



Ethnicity, Religion and Governance in Africa: Analyzing the Nigerian Situation

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Abstract

The mix in politicization of ethnicity and religion especially among minority ethnic groups in response to skewed fragmentation/balkanization of the Nigerian state through creation of regions, states, local government councils, jobs and disbursement of appointment positions largely shape the 'how and what' of governance, character of politics and national integration in Nigeria. The central government became alien to units where access to government turned platform for religious and ethnic nationalism thereby occasioning the dawn of ethnicization and religionization of politics as a way of expressing enticement of politicians and public officers to ethnic or religious spaces. This paper thus traces the nexus between politicization of ethnicity and religion in relation to governance in Nigeria. It through the use of secondary sources of data observed that the embers of kinship and religious ties have continually paved way for political support thereby forming the major desiderata for political/resources mobilization and allocation in Nigeria. While recommending significant devolution and decentralization of powers to be preceded by a nationwide programme of moral and ethical revival aimed at promoting virtues of honesty, transparency, accountability and justice, the paper makes case for good governance along lines of best practices at all levels of government in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnicization, religionization, Governance challenges, Federalism and National Cohesion

Introduction

Social diversity in racial, ethnic, religious or economic nature is a prominent generator of political difference across plural societies (Thomson, 2016). It results in opposing interests divided by social fractures that create political competition. Perceptions and attachment to social diversities like ethnicity played critical role in fuelling the World War II at the global stage, similar sentiments mixed with religion in the 1990s divided the former state of Yugoslavia among the Balkans. On the African continent, the 1994 ethnic cleansing in Rwanda (Tutsi and Hutus), Apartheid in South Africa, massacre of the Igbos in the inglorious Nigeria-Biafra civil war are adept cases on focus. Tensions associated with social diversity are common across continents (developed and developing) but some countries have managed theirs better as can be seen in the United States of America and Modern Germany.

Unfortunately, political divisions in Africa follow ethno-linguistic, religious and regional lines. South Sudan's civil unrest is regularly described in Dinka-Nuer terms. In the Central African Republic, McCauley (2016) posits that power struggles morphed into fears of ethnic cleansing against the Muslim community. Most periodic civil unrests in Nigeria take on ethno-religious labels. Hence, Young (1993, p. 15) notes that in contemporary African politics, "religion joins ethnicity...as the earlier version of the state tends to fade."

Nevertheless, the adoption of federal system of government upon the emergence of the Nigerian state which obviously was informed by the necessity for autonomy and collaboration among the various groups that were merged under peculiar circumstances has continued to be irked upon several contending issues (Odubajo, 2011). The separate groups have continued to emphasize their identities, stressing their varied orientations, beliefs amongst other parochial ties along the persistence and subtle recruitment and deployment of religious or ethnic metaphors, sentiments and themes to advance political ends by the political elites in manners that have continued to define the politics and administration of Nigeria and its economic trappings (Kukah, 2017).

Undoubtedly however, in spite of the appropriateness of the federal system for Nigeria, political stakeholders are yet to properly apply the principles of federalism thereby occasioning untoward agitations in the forms of call for restructuring, feelings of marginalization, farmers-pastoral conflicts, insurgency and militancy in unprecedented proportions from widening centrifugal forces. Thence, the procedure and practice of federalism in Nigeria is not just faulty but skewed

in favour of group(s) whose natives man the affairs of the federal government at any points in time. Thus the management of relationships among the units and institutions working the supposed federal covenant remain tensed thereby weakening the capacity of the Nigerian state to provide the benefits of political stability, economic growth, development and socio-cultural harmony to the groups and the entire citizenry (Odubajo, 2011).

