



## **‘Ties that Bind and Differences that Divide’: Exploring the Resurgence of Ethno-Cultural Identity in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates the resurgence of ethno-cultural identity in contemporary Nigeria. The article shows that contestations associated with ethno-cultural identity are not recent, but date back to the creation of the modern state called Nigeria. The article also demonstrates how colonialism fostered various social, economic and political problems in Nigeria and highlights the manner in which the post-colonial political class has fed on the far-reaching effects of colonialism to complicate intergroup relations in the country. The study reveals that Nigeria’s return to civil rule on 29 May 1999, opened the space for the political class to exploit the resurgence of ethnicity and religion in a way capable of jeopardising the corporate existence of the country, especially in the current phase of democratisation. In conclusion, it proffers possible recommendations towards ameliorating the enormous challenges arising from the mismanagement of ethno-cultural identity in Nigeria.

### **Résumé**

Les identités ethnoculturelles au Nigeria continuent d’être une question hautement controversée à cette époque contemporaine. Ces identités qui ont gagné en puissance pendant l’ère coloniale, ont servi à exécuter la politique du « diviser pour régner ». Cette situation a plongé le Nigeria dans un dilemme social et politique dans l’ère postcoloniale. Après l’indépendance, précisément en 1966, le pays a basculé dans une guerre civile (1967-1970), qui a eu des effets dévastateurs sur les différents groupes ethniques et religieux au Nigeria. Après des décennies de régime militaire, la démocratie dont le retour date du 29 mai 1999, a ouvert la voie à la résurgence des anciens clivages ethniques et identités religieuses. Cette situation a exacerbé les différences au sein et hors des groupes et fertilisé les tendances à la violence et posé des défis

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ethnico-religieux de l'existence même du Nigeria. Cet article soutient que, la manipulation des identités de groupe par l'élite est la cause de la résurgence de l'ethnoculturalisme envahissant dans la phase actuelle de démocratisation au Nigeria. Cet article conclut que la confiance des gens est rétablie grâce à l'engagement sincère de la responsabilité, la probité et la réactivité de leurs préoccupations, quel que soit leur identité ethnoculturelle.

### Introduction: Framing the problem

Nigeria with so many ethnic, religious and sectional groups paints the picture of a potentially vulnerable society to conflicts.

– Shettima, Kashim, 'North as Hotbed for Conflicts', *National Trail Newspaper*, Monday 17-Sunday 23, December 2012, p. 56.

The real and lasting victories are those of peace, and not of war.

– Budha

The resurgence of old boundaries of ethnicity and religion has become a major challenge in many countries across the world. The situation in Africa is particularly alarming and it is ravaging the internal stability of many countries, especially in sub-saharan Africa. The enormity of ethnic and religious crises faced by Nigeria in the current phase of democratisation is the outcome of the elite's manipulation of ethnic and religious identity (Usman 1987). Ethnic and religious contestations have produced antagonistic social and political relationships among various ethno-cultural groups which have turned out violently in contemporary times in Nigeria. Suffice it to say, however, that the dynamics of ethnic and religious identity and the way they manifest violently is not peculiar to Nigeria, but is also evident internationally. Jega (1996:89) and Falola (2004) associate the problems of ethnicity and religion to the historical configuration of the country, the nature of the political class and the manner in which they struggle. It is also associated with the exclusionary nature of the politics of ethnic and religious identity among different groups in the country.

Democracy in Africa evolved out of the need to provide an environment for profitable intergroup relations in a society marked by ethnic plurality. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many democracies on the continent because those countries that have embraced it did so without the readiness to adhere to democratic principles. In most circumstances, the failure to respect and adhere to democratic principles is responsible for the crisis Africa is experiencing in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The missing link in Africa's democracy is that political elites have failed to appreciate that democracy is the outcome of the struggles by citizens for a better life, and that, it is the social contract

they entered into with the citizens that construed their elections unto the power rostrums. In this case, the citizens act indirectly through their elected representatives. The elected representatives, therefore are expected to be responsive and accountable to their respective constituencies and ultimately, to their own countries (Cattell and Sisson 1984; Osaghae 1992; Nnoli 1994; Ake 1994, 1996). Unfortunately, government failures characterised by horizontal and vertical inequalities in countries across Africa have produced 'democratic paralyses' (Chirot 1977:224). Democratic paralysis manifests in the form of grave consequences and emboldened sentimental ties along ethno-cultural identity to starve the state of the required loyalty (Ibrahim 1995; Ekeh 2004).

The return to democratic rule in Nigeria rekindled people's aspiration for improved standard of living, but their aspirations were soon suppressed by parochial ethno-cultural and religious identities. There are no words to adequately describe and demonstrate the ethno-cultural challenges to democracy in Africa in contemporary times. Currently, the continent is experiencing political challenges enhanced by institutional decay and horizontal inequalities among different ethno-cultural groups in various countries. The result of the recent Arab spring and other related conflicts in africa reflect critical democratic deficits (Cillier 2004).

In Nigeria, the rebirth of democracy opened the space for various dynamics of social and political crises in that various ethnic and religious militias emerged to seek for social and political space and relevance, individual and collective rights, as well as ethnic and social equality among others. This work explores the resurgence of ethno-cultural identity in Nigeria in a democratic environment. The work analyses the reasons for their resurgence and proliferation, and provides suggestions on how they can be positively managed and harnessed.

### **Ethnicity, Religion and Democracy**

Ethno-cultural resurgence is a product of ethnic group group relation, which is rooted in the dynamics of identity politics. Suffice it to say that ethno-cultural identity is a social construct designed by human communities to understand internal dynamics of social relations with other groups. Ethno-cultural group identity revolves around organised questions, discourse and movement of identities based on ethnic, religious, social, cultural and national characterisation of groups within a geographical boundary (Du Plessis 2001). The concern here is the ethnic group. Weber (1968:389) defined ethnic group as 'primarily, the political community ... that inspires the belief in common identity' (Giddens 1971). Accordingly, an ethnic group can be defined as

people who conceive of themselves as being of a kind, united by emotional bonds and concerned with the preservation of their type with few of them speaking divergent languages but largely sharing the same culture and tradition (Shibutani and Kwan 1965:47). These definitions are in tandem with Ake's (1993) definition of ethnic group, which is '...a descent-based group, a segmentary hierarchy with boundaries defined by standards of exclusion and inclusion which are objective and subjective'.

From Weber (1968) and Shibutani and Kwan's (1965) definitions, two observations can be made. The first is people's self-identification to one ethnic group or the other. The criteria for determining one's self-identification with a group include: (a) unique cultural traits such as language, clothing, and religious practices (b) a sense of community (c) a feeling of ethnocentrism (d) ascribed membership from birth, and (e) territoriality or the tendency to occupy a distinct geographical area by choice and/or for self-protection' (Kendall 2007:311-313; Du Plessis 2001). The second observation can be located within the given characteristics, cultural traits or outlooks which set an ethnic group apart from other ethnic groups. At this point, the individual and the group find expression within these identity traits to assert social, economic and political inclusion in the larger multi-ethnic society (Giddens 1971). Emphasis here is on the use of ethnic consciousness to define in-group and out-group relations (Osaghae 1994), and could be situated within the context of the culture of a people.

The former gives an objective view of an ethnic group as a group unified by shared cultural and traditional ties. This implies that, ethnic group is an 'object' because it possesses some primordial pedigree. The latter definition is a subjective view about ethnic group, because it sees it as an identity group, which creates ethnic consciousness and emotion to promote social, economic and political struggles for inclusion in the state. At this point, ethnic group has been transformed into 'ethnic group for itself' (Nnoli 2008). Ethnic group at this level becomes a subjective force because of the sentiments of loyalty and consciousness it generates among members of the same ethnic group.

Ethnicity here assumes the character of group identity. Identity, according to Agbu and Lenshie (2010:59), is a given characteristic which differentiates an individual or a group from others. It produces identity politics. Identity politics is a by-product of primordial sentiments and manipulations by the elite in a multi ethnic society. Ethnicity is a product of identity. The first is built on the concept of group politics while the latter is constructed on the basis of elite politics. At group level, Jega (2000) argues that identity goes beyond individuality and self-awareness to identification with and commitment to certain values and belief systems in a social construct. This could often lead to group demand for recognition and inclusion in the state based politics

or even demand for self-government. Nnoli (1978) cited in Sithole (1994:152-165) points out that ethnicity exists only within a political society consisting of diverse ethnic groups; it is characterised by a common consciousness of belonging to one in relation to other relevant groups. It tends to be exclusive, and is often characterised by social relations, which tend to accept or reject one's identification or belonging based on linguistic-cultural grounds, and lastly, it is often characterised by conflicting relations.

From the foregoing, it implies that ethnicity reinforces ethno-cultural sentiment and tends to create the tendency for conflict generation and relations. Ethno-cultural sentiments may be 'ethnocentric' when it is attitudinally expressed (Nnoli 2008). It may also be destructive when it transforms into instrument necessitating intergroup competition for resources (Nnoli 1994:21). In plural societies, ethnic identity formations inform the struggle by both dominant and oppressed groups for greater autonomy, protection of rights and inclusion in the statecraft (Osunubi and Osunubi 2006:104).

Osaghae (1994:135-151) concurred that ethnicity is usually intense in countries where groups are many, and have unequal sizes, especially where they are unequally developed. In countries, namely Nigeria and Uganda, where groups have unequal sizes and access to resources and power, because of the recursive nature of regional, religious, class and ethnic forces make ethnicity intense. These forces stimulate, articulate and direct ethnic feelings against the state and its ramification for failure to provide the people with equitable means of livelihood. This means that the tense nature of ethnicity in divided countries like Nigeria produces 'ethnocentrism' or 'ethnic nationalism' which supersede national identity (Osaghae 1986; Jorklund 1987; Snyder 1993:12; Ekeh 2004:23).

Bangura (2006) buttresses the reasons for the manifestation of ethnocentrism when he stated that:

'ethnicity affects the identities of states, access to institutions, and the confidence different sections of society may have in government. Inequalities arising from the structure of opportunities and the way the public sector is governed are often a source of tension as individuals use group solidarity to maintain or alter advantages'. This means that ethnicity has the tendencies of creating ethnic animosity and conflicts. Ake (1993) cited Lancaster (1991:158) to corroborate that 'the conflicts, even violently could erupt should ethnicity become a dominant or leading factor in the struggle for power....'

Apart from ethnicity, religion is also a uniting force and a disintegrating force among and between groups of people. Cosmologically, religion is an integral part of one's ethnic identification. It is equally distinctive from ethnicity. Ethnicity deals with the aspect of material culture, religion deals with spiritual

culture. Religion is a powerful force which constantly negotiates vertical and horizontal relationships in the society. The vertical relationship is the personal/private domain of people. It is transcendental, and hence it relates to the spiritual and supernatural, which naturally guides people and control their actions and inactions (Lenshie and Johnson 2012).

Horizontally, religion is concerned with relationship between humans. It is an integral aspect of ethnicity which directs and redirects human social relations.

According to Emile Durkheim, religion is 'a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community' (Otile and Ogionwo 2006). Religion, importantly, determines intergroup relations and creates in-group and out-group phenomenon among religious adherents. In the process of intergroup relations, religion often leads to restiveness and violence.

Stephen (1999) cited Paul Gifford thus:

Religion provides definition, principles of judgement and criteria of perception. It offers reading of the world, of history, of justice and of ultimate truth. Religion limits or increases the conceptual tools available, or channels them, and withdraws certain issues from inquiry. It inculcates a particular way of perceiving, expressing and responding to reality. Religion can legitimize new aspirations, new relations and a new social order. Every religion involves struggles to conquer, monopolize or transform the systemic structures which order reality.

From the foregoing, we may infer that, as religion builds internal solidarity within a group of adherents, it generates the tendency of legitimising evil through the use of both transcendental and mundane myths to assert their religious world views above other religions. It can also increase the tendency of intolerance and aggressiveness and the willingness to use violence against opposing religion(s) (Haynes 1999). It is these tendencies that give birth to the rise of fundamentalism, which according to Nsirim-Worlu (2009) is an element of the superstructure influenced by the substructure. Central to this influence is the role of the elites or the ruling class to construct an ideological expression of its outlook on the lives of the people in order to bring the masses under subservience.

Religion also finds appeal among groups of people who Karl Marx consider as subscribing to religion in order to pacify their suffering (Nsirim-Worlu 2009). Religion, therefore, can be summed up as a weapon employed by the elites, both governing and non-governing elites, to control and direct political, economic and social actions. Often, these actions are influential,

confrontational and/or violent in nature. The myth use is the invocation of consciousness among a religious group to perceive adherents of other religions as infidels who should not be tolerated. The non-permissive approach religion has to prevent coexistence of adherents within the same geopolitical region is at the root of ethno-cultural conflicts across the world, particularly in developing countries in Africa and the Middle East. In most cases, the problems motivating conflicts are usually political but often they find expression in religious interpretations. Religion is always used to create the dividing line of intergroup relations (Lenshie and Johnson 2012).

