

## **Cultural Identity, Prejudices and the Question of Development of Africa in the 21<sup>ST</sup> Century**

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### **Abstract**

A critical look at the history of Africa reveals the phenomenon of cultural identities which is linked to ethnicity or race and developed based on cultural background has in turn had dire implications on specific experiences, namely racial discrimination, prejudice resulting from self-perceived ethnic or racial group membership, or both; against the notion of development. The aim of this paper is to examine how cultural identities have degenerated to prejudices and impinged on the question of development of Africa in the 21st century. Qualitative research design was used for this paper. Data were realized from secondary materials – books, journal articles and the internet. The historical, expository and analytical methods were employed for this paper. The historical method identified some incidents of prejudices recorded in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The expository method has been used to offer an 'expose' of the phenomenon of cultural identities, incidents of prejudices and the concept of development of Africa today. The analytical method presented the negative implications these prejudices have on society. The paper found out that there has been sectionalism, xenophobia, discrimination, chauvinism, parochialism, particularism, bigotry, fanaticism among ethnic nationalities in Africa that is why the continent has been witnessing slow pace of development. The paper therefore, concluded that, ethnicity should not be played to the gallery rather, the positive values imbedded in each ethnic group should be deployed for the best interest of all so that unity, solidarity, growth, peace and development will thrive in Africa; especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Key words:** Cultural Identity, Prejudice, Development, Xenophobia and chauvinism.

## **Introduction**

As reflective critical thinking, philosophy is linked to a way of life; a form of enquiry intended to guide behaviour; a form of thinking that sharpens and broadens our intellectual horizon, scrutinizes our assumptions, and clarifies the beliefs and values by which we live. Philosophy helps to liberate the individual from the imprisonment of ignorance, prejudice, superstition, narrow-mindedness, and the despotism of custom. Culture constitutes the raw data, the laboratory from which philosophers do their analytic experimentation. Culture is considered as philosophy of the first order activity. The paper maintains that any genuine global philosophy must include philosophical traditions from all cultures and regions of the world, as it is by seeking alternative philosophical answers to some of the thorniest problems facing humanity that we are most likely to find more lasting solutions to some global problems. In this commitment to a universal humanity, we cannot afford to depend on solutions from a single culture or from the most influential cultures.

That culture is significant to development is not an exaggeration. Cultural identity then, is the identity or feeling of belonging to, as part of the self-conception and self-perception to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality and any kind of social group that have its own distinct culture. In this way that cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also to the culturally identical group that has its members sharing the same cultural identity. Through this means, cultural identity has far reaching implications on the positive development of any society. However, many African countries are made up of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural groups who have failed to exploit their diversity to further the interest of the state. Instead, these states have been characterized by conflict, violence, xenophobia, hate speeches, ethnic cleansing, communal clashes, ethnic militia, separatists, rebels and insurgent groups exhibiting anti-state activities that have repeatedly thwarted efforts made at development. This paper therefore, examines the phenomena of cultural identities and prejudices as it affects development of Africa in this 21st century.

## Clarification of Key Concepts

**Cultural Identity:** Cultural identity is complex and can be defined in different ways, and in the current interaction context of globalization and technological development, where social interaction and sociocultural manifestations are in increasing evolution and are exposed in virtual environments, any social group can harbour multiple cultural identities (Heisey 66–82).

Generally, a community's cultural identity is characterized by its beliefs, customs, values, and symbolic traditions of everyday life. In this sense, traditions, due to their significant potential, are very important in socio-cultural, economic, and political expressions in a territory (Feighery 323–334). Crouch regards non-representative geography as the set of symbols, images, or metaphors that a group communicates as a part of its daily practices (63–76).

For UNESCO, cultural identity is a concept derived from material and spiritual elements, inherited within a social group that represents a strong authenticity and facilitates the understanding of a culture and increases the community's value (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Available online: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/unesco-universal-declaration-cultural-diversity>). Therefore, cultural identity is a determining characteristic of a region; it encompasses its own specific features and contrasts different peoples' customs, alongside identifying the expressions that are the results of social interactions between different communities. Hence, cultural manifestations will always constantly interact, change, and evolve.

**Prejudice** is typically conceptualized as an attitude that, like other attitudes, has a cognitive component (example, beliefs about a target group), an affective component (example, dislike), and a conative component (example, a behavioural predisposition to behave negatively toward the target group). In his seminal volume, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Allport defines prejudice as “an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a

group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group” (9). Most researchers have continued to define prejudice as a negative attitude (that is, an antipathy).