In that order, the inappropriate application of the principles of federalism is not unconnected with ethnicization and religionization in the 'how and what' of politics and administration of Nigeria which has created unparalleled mutual distrust among the groups making up the Nigerian state. This paper therefore examines the nexus between politicization of ethnicity and religion as threat to governance and national cohesion in Nigeria. It also sees the duo as the major contending parameters for appraising Nigerian national questions. It begins with clarification of conceptual and theoretical issues followed by discourse of the mix in the politicization of the key variables under study and capped with the concluding remarks cushioned with the dependable options for the Nigerian state.

Conceptual Clarifications

Like other plural societies, Nigeria has continued to contend with accommodating the variations presented by its political realities. It has 'no known citizen' since everyone traces his descent to his national (ethnic grouping) and sectional cleavages; nobody is a Nigerian: Okonkwo is an Igbo man while Musa is Hausa/Fulani, Dayo is Yoruba, Esien is Efik among others. Patriotism is sacrificed on the altar of politicized ethnicity and religion. The national government is alien and only works when one's tribal or denominational member is in office thereby making Nigeria a mere geographical expression as was accredited to Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Achebe, 1983).

Informed analysis of the Nigeria state, depicts a significant correlation amongst religious, ethnic and regional differences. Whereas northern Nigeria, which is dominated by the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups is predominantly Muslim with a sprinkle of Christians in such places as Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto (Zuru), Adamawa and the entire Middle-Belt; the Southern part presents a combination of dominant Christians in the south-east, south-south and a most likely higher number of Christians in the south-west (which parades pockets of some Muslim faithful in such places as Kwara, etc) thereby making the region a Christian dominated section of the state. Nigeria thus, tends to be polarized in ethnic and religious divides and orientation (Odubajo,

2011). Ethnicity has become so widespread that it in no small measures defines a lot of group affairs and relations at micro and macro levels in the Nigerian state. In all, Nigeria is multi-ethnic and the inter-play of ethno-religious factors pose centrifugal and daunting challenges to the corporate existence of Nigeria as a nation (Oladiran, 2013). The diversity in the Nigerian state is not just precarious but poorly managed thereby generating mutual mistrust and hatred leading to deep-rooted acrimony and tendencies for conflictual relationships. Even when mechanistic features present federalism as an ideal political system for plural societies, the mix of the politicization of ethnicity and religion in Nigerian government and politics creates a political situation that should be viewed from apt explications of the variables under investigation.

Politicization of Ethnicity and Ethnicization of Politics

As we already know, the existence of ethnic groupings in Africa is not a problem to most states but its attendant cum persistent adoption as primary bases for political mobilization and resources allocation has destabilized state and political development. Ethnic groups are sects and sections of the wider society that trace their common descent along language and other orientations which tend to grant members opportunities of coming together in conflictual situations in search of common ends that the centre fails to provide. Hence, Thomson (2016, p. 60) defines it as "a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language. In that order also, Calhoun (1997, p. 40) observes that "notions of ethnicity become pronounced and political when they are used to distinguish one social group from another within a specific territory". Hence, Salawu and Hassan (2011) argue that it is the phenomenon of negative ethnicism, which is rejective attitudes towards those regarded as outsiders that threatens nation-building.

The tendencies for cleavage attachment is inalienable and obtainable at all levels starting from the families to all other social formations in the society. Ethnicization defines the existence of internal cleavages, or hostility amongst members of an ethnic group or sect existing within a wider group (Obianyo, 2000). Thence, Nnoli (1978, p. 5) defines ethnicity as "a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups". He observes that the concept of ethnicity transcends beyond ethnocentrism while arguing that it is behavioural in form and conflictual in content, he avers that it is characterized by common

consciousness of being one in relation to the other relevant ethnic groups. The tendency to trace every conflictual relations in Africa along ethnic lines gives a primordialist explanation that tribes are left overs from pre-colonial Africa but consideration for ethnicity and other forms of social diversity are not unconnected with the challenges of the state in Africa (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2019). Taking a historical view of the concept of ethnicity, Joireman (2003, p. 9) holds that it is a term that is strongly contested but relates to nationalism with a benign manifestation of identity.