Reflecting on the multicultural nature of most countries around the world, the situation reveals that the only system in modern times which guarantees and celebrates pluralism is democracy. Democracy is a system of government that socially empowers the people. It is driven by the people and for the people (Chatuverdi 2006:82). It has the capacity to allow widespread participation of citizens in statecraft through the competition and co-operation of their elected representatives (Ake 1996). When government fails in the task of governance, the tendency for ethno-cultural resurgence of identity becomes imminent.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 ushered in the era of western cultural hegemony accompanied by widespread democracy across the world (Huntington 1996b). For Diamond and Plattner (1996), it was an era of global resurgence to democracy. On the contrary, for Huntington (1996b) it was going to usher in the era of clash of civilisation and the remaking of the new world order. Huntington's thesis points to ethnicity, and most importantly, religion, as decisive factors in intergroup relations across the world in the post-Cold War era. With global resurgence to democracy, particularly across Africa countries opened the space for political pluralism, a process that produced the environment for competitive political interactions and social relations which underpinned intergovernmental relations vis-à-vis ethno-cultural group interests within the political system.

There is no doubt that ethno-cultural resurgence of identity today is provoked by the struggles for self-preservation and survival in the new world order. Ethno-cultural resurgence of identity throughout Africa can be traced to the emergence of political tribalism. Political tribalism can be conceived as a practice constructed not on the basis of tribal grouping or ethnic identity but politics (Kerr 1997). It informs the practice that tends to exalt one's ethnic identity not for itself but to achieve certain goals or objectives in the political bargaining process within the state. Achieving the objectives for which political tribalism is motivated, certain nexus of identity affinities such as common historical past, race, religion, culture, territory, whether actual or perceived have to be aggravated.

Political tribalism also involves some clandestine practices such as hostility, confrontation, domination, suppression, exclusion and xenophobia, used as means of protecting, projecting and expanding the space of one's ethno-cultural identity. Political tribalism demands unwavering support for a political party by persons within a tribal area or they are made to suffer the consequences for failing to support the party. Political tribalism is the antithesis of constitutional democracy, with its freedom of association and incidentally, the right of the citizen at will to join or support the party of choice (Kerr 1997). Bujra's (2002) comparative analogy of the dynamics of conflicts of some selected countries in Africa reveals that ethno-cultural identity is a major tool used by politicians to aggravate and mobilise ordinary people – ethnic and/or religious groups to kill and be killed.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

This paper adopts group and elite theories to approach and analyse the resurgence of ethno-cultural identity in Nigeria. The rationale for choosing these theories is informed by the dynamics of ethno-cultural resurgence of identity in Nigeria, on the one hand, as a function of '...a complex process of group bargaining and interaction that ensures that the views and interests of a large number of groups are taken into account' (Heywood 2007:297), and on the other, as the elites constitute the central force that motivates, negotiates, directs and channels group behaviour towards achieving socio-economic and political goals in any plural society (Varma 1975). The group theory originated from Arthur (Heywood 2007:297). Some notable group theorists include Robert Dahl, Grant McConnell, Theodora Lewi and Oran Young among others. Fundamental to group theory is that, group reflects on the political and social dynamics of democracy, which inherently is characterised by ethnic and religious pluralism.

Bentley defines group as 'a certain portion of the men[women] of a society, taken, however, not as a physical mass cut off from other masses of men[women], but as a mass [of] activity, which does not preclude the men[women] who participate in it from participating likewise in many other group activities' (Varma 1975:162-163). In his discourse of group asymmetry, Horowitz argued that: 'Group claims are not equal. Some groups seek domination, not the mere avoidance of it. Some seek to exclude others from the polity although, and some seek merely to be included on equal terms'.

It is these interrelated but also separate claims that give room for conflicting relations, which is because 'political inclusion and exclusion have an area of mutual incompatibility' (Horowitz 1985:196). Accordingly, Horowitz further buttressed that the intensity of group conflicts is dependent on the strength of group claims, for example, to both tangible and intangible resources within

the state. In making its claims, a group does not necessarily seek for absolute value but a value determined by the extent to which it reduces another group's share (Horowitz 1985:196). The claims could be ethnically or religiously driven, but central to all, is that the '...claims to priority or exclusion are supported by appeals to moral principles, invoked to justify departures from strict equality' (Horowitz 1985:201). To the extent to which it takes this form, as it is in Nigeria, there are always forces actively pushing for such claims. This is because group relations in every society are constructed ostensibly based on ethnic blocs and religious blocs, to pursue common or variegated interests which are often confrontational, conflicting and eventually, end in violence.

In Nigeria, the problem with ethno-cultural resurgence lies between group claims to dominion and equality. It becomes conflicting when group demands transverse issues of resources, power and security, or when there are mutual fears of domination of a group by another within the same geo-polity. The activities of various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria can best be interpreted in this context. But, every group does not in any way emerge to pose challenges to the system without a rallying ideological base and those responsible for crusading and proselytising such ideological belief systems. This is because no group in itself can create any social action, that is capable of transcending into conflicts for itself, except mobilised by collective forces embedded in it. This force is one or more shared attitudes informed by certain affinities which they claim to make demands upon other groups (Varma 1975).

Often, in every group, whether ethnic, religious, political, economic or ideological, there are always a certain group within the group that create the bases for group solidarity and action. They are centrally the motivator of collective behaviour among group membership, directed at other groups to rectify these imbalances. This group are the elites. They are a small minority group, who by their status are leaders within the group. The concept of elites generates from the political thinking of theorists like Vilfredo Pareto, Roberto Michels, Gaetano Mosca and Ortega y Gasset among others. The elite are a minority group that possesses social and political power over the larger majority in the society. The majority consist of the masses, who, though have influence over the minorities but because of their gullibility, are incapable of self government. On the other hand, elites are successful people who rise to the top in every occupation and stratum of society (Varma 1975:144-145; Mahajan 1988). Pareto in his discourse on elites identified basically two types of elites belonging to higher stratum and the lower stratum of the society. At the higher stratum, these are the *governing elites* and the *non-governing elites*, whereas at the lower stratum are the *non-elites*. In the works of

Gaetano Mosca, elite is the class that rule no matter what form of government, and he referred to them as *oligarchy*. Outside this class lies the class that is ruled, which are the masses. For Roberto Michel, the oligarchs are predestined to rule the majority, who are predestined to submit to the dominion of a small minority. The oligarchs achieve this objective through the use of oratory power, persuasion, playing upon sentiments in order to fool the masses (Varma 1975; Mahajan 1988).

Varma (1975) cited C. Wright Mills as classifying the elites as follows: the political elites, religious elites, traditional elites, economic elites and the military elites. These elites must not necessarily be integrative, but have common objectives, each within the sphere of their operation. They have greater role in creating and determining the peaceful or conflicting engagements among various groups in the society. No matter what type of political system, whether religious theocratic state or democratic state or otherwise, they exist with various social and political dynamics, and pattern of primitive accumulation of resources, influence and power in the society does not change diametrically. What obtains in every society is the circling of elites. This takes the form of 'the old elites going out of being and the new elites coming into being' through recruitment and status progression, but before this is done, the old elites infest the new breed elites domineering ideals and objectives which they should pursue. In the process, intra-class struggle emerges and manifest virulently in the society. The ruled, in other words, the masses become victims of manipulation and channel their energies towards achieving some specific elitist goals. This is what constitutes the manipulation of the *mass mind* (Varma 1975; Mahajan 1988).

To understand the manifest dynamics of ethno-cultural resurgence in Nigeria, both the group and the elites must be understudied. The implication is that politics and governance in Nigeria cannot be understood from one standpoint, but through an integrated study of the various social forces within the Nigerian space. Both the elites and the masses are integrated within Nigeria, but their interests diverge at the moment of decision. At the activation of mass social action defined along ethnic and/or religious identities in Nigeria, the masses stand to suffer whereas the elite stands to gain from the creation of new opportunities derived from the mass action (Horowitz 1985:238). The various manifestations of virulence of identities in Nigeria, which largely are ethnic and religiously motivated and directed are in the real sense elitist struggles to rectify imbalance or set-off the balance in the society. The victims of their power game are the mass uneducated and gullible people, who, through transcendental and mundane mythology have come under mystification, and are used as expendables to satisfy elite interests and claims

in the competitive environment of the society. Some of the factors that become instrumental include group affinities, affiliations and solidarity, because without these, the elites igniting communitarian nationalism becomes difficult and as such will not achieve their purported objectives. The thrust here is to within this context study the trend in the virulence of ethno-cultural identity resurgence in Nigeria.

### **Evolution, Continuity and Change in the Trends of Ethno-Cultural Identity in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state which emerged from the rubbles of colonial domination, inhabited by people distinguished by geography, ethnic and cultural outlooks (Post and Vickers 1973). Nigeria, according to Akpan (1978), is 'an accidental foundation by Lugard', necessitated by European adventurism (Odojin 2003a). In Nigeria, colonialism started through a gradual process of trade monopoly and later, adopted military superiority, divide and rule system, and outright conquest of hitherto, independent ethnic communities (Osaghae 2002). Alavi (1972) posits that they were spontaneously conscripted and renegotiated into forming the current state call 'Nigeria'. This making brought ethnic groups in Nigeria into permanent socio-economic and political intercourse.

The colonialists in the task of colonial administration relied on local power structures to execute their colonising mission, since they could not do as their disposition would have permitted them. During the colonial and the post colonial era, various competing centres emerged to compete for political space at regional and national levels. In Nigeria, the three major ethnic groups, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, exploited this advantage to lord themselves over other ethnic nationalities (Ayohai 2010). It is the truism that ethnic nationality differences in Nigeria were manipulated so that the people would see one another as potential enemies and to prevent them from contesting colonial profligacy (Rodney 1972).

With these, the colonialists sustained the traditional institutions of some ethnic nationalities while destroying traditional institutions of other ethnic groups, or at best, ensuring that they were subservient (HSRC Review, 6(1), March, 2008). In this wise, some cultural structures, for example, Islamic institutions and practices in the northern Nigeria were allowed to flourish uninterrupted, whereas in southern Nigeria and the Middle-Belt areas, the cultures and traditions of people, who the colonialists christened as pagans were rendered barbaric. In no circumstance were they given cultural opportunity to flourish within the Nigerian space. Ekeh (1975:75) further buttressed this assertion thus:

Missionaries openly told Africans [Nigerians inclusive] that ancestors-worship was bad and they should cut themselves loose from their 'evil' past and embrace the present in the new symbolisms of christianity and western culture. Indeed, Africans were virtually told that the colonisers and missionaries came to save them, sometimes in spite of themselves, from their past.

During this period of colonisation, christian missionaries were allowed to christianise these areas identified above in the name of protecting the pagans from Islamic influence (Adebisi 1980). While doing that they created a head on collision between christianity and islam (Fafunwa 1974:100). Christianisation went side by side with the introduction of western education in the south, while the north was denied the privilege until 1922, when the Katsina College was established to build northern aristocratic intelligentsia (Sa'ad 1980; Ubah 1985; Kalu 1985; Osaghae 1998; Okwori 2003). In this vein, the colonialists created a double-fold problem of regional imbalances. They established tyranny of population in favour of northern Nigeria and educational headstand in favour of southern Nigeria (Odofin 2003a; Ikime 2006; Banigo 2008). Ekeh (1975:99) further argued that colonialism created two publics – the realm of primordial public, which largely is conditioned by ethno-cultural ties, and the civic public, which locates its value within the realm of westernisation. Within the primordial public, it further created dichotomy between the native (Africans, who are without western education) and the westernised (Africans, who have received western education).

Long after the colonialists departure, the elites due to their inability to figure out the future of governance in Nigeria, re-created the colonial strategy of 'divide and rule system' in which case, the Nigerian power elites relied on regional differences to galvanise support for their political organisation. Subsequently, the strategy threw the country into tumultuous confusion that culminated in a civil war. Afterwards, attempts to reconstruct the political and social infrastructures were never immune from some parochial considerations (Falola 2004). Owing to the growing frustration of adopting the colonial strategy of *divide and rule*, the Nigerian state settled for democratisation and multi-party system to integrate various interests, reminiscent of the United States of American model. This political experiment persisted but was infected by the virus of ethno-cultural identity resurgence. This malaise manifested in different forms, giving rise to first and foremost, all the political parties drawing support basically from ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The intensity of these identity differences ran-down the Second Republic, but insurgency became intensified with various ethnic and religious identity

groups such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the South-South, Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the south-east, Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and Afenifere in the south-west, The Middle-Belt Congress (MBC) in the north central and Arewa Consultative Forum and in the north among others, playing out to contest for social justice, human rights and participation with varied impacts on the corporate existence of the Nigerian state. The activities of the various identity groups threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria and eventually ushered in another period of military rule. The rebirth of democracy in 1999 to serve as a panacea to address these problems still leaves so much to be desired. These problems became heightened as the concept of rotational presidency emerged to legitimise and justify the identity criteria in our national ethos. Expectedly, the breach or brute-rape of this unconstitutional understanding provoked yet another round of identity politics, which basically is now playing out along ethnic and religious lines to some extent. The question is: could it be that democracy evolved on a wrong and feeble footing in Nigeria? This is where interrogating ethno-cultural resurgence of identity, understanding its foundation and the dynamics of such diversities and their complex social interconnections with violence in Nigeria is important.

