

## LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE IN NIGERIA: THE INTERPLAY OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

**Anikeze, Nnaemeka Hillary**

*Department of Public Administration, OSISATECH Polytechnic, Enugu*

### Abstract

*It amounts to stating the obvious that the internal coherence, institutional consistency and developmental direction of Nigeria have always been tortured, muzzled and marred by both centripetal and centrifugal forces of no mean implications. In the case of Nigeria, there is an inalienable interconnectedness among ethnicity, religion and politics; which has made the trio always occupies the front burner in all issues of national consideration and decision making. Consequently, the interdependence of ethnicity, religion and politics as social dynamics in fostering the development of a nation has become quite a concern across the globe. Nigeria is a highly heterogeneous nation with diversity in terms of multi-tribal, cultural, religious and political sphere. It is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria as a nation has been kept below the level of development expected of her by the indices of a pluralistic state mentioned above. Nigerian heterogeneous nature with reference to Religion, politics and ethnic pluralism had besieged Nigeria and kept her running round the vicious circle in terms of sustainable development. The emphasis of this paper is a clarion call for the entire citizenry to see this diversity from positive dimension. This paper is aimed at verifying the extent at which ethnicity and religious considerations have played itself out in leadership struggle in Nigeria and how this have dealt devastating blow on Nigeria's sustainable development. The paper proffers a way forward towards harnessing our pluralistic indices as a nation for national development.*

**Key words:** *Ethnicity, religion, leadership struggle, national development, Nigeria*

### Introduction

With three major ethnic groups: the Ibos, Hausa/Fulani and the Yorubas and about three hundred others in the minority (Bamgbose; 2004:119), Nigeria is by far the most diversified country in Africa. The British brought these groups together for administrative convenience not minding their differences in Culture, Religion and Politics. Today, Nigeria's political problems argued Ademoyega (1981:3) "sprang from the carefree manner in which the British took over, administered and abandoned the government and people of Nigeria".

When the British came to Nigeria as an imperial nation to take over rulership of the country, they met the people of the South free, only observing and regulating their own monarchs and institutions. In the North, they met the Fulani in the process of establishing their rulership over other ethnic minorities. In order to administer Nigeria to their own advantage, the British introduced the indirect rule system of government, thereby rubberstamping the political state of

the ethnic nationalities of Nigeria. This according to Bamgbose (2004:120) was one evil that outlived British administration.

The three major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria prior to colonial rule had distinct forms of government, the feudalistic oligarchy in the North, the centralized monarchical democracy in the West among Yoruba and the decentralized democracy in the East among Ibos. From the religious perspective, the Hausas were pagans before they were conquered by the Fulani who subsequently introduced Islam. The Emir doubles as both political and religious head of his people. The Yoruba and the Ibos practiced traditional religion before Christianity was introduced among them. Prior to independence, three power blocs were established Kaduna in the North where Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Sokoto emerged as leader, Ibadan in the West where Obafemi Awolowo, a renowned lawyer, was the leader, Enugu in the East where Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an accomplished journalist was the leader. This was the pattern that was the prelude to the independence of Nigeria.

With the calling forth of regional representatives to the constitutional conferences that brought independence, the political leadership of the country was born and nurtured along ethnic lines. That today we still talk about underdeveloped Nigeria is seemingly as a result of the challenges posed by the indices of pluralism. Of all the forces of diversities inherent in the Nigerian polity ethnicity and religion mingled in politics are the most suffocating. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with cultural differences between its component ethnic groups. From the north to the coast, the range in types of social system, dress, diet and languages far exceeds that to be found elsewhere in the world. This diversity has resulted in two major problems namely: problems arising between the larger ethnic groups and the hostility that derives from competition between peoples for wealth and power.