Furthermore, tracing the possible origin of ethnicity in Nigeria, Nnoli (1978, p. 97) avers that the contemporary ethnic phenomenon of Nigeria is not the result of the mere agglomeration of disparate linguistic and cultural groups. He contends that the thickening of ethnic identity is a colonial phenomenon initiated by the contradictions of the years of depression and the World-War II. The political economy dynamics of the colonial period, specifically between 1928 and 1948 gave vent to the ethnicization of Nigeria's socio-political environment. Undoubtedly, colonial rulers attempted moulding realities to their administrative requirements in Africa and classified communities into tribes for ease of administration on dubious historical and ethnological research (Thomson, 2016). Many Africans themselves willingly advanced on these new identities to further their political interests and those of their communities. These individuals benefited from becoming leaders of communities and gaining a degree of access to state institutions as well as the spoils that those positions unlocked. Under this circumstances, the emergent African leaders developed overriding interests in building the myth of tribe and advancing sentiments for group consciousness. To belong to a tribe enabled members to share the resources that their ethnic intermediaries extracted from the colonial authorities and vice versa.

Consequently, it could be surmised that ethnicity as an instrumental social construct for administrative and economic exigencies is a creation of the Whiteman and not a natural phenomena in sub-Saharan Africa. Yes, Africans identify with ethnic groups because it is in their interest to do so since cultural solidarity was a method of securing tangible political power and economic advantage. That points clearly at the rationale for ethnic groups being a form of minimum winning coalition large enough to secure benefits in the competition for spoils but

small enough to maximize the per capita value of these benefits (Bates, 1983). Hence, the rationale for this study.

What then is Ethnicization of Politics

Ethnicization is a process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a relationship, social practice, or group that did not identify itself as such (Omi and Howard, 1986). It is often borne out of the interaction of a group with another group that it dominates and ascribes identity for the purpose of continued domination. While it is often borne out of domination, the ethnicized group often gradually identifies with and even embraces the ascribed identity and thus becomes a self-ascribed ethnic group. For Penninx (1988) cited in Milikowski (2000), ethnicization is “a form of social organization based on (presumed) common descent, (elements of) culture, and symbols.” In a more direct and comprehensive postulation, Kukah (2017) avers that ethnicization deals with the persistence and subtle recruitment and deployment of ethnic clichés, metaphors, sentiments and themes to advance political ends by the political elites.

By and large, the foregoing descriptions indicate that ethnicization could be likened to a ploy by a group or sect of persons to woo and employ another person(s) who are members of their ethnic groups as instruments for the realization of certain aims through emphasis upon some cultural/parochial ties. It builds on a primordial sense of belongingness and kinship that sets the psychological and social scene for later comparisons and explanations. That aptly describes the character of the Nigerian political class who has continually manipulated and ceased all probable opportunities to incite, engage and fan embers of ethnicity in their politico-economic and social relations with other groups.

Virtually all African states are heterogeneous and as such have social cleavages that produce conflicting interests at most spheres of their inter group relationships. Thus each country presents different issues as the point of politico-economic and social mobilization. Nationalism, class, religion and ideology are rallying cries that gather individuals together, enabling them to make their political demands to the state (Thomson, 2016). In the end, ethnic identities reinforce the feeling of mutual suspicion and dominance that have characterized the Nigerian State till date.

Religious Bigotry and Religionization

Religion as aptly captured by Karl Marx is the opium of the people that when lacerated generates unimaginable level of consciousness and sentiments that see fanatics fighting without ascertaining the real cause of their action. Religion connotes socio-political, cultural and spiritual phenomenon with overriding influence in individual and community life of most members of the Nigeria population, and has been often suspected and accused of anti-social activities (Njoku & Njoku, 2013). According to Izah (2013), colonial policies deliberately promoted religious pluralism in Nigeria. While missionaries were actively encouraged to join the colonial powers in the “civilization” mission in southern Nigeria to establish churches and mission schools, their activities were severely restricted in Muslim northern Nigeria. As a result, the southern part of the country was generally more advanced in terms of Western education than the northern region. Be that as it may, Nigeria is a secular state as enshrined in Sections 10 and 38 of the 1999 Constitution.