### **Post-Colonialism, Ethno-Cultural Manipulation and Identity Resurgence**

The post-colonial character of ethnic and religious diversity in Nigeria finds sufficient reflection in Nwabueze's (1993) statement that, Africans were not under the same ethnic and cultural enclaves. They were traditional and primitive but the colonialists agglomerated them and imposed new states and systems that were both structurally and systemically different. This gave birth to the emergence of modern states in Africa which were directed at meeting new ends. At independence it led to the emergence of ethno-cultural gladiators to struggle for state power and accumulation of resources. The modern state soon became supervening, cabalistic and prebendal, in the process of elites class struggles and the manipulation and resurgence of ethno-cultural identity heightened (Jega 1996:96; Soyinka 2009; Joseph 1986). In this circumstance, the Nigerian experience was not an exception.

At independence, the Westminster model was imposed on Nigeria. The evolution of democracy was not organically developed from below rather it was constructed and constitutionally foisted on the Nigerian educated elites and the uneducated natives. Accordingly, the inability of the Nigerian political class to arrive at a consensus on the political system to adopt for Nigeria prompted the vertical adoption of the Westminster tailored after the country's

erstwhile colonialists. This systemic arrangement lends credence to various contestations and the rise of ethno-cultural identities which regionally was exploited to assert the elites' political influence over state power (Falola, 2004:159; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2006; Jega 1996). This was engendered because at independence, Nigerians were made to see themselves as divergent ethnic nationalities with different interests and competing centres of powers for easy manipulation and mobilisation of ethno-cultural identities. Recapping the circumstance, Olukoshi and Agbu (1996:77) argue that:

...by 1960 when Nigeria attained independence, it did so in a context in which there were influential and competing centres of power whose perception of one another and of national matters was increasingly coloured by ethnic, regional and religious considerations as the struggles for access to and control of resources intensified.

Affirming the above assertion, Ayam (2003) posits:

With independence, the pattern of party politics and participation did not alter the north-south divides. Rather, this pattern was reinforced by the few enlightened elites in whose interest it was to further polarise the regional, religious and political interest to the detriment of the ordinary Nigerian citizen.

This political character was manifested in their respective pre-independence party manifestoes. To buttress this point, Nnoli (1978) stated that:

...election manifestoes of the nationalist movements and parties led by these classes' show an overwhelming emphasis on relation of distribution rather than those of production and on the super structures of society such as the principles of social and political interaction rather than the infrastructure, the relation of production.

This explains why Nigeria is perceived as a colonial contrivance, which in the post-colonial era instead of generating the needed internal cohesion and solidarity, elevated ethno-cultural identities to the level of a monster. Ethno-cultural identities preceded national identity and it reflected in the organisation of various political parties of the First Republic and the Second Republic. For example, the Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo emerged from a pan-Yoruba association, the *Egbe Omo O'odua*, to promote and project their interests. In the north, the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) led by Sir Ahmadu Bello emerged from the *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa* (JMA) to enhance the competitiveness of the Aristocrats of Hausa-Fulani. To this end, as noble and nationalistic as the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) led by Sir Nnamdi Azikiwe was, it soon degenerated to a pan-Igbo political party to promote the interests of the Igbo people on the Nigerian political landscape.

The NPC in northern Nigeria however, emasculated the radical *lumpen proletariat* political party, the Northern Element People's Union (NEPU). They also contended with any form of opposition to their political hegemony by manipulating the 'one north, one people, irrespective of tribe and religion' philosophy to capture state power and to consolidate its usage (Kazah-Toure 2003:27-28). It is demonstrable that as from the 1959 election onward, the NPC had landslide victory both at the central and regional level. The process of governance in northern Nigeria was to the exclusion of NEPU from the power equation. At the national level, AG was excluded, and between NPC and NCNC, power frictions ensued.

In the western region, the northern led government carved out the Mid-western region but denied same to christian dominated Middle-Belt, which have clamoured for self-autonomy since the 1940s (Dudley 1982; Iwara 2004:19-36). The agitation by christians of minority ethnic groups of northern Nigeria was motivated by *Islamaphobia* of the Hausa-Fulani muslims, through the instrumentalities of the northernisation policy which favoured the muslims to the exclusion of the christians, who no matter their educational status or merit, were not allowed to attain the upper rungs of the native authority in northern Nigeria (Okwori 2003). According to Horowitz (1985), during the period northernisation policy was introduced in 1959, there were virtually insignificant numbers of northerners in the upper rungs of the civil service. By 1965 the number of northerners in the upper echelon of the civil service had outnumbered the number of expatriates and southerners respectively. Kukah (1993) revealed that in the early parts of national independence, the northern aristocrats established *Jama'atul Nasir Islam* (JNI) to champion the course of Islam. With the northernisation policy, Islam became a major factor for the attainment of social, economic and political privileges. To achieve this prospect, the resort to *islamisation* of northern Nigeria was subtly carried out through what Okwori (2003) referred to as 'economic jihad'.

It suffices to state that christians utilised internal solidarity to establish the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to counter virulent activities of the Hausa-Fulani muslims in northern Nigeria (Kukah 1993). The manner in which these religious umbrellas operated in Nigeria are to propagate and expand the teaching of Islam and christianity as well as developed based on the philosophy of Prophet Mohammed's Jihad and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even though, these personalities and their philosophies are entirely foreign to African and of course, Nigerians, within several periods employed communitarian nationalism as a tool to propagate their respective religious belief systems (Lenshie and Johnson 2012:43-53).

The various socio-political dynamic played out by the elites in the First Republic demonstrated that they were not concerned about the aspirations

of Nigerians. It could be recalled that the educated political class mobilised the uneducated majority of Nigerians and crystallised their consciousness towards political struggles for national independence, with the hope that national independence was going to transform into bumper political harvest of rights and freedom and social provisioning of means of livelihood (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2006). These political elites who emerged at independence jettisoned their aspirations. In fact, they were only concerned about capturing state power for primitive accumulation of resources. The post-colonial elites feeding on the colonial legacies of sectional fragmentation and confrontations, engaged in ethnic mobilisation expressed structurally in ethnic political parties to keep themselves in power (Anikpo 1985:45). Within this period, ethnic minorities in Nigeria intensified their struggles against perceived injustices meted out on them by ethnic majorities and this resulted to dozens of political violence and also led to military intervention of 1966 (Ademoyega 1981; Kurfi 1983).

The coup was perceived and misinterpreted as an Igbo coup motivated by pan-Igbo sentiment and nationalism, more so as General Thomas Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo and the most senior military officer became the Head of State. On assumption of office, he immediately suspended the constitution and announced the transfer of the public service to the federal government. These changes angered the north because they feared southern domination in the Nigerian civil service. On 29 July 1966, some young military officers of northern extraction staged a countercoup and assassinated him. Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Yakubu Gowon, as the Chief of Staff and the most Senior Military Officer of northern extraction assumed the office of the Head of State. Ordinarily, Brigadier Ogundipe, a Yoruba and the most senior military officer, was supposed to be the Head of State after the assassination of Gen. Ironsi, but the command hierarchy was not followed. Gowon was in Britain and therefore, was not prepared to assume power at the time of the counter coup. Logams (2004:725) argues that:

...late on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1966 after northern soldiers had forced Brigadier Ogundipe to resign and had taken a ship to England... Gowon finally made up his mind to assume the leadership of the nation and the Army in which the political nature of the soldiers he inherited was fundamental in shaping the decision on interests to preserve the federation of Nigeria

The failure to uphold the command hierarchy angered the late Lieutenant Colonel (and later, Major General) Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu against the Gowon led regime. The final stroke was public resentment, the declaration of the 'State of Biafra' and the civil war between 1967 and 1970 (Ademoyega 1981; Kurfi 1983).

The resentment of the late Lt. Col. Ojukwu was motivated by the failure of the 'military as a guarding angel of the state' to follow the laid down command hierarchy. With this he was cautioning against the military degenerating into an ethnic and religious institution. While he was insisting on the rules governing the military command, little did he realise that the Nigerian polity, including the military had already been politicised based on ethno-cultural identities. On the other hand, he was concerned about what he termed as *brutal annihilation of the Igbo race*, majority of them Christians resident in northern Nigeria and was calling for justice to take its course. He was seeking to foster a Nigeria where citizens will be treated on equal bases irrespective of ethnicity, religious affiliation, and other primordial identities. The inability to secure social and political justice, following the brutal annihilation of the Igbo in some northern states, namely, Kano, Kaduna and so on, motivated Biafran secession (Uwechue 1971; Jorre 1972). Events unfolding everyday in Nigeria point to Ojukwu's concern for Nigeria and Nigerians to live together in unity as a country. The polarisation of group identities along old ethnic and religious lines rather than creating a common sense of identity as Nigerians, explains why conflicts along these fault lines have persisted since the end of the civil war in 1970.

It is plausible to state that, Gowon assiduously worked to reintegrate the Igbo into Nigeria after the Civil War. Gowon's effort is presented by Poloma (2012) thus:

General Gowon declared a general amnesty to all Biafran troops which exonerated them from prosecution for treason and other war crimes and offences (no victor, no vanquished). Many soldiers who fought on the Biafran side were reabsorbed into the federal armed forces after the war. An opportunistic review of the career progression of few of the reabsorbed officers, which remains a matter of public record today... General Gowon's compassion, mercy and kindness were not limited to fighting soldiers alone. He undertook the resettlement of displaced persons and rebuilding physical facilities in the east. Ex-Biafran civil servants, who were in the public service at the regional level, were permitted to report to their new states for re-absorption, while those at the federal level were also eligible for re-absorption into the federal service if they so desired. Each returning civil servant in the east received salary advance as "mercy pay" along with three weeks leave to enable them settle down after the war.

Before Gowon could consolidate on the gains of *no victor and no vanquished*, Brigadier Murtala Mohammed led a palace coup and toppled the government. Apart from conventional reasons for toppling the Gowon's regime found in most extant literatures, there are three critical issues to rethink that era. These are: (a) the circumstance in which Gowon was invited to assume the

position as the Head of State. One cannot but admit that he was invited to assume the position of the Head of State, though a northerner and as a christian, the secessionist Biafrans were going to see and accept him as one of their own, (b) In case Nigeria lost the battle to reintegrate the secessionist Biafrans, as the Head of State he was going to be blamed. Invariably, to avoid this unforeseen tendency, he was going to recruit many within the central region to execute the civil war. Of course, this could explain why the bulk of the military recruit during the interwar period came from the middle-Belt of Nigeria, and lastly, (c) the inability of Gowon to keep to his promise of transition to democracy and to curb inflation was used as an excuse to topple his regime. The period of Gowon's rule was marred by civil war and rehabilitation programmes, therefore he needed more time to consolidate the process of governance, unfortunately, five years later, precisely in 1975, his government was toppled. Explaining the rationale for the Murtala Mohammed led coup, Logams (2004:723) stated that:

...when Gowon created states in Nigeria, Lt. Colonel Murtala Mohammed had lost the much of his support in the Army by the polarity of identities within the northern troops. This was largely so, because the Middle Belt officers and men in particular, were not prepared to countenance any challenge to the leadership of Gowon. Furthermore, many Middle Belt soldiers did not take it lightly when Murtala Mohammed unsuccessfully challenged the appointment of Joe Akahan, as Chief of Army Staff, seemingly based on the ideas that, since the Head of State and Supreme Commander of the Army, Gowon, came from the Middle Belt areas, the Chief of Staff, ought to come from soldiers from Islamic Society in the North.

This grief among other issues motivated Murtala Mohammed to stage a coup which ended the Gowon regime. The coup was interpreted by Gowon's kinsmen as an injustice done to a man who sacrificed to subjugate and reintegrate the Biafrans into the Nigerian federation. Gowon's kinsmen interpreted the coup as motivated by selfish interests of core northern Hausa-Fulani military elites, who although participated in the civil war, waited to take over power after successful execution of the war.

