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**Transcending Myths and Mystifications: Challenges of Ethnic and  
Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria in the 21st Century**

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## **Introduction**

Escalating violent conflicts are fuelled by the undemocratic practices in governance. In Africa conflicts are not restricted to countries with ethnic and religious diversity/plurality. Conflicts extend to even homogenous states as in the Somalia experience, also hinging on the manipulation of constructed and reconstructed identities mostly sectarian divides of clans and religious sects, as T. D. Sisk stresses (Sisk, 1996: 21). Conflicts in Northern Nigeria are not due to the plurality of ethnic and religious groups. Once governments find their legitimacy put to question – due to the failure to care for the majority of the citizens, protect the public good and to defend the rights of the citizenry – sectarianism soars. As the Nigerian State sinks into decadence many of the citizenry retreat into enclaves of ethnicity, religion and regionalism, which are perceived as avenues for providing alternatives opportunities and security (Ibrahim and Kazah-Toure, 2004: 4-8).

The post-independence project of constructing a common Nigerian citizenry with the similar aspiration, a pan-national identity, governing and abiding by one rule of law rather than ethnic, religious, regional and other micro loyalties remains mainly elusive – as shown in several studies (Ihonvbere, 1999; Lewis, 1998; and Jega, 2000: 27-34). Dominant political leaders continuously retain the rhetoric of denouncing ethnicity, religious bigotry and regionalism as undermining Nigerian unity. Paradoxically, most of them exploit ethnicity, religion and regionalism to exclude others.

In existence are inequalities in the control and distribution of resources, economic dividends not being extended to some sections, lack of care for the environment especially in the communities where material resources are extracted and not respecting the beliefs and cultures of the other. Mahmood Mamdani advances that when the boundaries coincide between those who control political power, dominate the economy and other facets of the state and society, and if these are in correlation with particular ethnic/religious groups, the conflicts become more serious at those levels (Mamdani, 1996: 289).

Yusuf Bangura maintains that primordial perception of ethnicity as intrinsic lacks historicity due to the wrong notion that “people have largely been the way they were from time immemorial, divided by language, custom, religion, race and territory” (Bangura, 1994). A deeper understanding is by focusing on social relations and systems that are retained on inequalities and exclusive practices. In reality group identities undergo changes overtime. These are also fluid and contextual. Often are employed in the contest for power, resources, security and prestige (Ottawa, 1999:12; and Van de Goor et al, 1996: 12 and 111).

There are cases of ethnicity being essentially a social construction, invented and not inherent. The roots of some ethnic and religious identities could be traced to the colonial process. J. T. Singer emphasises some groups could slug it out under the guise of ethnic, cultural and religious differences whereas the root causes could be far more complex (Singer,1996:36).

### **Historicising Major Ethnic and Religious Identities Northern Nigeria**

In the Northern Nigeria area migration was a factor in the formation of various social and political formations before colonial times. In the process peoples of diverse origins moved into the area and many subsequently lost their previous identities. Many embraced the culture(s) of the new environment(s).

The identity of the leading majority ethnic group, the Hausa, has undergone changes. W. F. Gowers shows that in the areas of Kano, Katsina, Kazaure and elsewhere, with the colonial conquest in 1903, colonial anthropologists and administrators classified 12 different ethnic groups on the basis of their origins and territoriality (Gowers, 1921: 41-43). For long the Hausa identity has been more of a language and culture. There is no tradition of common ancestry, origins and legends among the Hausa, as even different families within the same community could trace their origins from varied roots. Overtime a number of ethnic groups were getting enmeshed into a Hausa identity. Hausa language, culture and Islam were becoming the commonality among diverse groups (Kazah-Toure, 2004: 39-46).