Today, identification is easier at both family and ethnic levels. A consequence of this is that many of the citizens may never develop a proper concept of nation. This kind of ethnic group relation signifies a negative dimension and which may mean much for the Nigerian political system. It even becomes necessary given the cry of political marginalization coming from various ethnic groups in the new democracy. In all socio-political engagements in Nigeria, the factors of ethnicity and religion are reflected. It is particularly obvious in areas like voting, distribution of political offices, recruitment into the armed forces, selection into the national football team, employment into the public service and government general patronage of the citizens. It is against this backdrop that this paper assesses leadership struggle in Nigeria; with emphasis on the inter-play of ethnicity and religion.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This paper sought to assess leadership struggle in Nigeria and the inter-play of ethnicity and religion. The following specific objectives are vigorously pursued by the study:

- 1) ascertain the extent to which ethnic factors manifest in leadership struggle in Nigeria.
- 2) assess the effect of religion in leadership struggle in Nigeria.
- 3) determine the implications of ethno-religious variables in leadership struggle in Nigeria.
- 4) recommend measures for mitigating intense ethno-religious considerations in leadership struggle in Nigeria.

## **Research Questions**

This paper is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent has the force of ethnicism manifest in leadership struggle in Nigeria?
- 2) What is the effect of religious considerations in leadership struggle in Nigeria?
- 3) What are the implications of ethno-religious variables in leadership struggle Nigeria?
- 4) What are the measures for mitigating intense ethno-religious considerations in leadership struggle in Nigeria?
- 5)

## **Methodology**

This paper set out to investigate leadership struggle in Nigeria with particular focus on ethnicity and religion. The paper is both descriptive and analytical as data is largely drawn from secondary sources and analysis was by content analysis of documented evidence. The objectives and research questions served as relevant guide to the study.

### **Conceptual Framework or Review of Extant Literature**

Like any other terminology employed by social scientists, the concept of ethnicism is a term that does not lend itself to easy definition. To fully understand this, some related concepts like 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity' need to be defined. Ethnic group is an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other ethnic groups within the larger society because they share kinship, religious and linguistics ties (Contes, 2004). This means that ethnic groups are social formations, which are distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries (Nnoli, 1978). In an explanation of the idea above, Nnoli emphasized that the most important or crucial variable in ethnic identity is language. This then means that an ethnic group consists of those who are themselves alike by virtue of their common ancestry, language and culture, and who are so regarded by others. Ethnicity is another related word, which needs to be conceptualized in this paper. By definition it means the interactions among members of many diverse groups (Nnoli, 1978). On the other hand, the term ethnicism denotes ethnic loyalty. This is a feeling of attachment to one's ethnic group (Pepple, 2005). The concept of loyalty in the above definition carries with it the willingness to support and act on behalf of the ethnic group. Thus, ethnic loyalty or ethnicism usually involves a degree of obligation and is often accompanied by attitude of resentment and rejection towards those regarded as outsiders (that is, members of other ethnic group).

From the conceptualization of these two related concepts, it can be seen that ethnicity is a phenomenon, which involves interaction among various ethnic groups and which by itself does not pose any serious threat to either development or democracy. On the contrary, it is the phenomenon of negative ethnicism (a hangover of ethnicity), which is the rejection attitude towards those regarded as outsiders that threatens development process. It is important to note that it was the phenomenon of ethnicity that was found among Nigerians before the coming of the Europeans, while the second phenomenon (ethnicism) is a product of competition for both economic and political resources.

The problematic nature of ethnicism as conceptualized above can be explained in the context of some theoretical positions. In the first instance, one can examine the negative aspect of ethnicism

by linking it to the theoretical framework of Talcott Parsons' pattern variables. To understand this, it is important to make reference to Eberinwa (2010), who argued that while developed countries are characterised by the pattern variables of universalism, achievement orientation and functional specificity, the under-developed ones are characterized by the opposites, namely particularism, ascription and functional diffuseness. For the under-developed countries to develop, they must adopt the pattern variables that are characteristic of the developed societies. Whatever the criticism against this position, it is important to note that ethnicism breeds the pattern variables that are characteristic of under-development, particularly those of particularism, ascription and functional diffuseness.