According to Logams (2004:722-724), before the Nigerian Civil War in the northern region, ethnic and religious differences had already ensued, even within the army. The much feared Hausa-Fulani domination had led to the identity construct such as the *Yan Gida* (Home people) or Dan Gida (Home son) and the *Yan Arewa* (sons of northern Nigeria) or Dan Arewa (northern son). This was for them necessary as they sought to differentiate people from the denied Middle Belt areas from the larger northern Nigeria dominated by the Hausa-Fulani. In the army, despite the fact that Gowon was not ignorant that he was from the embattled Middle Belt areas, he accepted

the identity of *Dan Arewa* in order to maintain internal solidarity within the northern dominated. After the civil war, the internal identity factor contributed to Gowon's overthrow. The same factor explains why Maj. Bukar Suka Dimka led the reactionary coup that led to the death of Gen. Murtala Mohammed. Like the Chukwuma Nzeogwu led coup which was interpreted as the *Igbo coup*, the Dimka led countercoup was interpreted as the *Plateau coup* but every other coups that were carried by the northern Hausa-Fulani were reported as national coups (Lenshie and Agbo 2010).

General Olusegun Obasanjo, who later assumed power, quickly ushered in a transition to civil rule. The transition brought in Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), as president of the second republic (1979-1983). The democratic regime was overthrown by Major General Muhammadu Buhari in a bloodless coup. The military intervention, according to Nzeribe (1985) was another hope betrayed. Kukah (1993:103) pointed that, the Shagari administration was marked by high level of corruption, mismanagement, ethnic and religious manipulation as well as political exclusion tailored against ethnic minorities in northern Nigeria. He also negotiated Nigeria's controversial membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). During the Democratic Transition in 1982-1983, party politics followed ethno-religious lines and the politicians behaved like 'dogs let loose for vandalism'. Corruption became a household name of the democratic regime (Joseph 1987; Soyinka 1994). These, among other activities, were marked evidence that Shagari administration was going to be toppled. Major General Muhammadu Buhari stepped in to stir up the treacherous waters by overthrowing the government. Microsoft Encarta Premium (2009) avers that:

Buhari's government enjoyed widespread public support for its condemnation of economic mismanagement, of government corruption, and of the rigged 1983 elections. This support waned, however, as the government adopted a rigid programme of economic austerity and instituted repressive policies that included a sweeping campaign against 'indiscipline,' a prohibition against discussing the country's political future, and the detention of journalists and others critical of the government.

Gen. Buhari's perceived high-handedness rendered his regime unpopular. This explains why he was toppled by Major Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. With Babangida in power, people's hope was rekindled but the government in power was full of political deceptions. The regime set up the Political Bureau to consider the possibility of the transition to democracy. After 15 days of intense deliberation and inclusive resolution that power should be transferred to a democratically elected president in 1990, the government jettisoned such proposal and came up with new strategies to guide the transition to democracy,

which was faltered after the June 12, 1993 election (Osaghae 1994; Diamond, Kirk-Green and Oyediran eds. 1997).

The transition plan provided for a series of elections, beginning with the local government election in late 1987, the state gubernatorial election in 1990, and lastly, concluding with the election of the president and federal legislature in 1992. During this period, two political parties were formed. These were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). He enlisted two of his friends, Chief Moshood Kolawale Abiola, a Yoruba and Alhaji Bashir Tofa, a Hausa-Fulani, both Muslims to contest on the platform of the respective political parties. Although, the transition programme was considered the most costly and longest in Nigeria's political history, most observers were of the view that it was free and fair. However, the transition ended in a fiasco as the election was annulled when it seemed apparent that Chief Moshood Abiola of the SDP was going to emerge winner. The action of the regime motivated violent protest in south-west Nigeria. Since both presidential candidates were Muslims, what played out in the crisis was regionalism. Islamic religious elites from northern Nigeria considered the failure of the transition as an act of God. To the contrary, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) insisted that the computation of figures of the election results be concluded and the results declared (Kukah 1993). For many Nigerians, the election was annulled because even though Abiola, was a muslim and a key player in the propagation of islam, he was not a Hausa-Fulani muslim from northern Nigeria (Aper 2008).

Some of the regime's economic policies also created a lot of tension. The government unilaterally decided to adopt the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The policy brought untold hardship to the populace. It further exacerbated ethno-cultural resurgence of identities and pro-democracy protest across the country (Ibrahim 2003; Agbu 1996; Olukoshi 1995; Jega 2000). Again, the regime fostered the bidding to conclude Nigeria's membership to the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). This development brought about mutual mistrust and suspicion. This promoted religious confrontations between christians and muslims in northern Nigeria, especially in states such as Kaduna, Katsina, Kano and Gombe States as a response to this unpopular decision. By way of contesting the continuous favours which northern elites enjoyed under the regime, several attempts were made to topple the government; famous among the coups was the Gideon Okar led coup in 1995 (Diamond, Kirk-Green and Oyediran, eds. 1997).

Constant opposition from both national and international civil society organisations, compelled Gen. Babangida to "step-aside" from power. While doing that, he instituted an interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan,

as a measure to diffuse the political agitation from the people, especially from south-west Nigeria. In spite of the effort by the interim government to institute a new transition programme, with election to take place in February 1994, it failed to secure acceptance from the civil and the military domain. Gen. Sani Abacha therefore took advantage of the crisis and took over power in a palace coup (Ibrahim 1995; Elaigwu 2005). Gen. Abacha announced his willingness to hand over to a democratically elected government without any delay. He lifted the ban on party politics and six political parties were established to that effect. Of the six political parties, five of them adopted him as their consensus candidate. Chief Bola Ige christened the five political parties as Abacha's 'five leprous fingers' (Agbo and Lenshie 2010). Abacha's transition programme attracted political agitation from various pro-democratic fronts domestically and internationally. With this situation the regime lost credibility before the Nigerian public, more so that standard of living had worsened as a result of the causal effect of Babangida's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the crisis of the post-12 June 1993 presidential election (Diamond, Kirk-Green and Oyediran eds. 1997; Agbo and Lenshie 2010).

To actualise his self-succession plan, Abacha employed state terrorism to haunt and crush every form of ethno-cultural resurgence. Ethno-cultural organisations such as the Movement for the Actualisation of the Survival of the Ogoni People (MASSOP), the Middle-Belt Forum, Eastern Mandate Union (EMU), and Western Consultative Group (WCG), the Northern Elders Forum (NEF), the Ndigbo Federation (NF), the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) were all crushed. The pro-democratic forces championing opposition to his plans were jailed to serve different terms, some of them were assassinated and some others escaped death and exiled themselves from Nigeria. Mustapha (2004) connectively argues that particularly the Igbo suffered the most under the Abacha's regime, on the ground that they rallied themselves solidly behind Abiola after the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election.

Abacha manipulated ethnic and religious identities to enhance his legitimacy and hold on to power. This was evident in his several appointments which were based on ethnic and religious sentiments to favour the north. In the same vein, Igbo were pitched against Yorubas, muslims against christians, and the minorities against the rest and so on (Kukah 1999:10). He also executed the environmental activist, Ken Saro Wiwa and several other Ogoni people, who protested lack of government responsiveness to the suffering of the people of Niger Delta and the role of the Multi National corporations (MNCS) in the area (Watts, Okonta and Kemedi 2004; Watts 2004; Ibeanu 2006; Watts 2011:68). During this period, corruption became a full-blown cancer

in Nigeria as both military and civil elites in close ties with the regime exploited the advantage to stash their ill-gotten wealth in foreign banks (Lenshie 2006).

These characteristics of the regime attracted international sanction, but it could not prevent the use of state apparatus for repression and violence against Nigerians. It created the legacy of mistrust among Nigerian people (Haider 2011). Like Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Abacha was the state, the people and the government. It was after his demise on 8 June 1998 that Nigeria was rescued from tyrannical rule. Several reasons were adduced to explain the cause of his death (Egwemi 2010:2-3) but Adepaju (2009) reported that Abacha died officially of heart attack. After his death, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, took over power and concluded the transition to democracy in 1999.

### **Military Exit and the Resurgence of Ethno-Cultural Identity**

The exit of the military in 1999 led to a new era of party politics. During the transition period, some political parties notably the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples' Party (APP), later All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) contested in the April, 1999 elections. On the surface, these political parties had the required national outlook as they had party structures at least in two-third states in Nigeria. In terms of ethnic and religious composition all the parties were somewhat regionally confined except PDP that drew its membership from across the country,

The APP had its stronghold in the Hausa-Fulani muslim dominated areas of northern Nigeria. APGA dominated south-east Nigeria reflecting the pan-Igbo identity and interests, while AD was established by the *Afenifere* or the *Egbe Omo Oodua* extractions from the south-west Nigeria with the Yoruba exercising dominance. Despite the nationalistic character of the PDP, the zoning system adopted for the party assigned power shift between the north and the south poles of the country. The northern Nigeria, although ethno-culturally diverse, was treated as ethnically and religiously monolithic, southern Nigerians were allowed to battle out their ethnic differences. Meanwhile, it appears that in the zoning arrangement, the Igbo of the south-east were left out of the presidential power zoning principle (Agbo and Lenshie 2010:63).

Notwithstanding, the transition to democracy was embraced by various ethnic nationalities. For the Igbo, it was an opportunity to enhance their competitiveness on the political terrain more importantly that at this time power was zoned to the south. The contest became vociferous between politicians of the Igbo and the Yoruba nationalities. Before now, the Yoruba had lost out from capturing state power due to the annulment of the June 12,

1993 presidential election. Therefore, the constant clamour for a Yoruba presidency by the pan-Yoruba identity organisation became a stake in the political calculus (Mustapha 2004:259). However, the inability of the Igbo and Yoruba to reach consensus, the contest was alternatively pushed to be determined at the PDP primaries. In the primaries, the political heavy weight of the south-east favoured Chief Alex Ekwueme, while in the south-west Chief Olusegun Obasanjo earned the political will of his people to vie for the presidency. On a general premise, the party primaries swing in favour of Chief Obasanjo as the party's Presidential candidate. To indicate the unity and conflict of opposite in southern Nigeria, Mustapha (2004:262) avers that:

...prolong military rule from 1983 ... accentuated Igbo feelings of marginalisation, and democratisation was welcomed as an antidote. Though Igbo politicians were disappointed by the PDP's failure to endorse Ekwueme's candidacy, they still threw their support behind his rival Obasanjo, garnering massive votes for him in the south-east in the 1999 election.

Nevertheless, APP entered into an alliance with AD and presented Chief Olu Falae as their consensus candidate. Unfortunately, he lost at the presidential polls. Even though the Yoruba could not vote for Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, his victory was conceived to the general will. The support Obasanjo had from the southern and northern Nigerians demonstrated this assertion of the 'unity in diversity'. For most part of the northern Nigeria, Obasanjo's election as president was seen as political compensation for the annulled June 12, 1993 presidential election (Mustapha 2004). During his first tenure (1999-2003), Obasanjo gave northern Nigeria an unalloyed consideration in the power sharing formula of his cabinets and resources distribution. After securing a second term (2003-2007), he shifted concentration to the southern Nigeria.

This generated complaints of marginalisation among elites of northern Nigeria extraction. It also heightened ethno-cultural consciousness within the old boundaries of ethnicities to demand for social justice and inclusive citizenship (Alubo 2003). Before the democratic government could be rooted, islamic social forces had begun to garner support within the country and internationally. It was not quite long the lingering Shariah issue that has been in existence since 1979 was reinforced in November, 2000 by Governor Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State. More so, he stated that development in any sense could only be achieved through the islamic perspective, which can only find expression in the application of the Shariah system (Kendhammer 2012). Following the declaration, most muslims scholars and statesmen like Sheik Ibrahim El Zak-Zaky, Ali Abdullah and Alhaji Lawal Danbazzau have cautioned that it was going to be a failure in a system that is from its very

foundation developed on secular philosophy of federalism (Mustapha 2004:270-271). The question is, was the Islamic Shariah system successful? Therefore, Suffices to state that the initial consideration, though not pronounced, envisaged the Shariah legal system would merely represent religious symbolism, which to the best of our mind is established ostensibly to serve the interests of the power elites without the promise of fundamental relief to the oppressed. Accordingly, the system was also going to be utilised as a vehicle in service of the powerful interests there are and a political strategy to galvanise supports for their ambitions (Mustapha 2004:270-271).