Religious Bigotry Redefined

Religious bigotry refers to intolerance, fear, and hatred of those who profess and worship differently from ourselves. According to Njoku and Njoku (2013, p. 121-142) "intolerance is a blind refusal to understand and respect views or positions that are opposed to one's cherished views". Bigotry is almost universally considered wrong because it robs others of their rights as human beings through discrimination and persecution. It has devastating dimensions in Nigeria and defines elaborately the approach and character of most relationships amongst denominations. Thus, Olalekan (2017) succinctly posits that

When you hear Nigerians talk about the religious cause (Christianity or Islam) you will think that they are sanctimonious special breed whose main resolve on planet earth is to adore God/Allah. When you listen to Nigerians as they vow to die in defence of their faith (Christianity or Islam) you would be ashamed of yourself for being rebellious against the Almighty having had no fanatical zeal to defend his cause.

The above lines clearly describe the irredentism attached to religion amongst Nigerians while relating with citizens of other faith and denominations especially in lieu of value allocation and distribution. They tend to kill and destroy as if their God/Allah was impotent and not capable of fighting its cause. Thus, Ekechi (1972, p. 50-51) posits that denominational differences have often led to interdenominational crises and conflicts as a result of intolerance. Along that

pedestrian, Okoro (2008, p. 106) maintains that, religion is a contentious issue because where eternal salvation is at stake, compromise is difficult and may be considered sinful thereby paving way for religion to instigate conflict as a central part of many individuals identity, any threat to ones belief is considered a threat to ones very being. Therefore religious fanatics see human existence in the society as a struggle between the forces of good and evil.

To that extent, Iwe (2000, p. 20) posits that religious bigotry refers to

An irrational attitude to religion which leads the religionist to the practice of religion beyond the bounds of reason and therefore without moderation. Those who perpetuate intolerance in the practice of religion are fundamentalists and they come as sects and fashion out extreme literal myopic and selfish interpretation of their scriptures to justify or give credence to their radical and often violent religious activities.

Probably, it could be apt comprehension of those lines from Iwe that informed Edlyne (2004, p.23) perception of religion as a means to perpetuate violence, fueling of ethnic consciousness and solidarity, acquisition of political power, socio-economic gains, massive killings and the wanton destruction and vandalization of property of those considered infidels or who pay allegiance to other religions.

Politicization of Religion and Religionization of Politics

Freedom of worship and religion is an inherent human right and political virtue which is a fundamental prerequisite for the democratic and peaceful progress of human society (World Council of Churches, 2013). The contemporary world is witnessing a trend of politicization of religion. As religion is trendy and critical in politics and public life, politicization of religion and religionization of politics have become pervasive in Africa nay Nigeria. The trend is that politicization of religion adds to political polarization, hence the religious divide manifests itself in all spheres of the political system. When religion becomes a dividing force in the socio-economic and political arena, in its more intensive and durable form, it contributes to religious chasm (WCC, 2013). Choosing political allies with more radical positions allows a religion better to defend its interests in the political arena so as to win a privileged position and favours from the government.

Religionization of politics, destroys communal harmony and intensifies religious hatred which invariably leads politics to pander to the interests of religious groups and leaders who would like

to influence and control political power. Religion thus is being used as an effective instrument in elections, resources mobilization and allocation, employment and appointment selection and distribution thereby paving sustainable latitude for fanaticism and unjustifiable (in)actions amongst government personnel and the citizenry whose sentimentalities are lynched. The problems, by and large, persist in the assumption that political parties and associations/groups are successful if they invoke religious identity in their relations with other members of religious denominations. The strategies used by certain religious groups are to devise and carve roles for themselves in politics by way of invoking religious sentiments against other, minority religious groups. At the same time, they position themselves as true champions of their religion which is under threat from minority religions and their foreign affiliation. The attendant religionization of politics therefore engenders a situation where, relations between different religious communities are increasingly impacted by changes in local and national politics which have been largely reconfigured along particular religious lines. This trend also adds reasons for people of different religions to think in narrow terms of religious sentiments and consider that their religion is more prominent than others.