Another explanation for why ethnicism has become a problem to contend with is possible in the context of conflict theory. Social conflict can be defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain desirable values but also to neutralize, injure and/or eliminate their rivals. This is why Nnoli, (1978) has described conflict as an important aspect of ethnicism. The implication of this is that conflict is inevitable under conditions of inter-ethnic competition for scarce valuable resources. There is no doubt that this type of ethnic conflict will strengthen the in-group and out-group feelings of the members of ethnic groups involved in the conflicts. The fact remains that such conflicts will have negative impacts on certain institutions of the society including the political institutions. A conclusion that can be drawn from our discussion so far is that it has led us to belief that ethnicism leads to primordial sentiments in multi-ethnic society. This position is supported by the theory of ethnocentrism. On a general note, the theory of ethnocentrism simply denotes differentiation according to origin. This is to say that it is a kind of behaviour where a group of people look down on others and discriminate against them. Thus, one can see ethnocentrism as a belief in the unique value and rightness of one's own group. This human attitude manifests in form of prejudice and tribalism (ethnic communalism and conflict). The aspect of prejudice that is relevant to our discussion here is the one that has to do with group solidarity. Peil (2007) claims that group solidarity provides security in situation of potential conflict and informal support when official agencies cannot or will not help. Prejudice can be turned to discrimination. If this happens, there will be strong pressure to exclude outsiders in the sharing of scarce resources such as political power.

### **Conceptualizing Religion**

The definition of Religion as a social phenomenon had been considered a difficult job in that no single definition suffices for us. This according to Nwanze (2001) is because Religion has several segments from which people approach it. Religion as the oldest discipline in human society is the most difficult world to define. This is based on the fact that many people have different perspectives according to their disciplines. The researcher tends to give some definition on religion and tailored the definition to the subject matter in order to achieve the purpose of this work. According to a sociologist Glenn (2002:55), religion is defined as:

*... that part of culture composed of share beliefs and practices which not only identify or define the supernatural and the sacred and man's relationship thereto, but which also relate them to the known world in such a way that the group is provided with moral definitions as to what is good*

*(in harmony with or approved by the supernatural) and what is bad (contrary to out of harmony with the Supernatural).*

Glenn defined religion based on the operational and interactive element of the society. He also took recognition of the group emotional response to the Supernatural and the sacred. It also involves individual participation in a group. Another sociologist, Yinger (2004) in a book entitled the *Scientific Study of Religion*, defined religion:

*...as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with these ultimate problems of human life. It expresses their refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart their human association...*

Yinger stated that men need some absolute values to enable them live harmoniously in this problematic world of suffering. He emphasized that science had been unable to solve human problems which only religion can supply meaning in moments of serious crises and uncertainties. A theological definition of Religion was given by Ekwunife (2004:1) in his book *Politics and Religious Intolerance*, as man's awareness and recognition of his dependent relationship on a transcendent Being-the Wholly Order, expressible in human society through beliefs, worship and ethical or moral behaviour. Here, the Clergy recognized or appreciated man's knowledge of a higher Being more than him which is the origin of faith in religion. Experience has shown that every religion in relation to politics functions as a catalyst to man's ultimate problems. But the question to ask is whether in the case of Nigeria, the above statement holds any truth.

### **Leadership and Leadership Struggle**

On the other hand, Leadership is akin to a dynamic process in which people come together to pursue changes and, in doing so, collectively develop a shared vision of what the world (or some part of it) should be like, making sense of their experience and shaping their decisions and actions. Thus as Cole (1997: 54) posits:

*Leadership is a dynamic process at work in a group whereby one individual over a particular period of time, and in a particular organisational context, influences the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group tasks or goals.*

Janvier and Thaba (2007:2) submit that leadership can also be seen as both arts and sciences. As arts it refers to the personality, beliefs, convictions and people's skills. As science, it has to do with goals, structures, policies, times, boards and committees. On his part, Amanze (2004:75) insists that leadership has to do with both people and programme. A leader works with people, is responsible for them and is accountable to them. Amanze vehemently upholds that leadership is the ability to direct, guide and control while in the office. It is like beauty, he concludes, which is difficult to define but easily recognized when seen. Leadership struggle in this context, therefore, simply refers to the seemingly primordial quest by the various ethnic groups to acquire, utilize and consolidate political power at the centre using ethno-religious cleavages. This has become very common in Nigeria because of the multi-faceted nature its ethno-religious composition. We shall therefore, proceed to examine in more practical terms these ethno-religious variables that mingle in the polity to actuate leadership struggles that stifle national development in Nigeria.