These assertions were proved to be true when Ahmed Yerima decided to contest in the 2007 presidential election. When he discovered that the atmosphere was dusty, he reversed and used the same platform to access his ticket to the Upper Chamber (the House of Senate) in the National Assembly. Through the instrumentalities of northern elites, the Shariah system extended into other northern states like Kaduna, Yobe, Kano, Jigawa, Borno, Gombe, and Bauchi States. In all these states identified, it created the social pandemonium that sometimes resulted into violent conflicts, which has led to the wanton destruction of lives and property. The institutionalisation of the Shariah was for the Muslims a protest against the perceived decline of Islam in Nigeria occasioned by Western imperialism. In this context, Mamdani (2002) argued that United States of America created 'political Islam' which developed on the fringe of political Christianity, political Hinduism and political Judaism. The political Islam was ensured through the creation of *Al-Qaeda* by the CIA to drive the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. Today, the American creation is standing in conscious opposition to American political and international interests. This motivated the so-called categorisation of 'Good Muslim' (Muslims that are pro-west and their ideology) and 'Bad Muslim' (Muslims that are countering their imperial hegemony) across the world (Mamdani 2002). This dynamic of political discourse is further buttressed by Mamdani (2005) thus:

Contemporary, modern political Islam developed as a response to colonialism. Colonialism posed a double challenge, that of foreign domination and of the need for internal reform to address weaknesses exposed by external aggression. Early political Islam grappled with such questions in an attempt to modernise and reform Islamic societies. Then, came Pakistani thinker Abu Ala Mawdudi, who placed political violence at the centre of political action, and Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb, who argued that it was necessary to distinguish between friends and enemies, for with friends you use reason and persuasion, but with enemies you use force. The terrorist tendency in political Islam is not a pre-modern carry over but a very modern development.

This explains why the confrontation of islam against the west and westernisation, or better still, westernisation and christianity as detailed in Huntington's (1996) discourse of '*Clash of Civilisation and the Remaking of the New World Order*'. Inherently, culture is an integral part of civilisation and religion is the driver of every culture and civilisation, that is why central to Huntington's discourse is religion as the hallmark of civilisation, and he argued that states will continue to remain the main actors in international relations, but religion will continue to play a role in the relationship to determine the nature of such interaction globally.

Huntington (1996b) suggests that the plethora of violent clashes around the world can be explained from the fact that civilisations around the world are competing for relevance, space and influence. This development will bring these civilisations into open confrontation and each civilisation is characterised fundamentally by religious philosophy. The clash among these civilisations will remain the feature of post Cold War conflicts with religion as central factor defining their interactions. Well, this argument seems plausible because the major global political security confrontation seems to occur between *Al-Qaeda* and its affiliate organisations (Mali's *Turegs*, Somalia's *Al-Shabab*, Palestinian *Taliban* and Nigeria's *Boko Haram* islamists), who are mostly muslims, and United States of America with her allies in western Europe. It is plausible therefore to state that if any Arab or islamic nation has expressed support to United of America, it is either so done on certain strategic exigencies or out of the pretext to achieve self preservation and survival.

Chronicling through historical lenses as from 1960 onward, the manipulation of ethno-cultural identities such as regionalism, ethnicity and religion became the mainstay in Nigeria. Religion as an identity construct started manifesting violently in 1980, and after the Cold War era, it became the most virulent determinant of intergroup relations. Within this period Nigeria was trapped in the Muhammadu Marwa led *Maitatsine*, a radical-extremist islamic revival movement which motivated upheavals across various states in northern Nigeria. In Kano, the *Maitatsine* crisis claimed the lives of over 700-1000 population, over 3000 were rendered homeless and property worth millions of Naira were destroyed. It later spread to Yola, the Capital city of the defunct Gongola State in 1984, where many people lost their lives and several properties destroyed. This marked the genesis of modern religious fundamentalism in Nigeria. It was the era that Nigerians began experiencing radical islamic movements across the northern Nigeria with catastrophic implications for muslims/christian relations (Isichei 1987:194-210, Elaigwu 2005:5-6, Tagowa and Garba 2007:244-242, Abimbola 2010:96-97).

The rebirth of democracy in Nigeria opened space for ethno-cultural identity resurgence among various groups – ethnic and religious or even other social forces, to challenge the corporate existence of Nigeria (Oputa Panel report 2005). Before this period, Bala Usman (1987) had earlier cautioned against the manipulation of religion, when he posed that systematic manipulation of religious sentiments by the elites for the purpose of capturing state power and primitive accumulations of capital was going to yield the foregoing deleterious experiences. He had protested that there was nothing opposing or supporting that the islamic fundamentalist should be fanatical about except for reasons of economic hardship and bad governance (Usman 1987). Beyond this era, particularly, similar experiences continued after the military exited from power in Nigeria.

During this period, several associations confederated to agitate against perceived insecurity to their lives and property in northern Nigeria. It must be stated that apart from the several ethno-religious violence in the states mentioned earlier, in Plateau State the violence was along indigene/settler question with religion greatly playing out in the conflict between native christians and muslims (Danfulani and Fwatshak 2002, Best 2007, Kazah-Toure 2011). Native christians in most areas where these typologies of conflicts have occurred have always engaged in reprisal attacks. The consequence of such resurgence gradually pushed the president, Chief Olusengun Obasanjo to *democratic dictatorship*.

To calm restiveness in many parts of the country, Obasanjo used the military might, for example, in Odi, a small village in Bayelsa State in November, 1999 and Zaki Biam, a small Tiv community in Benue State in 2000 over killing of 19 Soldiers suspected to have aided the Jukun in a tribal war (Alubo 2006). The government during this era continued to make use of state coercive apparatuses to counter ethnic and religious insurgencies. To explain the locus of religious conflicts in Nigeria, Tagowa and Garba (2007:245) explained thus:

This religious conflict can be understood within the framework of intolerance as imbedded in the scriptures of both christianity and islam. The islamic extremist, for instance, believe that they have the right to murder in order to achieve religious and political goals. This is the theological framework developed by the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qulb in 1950s (Tomek 2006). This is an extension of the traditional Islamic rules concerning apostasy. For example, the Shi'a Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khomeini was quoted in Taheri (1987:4) as saying: '... Islam says, kill them, put them to the sword and scatter... Islam says kill in the service of Allah those who may want to kill you...' Similar assertions are also common among christian leaders. For instance, Jerry Vines, a Pastor in Jacksonville, Florida, was quoted in Tomek (2000),

denouncing Prophet Mohammed (SAW) as a demon-possessed paedophile, even the Holy Bible is categorical about intolerance of their religions. Thus, Apostle Peter is quoted as devaluing all religious faiths other than his own by preaching that salvation is only available through Jesus Christ (see Act 4:10-12, 1 Corinthians 10:20-21, 2 Corinthians 6:14, The Holy Bible).

Corroborating Tagowa and Garba's assertions, Nnoli (2008) succinctly explained why sectarianism has manifested on an unprecedented scale in Nigeria thus:

Religious differences have a high potential for separating people from one another. Throughout history these differences have been the basis of tension, animosity and even war. Many times a certain fanaticism is associated with people of a different religion, or hampers mutual trust and confidence when such relations happen to exist. This is because religion tends to define what constitutes appropriate social behavior. When this definition is at cross purposes with another, normal relations become difficult.

This can further be seen in the manner the 2003 electoral process was carried out. Prior to 2003 electoral process, people began to regroup under various umbrellas of ethnicity and religious identities to mobilise their people to vote along these identities. Ethnic associations such as the Afenifere was out for the Yoruba people, the Arewa People's Congress (APC) and the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) for the Hausa-Fulani, the *Ohaneze Indi Igbo* (OII) for the Igbo and the Middle-Belt Forum and the Northern Indigenes Interest Council for the northern ethnic minorities. Similar associations such as the Niger Delta Forum (NDF), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Niger Delta Resistant Movement (NDRM), Movement for the Survival of the Izon Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND) were for the southern ethnic minorities (Alubo 2003:60, Bamidele 2012:34).

Politicking during this period also tore religious lines as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and *Jama'atul Nasir Islam* (JNI) mobilised followers to vote according to their respective religions. In the election, the incumbent president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, emerged victoriously. Before concluding the second term, the president attempted to meddle through his third term agenda but the plan failed (Ibrahim 2006:51). This prompted an unprepared democratic transition which brought Alhaji Musa Yar'adua as an elected president in 2007. The transition was not without political violence recorded in some parts of the country (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart 2010). The election was considered fraudulent and characterised by high level of rigging and manipulations. To break the circle of electoral violence given several contestations, Yar'adua acknowledged that the process was not credible but was willing to make future elections more credible. He inaugurated

Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais Committee on Electoral Reforms to work out modalities for future elections in a manner they would be credible (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart 2010).

Demonstrating the desire and commitment towards transforming Nigeria to meet vision one of the world's twenty economies by the year 2020, the government engaged the 'seven point agenda'. Several issues featured on the agenda but the Niger Delta situation required urgent attention. While the government was making effort to end the restiveness in the oil-rich region by declaring amnesty to the militants, in northern Nigeria the radical islamists, the *Boko Haram* emerged to threaten Nigeria sovereignty as a secular state (Bamidele 2012). In the process they demanded the abolition of western education and the establishment of islamic theocracy (Danjibo 2011, Abimbola 2010, and The International Institute for Strategic Studies 2011, Ajobola 2012). This also implies that they are anti-christianity. What is it that informs their rational? It is factual that Nigeria is a product of western colonisation. The democratic system it is experimenting is modelled after United State of America, and christianity is believed to be a part of western civilisation. Could it be that *Boko Haram* attacks on the state is viewed from this spectacle of western imperialism? Also, could it be that the attack of the Church is purported by claims that it is hobnobbing with the West? While these among other reasons may partly explain their restiveness, they do not justify their attacks on innocent citizens, mostly christians and muslims, who are victims of reprisals.

The *Boko Haram* sect sees Nigeria as a by-product of western imperialism and it antics promoted through christianity. Therefore, they consider the existence of the Nigeria as a secular state, permitting the operation of various religions and their philosophies as antithesis to islam. In this context, Abimbola (2010:103) argued that it is a core value of Islam never to allow other religion to coexist together. Islam does not separate the state from the religion, therefore, must be transformed into an islamic state formation by whatever means. This is because the secular-liberal state creates two domains, which Chatterjee (2010:32) presents thus:

In accordance with liberal ideology, the public was now distinguished from the domain of the private. The state was required to protect the inviolability of the private self in relation to other private selves. The legitimacy of the state in carrying out this function was to be guaranteed by indifference to concrete differences between private selves – differences, that is, of race, language, religion, class, caste, and so forth. The trouble was that the moral-intellectual leadership of the nationalist elite operated in a field constituted by a very different set of distinctions – those between the spiritual and the material, the inner and the outer, the essential and inessential. The contested field over which nationalism had proclaimed its sovereignty and where it had

imagined its true community was neither coexistent with non coincidental to the field constituted by the public/private distinction.

The above quotation creates a distinction between two worlds, the public/private, spiritual/material, inner/outer, and essential/inessential. This is thinkable within what Huntington (1996b:48) also refers to as transcendental and mundane. These domains are not in any sense co-existent; the former is situated within the realm of spiritual while the latter is situated within the realm of the temporal, and are in continuous and perpetual opposition to one another. In this context, communitarian nationalism finds roots because the spiritual and the material exist in diametrically different terrains. They differ in approaches to explaining social, political and economic issues as they unfold around them. Therefore, within this context it can be appreciated that what motivates violent conflicts and confrontations of the *Boko Haram* islamists in Nigeria is the different lenses with which world affairs are interpreted.

It should be pointed out handy that by description of poverty line in Nigeria, the north-central recorded 67 percent; the north-west recorded 71.1 percent and the north-east recorded 72.2 percent of people living below poverty line. This points out that the north-east zone from where the sect emerged is the most poverty stricken (Danjibo 2011), while Abimbola (2010) pointed that over 75 percent of the region are considered as being poor as against the 25 percent in the southern Nigeria. This is against the background that northern Nigeria has some of the richest people in Nigeria, who have used state patronage to attain opulence (Lenshie 2006). The so called muslims and christians few, usually the political elites, within the realm of the temporal or the material make use of state patronage to siphon public resources to the detriment of the majority poor. This explains that both poor muslims and poor christians are living within the same material condition, but muslims have often reacted restively to this circumstance as if they share the same material fate.

In this regard, what is it that informs the passivity of christians and the restiveness of the muslims? If both muslims and christians are living under the same material condition and the Nigeria state is the cause of their suffering, why has the Church and christians come under attack? The basic explanation can be situated within the premises of cultural and religious consciousness to which muslims and christians are inundated. As pointed earlier, Islam does not separate the realm of the spiritual from the material. Both constitute the integral parts of the Islamic theocratic culture and tradition which means in Nigeria, Islam and the Shariah should and must constitute core values of the people and not to permit its existence with the presence of a secular culture and tradition.

If this is the objective of Islamic theocracy, they should direct their grievances against the state, not any religious institution or adherents.