**Development:** Development is all encompassing and to this extent, development according to Onimhawa and Ottuh implies economic growth, scientific and technological growth, socioeconomic transformation and better still, distributive justice. To them, development is a process of social change for the better (62).

**Xenophobia:** Xenophobia, simply put, is the fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers; it is embodied in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour, and often culminates in violence, abuses of all types, and exhibitions of hatred (Mogekwu 5). Studies on xenophobia have attributed such hatred of foreigners to a number of causes: the fear of loss of social status and identity; a threat, perceived or real, to citizens' economic success; a way of reassuring the national self and its boundaries in times of national crisis (Harris 21); a feeling of superiority; and poor intercultural information (Mogekwu 5). According to the latter argument, Mogekwu states that xenophobes presumably do not have adequate information about the people they hate and, since they do not know how to deal with such people, they see them as a threat (5).

**21<sup>st</sup> Century:** 21st (twenty-first) century is the current century in the *Anno Domini* era or Common Era, under the Gregorian calendar. It began on January 1, 2001 (MMI) and will end on December 31, 2100 (MMC) (“The 21st Century and the 3rd Millennium”. aa.usno.navy.mil). It is this current century.

### **Contextualizing Cultural Identity**

There are completely contradictory demands on how to deal with diversity and plurality in a society. The question is how can society deal fairly with all the different groups? Charles Taylor systematically addresses this in his work *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* by first asking why the recognition of cultural identity is so fundamental to human existence. Charles Taylor justified his philosophy of multiculturalism with the thesis that every human being strives for

recognition. According to him, the desire for recognition is rather a basic human need. He addresses the mutual recognition between the minority and the majority (Funta and Plavčan 15).

The struggle for recognition can only find a satisfactory solution through mutual recognition among equals. It is the task and challenge of politics to create an atmosphere in society that not only ensures that people are recognized in their cultural identity, but also initiates the removal of the power structure between minority and majority. Cultural identity is the feeling that represents belonging to a group or society. It involves self-evaluation that makes each person categorise himself or herself in a group, based on religion, nationality, class, or any other social classification. Cultural identity involves individual's perception of him/herself whereby; as a result, the person becomes part of the group that share the same practices and values (16).

The definition of cultural identity, in its most basic form is a sense of belonging. It is a shared sense of companionship that involves the same beliefs, interests and basic principles of living. When a person identifies with his/her culture, he/she often embraces traditions that have been passed down for years. The cultural identity that relates to a person's heritage helps him/her to identify with others who have the same traditions and basic belief system, even when he/she finds him/herself outside his/her ethnic geographical zone.

Some scholars affirmed that a person's cultural identity is the foundation or groundwork on which every other aspect of his/her being is built (Cushner, McClland and Safford 23). It is the cornerstone of what makes him/her who he/she is. Embracing one's culture often means practicing a specific religion and wearing a certain type of clothing. It creates an outward, visible means of identifying one as part of a particular culture or nationality. Examples of cultural identity can include anything that offers testament or validation that a person is associated with a particular group, religion or race. Many times, the way a person dresses and behaves in public are distinct examples of cultural identity and belief patterns (Adenuga and Alabi 7).

Meanwhile, understanding and valuing cultural multiplicity are the keys to countering racial discrimination and intolerance. In a working environment for example, all workers must feel free to explore the distinctiveness of their culture and identity while developing understandings of the cultural diversity that is in the world around them. However, denial of cultural freedom connotes limiting the expression of unique perspectives about life and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, no matter how attractive such group may appear to be (7).

Cultural identity is important because it acts as a way of preserving history and provides individuals a place where they feel they belong. Cultural identity is established when a group of people continually follows the same sets of social norms and behaviour as those of earlier generations. People with a strong sense of culture identity are more likely to feel a sense of security and belonging, while those whose cultures are unpopular in an environment may feel threatened by the homogeneity that may manifest from the former. In government establishments, it is not uncommon to sight favouritism and nepotism for employment and appointments into public offices because of cultural affinity. Cultural identity sometimes gives people who occupy major positions in public offices privileges of ethnocentric preferences (11).

Meanwhile, the advantages of cultural identity is that it promotes, respect and values people's achievements without any attachment to their culture. It provides avenue for the respect of individual cultures because in every environment, it is expected that official matters should not be impersonalized, as such, cultural diversity is permitted and respected. Also, parts of the merits of having diverse cultures within an environment or setting is the opportunity it creates to erase every existing barriers or stereotypes that may have been ideologically levied against any tribe or ethnicity. People who work in an environment with diverse cultures can use the opportunity to learn new languages, music, fashion and dressing patterns, new food consumption pattern and some other immaterial aspects of other people's culture. There is also increase in the chances of having inter-tribal marriages within such environment (12).