## **Ethnicity as a Factor of Leadership Struggle in Nigeria**

The incontestable fact is that heterogeneity prevails in Nigeria in the face of the existence of more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. Out of these, the predominant ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani, Ibos and the Yoruba. Each of these dominates a specific region of the country. The Hausa-Fulani dominates the northern parts, the Ibos dominate the Eastern part and the Yoruba inhabit the Western part. Among these three predominant groups, as well as the minorities hostilities have been rife as skirmishes of war are very much obvious. Ademoyega in Oyeneye (2003) submits that the roots of the hostilities among ethnic groups can be traced back to the colonial period when the British pursued the policy of divide and rule. The above assertion confirms the earlier position of Achebe (1983:5), when he opined that:

*...Nigeria was called a mere geographical expression not only by the British who had an interest in keeping it so, but even by our nationalists when it suited them to retreat into tribe to check their more successful rivals from other parts of the country. Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more than the chequered fortune of tribe in her vocabulary. At our independence in 1960 our national anthem which is our Hymn of deliverance from British colonial bondage has these lines: "Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand".*

In Achebe's opinion this was "a most ominous beginning" and not surprisingly, this brotherhood lasted only six years. And ever since then, a Nigerian child seeking admission into a federal school; a student wishing to enter a university; a graduate seeking employment in the public service; a businessman tendering for contract will fill a form which requires him to confess his tribe. To a large extent, whatever experiences Nigeria is witnessing today with recourse to the inter-play of ethnicity and religion in leadership struggle; cannot be appreciated adequately outside the purview of colonial administrative arrangement in Nigeria, which encouraged ethnic politics. The division of Nigeria into three regions in 1946 by Richard Constitution for administrative convenience was directly associated with the three major ethnic groups – Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo.

With recourse to leadership struggles, however, it must be recalled that in pre-independence era, party politics in Nigeria was based on ethnic factor. One can say without fear of contradictions that it was during this period in question that the seed of ethnic politics was propagated, nurtured in the First Republic and the products started replicating during the second, third and fourth republics. For example, the Action Group (AG) as a party led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo developed from a Yoruba socio-cultural association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa and had the Yoruba land as its seemingly exclusive political base; the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), later renamed National Council of Nigerian Citizens led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe was closely allied with the Igbo Union and consequently held sway in entire Igbo land, while the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) emanated from Jamiyyah Arewa led by Sir Ahmadu Bello and of course the party had the core Hausa/Fulani land as its exclusive buffer zone. Thus the leadership of the aforementioned parties was along ethnic cleavages.

It is not surprising therefore that the first political parties were formed along ethnic lines. During the first republic, politics was organized in the same way as during the pre-colonial era. It was still the AG, NCNC, NPC and other minor parties like the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) by Aminu Kano; and United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by Joseph Tarka. There was no radical departure from those of the pre-colonial era as the parties had ethnic colouration in terms of leadership and regional affiliations. The ethno-political rumblings of the first republic culminated in military incursion in the polity and climaxed in the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. The civil war dealt serious blow on the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. However, in the Second Republic regionalism (not ethnicism), was played down a bit. And it was because the 1979 constitution stipulated that for a political party to be registered, it must be national in outlook. Nevertheless, the new political parties that were registered had their leadership replicated along ethnic lines as in the first republic. Thus, Obafemi Awolowo retained the leadership of AG which metamorphosed into Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nnamdi Azikiwe controlled the Igbo speaking areas under Nigeria's People Party (NPP), which is an offshoot of the old NCNC. National Party of Nigeria (NPN) dominated the Hausa-Fulani areas; Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) in Hausa speaking while Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) led by Ibrahim Waziri controlled the Kanuri speaking area. Therefore, ethnic colouration and affiliation played out in political parties' formation and operation during the second republic. Voting patterns equally followed ethnic lines in the elections (James, 2011).

The third republic in Nigeria was short-lived. However, the transition programme designed to usher in that republic provided a framework within which two political parties were proclaimed by the Military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. This two party approach was applauded as it naturally put to rest any attempt to affiliate political parties with ethnic groups. This is however not to say that ethnic sentiments disappeared from the polity during the period; after all the annulment of the June 12 elections was in itself an act in pursuit of ethnic agenda in leadership struggles. The aftermath of the annulment of the June 12 elections heightened the political tension in the polity, which further exposed the ethnic variable in leadership struggles in Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2003).

