-political and economic

development of the country (Bratton, 2007). There must be political will on the part of the citizenry, who must resolve to build a stable political environment. There is the need for political dialogue which should be made one of the greatest strength of the Nigerian federation. The citizens must promote and respect the mechanisms that enhances national consensus.

In other to overcome dismal performance of the Nigerian federation, which has led to the persistent crises due to the multi-ethnic nature of the country, is to drop the idea of federalism for a possible better confederacy. Though, the call for confederacy may be criticized in some quarters and if it is difficult to attain confederacy because of the gains of federalism which is enormous, it should continue with serious reforms (Austin, Fischer & Ropers, 2004:9-25). There is the urgent need of restructuring the country into a federation that will guarantee justice, fair play, and equity for all. Only federalism practiced in a true form could ensure that the above qualities are attained. It is only the true practice of federalism that will move the country along the envisaged path of progress.

The idea of state and local government creation should be discouraged and put on hold for now, the creation of states, and local government has led to ethnic violence in the past and exacerbated lingering ones. This is not condemning state and local government creation, but it must be pointed out that states and local government creation failed to solve the problems they are meant to solve. Ethnic conflict also arises out of political situation. The races to occupy public offices become do or die affair (Ihonvbere, 1996:3-33). Today, we still ethnic, sectional, or zonal backing of political aspirant from a particular sections of the country. This sort of backing are needed by these sectional or ethnic groups to push home the demands and in cases like this, ethnic violence could not be avoided (Tamuno, 1995).

## CONCLUSION

This study recommends that ethnic conflict should be addressed headlong by government in order to able to consolidate the gains of federalism. It is, therefore, vital for government to re-examine how best to constitute the Nigeria federation so as to endow it with justice, fair play, equal opportunities, objectivity and neutrality in the treating of vital issues relating to all the ethnic groups in the country. In doing this, the study believes that the country will attain greater heights and achieve greater future prospects. Democracy is based on tolerance not only with those who do agree with us, but also with those who don't agree with us. A world full of peace is not beyond human mind to achieve but it needs that conflicted parties should be ready to solve the past animosities and incompatibilities.

It is very pertinent to mention here that third world countries are in transitory period; it needs a time to come out from the transition and to reach prosperity. Therefore, saying that conflict in Nigeria could not be solved would be wrong but no conflict is unavoidable. Nigeria needs a true federal practicing, then every problem of ethnicity could be resolved. It is only true federalism which is the real guardian and protector of harmony, equity, and cooperation. It is the real balancer of power sharing approach among different identities and segments of diversified society.

National integrity and nation building process can be bolstered through the process of decentralization of power. A successful democracy needs do justice with all identities. Particularly with those who are downtrodden and disadvantaged sections in society, their conditions needs to be ameliorated only, then, democracy can work in a diversified country. There is need that some kind of autonomy should be provided them; it is the best way to control the urge of separatism and revolutions. Along with this, democracy needs peaceful tactics for the conflict resolution process, not military actions and force. State came into existence for the betterment and wellbeing of the people (Wallenstein, 1991).

There is the need for the country to encourage alignments based on national and collective interests, rather ethnic or sectional consideration. The government must realize the fact that the use of soldiers to quell violent ethnic or sectional crises is no longer fashionable in a democratic setting. There is the need for government and the people to come together and chart the way forward for country. The use of military personnel could only be tolerated in a complex, more sophisticated, and violent clashes. In a democratic setting, the sole responsibility of preventing and quelling violent clashes rests on the police. People accused the police of lapses in handling crises, this is due to the fact that majority of the policemen in the state were mainly indigenes and they naturally took sides with their kits and kins.

The government should bring to justice those who perpetuate violence in whatever name and for whatever reasons. If the government fails to punish those responsible for the inter-communal, religious, and ethnic conflicts in the Nigerian federation, they should realize that they are only paving way for further bloodshed in the country. Police and army should be used as the guardians of the people, not to create problems for people. Police reform is needed in diversified country. Malice is not a good option to be adopted, it will create only more animosities rather than cooperation and harmony.

Major democracies are based on the rule of law and protection of human rights that should be taken into consideration at the first level. Only true federalism and decentralization is a way forward to create balance and accommodation among different identities in Nigerian society. Nigeria needs good institution which could be successful in maintaining good governance. Therefore, dysfunctional political system reform and restructuring for maintaining social justice with all without any discrimination.

Democracy can be successful when the all identities will be given same opportunities and avenues for their growth and development. Ethnic animosity could be removed for giving due to every marginalized

identity. Dignity of people has to be respected only then political participation can be gained for the political development. A true federalism and true democracy can be used as a real panacea of ethnic conflict. In summation, it can be said that shaping and sharing of powers could be also better option for creating a peaceful and prosperous in Nigeria.

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