If the state should be their target, it again raises a pertinent question: what is a state? The concept, the 'state' is politically elusive. The state is defined as group of people resident within a geographical territory internationally recognised and accorded respect as independent sovereign entity. However, the state can best be described by its features which include: (a) geographical boundaries, (b) population, (c) government, and (d) sovereignty. From these features, what is the central target? Is the Nigerian population? Is the government and her institutions? Who then constitutes the government? The problem should not be seen as being the Nigerian population, who largely consist of the poor victims of brutality from within the state, and these are the elites. The elites are not a religious category but a small group of people who through their wealth have brought other people under subjection politically, economically, religiously, mentally and otherwise. Religious scholars and preachers, using both transcendental and mundane mythologies to incite people into warring against another should be their targets.

Unfortunately, their anger is directed against the Church and Christians, because of the wrong perceptions about Christianity as agents of western imperialism or Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere are hobnobbing with the West. However true it is, the Christians are also victims of imperialism and the state. In the same vein, the Christians have no reason to attack local Mosques and Muslims in reprisals, who, Christians perceive as agents of the Arab imperialism and Islam, promoting and projecting *Arabisation* in Nigeria. This is because they are living under the influence of pan-Arabism. This assertion, therefore, reflects what Professor Mahmood Mamdani would describe as 'radical political Islam', which he argued is not a development propagated by the *Ulamaa* (legal scholars), not even by the *Mulahs* or *Imams* (prayer leaders), but mainly the works of non-religious political intellectuals' (Mamdani 2005). Who are these non-religious political intellectuals? Could it be Americans as claimed? Islam created this logic of two worlds: *Dar-ul-Islam* (house of peace) and *Dar-ul-hart* (house of discord). Therefore, peace is comprehensible only in *Dar-ul-Islam*. Outside it is *Dar-ul-hart* where the infidel or the unbelievers are. These people need not to be tolerated until they confess Islam. But, those in *Dar-ul-hart* globally have no problem with other people they live with, and even those people/members of *Dar-ul-Islam*. Why should they be targeted? This demonstrates how this question is pertinent to understanding the resurgence of ethno-cultural identities in Nigeria.

### **The Post-Yar'adua's Era: Zoning Politics and the Resurgence of Ethno-Cultural Identity**

The period the late president Yar'adua took ill and later, announced death after protracted health condition created a lot of political debacles. Before now members representing various constituencies in the National Assembly contested that they wanted to be in the picture of the president health situation. Admits the power games that went on at the national level, the military were understudying the political scenario surrounding the contestations of president's health condition. The National Assembly in its wisdom under the leadership of Senator David Mark in 2010, created the allowance for the Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, to act in the capacity of the president to remedy the lacuna inherent in the constitution, which did not envisage the emergence of an acting president. After a hundred days in office, he inaugurated the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and designated it to Professor Attahiru Jega, a renowned Political Science scholar and former Vice Chancellor, Bayero University, Kano, to chair the commission.

The incumbent president later indicated interest to run the 2011 presidential election. This created serious controversy within the PDP. Northern elites in the party, dominantly Hausa-Fulani muslims, resorted to the party constitution to make claims for the retention of the presidential zoning in northern Nigeria. Within the northern Nigeria, some of them insisted that power should be retained in the north-west, the zone of the late president; some other politicians from the north-east within the premise of political marginalisation, countered the proposal and insisted that the region had had enough and should give room for others. The christian minorities in northern Nigeria also insisted that if northern Nigeria must retain the position, then the party candidate should be a christian. Somehow, the PDP zoning principle was shoved away and Goodluck Jonathan's candidature was endorsed within the party.

Abubakar (2010) was quick to caution ahead of the PDP debacle over zoning principle, thus:

If zoning is killed as being propagated, an Idoma man would never enter the Government House in Markudi. This would apply also to southern Kaduna, southern Borno, the non-Igala in Kogi state and those from such minorities' areas of various states. ...those championing its death are those whose areas can never produce a governor or council Chairman except through the application of its principle (Desert Herald, October-November 2010).

The assertion is quite correct because without the zoning principle or the power rotation, ethnic minorities or religious minority groups in Nigeria may not attain any political height or significance whether at the national, state or local government level. However, the adoption of the zoning principle in

some countries has proved not to be successful. Professor Eskor Toyo argued that the political rotational presidency could not save a federation like Yugoslavia (Toyo 2001:15). The structuring of states into ethno-federal arrangement could also not survive in the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Therefore, it suffices to state that the PDP zoning principle is inimical to the principle of federalism and democratic practice in Nigeria and it is not a yardstick to measure the survival of Nigeria as a country.

After defeating former Vice President Atiku Abubakar in the party primaries and also going on to win the April 2011 presidential election, the presidential candidate of Congress for Progressive Change, General Muhammadu Buhari, expressed his dissatisfaction with the manner in which the election was conducted and contested the result of the election, alleging large-scale rigging by Goodluck Jonathan's People's Democratic Party. Soon, the supporters of Buhari took to the street to unleash mayhem, destroying lives and property of innocent citizens. The *Boko Haram* islamists also reacted to the victory of President Goodluck Jonathan. Maiangwa and Uzodike (2012) stated that:

Following the declaration on 18 April 2011 of Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw christian from the Niger Delta region as the winner of Nigeria's presidential elections, there was a violent outburst in many northern states, reputedly masterminded by the supporters of General Muhammadu Buhari – the perennial and conservative presidential aspirant who served as Nigeria's military ruler between 31 December 1983 and 27 August 1985. While *Boko Haram*'s strategy pre-dated the 2011 general elections, the bitterness and peculiar handling of the electoral results (especially the presidential outcome) by many northern political elites aggravated (muslim-christian and north-south) tensions and, it seems, the *Boko Haram* menace. The net outcome was that *Boko Haram* cashed in on the political bitterness by directly attacking christians and destroying government structures in places like Kaduna, Kano, and Abuja.

During this period the *Boko Haram* islamists demanded the *islamisation* of Nigeria and its president (Abimbola 2010; Danjibo 2011). To send out a message of commitment to this task, the sect launched an attack on the national police headquarters in Abuja in June and on the UN compound in Abuja in August 2011 respectively.

Since August 2011 there have been almost weekly attacks in Nigeria's north-east by *Boko Haram* militants, planting bombs in public places or in churches. The group has also broadened its targets, away from direct revenge attacks on the state to include other representations of authority. This expansion includes setting fire to schools and attacking newspaper offices. In March 2012, some twelve public schools in Maiduguri were burned down during the night, with as many as 10,000 pupils forced out of school. Three

alleged members of *Boko Haram* were killed while trying to set fire to a school. The group has told journalists that these attacks are in retaliation for the arrests of a number of Islamic teachers from traditional *Tsangaya* Quranic schools in Maiduguri. They also declared war on the western education system in Nigeria. It could be recalled that in a 2009 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) interview, the founder of the sect, Mohammed Yusuf stated his disbelief in the concept of a 'spherical earth' and the Darwinian evolution theory and the concept of rain originating from water evaporated by the sun, on the grounds that these scientific evidences were mere claims and were not in tandem with Islamic teaching and should be rejected.

As observed by Rikowski (1990), Harvie (2006), McLaren (2005) and Cole (2007), the reaction of *Boko Haram* Islamists against western education could be interpreted in the context of 'politics of human resistance' to the failure of the neo-liberal system of education to provide for social inclusion, lifelong learning, higher education 'standard', or creativity in education for the development of the Nigerian society. However, should western education be abolished, what educational system will be adopted for Nigeria? If it is an Islamic system of education which the *Boko Haram* Sect is advocating, how possible would it be to have the country and the president Islamised? Could this not be a problem of culture or civilisation which people have adopted as life guiding principles?

This is where Gellner's (1983) contention associated with culture discourse finds expression. He argued that:

The role of culture is no longer to underscore and make visible and authoritative the structural differentiations within society (even if some of them persist, and even if, as may happen, a few new ones emerge); on the contrary, when on the occasion cultural differences do tie in with and reinforce status differences, this is held to be somewhat shameful for the society in question, and an index of partial failure of its education system. The task with which that system is entrusted is to turn out worthy, loyal and competent members of the total society whose occupancy of posts within it will not be hampered by factional loyalties to sub-groups within the total community; and if some parts of the education system, by default or from surreptitious design, actually produces internal cultural differences as something of a scandal.

From Gellner's (1983) assertions, culture is a sanctuary where right values or societal morality is upheld and if the society is trapped in a situation, like the one Nigeria is facing, it can be seen as a product of the failure of the educational system. The problem is not the liberal education system but it is about individual group quest for ethnic and religious hegemony in a multicultural diverse country like Nigeria. The quest of a multicultural society is to build a society where within the philosophy of meritocracy the individuals

are given what they deserve and this can be achieved within the context of democracy. Unfortunately, in Nigeria ethnic and religious chauvinists have hijacked the education system that is why it appears as if the liberal education has a problem. It must be pointed out that the arrowheads of the sect, particularly the founder, late Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf received Western education, in fact, he was a university graduate.

Could it be that it was the western education received or the culture which he imbibed that motivated the philosophy behind the *Boko Haram* establishment? Culture is the sum total of the ways life of a people, and for many people, it finds expression within the religious belief systems, therefore, it is pertinent to ask: can culture be divorced from religion? What then are the moral justifications of the insurgencies? In an interview with British Broadcasting Corporation, building on religio-cultural philosophy, while denouncing western education Yusuf stated 'his belief that the concept of a spherical Earth is contrary to islamic teaching and should be rejected, along with Darwinian evolution and the concept of rain originating from water evaporated by the sun' (*BBC News*, 28 July 2009).

Mamdani (2002:768) in his analogy of the relationship of common place mission between christianity and islam pointed to salient issues and likened the problematic to the United States, thus:

...Islam and christianity have in common a deeply messianic orientation, a sense of mission to civilise the world. Each is convinced that it possesses the sole truth, that the world beyond is a sea of ignorance that needs to be redeemed. In the modern age, this kind of conviction goes beyond the religious to the secular, beyond the domain of doctrine to that of politics, Yet even seemingly secular colonial notions such as that of a 'civilising mission' – or its more racialised version, 'the white man' burden' – or the 19<sup>th</sup>-century U.S, conviction of a 'manifest destiny' have deep religious roots.

From the foregoing, it must be appreciated that the pursuit of the United States of America as imperial and as claimed has deep religious roots. If it does, it is reasonable to question, which religious ideology the United State of America is promoting? Is it islam or christianity? Is not the language of capitalism, economic domination, promoted through international financial and industrial capital? Is the collision between the West and the rest not an international relation that can be explained within Huntington's (1996b) '*Clash of Civilization*' thesis? John Perkins, the author of the book titled: *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, who, in an interview with Amy Goodman of *Endtime News Digest* in March 2005, confessed that 'we were trained to build up the American empire – to create situations where as many resources as possible flow into this country, to our corporations, and our government...

This empire, unlike any other in the history of the world, has been built primarily through economic manipulation, through cheating, through fraud, through seducing people into our way of life, through the economic hit men'.

Perkins will wish that the Holy War which the muslims are carrying around the world should not be between islam and christianity, but be directed at the Developed Countries (DCs), the exploiter, rather than Less Developed Countries (LDCs), the exploited. Perkins (2004:50) argued that:

The concept of a worldwide holy war was a disturbing one, but the longer I contemplated it, the more convinced I became of its possibility. It seemed to me, however, that if this jihad were to occur it would be less about muslims versus christians than it would be about LDCs versus DCs, perhaps with muslims at the forefront. We in the DCs were the users of resources; those in the LDCs were the suppliers. It was the colonial mercantile system all over again, set up to make it easy for those with power and limited natural resources to exploit those with resources but no power.

The posers are, who are the developed countries and where can they be located? What indices can be used to know that a country is developed or less developed? Development scholars have not come to terms on specific indices with which development can be measured. Then, could China, Japan, and so forth, commonly known as Asian Tigers, be considered as DCs or LDCs? May be his choice of muslims at the forefront of the jihad against the DCs is informed by their consciousness of both religious and social forces operating around the world. Again, given the argument of the above speculated muslim leadership in the hypothetical global jihad, what philosophy will the revolutionary elites present as the rallying philosophy of the LDCs against the DCs? And what rallying philosophy would be implemented after the victory given the pluralism of the revolutionary movement within the context of a world divided along civilisation? Perkins assertions, therefore, amount to nothing, but wishful thinking, mere discourse of marketplace and an act of impossibility in a contemporary world.

In Africa, for example, there are reasons to attest to its lack of feasibility and impossibility. The continent is in a constant state of flux, it is in what Professor Ali Mazrui refers to as 'the triple heritage' that have helped to shape contemporary Africa: Africa's own rich inheritance, islamic culture, and the impact of western traditions and lifestyles' (Mazrui 1986). Accordingly, the coming together of the three civilisations in the continent produced the triple heritage because it reflects 'a wide variety of ideas and values drawn from different civilisations, all competing for the attention of potential African buyers' (Mazrui 1986).