In that order, the introduction of party politics and Western type of democracy in essentially peasant societies with limited class differentiation meant that religious and ethnic differences formed the bases of 'we' and 'they' relationships as the political parties mobilized support in Nigeria (Izah, 2013). So the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was predominantly Hausa/Fulani cum Muslim while the duo of Action Group (AG) Yoruba and National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) predominantly Ibo were predominantly Christians. Rather than mobilize Nigerians to their cause as politicians upon independence, the emergent political elites mobilized their religious constituencies for a war against one another. Muslims believe that if they do not stand their grounds, non-Muslims would continue to subjugate them while non-Muslims on the other hand argue that the debate is not about Islam as a religion, it is largely a debate about the articulation and legal defence of the liberty of Nigerians to live under a secular, democratic Nigerian state. While non-Muslims argue that they need to be voted in so as to defend Christian territories from Islamic control, Muslims on the other hand see the support of their constituencies to arrest the threats to Islam posed by non-Muslims. With religion generating so much passion, the polarization of the nation has found full expression as the country is finally pitched as a battleground between Christians and Muslims.

Governance Challenges

According to the UNDP (1997) governance refers to the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. In a similar vein, the World Bank (1993) defines it "as the method through which power is exercised in the management of a country's political, economic and social resources for development. What is more, the UNDP cited in Waziri (2009) believes that, governance has three legs: economic, political and administrative. Economic governance includes decision-making processes that affect a country's economic activities and its relationships with other economies. It clearly has major implications for equity, poverty and quality of life. Political governance, on the other hand, is the process of decision-making to formulate policy for the common good of the citizenry (Chiamogu, 2017). Administrative governance describes the system of policy implementation. The poser therefore is to what extent has the authorities in Nigeria managed the affairs of the country along those panels enunciated by the UNDP and World Bank? What are the constraints to effective management of Nigeria's politico-economic and administrative affairs? Are there institutional or environmental challenges?

Glaringly however, successive governments and administrations have not effectively managed the affairs of the country and the parameters set by the two world bodies for measuring governance are far from being positively attained in Nigeria. Literature is awash with scholarship on governance (good, bad and poor) in Nigeria (Chiamogu & Okafor, 2014), but this paper views the challenges of governance from the microscope of the key variables in the study. The study is of the perception that leaderships and administrations fail due largely to ethnic and religious chauvinism in Nigeria. It observes that politicization of ethnicity and religion has occasioned ethnicization and religionization of politics and administration. Thus the duo of ethnicity and religion are the primary desiderata of government and politics. They sustain and promote corruption of all forms and facets in both private and public lives in Nigeria. The relationship among the various ethno-religious groups in Nigeria remains the fundamental issues in Nigeria's federalism. The ubiquitous nature of politicized ethnicization and religionization can be gleaned from its impact on every aspect of social, economic and political lives of the people. Party

politics and democratic regime compositions are shaped by the same characteristics which have perennially accentuated division, domination, bickering and tendencies for separation in the political system. Ethno-religious factors remain the major forces that contribute greatly to the socio-political instability in the country (Oladiran, 2013). The level of ethnic and religious consciousness has subdued political structures and power sharing approaches whether in the form of federalism or Unitarianism.

Theoretical Exposition

Viewing ethnicization and religionization as products of severe competition and rivalry amongst political elite groups for economic and socio-political resources, the study Problématique is anchored and explained in the context of the elite pluralist theory from where the negative aspects of ethnicization and religionization are analyzed.