The Sokoto Jihad of 1804, in Hausaland and beyond, marked a transformation into the most extensive Muslim caliphate in West Africa. By the 1930s most of the previous group identities in Kano and elsewhere submerged into the Hausa identity. Islam has been the predominant religion of the Hausa, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century many of the communities and languages, now tagged northern minorities, were found in numerous independent polities in the Central Nigeria area, which many refer to as the Middle-Belt. These geographical lower parts of the Northern Nigeria have been the most diverse, in terms of ethnic groups and languages. Prior to colonialism most of the peoples were practitioners of African traditional religion(s). Christianity got to Northern Nigeria in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century several of these ethnic groups have a majority Christian population.

The concept of the Middle -Belt surfaced as a cultural and political construct, with roots in the tussles of the decolonisation process, from the late 1940s, by Christian elite. They were in economic, political and social contestations with the predominantly Hausa, Fulbe

(Fulani), Kanuri, Nupe and other Muslim aristocracies in Northern Nigeria. These days, in most of the varied contestations, other ethnic minority groups that are mainly Muslims are categorised alongside the Hausa and Fulbe due to their Muslim identity (Kazah-Toure, 2004: 50-62).

Before the 20th century there were no terms as northern minorities and northern majorities. Northern Nigeria was established by the British in 1900 by bringing the Sokoto Caliphate, the Sheikdom of Borno and many autonomous social and political formations into the Protectorate of Northern. The latter was amalgamated with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1914 to constitute the colonial Nigeria. Northern Nigeria, in present times, is made up 19 of Nigeria's 36 states, the federal capital (Abuja) is situated in the north. The north has more ethnic and religious plurality than all other geo-political zones in Nigeria combined. However, Northern Nigeria ranks as the major hotspot of ethnic and religious contestations and conflicts in the country. The Middle-Belt identity is more acceptable among elite from ethnic groups that have a majority Christian population.

Consistently the leading elite circles in the ethnic minority communities have been claiming marginalisation by Hausa, Fulbe (Fulani) and Muslim majority in the north. In reality most of the ethnic and religious conflicts have assumed divisive dangerous trend. A leading proponent of the Middle-Belt agitation as well as prominent politician and former national chairman of the Nigerian ruling People Democratic Party (PDP), Solomon Lar, maintains that "the geographical Middle Belt is distinct from, and smaller than the political Middle Belt" (Onuorah, 2003: 1-2). Lars holds that the "political Middle Belt" encompasses all "the marginalised minority groups in Northern Nigeria" and these groups have historically "resisted political oppression, injustice and religious discrimination" by the Hausa, Fulbe and Muslims (Onuorah, 2003: 1-2). All this is part of the dangerous manipulation of ethnicity and religion by the many political leaders in various landscapes of the region.

### **Legacy of Colonial Imposed Identity Divisions**

Social scientist such as Shelley Drayton and Okwudiba Nnoli make the point about colonisers' entrenched segregation among the colonised in many parts of Africa (Drayton, 1995:10 and Nnoli, 1980). In Northern Nigeria imposed ethnicity and partly religious demarcations were glaring in urban areas. In settlements "local natives" were by law living separately from the "non-local natives." A similar pattern of the dividedness extended to colonial schools, in both government and missionary schools. M. M. Tukur laments that the

colonialists did everything to keep the colonised communities apart “physically, culturally and psychologically” (Tukur, 1990: 138).

One effect of the policy and practice was ingraining in many incipient elite circles of divisions along ethnic and religious identities. Pan-Nigerian nationalists struggled for a cosmopolitan consciousness. Some post-independence governments constitutionally and through other policies tried to abolish the colonial imposed divisions. However, ethnic and religious conflicts from the 1980s have contributed to the resurfacing of identity based settlements, though not based on legality or constitutionality, due to fear and insecurity of the other identity.

At independence of Nigeria in 1960 the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) emerged as the ruling party in the Northern Region and at the national/federal level. On October 1 1951, the NPC was formed. It emerged as conservative party that was pro-colonialists and pro-aristocracies. The aristocracies were in charge of the various Native Authority (NA) tiers of government in the north. The NPC had the support of the major institutions and officials of the colonial state. It was a party that was propped as a counter-force in the decolonisation process. Partly the NPC was to checkmate the radical and fiery first political party in Northern Nigeria, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU).