Leadership struggles in the fourth republic has not deviated from the intrinsic undertone of ethno-religious sentiments and affiliations replete in the previous republics. During this period there have been ethnic movements of diverse magnitudes from Boko Haram insurgency in the North, Niger Delta militancy in the South-South, Egbesu Boys in the West and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra and more recently the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) in the East. All these are primordial groups for leveraging ethno-political sentimentality in leadership struggles and interests aggregation in Nigeria. Added to the above is the fact that the ethnic considerations have always occupied the front burner in electoral behaviour in Nigeria recent general elections. There is no doubt therefore, that this scenario has serious implications on national development in Nigeria as it breeds political instability, frustrates development efforts, results in social disequilibrium, economic stagnation and hampers democracy and good governance.

### **Religion as a Factor in Leadership Struggle in Nigeria**

When the nation Nigeria was born, there existed different regions dominated by ethnic groups following a different religion of a type. In its simplest form, while the Northern Nigerian is

predominantly Hausa/Fulani and Muslims, the Southern Nigeria is largely Yoruba/Ibos and Christians. Nigerian colonial master sowed seeds of discord between Christianity and Islam-the two major religious bodies that held sway in the socio-political scene of her national life. Kalu (2000) painted a true picture of the scenario created by British imperialism which laid the foundation of suspicion and rivalry among the ethnic nationalities and religious groups in Nigeria when he posited as follows:

*Meanwhile a contrary wind blew in the north as the root of Islamic fundamentalism was sowed. This veritable religions and political challenge to Christianity was nursed in the early days of independence. The conflict between Christianity and Islam was at first an aspect of regional rivalry and development.*

This ethno-religious plurality has not been for the best interests of Nigeria as it has been the basis for many conflicts Nigeria as a nation-state has “witnessed the most perturbing and unprecedented upsurge of ...religious disturbances...” (Anugwom and Oji, 2003:143). Religious riot has remained a constant threat to peace in Nigeria and has continued to threaten the continued coexistence and habitation of the different ethnic nationalities that make up the country. One of the major religious crises ever witnessed in Nigeria on a large disturbing scale is the *Maitasine* religious riot which took place in Kano in 1980 (Okwueze, 2003:143), in Jimeta Yola in 1984, in Gombe, former Bauchi State in 1985. These were followed by religions disturbances in Ilorin in 1986, in Bauchi town in 1991, Kano (1991), Zango-Kataf (1992) and recently in 2000 the *Sharia* riots in the Northern states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Kano and the reprisal attack in the East. For the first time in the history of Nigeria religious riots occurred in Aba, Umuahia and Owerri (Anugwom and Oji, 2003:9) and Uyo in Akwa Ibom State. Evidently, religion in Nigeria functions as a means for the perpetration of violence, fuelling ethnic consciousness, and solidarity, acquisition of political power and socio-economic gains, massive killings and the wanton destruction of lives and vandalising of property of those considered infidels or who pay allegiance to other religions. This is traced to the acrimony between the two dominant religions- Islam and Christianity, which had often resulted in the struggle for power and supremacy, bitter feud and wanton destruction of lives and property. This religious madness had like a cataclysmic vortex devastated the ground for transparent leadership selection process in Nigeria; and this has far reaching consequences on national development and particularly sustainable socio-economic development of Nigerian.

In contemporary Nigeria, religious affiliation has gradually been elevated to a factor in voting behaviour, where it has become the norm for people to vote a candidate (whether credible or not), insofar as they share same religious beliefs. This no doubt is a serious indictment to the inter-face of ethnicity, religion and politics in Nigeria. The implications on national development are daunting: there is a persistent culture of violence, mutual suspicion, mistrust and lack of tolerance. No development of any sort can take place in an atmosphere of religious acrimony.

### **Assessment of the Inter-play of Ethnicity and Religion in Leadership Struggle in Nigeria**

Evidences abound in reality to buttress the inter-face between ethnicity and religion in leadership struggle in Nigeria. Lukman (2013) makes bold to state the obvious; that divide and rule is by far the dominant strategy in Nigeria’s contemporary politics, that it thrives on zoning and rotation of

political offices with aspiring candidates for leadership at all levels of government and society cheaply brandishing their religious and ethnic credentials over any other qualification(s).