However, the disadvantages of cultural identity are that, it can contribute to barriers between groups and people. Also, members of smaller cultural groups can feel excluded from society if others obstruct, or are intolerant of their cultural practices. There may also be feelings of insecurity when people of the same ethnic background relate in their language (12).

### **Historicizing Cultural Identity in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a volatile state that is highly responsive to primordial identities which has seen the politics of the country play along the same line, that is, the major ethnic groups are Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba who are majorly distributed according to religious alignments and each struggling for dominance, albeit at the expense of national cohesion or development. Of course, this has strained development because protracted and widespread violent conflicts leads to devastating economic crisis just as identity-related crises leads to interruption of economic transactions, alteration of resource allocation by the state, pulling down of human and physical capital as well as amplified cost of carrying out transactions.

Identity crisis has become exacerbated to the detriment of national development in Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria whilst affirming that the antagonistic nature of interaction in these states does not allow for development to thrive. More than ever, African nations today are faced with the test of dealing with their multi-social, lingual, ethnic and religious groups even with strict demands for improvement both in the economic and sociopolitical circles (Bakare 1-14).

The population of Nigeria is over 150 million. This confers on it the status of the most populous country in Africa which is close to 20 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa. In the same light, Nigeria is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. It is thus, a multi-cultural nation with about 500 ethnic groups with very diverse socio-cultural system deeply rooted in ethnic segmentation (Olutayo and Akanle 53-72).

The form of cultural identity being portrayed in Nigeria today is not an identity of being a Nigerian, but one of being from a part of Nigeria. For example, an Igbo man from Arochukwu in Abia state, will see himself first as an Arochukwu man, from a particular clan, before thinking about

being an Igbo man or a Nigerian. This form of mentality about “cultural identity” is prevalent among citizens. Being employed in a government parastatal is no longer based on merit but where one is from as evidenced from. Federal character is de-emphasised and “ethnic character” is emphasised. Such form of cultural identity promotes disunity, distrust and the absence of social cohesion (Balogun and Obosi 57).

What should be noted here is that any examination of Nigeria's identity diversity would have to be inclusive of all identities – civil and primordial – and the ways in which they are intricately linked. This is necessary to enable us situate the various identities, especially the more active and politically salient identities, in their fuller, robust and recursive contexts (Osaghae and Suberu 7).

Nigeria presents a complex of individual as well as crisscrossing and recursive identities of which the ethnic, religious, regional and sub-ethnic (communal) are the most salient and the main bases for violent conflicts in the country. This is both from the point of view of the identities most commonly assumed by citizens especially for political purposes and the identities often implicated in day-to-day contestations over citizenship as well as competitions and conflicts over resources and privileges (7).

To emphasize the interconnectedness of ethnic, regional, and religious identities and the fact that they are often mutually reinforcing, they are sometimes compounded or hyphenated as ethno-regional and ethno-religious. The latter references have historical, geographical and political origins. They evolved from the old regional structures of the Nigerian federation, where identities were shaped by leaders of the dominant ethnic groups Hausa/Fulani in the Northern region (predominately Muslim), Igbo in the Eastern region and Yoruba in the Western region that exercised some form of hegemonic control over the regions (7).

As a result, ethno-regional identities were, and continue to be, used as shorthand references to the dominant ethnic groups acting as regional 'hegemons'. This is the sense in which conflicts among the three

dominant groups are generally referred to as ethno-regional. With the division of the country into six semi-official geo-political zones in the late 1990s, which not only have ethnic referents but have also gained currency in the political lexicon, the usage of ethno-regional categories is likely to expand, but so far the old regional references remain dominant (7).

Similarly, the category of ethno-religious identities initially owed its origin to regional formations. It has been useful for differentiating the predominantly Muslim North from the predominantly Christian South. The category has also helped to differentiate the dominant Muslim group in the North from the non-Muslim minorities in the region. Indeed, unlike the south where majority groups are distinguished from minority groups on the basis of ethnicity, majority-minority distinctions in the north have been more religious than ethnic (7).