NEPU was anti-colonialists and anti-aristocracies. The party was formed in Kano on August 8, 1950. It forged an alliance with the most radical nationalist parties in Southern Nigeria as well as smaller parties that sprang up to champion the interests of minority ethnic groups in the north.

NEPU won majority seats in Northern Nigeria, at all levels, in the first elections of the decolonisation electoral process in September 1950. However, the NEPU mandate was annulled by the British. The colonial government changed the rules mid-way, by introducing a secondary stage of the elections. It immediately introduced an Electoral College, for the Northern Region, in which 40% representation was automatically allotted to the emirs and other subordinate aristocrats in control of native authorities. These rulers were backing the NPC. Their parliamentary seats, in addition to ones won by the party, gave the NPC accelerated victory. Beyond this, it also explains why the most brutal acts of repression of NEPU members and supporters were intensive. This massive repression took more ideological and class forms and was not perceived and responded to in ethnic and religious terms. So was the situation from 1950, through the attainment independence in 1960, to the termination of the First Republic by the military in 1966. Mainly, NEPU was deeply rooted

among the peasantry and non-nobility classes in many Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria. (Kazah-Toure, 2003: 97-115).

The third party in the north was the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). It suffered political repression that was mostly perceived in ethno- religious terms. UMBC was an umbrella party claiming to represent northern minority ethnic groups. It drew its support from some of the predominantly Christian/traditional religion communities in Central Nigeria (Kazah-Toure, 1999). A revolt broke out in 1964 in Benue Province – in which Tiv Division was the foremost stronghold of the UMBC – against the NPC led governments. The revolt was anchored on claims of political and economic marginalisation, chauvinism and religious discriminatory practices against minorities.

A.L. Jinadu (2004a) maintains that the major agitation was the demand for autonomy by creating another region out of Northern Nigeria. The UMBC maintained that the north was dominated by the majority Hausa, Fulbe (Fulani) and Muslims. According to Remi Anifowose the UMBC viewed the northern regional government, the federal government and the Tiv native authority as being synonymous with the ruling NPC (Anifowose, 1992: 155-177). The NPC led federal government did not explore any conflict resolution mechanism. Rather it deployed the army and mobile police to crush the rebellion. Conflict in Tiv Division boiled-on until the first military coup in Nigeria on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1966.

### **Militarism, Political Restructuring and Identity Contestations**

One feature of the first military seizure of power was that civilian political leaders and top military officers of northern extractions were killed. Those assassinated included the Prime Minister of Nigeria, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of the Northern Region Ahmadu Bello. Military officers of northern descent, with one exception, of the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and above were murdered. Fewer politicians and military officers from the Western and Mid-West Regions were also eliminated. However, no politician or military officer from the Eastern Region was killed. The coup leaders were overwhelmingly Igbo easterners. This contributed to a general interpretation of the coup as sectionalist and anti-north (Kazah-Toure, 2003).

The military took over political power in Nigeria, with Major General Thomas Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo, as the military Head of State. The constitution was suspended and there was the promulgation of decree 34, of May 12 1966, which reversed the federal system and restructured Nigeria into a centralized unitary system. Widespread interpretation was

that the regime of Aguiyi-Ironsi was embarking on a calculated hidden agenda to establish Igbo hegemony in Nigeria (Kazah-Toure, 2004).

Before the regime implemented unitary system decree 34 there was a bloodier counter-coup, led by officers of northern extractions on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1966. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a northern Christian, emerged as Nigerian second military leader. Most of the northern officers who carried the counter-coup were eventually the central actors, in all the regimes, during protracted military rule in the country that lasted a total of 29 years. The period was marked by their ferocious power play including coups and counter-coups, with the northern officers being most prominent. In the July 1966 counter-coup about 300 Igbo soldiers were executed, including Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi. Inter-regional relations worsened in the country and there was massacre of thousand of Igbo people, particularly in Northern Nigeria (Kazah-Toure, 2003).