Generally, classical pluralists posit that society is made up of several groups with interests which may be at variance indicating that there could be sectional interests in form of class, gender, religious and ethnic orientations. Where an individual pits his tent on any political matter is, therefore, a factor of all his many interests which may include class, religion and ethnicity. In apt realization of the major pitfalls in classical pluralism, Dahl (1982) cited in Cook (2011) conceded to the fact that equality and plurality are impossible in politics. Describing this emergent modification, Marsh (1985) created the theory of elite pluralism wherein he agreed with classical pluralists that there is “plurality” of power, but contended that this plurality is not “pure” as some people and groups have more powers than others. He further attributed this inequality to existence of the “elites” in the society; while referring to the elites as those people who have more powers, perhaps through money, inheritance or social tradition than others.

The foregoing situation is grossly being exploited by ethno-religious chauvinists in Nigerian government and politics. It further explains ethno-religious attachment to virtually all matters of inter-group relationships arising from an overdeveloped state that bears all socio-political and economic trappings that make it the highest employer of labour, bedrock for capital accumulation and the greatest source of transportation and distribution of values in our context. It is these onerous and multifarious resources at the display of the state that the elite struggle to control and in such struggle employ the instruments of ethnic and religious sentiments for

personal aggrandizement. This situation occasions violent competition, rivalry and drive to exterminate others in a zero-sum game of politicking and skewed governance.

Ethnicity and Religion: The Primary Contending Parameters of Politics and Administration in Nigeria

The history of Nigeria is best captured in ethnicity and religious biases. The elites have so exploited the two variables that division and violence arising therein have continually defined the character of all relationships in the country. Thus, Ismagilova (1996, p. 32) contends that “ethnic [and religious] consciousness is a fact of reality which cannot be ignored”. The colonial state in Africa pursued, propagated and enthroned a number of policies that prepared the ground for sectional conflict (Obianyo, 2000; Thomson, 2016). In that regards, Obianyo (1988) further contended that such policies like divide and rule, British pattern of development and urbanization in West Africa (by design or accident) resulted in ethnic, clan, regional and sectional consciousness and the consequent disunity among the peoples of the colonial Nigerian state. Clearly, colonialism and imperialism sowed seeds of discord and outright conflict between Christianity and Islam in Nigerian politics and administration thereby making national integration exceedingly difficult.

What is more, political perspective of nationalism leads to acute mobilization of ethnic, tribal, regional, religious and other sectional ties in pursuit of political power. As social diversity phenomena, ethnicity and religion have attracted enormous attention in socio-political relations in Nigeria with special reference to relationships amongst the numerous disparate ethnic groups making up the Nigerian state. Virtually all major national issues in Nigeria are cast in the mould of ethnicity and religion thereby giving rise to virulent ethnocentric and religionizing vituperation (Osai, 2006, p. 43). Thus, the quest for public office is seen from the perspective of promoting the socioeconomic gains of one's ethnic group against the others in an atmosphere of continual inter-ethnic contest for economic and political dominance. The end result of this is that patriotism has given way to parochialism or, at best, sectionalism, all in the name of ethnicity (Osai, 1997).

Buttressing the foregoing perspective further from the Augean of public service, Oronsanya (1984) aptly observes that authority figures apply ascriptive and particularistic values rather than universalistic criteria in recruitment, placement, redeployment, promotion and numerous political

patronages. Thus a Nigerian child seeking admission into a federal school be it a college or university; a graduate seeking employment in the public service; businessmen tendering for contract will fill a form which requires them to confess their tribe, state and local government area of origin, religion among other disintegrative forces thereby exacerbating the level of division.