Thus, a member of the Hausa/Fulani majority group in the north who is Christian is as much a minority in the overall scheme of things as say an Idoma or Igala, (both of which are northern minority groups) and is actually likely to enjoy lesser privileges than an ethnic minority person who is Muslim. Since the early 1980s when the Maitatsine riots ushered in a regime of religious fundamentalism in the Northern parts of the country, ethno-religious categories have been more frequently used to describe conflicts that involve an intersection of ethnic and religious identities. Again, for partly historical reasons, this has been truer of the North where, as has been pointed out, religious differences play a major part in ethnic differentiation. Thus, conflicts between Hausa/Fulani and minority ethno-religious groups are described as ethno-religious (7).

However, the increased politicisation of religion by the state, including the adoption of Islamic penal law by several Northern states in the Fourth Republic, has led to the generalisation of ethno-religious conflicts all over the country. In the recent past, other 'primordial' identities that have gained wide currency and greater political significance, especially in contestations over citizenship, are those of 'indigenes', 'non-indigenes', 'migrants', and 'settlers'. These categories have ethnic, communal, religious and regional origins, and have evolved from an entrenched

system of discriminatory practices in which non-indigenes, migrants and settlers are shunted out or denied equal access to the resources, rights and privileges of a locality, community, town or state, to which 'sons and daughters of the soil' have first or exclusionary access (7).

The system produces and sustains a hierarchical, unequal, and ranked system of citizenship that has provoked violent conflicts all over the country, and goes to the very heart of the 'National Question'. Although, these identities have grown in significance in the recent past, which obviously has to do with the aggravation of the 'National Question', they have deep historical roots in pre-colonial patterns of inter-group relations, and the discriminatory practices and ethnic inequalities entrenched by both the colonial regime and continued by post-independence administrations. These have cumulatively provoked various forms of self-determination agitation by different groups (8).

### **Panorama of Identity Crises in Nigeria**

Since the 1980s, identity clashes have turned into a common decimal in Nigeria, particularly in the country's Northern region (Abdu 22). This identity crisis is not peculiar to a state. It has caused similar problems in Modakeke/Ife, Sabongari/Kano, Sabo/Ibadan, Zango/Kataf, Urhobo/Itsekiri, Jukun/Tiv, Kuteb/JukunChamba and Hausa/Shagamu (Danfulani, "The Jos peace conference and the indigene/settler question in Nigerian politics", <http://www.ascle=den.n//pdf/papdanfulan.pdf>). Others include the Chamba vs Kuteb, the Ogoni vs Andom in Rivers State, the Sharia crisis in Kaduna State, the Tiv vs other ethnic groups in Azara of Nassarawa State in 2001, the Tarok vs Hausa/Fulani in Plateau State in 2004, the Geomai vs the Hausa/Fulani in Shendam local government of Plateau State in 2002, the Quan vs Pan in Quan'pan local government of Plateau State in 2006, the Hausa/Fulani and the Beron, Anaguta and Afizare in Jos North local government in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008, and 2010 and the *Boko Haram* savagery that has immersed Borno, Yobe, Bauchi and Kano States since July 2009 (Kwaja 67-79).

While the foundation of ethno-religious and other identity conflicts have been connected to colonialism and the Cold War, it is likewise irrefutable that such clashes are established in bad governance, politicization of

ethnic and religious identities, the challenge and strife for political power by the ethnic and religious communities individually (Machava, referred to by Idahosa and Akov 349-360).

In spite of strong optimism that the adoption of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 would mitigate or alleviate rough identity clashes, the country has rather seen resurgence in significant level with reference to ethnic, religious and communal clashes with devastating consequences (Kwaja 67-79). One of the cases for the adoption of democracy, just as democratic consolidation in Nigeria lies in the fact that as a centripetal power, majority rule system is the main institutional game plan that can ensure peaceful resolve or controlling of ethnic, religious and other identity clashes (Olayode 121-142).

According to Ibrahim in Idahosa and Akov, ethno-religious and communal clashes in Nigeria, are connected to citizenship within the context of identity, which is rooted in the politics of inclusion or exclusion (349-360). These attach to cases and counter-claims over identity as a reason for figuring out who is excluded or included in decision making just as access to benefits and opportunities under the 'we' versus 'them' antique (Kwaja 67-79). These identity clashes have had expansive ramifications for the state. As for Babangida, the results have been misusing of human and material resources in ethnically and religiously roused violent encounter, conflicts and even battles, dangers to security of life and properties, the elevating of the fragility of the economy and political process (11).