National contradictions and conflicts resulted in the declaration of the independent country of Biafra, led by Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, by the Igbo majority Eastern Region in 1967. The secessionist bid of Biafra from Nigeria culminated in a civil war, which was fought from 1967-1970 and ended with the surrender of Biafra. The 1966 exit of Igbo people from other parts of Nigeria triggered the tempo of expansion of the number of northern elite. More people from the mainly Christian/African traditional religion(s) ethnic minority communities were incorporated into the system. Prior to the national crisis of 1966-1970, thousands of Igbo were in the employ in various sectors in Northern Nigeria. Paradoxically the civil war years were major lift-forward for many northern minorities. Thousands of youth streamed into vacated jobs - previously occupied by the Igbo - were enlisted in the armed forces, police and security services (Kazah-Toure, 2003).

Ironically most of the political reforms in Nigeria were introduced by the military regimes. The same military that wanted to impose a unitary system addressed an old agitation of Nigerian ethnic minorities by creating states. The Gowon regime abolished the 4 regions and restructured the country into a 12 states on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967 within a federal system (Jinadu, 2004b). The threat of Biafra secession influenced the first creation of states. It was part of the federal government strategy to de-link the Igbo from getting the support of ethnic minorities in Eastern Nigeria that were for a long time campaigning for their own region/state. The military government consented to demands for autonomy by various ethnic minorities in all parts of Nigeria. Demands for the creation of more states has since become a never-ending decimal and the number increased from 12 in 1967 to 36 as at 2011.

Access to political power and the control of resources occupies centre stage in Nigeria. Controlling political power at the state and local council levels is a crucial weapon use to bargain with the federal government and to exclude rivals and weaker competitors. Somehow, this also explains why ethno-religious cards have been manipulated and employed by rival competitors. According to Attahiru Jega a major rationale for this is located in the fact that “only constituencies and clients of those who control state power actually continue to have access to state resources through patronage” (Jega, 2000:25) Conflicts are sometimes in Nigeria ignited or triggered to get concessions.

### **Structural Adjustment and Rising Flames of Religious Crises**

The 1980s witnessed escalation of religious fundamentalism with influx of foreign support for religious sects both ideological and material. In 1986 the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida embarked on implementing the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Pursuance of the neo-liberal economic policies had negative consequences on most of the people. It coincided with Key actors of the dictatorship joined strongly in the politicisation of religion, which entailed patronization of religious leaders and their organisations increased (Ibrahim, 2000: 41-57). The regime was searching for legitimacy in different Muslims and Christians influential circles. An effect of this was the further undermining of national cohesion and more sectarian polarisation. The authoritarian regime made ethnic and religious bases relevant in terms of the recruitment of its collaborators.

Continuous creation of states in the country transformed some ethnic groups that were categorised as northern minorities into majorities in some states. A number of such groups are now also often charged of lording it over others. Controlling political power and resources at the level of a state is used to exclude weaker rivals and to vigorously challenge stronger rivals in competition. This has contributing to the heightened ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria (Ibrahim and Kazah-Toure, 2004: 5-8).

On March 6, 1987 a major religious conflict that involved Christians versus Muslims exploded in Kafanchan and spread to all the major cities in Kaduna State. Hundreds of people were killed, many churches and mosques were burnt and a lot of destruction of property (Kazah-Toure, 2003: 74-81). This marked the worst ever religious conflict in Nigeria. From that time, political mobilisation intensified and hinged basically on religious basis in many parts of the north (Kazah-Toure, 1999).