These triple forces of indigenous culture, islam, and westernisation are in constant rivalry and seeking to dominate. Most policies, group actions and individual decisions in contemporary Africa are determined by this triple heritage. This means that the manifestations of various dynamics of conflicts and violence, whether ethnic or religious, find expression within the theoretical but practically demonstrable postulations. Buttressing practically the triple heritage discourse, Mazrui (1986) argued that the flux nature of the continent in this era of globalisation was ensured through the attempt to dislocate African belief system. He puts it simply thus:

What both types of African society have shared is nearness to nature. For centuries the continent has had abundant animal life and vegetation, and the indigenous religions have fused God, man and nature. Islam and western christianity have challenged this fusion. Man alone is supposed to have been created in the image of God – contrary to indigenous African beliefs in which the image of God takes many forms. Among God's creatures, only man – according to islam and western christianity – is close to sacredness, in possession of a soul, and destined for spiritual immortality. This is contrary to indigenous African religions, which allow other creatures to share in sacredness and sometimes endow mountains and springs with a holiness of their own.

From the foregoing, Mazrui (1986) posits that the Africans were in harmony with nature until the arrival of these religions that have played out to distant them from their belief systems. These cultures have rather caused more confusion rather than actually meeting their respective messianic orientation and mission of civilising the world. The trauma Africans are facing is the lack of exact direction to locate life-guiding principles. However, he pointed to Africa's triple heritage of indigenous, islamic and western forces, and argued that it can serve as a catalyst for growth and development when properly harnessed. Unfortunately, the interplay of these cultures has greater implications for intergroup relations at all layers of the society. In many situations, this has given rise to frustration, aggression, conflicts and violence in Africa.

This also explains that in virtually everything, invisible cultural hands of the triple heritage interplay in the process of societal relations, but with 'others' making assiduous efforts to counter it or over play one culture over the others. Here, indigenous culture is being suppressed by islam and christianity, though all have commonplace of purpose which is geared towards civilising the world, and are in constant confrontation. This also relates to what Huntington (1996b) explained in his '*Clash of Civilization*' thesis. The triple heritage makes Africa a confused continent and Nigeria a confused country, and of course, explains the virulence of conflicting religious and ethnic relations across the continent in recent times. Ethnicity and religion as essentials of ethno-cultural diversity in Africa and in Nigeria are not natural

but socially constructed phenomena geared towards specific or variegated objectives of a few people masquerading themselves as carriers and campaigners of universal opinions of a given community.

Recently, the Sultan of Sokoto Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, Mallam Adamu Ciroma, Chief Edwin Clark, the National Security Adviser (NSA), Col. Sambo Dasuki (rtd), northern governors and the *Ohaneze Indi Igbo* among other people and groups, called on the federal government to negotiate and grant the *Boko Haram* islamists amnesty as was done with the Niger Delta militants by the former president, the late Musa Yar'adu. Many people view the call for the amnesty to the radical islamists as the brain child of the Sultan of Sokoto (*Frontiers News*, Monday, 15 April 2013; Daniel 2013; Niyi 2013).

The Sultan's position on amnesty for the radical islamists, however elicited a negative reaction from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other christian clergies and adherents. In a communiqué, CAN disapproved the proposal, claiming that the Sutan goofed because *Boko Haram* presents a different case scenario from the experience of the Niger Delta militants, who were granted amnesty (Ifowodo 2013). This response is a reflection of the experiences of the christians, both indigenes and residents in the northern Nigeria which is captured in a data CAN presented to the United States Secretary of States, Hilary Clinton, to buttress why she must not visit Nigeria. The data reads thus:

Out of the 137 religious-motivated violent incidents we tracked, 88.3% were attacks on christians, 2.9% were attacks on muslims, attacks on security agents 4.4%, sectarian clashes 2.2% and extra-judicial killings were 2.1%. The US Terrorism report 2011 indicates a total of 136 terrorist attacks in Nigeria. It is inconceivable therefore that muslims were the primary victims of a jihadist group whose intent is to islamise Nigeria. This year 2012 alone, there have been 49 security incidences of which 80% have targeted christians (<http://news.naij.com/5117.html>, 9 August, 2012).

Also, President Goodluck Jonathan turned down the request for amnesty for Boko Haram claiming that you cannot grant amnesty to faceless people. The amnesty granted to the militants in the oil-rich Niger Delta region was possible because they presented themselves and engaged the federal government in negotiation. He stated thus:

You cannot declare amnesty for ghosts. *Boko Haram* still operates like ghosts. So, you can't talk about amnesty for *Boko Haram* now until you see the people you are discussing with. When you call the Niger Delta militants, they will come; but nobody has agreed that he is *Boko Haram*; no one has come forward. If amnesty can solve the situation, then, there is no problem. But, nobody has come forward to make himself visible (*Niger Reporter*, April 12, 2013).

Responding to pressure the president set up a 26 man committee to advise on the modalities and processes towards the amnesty exercise for *Boko Haram* islamists. This decision by the federal government was applauded by many Nigerians as a giant step towards ending restiveness in the country, particularly in the northern Nigeria (*Leadership Newspaper*, Wednesday, April 17, 2013). However the peace-making process has been rejected by the sect, (*BBC News 2013*) stating their strong commitment to their religious ideology and reprisals against the federal government thus:

We are surprised that today it is the Federal Government saying it will grant us amnesty. Oh God is it we who will grant you amnesty or you are the one to grant us amnesty? What have we done? If there is room for forgiveness, we are not going to do it until God gives us permission to do it. Have you forgotten your sin, have you forgotten what you have done to us in Plateau, the state you called Jos. We emerged to avenge killings of our muslim brothers and the destruction of our religion. Was it not in Plateau that we saw people cannibalising our brothers? (*Niger Reporter*, April 12, 2013).

Reflecting on the Niger Delta case scenario is centred on communitarian nationalism, where the disenchanted people through the militants make demands on the multinational companies operating in the region and the federal government, on behalf of the Nigerian state for her *rentier* character with predatory role as a passive recipient of petro-dollar without any serious concern for the welfare of the people of the oil-rich communities (Aghalino 2004:119). Historically, Aghalimo (2004:113) stressed failed promises offered to the citizens in the Niger Delta in exchange for their lands for oil exploration that was at the core of the militancy in the region:

At the onset of the oil industry, the people of the Niger Delta bubbled with expectations; they were highly enthused as to the prospect of the transformation of their region. Their hope was robust, as this was ignited by promises of gainful employment, provision of basic amenities, better quality of life and assurance of establishment of cottage industries that would employ their sons and daughters. To be sure, the oil industry made a dozen barrel of promises; raised the expectation of the people to an unprecedented height. This optimism, probably explains the initial warm and convivial disposition of the people of the region to the oil firms. Without a prospect for the transformation of their lives, the people of the oil-rich Niger-Delta could not have given such unfettered reception to the oil industry, having earlier been hoodwinked by colonial masters. With time, the people discovered to their chagrin that, the industry was not committed to fulfilling the promises made to the people. There is an explosion in the number of youths who have obtained higher education who, as it were, feel they should be absorbed as pledged by the oil firms and the federal Government. The local elite seem not

to have access to plump jobs in the oil industry; rather, the major ethnic groups appear to have hijacked the oil industry. Besides, it is claimed that the revenue from the region has been used to transform cities like Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Port Harcourt and Enugu. The people of the Niger delta have always referred to these cities as Isoko.' It is not out of place to stress that, it is the combination of the educated elite, angry unemployed youths and their parents, frustrated by diminishing opportunities in the oil industry, as well as the stagnant development in the region that seems to be the plausible underlying factors in the anti-oil protests in the Niger Delta.

This assertion points out that Nigeria is highly dependent on the rent from the oil-rich economy in the Niger Delta region. Bagaji, Achegbulu, Maji and Yakubu (2011:38) asserts that 'Nigeria exports approximately 50 percent of its crude oil to the United States, which means approximately 10 percent of the oil imports of the United States come from Nigeria'. However, Omotola (2006) and McNamee (2013) revealed that Nigeria's dependence on oil accounts for over 80 percent of the country's foreign and domestic earnings to finance the internal economy. Despite this evidence the Niger Delta condition has not been better off, rather it keeps worsening every passing day. Omotola (2006:30) indicts self-seeking politicians, who through their nefarious activities account for the incessant political instability in the country. The scholar condemned this practice which has become deleterious for the coexistence of Nigeria as a country that professes 'unity in diversity'.

What could explain the dimension of the militancy or insurgency in the Nigeria? Lewis (2002) identified some factors which include 'poverty, unemployment, social dislocation, cultural polarisation, and a large pool of disaffected young men' which helps to foster radicalisation. To buttress his argument, he argued further that in northern Nigeria, at least fifty million muslims have lived for decades in unsteady equilibrium with a roughly equal number of christians.

Ordinarily, the poverty thesis used by many Scholars, namely Lewis (2002) among others to explain the situation in northern Nigeria does not adequately explain the causal factors for the restiveness in the country. Although it may cause the restiveness, but again, it may not be volatile as those instigated by elites' competition to capture state power and the control of economic resources. Other people from other parts of the country are also poor but have not taken arms against the state without objective reason for their pursuit or against other people as reason for them being poor.

Restiveness is not peculiar to the north or the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Igbo people of the south-east Nigeria have severally contested that they were going to secede from the Nigeria federation (Elaigwu 2005). It could be recalled that since the end of the Civil War, the Igbos have found themselves

displaced from the inner circle of government, even though a handful of them were reinstated into the government service. In contemporary Nigeria. Igbo resurgence to ethno-cultural identity has intensified with the rise of *Boko Haram* islamists to defend their race anywhere in Nigeria. Some of these identity prone organisations include the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Igbo People's Congress (IPC) and the National Union of True Igbo Movement (NUTIM) among others. These organisations at several occasions protested against injustices meted to their people across the country. They have often threatened to quit the Nigerian federation if the situation does not improve (Alubo 2003; Elaigwu 2005; Onuoha 2011).

Accordingly, the Igbo race hold tenaciously to the belief that, just as it was before the civil war began in 1967, the activities of the *Boko Haram* islamists is targeted and directed at them, even though no particular ethnic group has been singled out by the islamists. However, this perception is prompted by the philosophy and objectives pursued by the islamists, which is to uphold islam and its teaching. The Igbo ethnic group controls the informal sector of the economy not just in northern Nigeria but throughout the country. They constitute an estimated population of one-third of northern Nigeria and majority are christians (Lenshie and Atando 2013). The implication is that the Igbo race must embrace islam and the shariah or otherwise, evacuate the northern Nigerian territory.

Several insurgencies which have caused the death of many people, both christians and muslims alike have triggered threats of reprisal attacks in southern Nigeria. Amaize and Oyadogha (2013) reported that the MEND have threatened that they were going to kill muslim clerics, bomb mosques from May 31, 2013, to save christianity in Nigeria from annihilation by the northern islamists. The spokesman of the militant group, Jomo Gbomo, was quoted thus:

On behalf of the hapless christian population in Nigeria, MEND will, from Friday, May 31, 2013, embark on a crusade to save christianity in Nigeria from annihilation. The bombing of mosques, hajj camps, islamic institutions, large congregations in islamic events and assassination of clerics that propagate doctrines of hate, will form the core mission of this crusade code named Operation Barbarossa. ... We may only consider a ceasefire of Operation Barbarossa if the christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, the Catholic Church and Henry Okah, one of the few leaders in the Niger Delta region we respect for his integrity, intervenes. Also, the assurance for a cessation of hostilities targeted at christians in their places of worship, made privately or publicly by the real *Boko Haram* leadership will make us call off

this crusade. We have no problem with their attacks on security agencies including the prisons, for their role in extrajudicial killings, torture, deceit and corruption.

This declaration stems from the fear of uncertainty and the conspiracy of silence, which northern leaders have adopted not to condemn the insurgent activities of the *Boko Haram* islamists. However, what remains a puzzle is whether the ethno-cultural identity is detrimental to the survival of democracy in Nigeria. Apparently, ethno-cultural identity does not constitute in any way a misnomer. Ethno-cultural identities reflect the pluralist nature of democracy across the world, because it assists in shaping and redirecting the focus and energies of government towards political integration, effective governance and inclusive citizenship. Ethno-cultural identity becomes pervasive when it is manipulated to serve some specific social relations of production and distribution of resources. For example, the problem with ethno-cultural resurgence as it is manifesting today is rooted in the political economy of Nigeria, which many elite and group gladiators take advantage of for their self-aggrandisement. This explains why the government is finding it difficult to deal with the problem of insurgences in Nigeria. Explaining in an interview the difficulty faced by the government in addressing security challenges in Nigeria, Sani (2012) told *People Monthly* tabloid thus:

Some are profiting from it as security contractors, some are profiting from it as defence entrepreneurs, some are profiting from it through scams that come in form of peace talks. ...our resources are being plundered in the name of insurgency. State governors are allocating huge sums of money in the name of security while depriving other sectors like education, health and infrastructure, and ...we also have persons from the side of government and then other persons that purport to be from the side of the insurgents that are also milking this country dry in the name of dialogue.