Hence, the ethnic, religious and communal groups that feel sidelined by the significant ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) are compelled to adopt constitution and extra-constitutional ways to challenge the authority of the major ethnic clusters. The primary driver of violent identity conflict in Nigeria is that most minority groups have remained minorities for far too long, while the dominant groups are perpetually dominant, a pattern which has far-reaching ramifications for inter-ethnic and religious relations among the differing ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria. Thus, the motivations for participation, agreement and bargain have been undermined in this way representing a

huge test for the task of peace-building, as diverse ethnic groups are forced to exist together in an atmosphere of mutual mistrust, indifference and doubt (Idahosa and Akov 349-360).

### **Manifestation of Cultural Identity and Its Implications on Development**

Violent conflicts, Bassey argues, produce social division, reverse economic progress, obstruct sustainable development, infringe human rights and compromise the security and work of the people in conflict (27). According to him, the numerous and constant economic crisis in the African continent has been commonly connected to the protracted and widespread violent conflicts. For Bassey, in existential terms, the impending linkage between conflict and underdevelopment crisis is non-linear, yet, dialectical underdevelopment crisis breeds conflict which in turn promotes the entanglement of economic crisis in Africa. The effect of extended violent conflicts on development in Africa, Bassey further states, has been incessant so much so that development and security have demonstrated contradictory results which can be recognized from their immediate and roundabout effect on the society and the economy. Such effects, extend from devastation of human and physical capital, interruption of economic activities, increased cost of conducting such transactions, to distortion of resource allocation by the state (28).

King and Sall avers that intense conflicts compromise economic stability, thwarts progress, and retard infrastructural developments. Ceaseless conflicts endangers human life and render people nonessential. Persistent dissension encourages itself. Flares of unrest expend fundamental normal and natural resources. Separations brought about by crime, joblessness and deadly transmittable diseases go unaddressed, devastating the human soul (11).

As indicated by Dumoye, there is no repudiating the way that conflicts have negative effect on political cum economic stability of any country, since ethnic clashes and economic crisis are mutually reinforcing. Poverty, he added, fuels ethnic conflicts, which thus hinders economic development (77). Dumoye states further that a country where there is prolonged violent conflicts will not have the option to complete any

notable improvement on the grounds that erratic resources intended for development will be occupied to keeping up lawfulness. Likewise the productive segment of population is either dead, battling or are in refugee camps.

As also indicated by Adetola, conflicts have the ability to negatively influence developmental programmes by annihilating infrastructure, interfering with the production process and diverting assets from beneficial employments. He contends further that like never before, peace and development are currently more personally connected and are frequently respected by the United Nations and other international actors as indistinguishable objectives. Also, that food security which simply refers to access by all people, at all times, to sufficient food for a healthy and productive life can be disrupted resulting into food insecurity. Therefore, food security can occur due to disruption or damage to the food production system which might be because of war, starvation, socio-economic/political conditions, dry season and social conflict. In fact, development cannot happen in a tempestuous environment; after all, one of the pillars of development is stability. Once fueled, ethnic pressures can and do bring about mass death (qtd in Raphael 25).

Conflicts between various ethnic groups have undermined development interests in sub-saharan Africa, again giving way to full-scale civil wars. The ethnic tensions in Nigeria during the 1960s culminating in the Biafra war remain a case in point. Such a circumstance dissuades direct foreign investment into sub-Saharan economies. In numerous instances, potential foreign investors have retired their investment interests reserved for sub-Saharan countries on account of the unsteady and unpredictable social and political conditions brought about by ethnicity. Besides, ethnicity leads productive individuals to channel their energies into ethnic conflicts as opposed to utilizing them to build up their country (Noyoo 55-67).

As stated earlier, cultural identity finds expression in language and religion. Take religion for instance, there is religious parochialism, particularism, bigotry, fanaticism and chauvinism can be expressed under the following: obstructive and disruptive modes of worship,

disparaging preaching and stereotyping, proselytising, government patronage, religious preferentialism and marginalization, sensationalism in media reportage and the use of religious symbols. In other words, it is not enough to harbour the above attitudes, but it is enough to practically express them through a medium.

For example, taking religious fanaticism for example, fanatics perpetuate intolerance in varied manifestations categorized in the following order:

- (i) Overt Religious Fanaticism: This group does not hide their feelings and actions, the members normally display their violent, often than not, (unreasonable enthusiasm in crude form) publicly, usually associated with rustles illiterates instance of *Maitasine* and *Boko-Haram* sects.
- (ii) Hidden Religious Fanaticism: The fanaticism associated with educated and diplomatic elites who indulge in religious prejudice, subtle and in surreptitious manner. Those fanatics exhibit their level of intolerance in different ways displayed through hatred and intolerance openly without pretension. They go to any length to prove that their views override the views of other adherents and that everybody must do their bidding and should they resist, they take up arms against them by embarking on widespread destruction of life and properties.