## **Citizenship Rights, Conflicts and the Challenges of Federalism**

A central issue in present expansion of ethnic and religious conflicts is the challenge of citizenship and federalism. Citizenship in the operational 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is by birth, registration and naturalisation. Millions of citizens are denied certain rights where they reside on the basis of their classification as “non-indigenes”/“settlers”. Nigerians categorised as such, anywhere within the polity, have various obstacles concerning enjoying citizenship rights. Abubakar Momoh argues that ethnic, religious and several other identities have become major challenges because these are associated with the perceptions of discriminations and the prevailing limitations of inclusive citizenship (Momoh, 2001). This indigene and settler dichotomy is a major contradiction in Nigerian federalism.

There are constitutional stipulations on rights of citizens to include political, civil, and social rights. Often the rights of citizens are limited to the right to life, freedom of religion, peaceful assembly and freedom from discrimination. Such rights are not generally upheld in practice. More so “social rights such the rights to employment, education and economic well being” are not included in the 1999 Constitution (Ibrahim, 2002).

Section 147(3) 147 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution stipulates that “the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each State, who shall be an indigene of such State.” This clause makes millions of Nigerians citizens redefined as to whether they are indigenes or not. Violent ethno-religious conflict in Jos, which lies in the Central Nigeria, has been based on contestation of who belongs and who is excluded. Interpretations of the constitutional provision have been extended to government appointments at federal, state and local government levels. Certificates of prove of being indigenes of particular places, based on consanguinity/primordial or ancestral origins to a particular community have to be tendered when searching for employment, access to schools, recruitment into the armed forces and elsewhere.

Three are citizens that complain much about denial of citizenship rights in their places of residency but at the same time rush to the communities or states they claim origin to fight, kill and expel other citizens who are labelled non-indigenes. When a new state was created, such as the case of carving Nassarawa State from Plateau State, some workers in the public service hardly waited to embark on expelling each other as non-indigenes (Kazah-Toure, 2004:

### **Exceptionality of some Ethnic Conflicts without the Religious Dimensions**

A type of conflict that has been occurring in the far north is between the nomads, mostly Fulbe (Fulani) and the sedentary farmers of the Hausa, Bedde and Kanuri ethnic groups. All these ethnic groups are overwhelmingly Muslims. This type of conflict takes ethnic form. The serious problem of various layers of governments neglecting addressing the land question in terms of grazing, source of water and farming as well as the impact of desertification has also affected the citizenship question in the rural communities. According to Adagbo Onoja in 1995 over 500 people were killed and 16 villages razed in Guri district of Jigawa State, in the nomadic Fulbe versus the sedentary Bedde conflict (Onoja, 1996: 6-7).

Y.B Usman maintains that numerous of the nomadic versus sedentary groups' conflicts have not been grapple with in most analyses. These are so, because such conflicts do not fit into the predominant mythology that it "has always been, a matter of rivalry and conflict, pitting, the north versus South; Christians versus Muslims", Hausa and Fulbe versus northern minorities; and Hausa and Fulbe versus the rest (Usman, 2003:20).

Another type of conflict that manifests in a deep ethnic form has been occurring mostly in the north-east such as Taraba State, mostly composed of tens of ethnic groups that are also categorised as northern minorities. Several of the ethnic groups are mostly Christians. Inter-ethnic conflicts between these groups entail the level of violent that surpasses the one in most of the Christian versus Muslim conflicts.

A major peak in the process of the long-term conflicts between the minorities Kuteb, Jukun and Chamba ethnic groups was the explosive physical clash of April 25 - 26, 1993. Eight villages were completely destroyed, over 100 people were killed, hundreds of others wounded and thousands were rendered refugees (TSG, 1993:2). The issues in contention includes control of local government councils, chieftaincy institutions, land, markets, collection of taxes and the decision taken on sites for federal government and state government projects.