Broadly speaking, party politics and electoral democracy in Nigeria has been characterized by ethnic based politics (Azeez, 2009; Oladiran, 2013). From the first through the second, third and this fourth republics, many political parties were formed and alliances made for the purpose of taking the control of the nation's power and resources along ethnic divides. In the first republic, the Action Group (AG) as a party led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo developed from a Yoruba Cultural Association, *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*; the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe was closely allied with the Igbo State Union while the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) developed from *Jamiyyah Arewa* group led by Sir Ahmadu Bello. Thus the leadership of the aforementioned political parties was along ethnic cleavages (Oladiran, 2013). During the first republic, there was no radical departure from those of the pre-colonial era. Hence, Ngele (2008, p. 177-190) observed that in the 1964 general elections the two main alliances for the election were Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) comprising the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and its client parties NNDP, NDC, MWDF, the other alliance was the United Progress Grand Alliance (UPGA) formed by the NCNC and AG, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). The alliances presented a North and South constellation of forces. The mainstay of the NNA was NPC whose motive was the consolidation of Northern hegemony. The UPGA on the other hand was a Southern coalition whose primary objective was to halt the hegemony.

Amidst re-enforcing the imperativeness of ethnic division against check measures in the 1979 constitution, political parties in the Second Republic could not achieve national outlook, even in their operations. The new political parties that were registered had their leadership replicated along ethnic lines as in the first republic: Chief Obafemi Awolowo retained the leadership of AG which metamorphosed into Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe controlled the Igbo speaking areas under Nigeria People's Party (NPP), which is an offshoot of the old NCNC. National Party of Nigeria (NPN) dominated the Hausa-Fulani areas; Peoples Redemption Party

(PRP) in Hausa speaking while Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) led by Ibrahim Waziri controlled the Kanuri speaking area.

Surprisingly, the third republic saw a different turn of events when Generals Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida and Sanni Abacha manipulated and steered the ship of transitions to civilian rule. General Babangida midwived the formation of two supposedly national parties that relatively enjoyed better national spread in the Social Democratic party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). However, the parties later degenerated into the norm with ethno-religious cleavages being visible in the membership and composition of the two parties. While the SDP favoured the southerners, NRC was a party for the Hausa-Fulani North as could be observed from their operation (Olaniran, 2013; Adamu, 2016).

In the current political dispensation of the Fourth Republic, ethnic orientation has grossly reared its ugly head. The All Nigeria's Peoples Party (ANPP), Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) are traceable to Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups respectively. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) are being perceived as to have deviated a bit from the usual ethno-religious dominated party politics of the past with their membership and formation cutting across the clime of Nigeria. However, in the 2015 general elections, ANPP merged with CPC and 3 other parties to form the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), which dominated politics in the North and South West geopolitical zones but was clearly rejected in the South East and South-South who were massively clung to PDP in an ethnically oriented form and content being that a candidate from the South was vying for the presidency. The merging of parties as well as re-alignment of forces in this regard cannot be divorced from either the contest for power or/and resources among the geopolitical zones. The political instability occasioned is borne out of who gets what, when and how.

What is more, it should therefore be noted that in sharply divided societies, like Nigeria where Islam and Christianity are in competition, ethnic sentiments are wielded and this invariably threatens the stability of the system (Oshewolo & Maren, 2015). Religion becomes a critical factor for political mobilization (Nolte, Danjibo & Oladeji, 2009). In that order, Mazrui (1996, p.198) notes that in those African countries, where Islam is in serious competition with Christianity and both are politicized, the two creeds become divisive rather than unifying,

thereby destabilizing rather than legitimizing state and political development. He further submits that where religion reinforces ethnic differences on regional variation, governments become less stable. The two Semitic religions in Nigeria Christianity and Islam reinforce regional and ethnic differences, and make political stability more difficult.