Relatedly, another group of fanatics do not openly display their intolerance. They are non-violent but not friendly. They use any opportunity that comes their way to vent their anger on people of other faiths. If this category occupies position of authority, their worst would be to discriminate against people who are not of the same religion with them. Other manifestations of cultural/religious identity are as follows:

### **Proselytising**

One of the major causes of religious violence in Nigeria is the methods of proselytising used by the two dominant religions. Although, Islam and Christianity deprecate the use of threat and coercion as a means of proselytizing (Omosho 31), their approaches to preaching have remained mentally and sometimes physically coercive. Unfortunately,

the most visible approach to Islamic conversion campaigns, particularly in northern Nigeria, is that of Jihad. This is epitomised by the *Boko Haram* declaration that Western culture, as represented by Christianity, is polluting and worthy of spiritual purging. Muslim fundamentalists view adherents of other faiths, and sometimes moderate Muslims, as corrupted stock worthy of Islamic conversion or regeneration as the case may be. Thus, the extremist disposition to enlisting conformity by brute force has created serious religious tensions in Nigeria (Sampson 122).

### **Government Patronage, Preferentialism and Marginalization**

In spite of the constitutional prohibition of disqualifications or disabilities inflicted on persons on account of their religious leanings, religious patronage has been entrenched in the public realm, depending on the predominance of particular religious adherents in positions of authority. Thus at the Federal and State Government levels, public officials manifestly patronise particular religions at the expense of others. In many States of northern Nigeria, public funds are used in the purchase and distribution of food items and other valuables for Muslim faithful during the Ramadan fast; however, government does not extend the same gesture to Christians during Christmas or traditional religious worshippers during their traditional ceremonies. This attitude is reversed in some Christian dominated states. Furthermore, whereas, the Federal Government has established both Christian and Muslim Pilgrims Commissions with State funding, some States, especially in the North, have single pilgrims' commissions for particular religions at the exclusion of others.

Depending on which religious group has the superior numerical strength in a state, the clergy is given prominent roles and privileges at state functions, while marginalising the others. In most states, the dominant religion denies the other religious groups access to certain privileges like land for locating worship houses or air time for transmitting religious messages. This attitude translates into political and economic preferentialism towards the favoured religious group (s), while marginalising the others.

### **Sensationalism in Media Reportage**

The media's penchant for exaggerating details of religious violence and thereby fuelling their intensity is well known and documented (Kukah 22). A dangerous dimension to inter-faith ridiculing and provocation in Nigeria is manifested in the publication of critical literature by religious intellectuals. In his treatise, Omotosho chronicled the following hate-influenced publications by both Christian and Muslim intellectuals among others. These publications have all made disparaging remarks against opposing religions and their prophetic essences. The mockery of opposing faiths is also compounded by the pervasive stereotyping of religious adherents. For instance, Muslims, especially those from the northern part of Nigeria, are in the habit of referring to all non-Muslims as *Arna* or *Kafir*; Arabic words for 'heathen' or unbelievers; while it is fashionable for Christians to refer to all Muslims as terrorists and violence-mongers (31). This attitude of religious stigmatisation has generated religious violence in the past and has the potential to do more.

There was Kaduna riot on 22nd November 2002 where about 200 people were reported killed and properties worth millions of naira were also destroyed. Those crises were said to have been caused by what was termed “blasphemous publications” (Sampson 124). Also, on the same day, there was a protest against Miss World Beauty contest scheduled to hold on 7th December, 2002 in Abuja. This media character constituted the gravamen in the 1987 Kafanchan religious disturbances. News reports monitored on Radio Kaduna, immediately after the commencement of the violence, alleged that Christians were killing Muslims indiscriminately, burning their Mosques and copies of the Holy Qur'an, and banishing them from the town. The broadcast further alleged that an itinerant preacher had misquoted the Qur'an and blasphemed the name of Prophet Mohammed, urging Christians to kill Muslims and burn their Mosques (Newswatch 10). These reports ignited reprisal attacks by Muslims all over Kaduna state, causing an invaluable loss of lives and property (Gofwen 91–93).