Typical military warfare tactics mark the violent conflicts. This area has many retired military officers and rank-and-file soldiers. After retirement many of the ex-soldiers have been joining the ranks of the landless peasants as well as the unemployed. These easily become militant actors in the conflicts, as in a phase of violent battles in the years 1991-1998. Even at that time opposing partisans were expressing no confidence in the Nigerian security forces in Taraba State. The Kuteb ethnic group, for example, were making allegation in 1997 that most of the police in the zone have been combatants in the communal battles, because most of them

were either of the Jukun or Chamba ethnic communities, “and thus indigenes of the conflicting communities” (Adaji, 1997:27).

### **Manipulation of Religion by Political leaders**

The introduction of Muslim Sharia Law in 12 states in Northern Nigeria, and opposition to it, cannot be separated from the tussle for political support. It raises a basic challenge to equality of citizens and their religious rights. The emphasis by politicians in power has been using the most punitive aspects of religious laws to victimise the weak in society, especially poor women. The core issues of Sharia on social justice and social provisioning have been negated through politicisation.

Thea Buttner argues that in colonial times the British strengthened the auxiliary positions of the native authority aristocracies by using the native courts, claiming these courts were based on Muslim laws (Buttner, 1977:27). However, in reality the commoner classes experienced the brutality of the police through these courts, which were used by the local rulers in the employ of the colonialists to maintain grip on the peasantry and other commoner strata in society.

The 1999 Nigerian constitution made provision for Sharia courts up to the federal Sharia Court of Appeal. The main contention has been over the codification of Sharia – in some northern states – to cover the death sentence. The politics behind Sharia has brought to the forefront religious polarisation and violent conflicts in which hundreds of lives have been lost in Kano, Kaduna and several other towns from year 2000. These have contributed to widening social separation and a dichotomy that is further entrenched in the psyche of the peoples. The classification of the “settler” and “indigene” goes together with the Muslim and Christian dichotomy (CFCR, 2001). Extreme hate speeches, sermons and materials are produced massively and dish to co-religionists. Paranoia perceptions, discourses, doctrines are finding more avenues and schemes of promoting and inflaming hate between Muslims and Christian have been floating (Kastfelt, 2003). In the course of this sectarianism has been growing in grasping and interpreting external (foreign) conflicts and transplanting the perceptions on Nigeria along deadly religious divides. Ethnic and religious conflicts are interpreted along externalised perceptions.

On coming to power in 1999 President Olusegun Obasanjo embarked on talking carelessly about religion and evoking religious symbols in official functions, as a self-declared born again Christian. Many Muslim circles watched all this in disquiet and planning how to response. Ethnicity and religion have become enclaves of political identity, economic

advancement and social solidarity. This is more so due to failure of most governments in terms of the welfare functions of providing basic necessities of life, and evolving a social integrative mechanism to promote inter-group solidarity. Religion and ethnicity are sometimes exploited to create conflicts and use as ideological cover for phenomena that are more complex (CFCR, 2001).

### **Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (Boko Haram) Insurgency**

In 2009 the Islamic sect Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, known in Nigeria as Boko Haram, rocketed to the level of insurgency in the north-east. The principal area of activities has been the town of Maiduguri (2 million population), the capital of Borno state. The zenith was the summary execution (extra judicial killing) of the sect leader and an alleged financier, in the wake of vicious insurrection that led to the death of thousands of people by both the sect and security forces. The origin of Boko Haram can be traced as a break-away faction of another puritanical but non-violent Islamic sect. Earlier in 2000 it started demanding for all laws in northern states to be strictly based on Sharia and according to its interpretation. In no the sect vigorously embarked on preaching and mobilisation against the authorities, the search for knowledge and modernity. This brought to the fore a rejectionist offensive and nihilism. As Funshon Balogun puts it the Boko Haram sect "obeys its own rules only" (Balogun, 2011: 15). It has been detonating bombs in several states in the north. The first ever suicide bombing in Nigeria was the blast at the national Police Headquarters in Abuja on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2011. Another suicide bomb blast killed 32 people at the United Nations (UN) House in the federal capital on August 23 2011. The organisation has never sheer in claiming responsibility for its acts of terror. Several military, police and other security barracks have been bombed as well as blasting some places of worship (both Christian and the other Muslim) and pubs. People have been killed people in their thousands. Leading victims of wave of series of assassination include politicians, Muslim clerics of the other sects and traditional rulers. Banks are also being robbed.