A quick assessment of developments in Nigeria, at all levels from independence and since the mid 1990s will highlight remarkable departure and erosion of especially leadership values. At all levels of Nigerian society, standards have crashed and leadership requirements have been reduced to purely material (money) wellbeing. Anyone with money and from a dominant ethno-religious group can buy his/her way to power at all levels, be it local governments, states, federal government and even nongovernmental organizations. In the circumstance, people with poor knowledge, without any vision, lacking of any priority and often of doubtful integrity are vested with leadership responsibility. Citizens are coerced, blackmailed or hoodwinked to support so-called leaders based on primordial sentiments with our leaders hardly challenged to win support of other Nigerians beyond their immediate narrow support base, often limited to their birth places, local governments, senatorial district, states, geo-political zone and hardly the nation as a whole.

It is therefore, intrinsically truism that ethno- religious factors have therefore emerged today as perhaps the most defining factors in contest for leadership positions in the country. As a result, there are incidences whereby leaders are produced with very narrow and parochial perception of their constituencies. In many cases, they even emerged just based on the endorsements of sections and few members. Even the practice of campaigns using posters, handbills and media hardly takes place, and if it does, it is reduced to mere symbolism. It is just simply a case of arrogance and contemptuous disrespect of the support of other sections and citizens other than so-called birth places, local governments, senatorial districts, states and geo-political zones. This practice is widespread in many of our political institutions today. A visit of many seats of governments at all levels is enough to make any genuine Nigerian sick. Perhaps, it can be argued that this has been with us as a nation since independence. In some ways, it is an acceptable norm and little or nothing can be done about it. Yet, to the extent that it projects us as a fractured nation and promotes primordial hatred and anger, it constitutes a major national problem. How can we address this big national problem? Is there any possibility, however remote, that Nigeria can produce a leader who is not just a sectional leader? Or, is there anything that can be done to transform any of our leaders today from being narrowly perceived as a sectional leader to a national leader?

Our notion of leadership and assessment of their relevance to societal problems, in every respect, will influence our judgment with respect to these questions. To the extent that leadership is about having unregulated and unaccountable access to public resources, competition for leadership will continue to be driven by sentiments. Once leadership is blind to the issue of nurturing good human relations, our societies and nation will be highly vulnerable to reckless and crazy management of governmental and non-governmental affairs. So long as competition for leadership in our society and nation is reduced to our identity by hyping ethno –religious sentiments and the hegemonic drive for dominating others, knowledge and the challenge of environmental control will be a distant responsibility, if at all. It is ostensible that British colonialism laid the foundation for modern Nigerian state. Egwu (1999) has argued that colonialism played a critical role in the process of ethnic formation and the political use to which such identity or consciousness was expended. This was obvious as the colonial administration invented and promoted a sense of social distance among the various Nigerian peoples. This led at independence to the emergence of regional and ethnic leaders rather than national leaders. It was no wonder, therefore, that political leaders on the eve of independence made statements that

challenged the rationale for forging a nation out of the diversities of the people and cultures. This fact remains with us today when leaders cannot rise above ethnicity, religion and other primordial predispositions.

At independence, political leadership was confronted with the challenge of building a nation out of the diverse, complex groups and nationalities. However, Nigeria since independence, has been characterized by “a long-drawn-out decay or decline” as evident in political instability, a low level of national cohesion, and economic crisis, all of which are mutually reinforcing (Osaghae, 2011). Leadership crisis since independence has also been characterized by political instability in terms of the high turnover of political leaders, both civilian and military, especially the protracted interregnum of military dictatorship, interspersed with short-lived civilian rule thwarting the growth of a democratic culture in the nation. More than five decades after independence, the issue of national cohesion remains a major challenge in the nation. This is evident in the recent national dialogue in 2014. The leaders, over the years, have been overwhelmed by the crucial necessity to handle raging issues such as ethno-religious conflicts, minority and citizenship rights, separatist movements, resource control and distribution, political marginalization, free, fair and credible elections, terrorism and insurgencies etc. Politics revolves around the contestation for control of and access to national resources.

### **Findings of the Study**

It can be emphatically stated that since independence, there has been real and imagined issues and experiences relating to ethnicity and religion in leadership struggle in Nigeria. In the light of the above this paper made the following findings:

- 1) This paper ascertained that to large extent ethnicity as a factor has conspicuously continued to manifest in leadership struggle in Nigeria. This has been evident in political parties' formation, membership, candidate nomination and of course voting preferences.
- 2) Religious affiliations and consideration have equally affected leadership struggle in Nigeria. Evidence shows that religion has come to occupy the front burner in national politics as people politicize religion thereby promoting culture of impunity, violence and intolerance.
- 3) The implications of ethnicity and-religion in leadership struggle in Nigeria as found by the study are that merit, transparency; free, fair and credible elections are jeopardized and sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity and religion.
- 4) The inter-play of ethnicity and religion in Nigeria's leadership struggle has adversely affected the political future of the country, it has produced leaders that are lacking in national consciousness and who rely on ethnic and religious sentiments as bases for winning political office.