Most religious leaders in the country have therefore, accused the media of fanning the embers of religious violence by their provocative and emotive reports (Kukah 23). News headlines such as 'Islamic Assailants

Kill Hundreds of Christians near Jos', 'Muslims slaughter Christians in central Nigeria', 'Muslims slaughter 400–500 Christians in latest Jos crisis' (Creeping Sharia 2010) are very common during religious disturbances.

Such alarming headlines, coupled with gory images of victims often trigger reprisal attacks. The proliferation of media technology has made it easy for some of these emotive reports and images of slain persons to be transported far and wide, generating intense hatred between belligerents and reprisal attacks in a cycle of violence. The ethno-religious violence that has engulfed Jos, central Nigeria, in recent years has generated an unimaginable level of hatred between the locals and the alleged settlers (who are generally divided along religious lines) as a result of the dissemination of gory images of victims on the internet. This has helped to sustain recrimination and reprisal attacks from both groups (Yangu and Akputu 223).

### **The Use of Religious Symbols**

The use of religious symbols is increasingly becoming a source of religious conflict and violence in Nigeria. Down to the Southern part of the country, there were crises that erupted because of religious symbols. For instance, there was a religious crisis in May 1986 at the chapel of Resurrection, University of Ibadan when the statue of the Risen Christ was set ablaze by an unknown group of people. Besides, in Imo State, the Ikenga Symbol which signifies an upright man struggling through the vicissitudes of life in Igbo land was destroyed by a group of religious fanatics who described the symbol as an object of idol worship (Adamolekun 18).

The ideal of religious tolerance has constantly eluded the devotees of three major religions of Nigeria such as African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christians of this country contemptuously regarded traditional religious beliefs and practices as devilish, paganist, satanic and fetish. Traditional shrines are often looted and valuable sacred symbols and images carted away and sold either in Europe or America, this unkind act has caused violence and crises in the affected areas in the country.

Most Muslim women insist on the use of the *Hijab*, and in extreme cases, *Niqab* and *Burka*, even where the regulatory regime prohibit their use. In 2005, following the prohibition of the use of head scarves by female law students in the Faculty of Law, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria; a Christian Lecturer, Dr Andrew Akume, turned back a female student who wore the *Hijab* from attending his lecture. This action drew the ire of the Muslim Students Society (MSS), who mobilised their collectives and issued a *fatwa* (Islamic death sentence) on the said Lecturer, thereby forcing him into hiding (Madugba 4). This act did not only cause serious religious tension on the campus, but ignited a diplomatic strain between the governments of Kaduna and Benue states (the state in which the University is located and the Lecturer's home state, respectively) over Akume's safety.

Furthermore, the inscription of Arabic symbols on Nigerian currency denominations has also been vehemently opposed by Nigerian Christians, who associate it with Islam and an overarching *Islamisation* agenda by northern Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims have continuously opposed the use of the 'cross' as a symbol on public hospitals' bill/sign boards and other hospital accessories. These situations remain potential triggers of religious violence.

Having identified the above, one can hereby submit that parochial, particularistic, bigotry, fanatical and chauvinistic attitudes are deliberately chosen to kick-start discussions on the drivers of cultural violence in Nigeria because they form the base (sub-structure) upon which other sources of cultural violence rest. There is no gainsaying about the fact that the problem of cultural identity in Nigeria has devastating effects on the stability order. The destruction cultural identity has caused to Nigeria cannot be quantified. The frequent clashes which erupted as a result of this had inflicted untold hardship on both the individuals, in term of loss of lives and property and on the Government in terms of occasional provisions of relief materials for the victims of cultural identity. Though, there are many consequences of cultural identity, but the most obvious consequence has been loss of lives and property. Innocent citizens are in most cases the victims of violence. Cultural identity has the potential of resulting into large-scale physical

displacement and forced relocation of individuals, families and groups. The spate of this violence in the last three decades has certainly resulted in varying degrees of internally displaced persons (Jibrin 65-82).

Apart from undermining the stability order, cultural identity tends to dent the image of the country in the international community. The frequent eruption of uprisings has forced some countries to issue travel warning advising their citizens not to travel to Nigeria because of religious tension that could erupt quickly and without warning. For instance, in December year 2003, the American State Department citing alleged resurgence of violence crises, warned its citizens of the dangers of traveling to Nigeria (Abubakar 6). Also in December year 2004, the Government of United States and Britain re-issued travel advice to their citizens traveling to Nigeria. The advisory noted among other things that 'religious tension between some Muslim and Christian communities results in occasional acts of isolated communal violence that could erupt quickly and without warning...' (Egua and Makinde 6).