More so, it is observed that Islam was being practiced from the Sokoto Caliphate, the Borno empire, to the Yoruba land and down to the Atlantic coast of Lagos before colonialism. Christianity on the other hand came with the colonialists who were imperialist agents (Oshewolo & Maren, 2015). Before this period, all political activities were surrounded by the then African traditional religions. Chief priests were prominent chiefs and they wielded enormous powers. This implies that right from time immemorial politics has always been influenced by religion. Religious intolerance and violence pose perennial threat to peace and national cohesion in Nigeria. The *Maitatsine* religious riot which took place in Kano in 1980 (Okwueze, 2003), in Jimeta Yola in 1984, in Gombe, former Bauchi State in 1985 were ravaging before the dare destructive period of boko haram. Those were followed by religious disturbances in Ilorin in 1986, in Bauchi town in 1991, Kano (1991), Zango-Kataf (1992) and the shari'a riots in 2000 at some Northern states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Kano with reprisal attacks in South Eastern cities of Aba, Umuahia, Owerri and Onitsha (Anugwom & Oji, 2003, p. 9). No wonder, Ngele (2008) posits that religion in Nigeria functions as a means for the perpetration of violence, fuelling ethnic consciousness, and solidarity, acquisition of political power and socio-economic gains, massive killings and the wanton destruction of lives and vandalization of property.

What is more, prolonged military rule had its impact on the polity in several ways. Without political parties, religion became the major source of differentiation whereby political differences were seen through religious prism (Izah, 2013). In the transition to the Second Republic, Muslims saw an opportunity to voice their disapproval of Muslim's marginalization in the scheme of things and demanded the introduction of Sharia legal system in the country. A compromise was eventually arrived at after heated debate in the Constituent Assembly in 1978.

Religious issues took the centre stage again during the regime of Ibrahim Babangida who had declared himself President and sought legitimacy from Western media institutions. It is believed that Babangida encouraged the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). It was also this period that moves were made to restore diplomatic relations with Israel in order to woo

the support of the Western media dominated by Jews – CNN, New York Times, Washington Post and the Murdock expanding media empire. When Muslims protested at the support Christians gave to the move, Babangida equally led the country into becoming a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Thus, the manipulation of religion to attain a political goal really became an art of governance under the reign of Babangida. If a Muslim becomes a president or head of state, it becomes desirable that his deputy should be a Christian. IBB had Christian deputies in – Ebute Ukiwe and late Aikhomu, Alhaji Shehu Shagari during the Second Republic tried to re-enact the NPC/NCNC alliance through the formation of coalition government of NPN and NPP with Dr. Alex Ekwueme as his Vice President. As a matter religious bias, in contemporary Nigerian politics and administration, it is taken for granted that the president cannot come from the same religious background as his vice-president. The trend has been maintained till date. President Umaru Musa Yaradua had Goodluck Jonathan, Jonathan worked with Namadi Sambo and now President Buhari has Professor Osibanjo as their vice presidents.

Upon return to civilian administration in 1999, beginning with Zamfara, northern governors, one after another introduced Sharia legal system in protest against southern presidency. In the 2011 presidential election, twelve of the far northern states which are predominantly Muslim voted for Buhari while the predominantly Christian south/south and south-east massively voted for Jonathan. The North Central and South West had mixed results as well as mixed religious faith. The exception to this was Adamawa and Taraba who are in the North-East but have Christian majority population.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Critically, ethnicity and religion are the two most prominent social markers in sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that groups and leaders are engaged in perennial conflict. Both variables affect African political behavior independently and simultaneously because most Africans have both ethnic and religious identities which they consider critical in inter-group relationships. Glaringly, political leaders employ ethnicity and religion interchangeably as social identifiers in inter-group relationships. Virtually all problems militating against politics and governance in Nigeria are directly and or indirectly related to ethnicization and religionization of politics.

Political parties are formed along ethno-religious lines with the spoils of office distributed in that order.

All in all, the paper suggests a significant trimming of powers contained in the exclusive legislative list to grant the component units of the Nigerian federation sustainable leverage to be relatively autonomous and cooperative. It further advocates more inclusive governance approach that could allay the fears of the various groups along best practices that guarantee equality, justice and fairness in resources/value mobilization and allocation. It also calls for national value and ethical re-orientation to engender love and dedication to the Nigerian project.

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