The security forces, in the name of hunting down the Boko Haram insurgents, have killed a lot of innocent citizens. Prominent figures in Borno state have taken protest to the Nigerian presidency in which they claim that the soldiers have also become a threat to the civilian population. They allege that in Maiduguri the soldiers have been "burning down houses, killing innocent people, looting private property...and raping young girls..." (as quoted in Balogun, 2011: 19). Somehow Maiduguri has been reduced into ghost with mass

exodus of people, especially women and children. The refugee problem has been amplifying in many neighbouring states.

Borno state shares boarder with Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republic. Maidugur is a border town just close to the Lake Chad. Over the decades it has been experiencing a fair share of the problems of the Sahelian region such as poverty, unemployment, low level of education, desertification, fluid movement of population across frontiers (and all that it entails) and so on. Historically, conflicts in some parts of Central African region, Sudan, Somalia, Niger and so on have impact on Maiduguri . With the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) military support to the new authorities of the National Transitional Council (NTC) in Libya, and most likely subsequent emergence of a pro-Western government whenever elections are conducted, countries such as France and other European countries, the United States of American (USA) and the various Western companies will move for the control of the vast resources beyond Libya into the Lake Chad basin. This will have all sorts of implications for the African Sahelian region (Amin, 2011).

These could include operation by new armed movements against the imperialist drive of NATO and the contest for control of Libya. It is doubtful if the NATO installed new Libyan leaders can bring stability. Thousands and thousands of black population are exiting from that Maghreb country, with many moving southwards into countries such as Niger south. Xenophobia is raving in Libya directed at black Africans. A glaring new scramble by the NATO countries for military bases, control oil fields and vast underground water resources, from Libya southwards to the Lake Chad basin, will rub on northern most parts of Nigeria. Religious fundamentalists may also start new operations and drug traffickers continue searching for routes across the Sahara, leading into the drug markets of Europe, in conditions of instability. More so the proliferation of small arms could escalate, especially with the current situation in. All these are challenges in various spheres - national security inclusive - facing Nigeria.

### **Killings in Jos Fields**

In Jos a murderous guerrilla-like warfare has been occurring since 1994. Thousands army of unemployed youth are recruited to kill Christians and Muslims in large numbers, depending on which side their perpetrators support. Murderous actors, on both sides of the divide, no longer view the federal and state governments as neutral arbiters.

Claude Ake rightly captures a tendency that many people in Nigerians only get concern about discriminatory practices as affecting their own side, but are pervasively

ignoring the rights of other citizens (Ake, 1995:34). The “indigene” versus “settler” dichotomy is a strong feature in the Jos conflict, part of which is that people that have lived for well over a century in the place cannot be “indigenous”. Perhaps they have to be “settlers” forever, as Nigerian citizens. The police, armed forces and even the judiciary are perceived as playing non-neutral roles. In the vicious circle of killings in Jos even bellies of pregnant women are slashed, emptied of bowels and the unborn babies cut into pieces. Increased politicisation of ethnicity and religion has become more disintegrative and destructive. This in itself is threatening peace, stability and security as well as posing challenge to Nigerian federalism (Ibrahim, 2010: 14).

### **Conclusion**

The undemocratic practices in governance, the ruining of national institutions, poverty, unemployment, and exclusion from several processes and other ills in the country transcend ethnic and religious boundaries. However, the dangerous heightening of violent ethnic and religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria – if not checked – could contribute in leading the entire nation and its unity and survival to a precipice. Pluralism, democracy and national unity cannot entertain exclusionism . Over half a century after the attainment of nationhood in 1960, Nigeria is yet to have a major commonality from a national debate or conference on inclusive-participation in national life by all segments of the peoples based on agreed consensus.

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