All factors been equal, ethno-religious factors in leadership struggle in Nigeria have seriously dealt a devastating blow on national development. The question now is what hopes for the future of Nigeria given the prevailing culture. A number of recommendations will be tangential and germane to mitigating the problems associated with ethno-religious leadership struggle in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The paper makes the following recommendations:

- 1) The government should engage in functional programmes aimed at mobilizing strategies towards the promotion of unity among Nigerians.
- 2) There is need to evolve legal measures/reforms to guarantee the institutionalization of good governance founded on respect for the contributions of citizens.

- 3) There is urgent need for collective engagement in the enthronement of good and transparent leadership through free, fair and credible elections.
- 4) The need for public re-orientation across the various levels of government should be implemented as a matter of urgent national importance to promote enduring values of merit, integrity, track record of service to people, and discourage greed and self-centred tendencies.
- 5) There is need also to engage all relevant social organisations and civil society groups in the quest to rebrand our societal values through sound moral and spiritual development in homes, schools, and the society at large.
- 6) The press which is regarded as the Fourth Estate of the Realm should re-strategize to strengthen its role of informing, educating, entertaining, and setting agenda for development, apart from serving as the watchdog of the leadership. The media must truly operate on the principles of truth, honesty, sincerity, justice, fairness, and societal good to ensure good governance.
- 7) The word tribe or state of origin should be expunged from our vocabulary and should not be used in matters of national interest such as appointment into offices, employment, and giving other privileges to Nigeria citizens.
- 8) Nigerians should rise to the occasion and discourage the idea of choosing a leader based on his ethnic group and religious affinity.
- 9) The leadership needs to undertake policies and programmes that would provide solution to socio-economic problems like poverty, unemployment. Power imbalance, inequitable distribution of resources, and quest by some ethnic nationalities for freedom and justice.
- 10) Religious leaders should give proper orientation to their followers and should emphasize that religion pursues peace and not violence.
- 11) Finally, there is need to consider for implementation some of the core recommendations of the National Conference as way forward for national integration in Nigeria if the peace needed for national development is to be achieved.

### **Conclusion**

From what has been discussed so far, Nigeria is undoubtedly a plural society with different ethnic groups, religions, languages, cultures and institutional arrangements. As a heterogeneous society, 250 ethnic groups have been identified each interacting with one another in competition for power and wealth. This has resulted in ethnic conflicts. A major contributor to ethnic conflict in Nigeria is what some observers have described as constitutional factor. The focus of this line of argument is that constitutional developments in Nigeria, particularly the colonial constitutions, tended to engender ethnicism and hinder national integration; of particular interest is Arthur Richard Constitution of 1946. This constitution established the first regional governments in Nigeria. Although the constitution achieved the integration of North and South in a common legislative council, it actually brought to force the concept of regionalism.

Many political observers and commentators have observed that the 1946 constitution formed the beginning of the process of fragmentation along ethnic line in Nigeria. Nigerian constitutional changes all along the colonial era encouraged factionalism, which resulted in ethnic nationalism. This tendency is shown in the allegiance individuals in this country pay to their ethnic groups. Consequently, many still prefer to identify primarily with their ethnic groups rather than with the state. This manifestation of strong allegiance to ethno-religious group encourages primordial sentiments among Nigerian people. Thus, the individuals are concerned with socioeconomic and political development of their own group and not the nation as a whole.

Relying therefore, on the recommendations above proffered, the Nigerian society will be able to reduce the incidences of ethnicism and religious fundamentalism in the country's body polity. This will transform particular loyalties to loyalty to the Nigerian state. It will reduce the common syndrome of ethno-religious loyalty, which has always resulted in unhealthy political (leadership) struggles, which has manifested in various types of political protests, violence, and instabilities.