Therefore, it is deducible that the country is at the crossroads. Evidence across the country reveals that Nigerians are so sceptical and suspicious of one another that the slightest provocation could result in violence. These fears are manifest at all levels of intergroup relations, and it is responsible for the resort to ethno-cultural identity as alternative for individual and group security, recognition and acceptance within the Nigerian geopolitical space. This divisive tendency makes nonsense of the national project because individuals and groups see themselves from their respective ethnic mirrors rather than nationalists. Much more glaring are the evidence as captured by Karl Maier in his most revered book on Nigeria: *This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria*, published in 2000.

### **Ethno-Cultural Identity Resurgence in Nigeria: Is the Problem with the System or the People?**

This question is confrontational and pertinent to rethink and appreciate the virulent manifestations of ethno-cultural identity in contemporary Nigeria as an alternative safety net for the perceived disaffected and disenfranchised citizens through non-inclusive democratic governance. Democracy is a system of government which upholds human pluralism, and within this context, promotes human choices as primacy for its survival. The spread of democracy across the world, for example, the women and youth in Saudi Arabia clamouring for inclusive-participatory democracy, as well as the recent events in north Africa and the Middle East, popularly called the Arab Spring, are geared towards expanding the space for democratic participation within a given label of social and cultural background. The much desired spread of democracy after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 reflects Fukuyama's (1992) assertion that:

[L]iberal democracy may constitute the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the final form of human government, and as such constitute[s] the end of history... there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all the really big questions have been settled... we are now at a point where we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own.

However, the democratic system of government in many countries, especially in developing countries in Africa has come under serious ethno-cultural contest. In countries like Nigeria where this is happening, there is an internal struggle between the oppressors of the oppressed. This can be understood in two categories: the first category, the oppressor implies 'the rich elites' citizens' and the oppressed implies 'the poor ordinary citizens' (Slaughter 1975). The second category is the civilisational or cultural clash between western and the Arab civilisations on African soil, each seeking to dominate, conquer or exert influence over the other, while also making effort to oppress the African civilisation (culture and traditions). At this juncture, the African civilisation is the oppressed whereas western and Arab civilisation in which Africa is victimised are the oppressors (Mazrui 1986; Huntington 1996b).

The former reflects that the struggle among oppressors, – 'the rich elite citizens', centres on the objectives of capturing state power and influence in governmental decisions and actions. The oppressed, the disaffected and disenfranchised citizens become the recipient of their individual and collective actions and inactions. To achieve this, they construct both the transcendental and mundane myths within the premises of religion and ethnicity to motivate

sectional interests and reaction that can turn out violently. With this circumstance, they undermine democratic values. The latter reflects the struggle for and against ideological hegemony. Historically, the struggle dates to the colonial era, particularly when the *ihadists* conquered, though not without resistance, the non-muslim communities in northern Nigeria and brought them under islamic subjugation (Ihuegbu 2002; Lenshie and Johnson 2012).

The same was the experience of the entire country when British colonialists entered Nigeria. This brought Nigeria under the control of two dominant and competitive civilisations over African civilisation. The effect is the violent conflicting relations the continent is experiencing in contemporary times. With this circumstance, could it be that democratic system has failed in Nigeria? Is the problem not with the people? Careful consideration of the basic tenets of democracy, make it obvious that democracy has no alternative. At the individual, group and societal levels, democracy allows every individual to speak, criticise and disagree with others. It tolerates individual and group interests and separate ideas and ideologies. It believes in the method of persuasion and peace at both internal and international spheres. It promotes social welfare, upholds the dignity of human personality, individual and collective rights, liberty and equality of various social forces in the society, and method of resolving conflicts through non-violent means (Mahajan 1988:795-796).

The principles of democracy are sacrosanct, they do not change over time and space across the world. Therefore, the problem with democratic government in Nigeria may not be the system, but the people either as individuals and/or groups. This is because they constitute the major non-state actors in intergroup relations domestically and internationally. The nature and manner of individual and group interaction determines the peaceful or chaotic nature of the society. Usually, individual and group attitudes are motivated basically by their respective orientations. However, their orientations are carried out and directed by certain group of individuals, usually called the elites. These elites include political elites, military elites, traditional elites, and religious elites. The elites are the drivers of political, economic and social consciousness and actions in the society. This is done to distract the masses from collaborating against them and to render them powerless and subservient (Slaughter 1975; Varma 1975).

The virulent ethno-cultural resurgence in Nigerian democracy is considered as a factor in the failure of the system to provide the needed societal requirements. This problem was a poser for Ake (1993) when he asked the question: *Is Africa democratising?* The question is more significant in contemporary Nigeria. The rise of Niger Delta militants, *Boko Haram* islamists and other ethnic militias is conceived to be as a result of the failure of the

democratic system in Nigeria. What are the conditions motivating this perception. This excruciating factor of democratic system is captured by Oluwafemi and Orji-Ugbagha (2013) thus:

The return of democracy after a prolonged military rule should have been the beginning of a new era for the nation if only the politicians that took over the leadership of the long-tortured nation were prepared to tow the part of honesty in governance. A leader that is honest and sincerely committed to the task of rebuilding his country on the path of truth would definitely assemble a cabinet of men and women in the image and likeness of himself.

It becomes clear that the missing link in the democratisation process in Nigeria is the absence of honest and sincere commitment to the Nigerian project. Omotola (2006:30) indicts self-seeking politicians, who through their nefarious activities account for the incessant political instability in the country thereby undermining the professed emblem of 'unity in diversity'. Oluwafemi and Orji-Ugbagha (2013) argued that 'the successive military administrations that imposed themselves on the nation dwelt on cutting corners ... they entrenched such a depth of corruption that subtly became adopted as a replacement of the culture of hard work and dignity of labour. ...no civilian administration since the return of democracy in the Fourth Republic has made any attempt to create a place for this country in the comity of developing economies'. The reason for the failure generates from perceived sectional, political, economic and social deprivation within the larger Nigerian federation.

However, even though it appears that democracy in Nigeria is in crisis, this does not imply that it has failed. This is because no political system that emerged out of human ingenuity is free from crises. The people subscribing to even islamic theocracy must appreciate that the system also has its internal disabilities. It was internal crises that led to the collapse of many islamic empires. The Oman Empire for example, was very notable and powerful but internal corruption led to its collapse. Even in contemporary times, several islamic kingdoms, empires and states are suffering from governance crises. Many of them are democratising signalling that democracy has no substitute that can reflect human dignity and livelihood in a multicultural or plural society. What then is the problem associated with democracy? The democratic system suffers deficit when in the process of nurturing it, human attitudes and activities are not moderated or when there is democratic extremism (Mahajan 1988:795-796). This implies a circumstance where individuals and groups are permitted the latitude to act on and react to issues in the state without any serious formal regulations guiding their conducts. In other words, it implies a system where there are laws but the laws have no effect on the behavioural pattern of the people within the democratic system.

One major factor that creates the tendency for extremism is corruption. In a corrupt system, rules do not apply. The manifestation of violent ethno-cultural identities in Nigeria is an antithesis to democracy, which cardinal principle hinges on ethnic and religious pluralism. Therefore, the absence of peaceful coexistence and internal solidarity points to the corruption of the democratic system for which the elites are responsible. There is no doubt that the over two decades of military rule in Nigeria exalted corruption to a higher pinnacle of national ethos. Notable military government often accused of this character were the Ibrahim Babangida (1986-1993) and Sani Abacha's (1995-1998) regimes (Lenshie 2006; Lenshie and Ayokhai 2011). Politicians, who took over after the military exited from power, could not change the political character of the Nigerian state. Alawusa (2011:13) advanced that:

...the present crops of politicians have failed to make the desired and necessary impact on the lives of the citizenry; they have failed to discharge their constitutional obligations in the sense they have proved incapable of mitigating the long sufferings of the ordinary people. More annoying is the fact that in spite of the huge amount of money that accrued from the sale of crude oil, especially in the past decade, the people are left to fend for themselves without basic social needs. No water, no electricity, no quality of education for children, no good motorable roads and no standard health care services as our hospitals are nothing more than glorified mortuaries.

Timawus (2012:22) corroborates this when he argues that the numerous problems arising from ethno-cultural resurgence of identity in Nigeria stem from gross incapacitation of the political system to make provision for social security of the citizens, particularly in the northern Nigeria. Politicians when elected into office soon become demigods and turn public treasury into personal reserves. How can such unhealthy scenario not occur when they have refused to open space for citizens to interact and set up agenda for the government? How can the country not be rendered ungovernable while majority of Nigerians are living below poverty line? How can the situation be salvaged when the system rewards school dropouts more than what a professor earns in his entire life time (Timawus 1999).

Apart from the problem of social provisioning, another problem is associated with the Nigerian electoral process. Many Nigerians are disenchanted with the manner in which various elections have been conducted. For many people, elections in Nigeria have never been free and fair. Historically, there is no election results declared that have not been contested, no matter how free, fair and creditable they were adjudged. Evidence from the past elections such as the 1965, 1979 and 1983 buttresses this assertion (Ademoyega 1981; Kurfi 1983). In the same vein, all other

elections such as the annulled 12 June, 1993 presidential election, 2003 and 2007 presidential elections as well as the April 2011 presidential election, were all contested. In fact, the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria was considered the best run but the worst hit by violence. The cause of it was the rejection of the election results by one of the candidates, General Muhammadu Buhari who publicly denounced the outcome, claiming it was wantonly rigged to ensure President Goodluck Jonathan's victory.

The post-election violence resulted in the loss of lives and property of innocent citizens, and since then the country has remained ungovernable. With this it can be said that the democratic system is not the problem. The actual problem is the people, especially the elites, who are drivers of public psyche. People are often manipulated and divided along the lines of ethnic and religious differences.

As the forthcoming elections draw close, the political atmosphere is looming with lots of political strategies geared towards defeating the incumbent, who recently secured the permission in the country's highest court to contest in the forthcoming round of election. A vital factor in the political engineering is the current security challenges in northern Nigeria that has remained untamed by the federal government.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria's political atmosphere presents an ever increasing level of virulent ethno-cultural resurgence of identity. The elite's manipulation of ethnicity and religion tends to affirm Awolowo's (1966) thesis that 'Nigeria is a mere geographical expression'. It also lends credence to Akpan's (1978) thesis that, 'Nigeria's federalism is an accidental foundation by Lugard' and indeed, Soyinka's (2009) postulation that 'Nigeria is a nation space'. Implicitly, it reveals that Nigeria is a colonial creation, its people were neither created nor invented by the colonialists (Odofin 2003). Colonialism in Nigeria, as it was throughout Africa, brought the people, who were hitherto independent into permanent socio-economic and political intercourse. After five decades of independence, Nigerians have not come to terms with the need to coexist as a nation. In the last decades, what the country has witnessed is a constant manipulation of ethnicity and religion, with the implications of violent engagements among various competing elements struggling for space, recognition, power and security.

This point underscores the pervasiveness of ethno-cultural diversity in Nigeria and how it affects the development of democracy and its ability to take root and be sustained. This diversity which by nature is a blessing has been mismanaged. Democracy requires moderation and the expansion of social and economic space for citizens. It also requires a mechanism for

accommodating divergent interests and the capacity to make democratic institutions more inclusive and responsive to citizens. This can address disenchantments resulting from elitist democratic deficits played under the façade of ethnic and religious politics in Nigeria (Mutfwang 2003:110). For democracy to be consolidated in Nigeria, people's concerns such as the promotion and protection of civil rights and liberty must be guaranteed on the bases of equality (Janda, Berry and Goldman 2000:35; Otoghile and Terkimbe 2011:78-91).

Another issue to deal with is election. Elections in every democracy are a litmus test of the will, yearnings and aspirations of the people. It is the starting point and not the end of it. Election in this country has always been marred by a lot of irregularities and controversies. The problem of election is associated with poor electoral mechanism and manipulations. This must equally be addressed. Group claims and counter claims in Nigeria find expression within this premise of democratic deficits created by elitist democratic practices. The virulent manifestations of ethno-cultural identity are by and large an elitist struggle for power and resource control. The rise of *Boko Haram* radical islamists can be explained within this context.

To bring an end to these misnomers, people's confidence must be restored through enhanced accountability and responsiveness to all and sundry, irrespective of ethnicity, religion and ideology. Also, political and educated elites, who play upon the sentiment of identities to which individuals and groups subscribe, must redirect their ideologies towards rational appeals. This will be decisive for the forthcoming elections in Nigeria. Importantly, citizenship education must be taken serious. Ethnicity and religion must be de-emphasized in all affairs of the country. Lastly, it is strongly suggested that a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) be convened to discuss and rectify the problems bedevilling the corporate existence of Nigeria as a country.

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