It is a truism that this kind of warning does not augur well for stability order in the country, hence, the need for peace. It also causes psychological trauma to those who witnessed the killing of their relatives, and burning of their properties. And it increases the unemployment level when most of the small-scale industries that employ young and able youths are lost to religious violence.

In other words, cultural identity is not intrinsically bad but as when employed positively can be a factor for national development but rather, it has also been manipulated to wrought havoc on the Nigerian populace. Between the year 1980 and the year 1990, Nigeria recorded major cultural crises with heavy human and material losses; many monuments of high and historical value were also destroyed. Apart from the monumental losses which can be qualified, the crisis further deepened the division which hitherto existed among the various cultural groups. For example, the psychological trauma and the sear among the victim of these disturbances is a recurring decimal. Such persons never live to neither forgive nor forget the persons involved in the circumstances of such carnages.

And economically, Nigeria has lost opportunities of economic recovery owing to suspicions based on cultural crises. For example, in the year 1984, Nigeria lost an opportunities of an interest free loan from Saudi Arabia which agreed to lend Nigeria a substantial part of the 2.5 billion Naira loan, she was negotiating with the I.M.F. The rumour then was that Nigeria's regulation of her membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) would make Nigeria an Islamic state (Ojie 12-17).

Nigeria lost this golden opportunity even when relatively smaller nation such as Gabon, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Guinea Bisau enjoy comprehensive economic facilities of the OIC and have not become Islamic States in the process of their regular membership. The incessant nature of violence in the country also has the impact of breeding social miscreant and criminals who by their access to weapons of war (which are usually sophisticated) become terrors to both their immediate community and the larger society. After the crisis, it is always difficult to retrieve such weapons back because most of these people are originally jobless, they often found solace in terrorizing the society. Also, the inability (in most cases) of the security forces to nip in the bud this religious violence before they escalate to the level of wanton destruction and killing expose the quality (in terms of knowledge, readiness, expertise and equipment).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Having examined the phenomena of cultural identities and prejudices as it affects development of Africa in this 21st century, and assessed their implications on Nigerian society, it is necessary to make some recommendations:

To avert cultural crises, the Nigerian Government should, at the Federal, State and Local Levels, adopt an open and uncompromising neutral attitude towards cultural groups in the country. By this, it means that anyone in the position of power in a multi-religious country should not allow his cultural inclination to override common interests. Nigerians should be treated equally and be given equal rights and privileges irrespective of their cultural background.

Relatedly, political leaders should preach the genuine teaching of their respective cultures about peace to their members. All cultural groups could promote peaceful and harmonious co-existence among people if only their teeming members are informed of the erroneous consideration of anyone outside their group as an antagonist.

In addition, the Nigerian press can play a big role towards averting cultural violence and promoting national peace and stability order. The objectivity of the Press in reporting cultural matters, will promote cultural harmony and peaceful co-existence. It is expected that the mass media practitioners should always imbibe the ethics of professional journalism whenever they are reporting or making news analysis and features.

Furthermore, at the levels of education in Nigeria, Students and their Lecturers should constantly reflect on the value of tolerance in a multi-ethnic nation as Nigeria. In all tertiary institutions; symposia, lectures and conferences should be frequently organized on this topic (Lederach 43). Experts on dialogue with different cultures should be invited to present leading papers that will promote meaningful dialogue. Enlightenment campaigns should also be organized for the members of the public on cultural peace.

The need for inter- cultural dialogue in a pluralistic state like Nigeria is equally expedient. The aim of dialogue should not be to obliterate the identity of a participating cultural group, rather, its objective should be to discuss the various aspects of the problem that pose as threat to the peaceful co-existence between different cultural groups. The promotion of inter- cultural dialogue in Nigeria, will therefore contribute a great deal in averting cultural violence.

Furthermore, there is the need for the development of an early warning system for raising alarm on the imminent eruption of cultural uprising. Such warning system will enable the law enforcement agents to intervene promptly in cultural tension before it escalates into violent outburst. The pluralism on cultural matters and ethnicity call for sincerity when relating with, we must be truly tolerant of each other especially

where the practice of culture proves divisive.

The work therefore concluded that, education, tolerance, dialogue and reconciliation among others should serve as tools with which to douse the parochial, xenophobic, fanatical and chauvinistic tendencies of ethnic groups in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. This will ensure peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethnic groups. This would also help in the restoration of peace, security, growth and stability in Nigeria as a nation and Africa as a continent.

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