The findings of the study are indubitably value laden in the illumination and formulation of policies for managing ethno-religious leadership struggles in Nigeria, and for creating a more equitable, viable and stable system of federal democratic governance in the country. Finally, it is expected that the study will make up an important empirical and analytical contribution to the literature on the problems and prospects of ethno-religious leadership struggles and national development in plural societies.

### **References**

- Achebe, C. (1981), *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Adebayo, R. I. (2004) "Umar Ibn Al-Khattab: A Model for Contemporary Political Leaders in Nigeria" in A. P. Dopamu et al (Eds) *Religion, Leadership and Society: Focus on Nigeria*, Lagos: Free Enterprise Publishers.
- Ademoyega A. (1981), *Why We Struck: The Story of the first Nigerian Coup*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers.
- Aluko MAO (2003), Ethnic Nationalism and the Nigerian Democratic Experience in the Fourth Republic. *Anthropologist*, 5(4): 253–259.
- Amanze, P. O. (2004), "An Appraisal of the Ministry of Moses and Its Implications for Religious Leaders Today" in A. P. Dopamu et al (Eds) *Religion, Leadership and Society: Focus on Nigeria*, Lagos: Free Enterprise Publishers.
- Anugwom E. and Oji P. (2004), Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria: A Review of Past and Present Dimensions in Okwueze M. I. *Religion and Societal Development: Contemporary Nigerian Perspectives*. Lagos: Merit Intil Publication.
- Babangida, I.B. (2002), Ethnic Nationalities and Nigeria State. Excerpts from a Lecture Delivered at NIPSS, Kuru, Jos.
- Bamgbose, J. A. (2004), "Party Politics and Godfatherism: the Nigeria Experience" in Dukor M. *Godfatherism in Nigeria's Politics*. ESSENCE Journal Philosophy Science and Society Vol. 1 No. 1
- Contes, A. (2004), *Urban Ethnicity*. London: Taristock Publications Ltd.
- Crawford, Y. (1993), *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*. London: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Eberinwa, O. (2010), *Dynamics of Development Administration*, Aba: Standard Publishers.
- Ejizu, C.I. (1993), "Religion and Politics in Nigeria: The Perspective of Indigenous Religion" in Abukare R. et al *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*. Ilorin: NASR
- Ekwunife, A. (2004), "Values in Traditional and Modern Nigerian Society: A study in Leadership" in M. I. Okwueze (Ed.) *Religion and Societal Development*, Lagos: Merit International Publications.
- Janvier, G. and Thaba, B. (2007), *Understanding Leadership: An African Christian Model*, Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks.

- James, O. (2011), Ethnic Politics in Nigeria, July 20, 2011, *Nigeria Exchange News*, Ngex, on-line.
- Kanu, R. (2000). "African Traditional Morality and Nation Building" in M. I. Okwueze (Ed.) *Religion and Societal Development*, Lagos: Merit International Publications.
- Lukman, S. M. (2013), *Issues in Nigerian Leadership: Political Prospects and Challenges*. Lagos: Johnson Press.
- Makinde, A. F. (2004), "Political Leadership Problem in Nigeria: A Panacea from Islamic Perspective" in A. P. Dopamu, et al (Eds.) *Religion, Leadership and Society: Focus on Nigeria*, Lagos: Free Enterprise Publishers.
- Nnoli, O. (1978), *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu. Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Nwankwo, O. (2003), *Elections and Democratization in Nigeria*, Owerri: Totan Press.
- Oyeneke, I. (2003), *Round-Up Government: A Complete Guide*. Ibadan: Spectrum Publishers.
- Osadolor, O. B. (1998), "The Development of the Federal Idea and the Federal Framework, 1914 – 1960." In Amuwo K et al. (Eds.) *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan. Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Osaghae, E. E. (2001), "Ethnic Mapping Project: A Brief Concept" In Osaghae (Eds.) *Ethnic Group and Conflict in Nigeria*. Ibadan: PEFS, Vol. 1.
- Peil, M. (2007), *Consensus and Conflict in Africa Societies: An Introduction to Sociology*, Addison-Wesley: Longman Ltd.
- Pepple, I. A. (2005), *Ethnic Loyalty and National Identification*. Conference Paper Proceedings on Rural Resources and National Development. University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.
- Yinger, M. J. (2004), *The Scientific Study of Religion*, New York: Macmillan