

**GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT
SCIENCES, HISTORY UNIT, SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES,
UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA, FABARA CAMPUS, SERE KUNDA,
THE GAMBIA**

ISSN: 2992-300X

**GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL AND
MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, HISTORY UNIT, SCHOOL
OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF THE
GAMBIA, FABARA CAMPUS, SERE KUNDA,
THE GAMBIA**

ISSN: 2992-300X, Vol.2, N0.1, January, 2024

**PUBLISHED BY THE HISTORY UNIT, SCHOOL OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA,
FABARA CAMPUS, SERE KUNDA, THE GAMBIA**

JOURNAL SCOPE

Global Journal of Arts, Social and Management Sciences is domiciled in the History Unit, School of Arts and Sciences, University of The Gambia, Sere Kunda, The Gambia. The Journal welcomes unpublished articles, short reports and monographs in all areas of Arts, Social and Management Sciences such as English, French, Linguistics, History, International Studies, Diplomacy, Philosophy, Religious Studies, Music, Theatre Arts, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Accounting, Psychology, Geography and Regional Planning, Mass Communication, Business Administration, Marketing, Insurance, Quality Management, Risk Management, Decision Support Systems, General Management, Banking, Insurance, Gender Studies, Development Studies, Global Studies, Human Ecology, Library and Information Science, Media and Leadership Studies. All articles in this journal are indexed in some recognised indexing bodies. Contributors' papers are uploaded online after publication, at the official website of the journal.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editors-In-Chief

Prof. Lamin Sidibeh

American University in the Gambia, The Gambia

Prof. Philip G. Arthur

University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Editorial Secretary

Malang Fanneh PhD

University of The Gambia, The Gambia

Editorial Members

Lamin Jammeh PhD

University of The Gambia, The Gambia

Ismalia Ceesay PhD

University of The Gambia, The Gambia

G. Badjie PhD

University of The Gambia, The Gambia

RELIGION AND HUMANITY IN NIGERIA

Malang Fanneh, PhD.

Department of History, School of Arts and Sciences
University of The Gambia, The Gambia
Email: mfanneh@utg.edu.gm

&

Ihuoma Chinonso

Department of History and International Studies
Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State
Nigeria
Email: ihuoma.chinonso@yahoo.com

Abstract

With a myriad of societal problems facing Nigeria, there has always been the need for analytical discourses on the nexus between religion and humanity. The view that religion is akin to humanity has always remained a contentious topic of discussion among scholars. Be that as it may, religion has played significant roles in the transformation of Nigeria as a nation and has always been a catalyst as well as an obstacle for nation-building in modern Nigeria. Today, there are different types of religions practised in the world and most, if not all, have traces of humanistic tendencies in their nature. This paper argues that religion has been manipulated by the Nigerian elite to perpetuate inhuman activities and cause a strain on inter-religious relations in the country. To this end, there is the need to interrogate the place of religion vis-à-vis humanity in Nigeria. By looking at religion as a major impetus for ethno-political conflicts in the country. The paper however, tries to document how the conflicts are correlated with, but not limited to the desire to express cultural identity and a strong national government that will respond to the needs and aspirations of the citizens irrespective of their political, religious and ethnic affiliations. Using the historical method, this study undertakes an analytical study of the roles of the three major religions in Nigeria

(Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam) and how this affects nation-building in Nigeria. Secondary sources were derived from journal articles and textbooks.

Keywords: Development, Humanity, Nation-building, Religion, Society and Nation-Building

Introduction

The challenges of nation building in Nigeria is enormous; and religion has been one of the major catalysts and impediments that Nigerian leadership and citizens continue to grapple with since independence. Between 1861 and 1914, pivotal events led to Nigeria's creation from the former British Colony. The challenges are so great that sometimes, difficult choices need to be made by the political leaders of the country. Without this intervention from those leaders, the future of the country would remain bleak and gloomy in all ramifications. Emmanuel Oladipo Ojo argues that the 1861 annexation of Lagos gave Britain a firm foothold in Nigeria. From that time till 1903, virtually every region or kingdom in existence capitulated to British imperial rule. On 1 January 1914, Sir Donald Fredrick Lugard climaxed the British policy of unification in Nigeria by 'uniting' the country - Northern and Southern Protectorates - in what has since been known as the amalgamation¹. The British thereafter administered the country for another five decades until Nigeria obtained independence on 1st October 1960. This implies that Nigeria is a little more than a century old as a geographical entity and almost six decades old as an independent sovereign state. Ademola Ajayi² is of the view that the country is 'an amalgam of different micro-nations' and further postulates that the state is divided along ethnic, cultural and religious lines. This observation is apt because it avails us the opportunity to grasp the enormity of the challenges that arose subsequently after she gained independence from the British.

Although Nigeria has been a secular state since independence, religion has had a defining role in national cohesion and it continues to be one of the major challenges of nation-building in the country.

Some have argued that religion can be used as an instrument to forestall instability and conflicts which are huge impediments to nation-building as is the case today in contemporary Nigerian society. It is important to add that religion remains a powerful source of individual and group identity in many countries and Nigeria is not an exception. It is important to buttress this point because religion frequently serves as the identity impulse of individuals and groups which sometimes blindfolds them to accepting that individual interests should take precedence over the collective national interest. This is an anomaly that cannot be in the interest of the majority in the country. Through religion, group feelings³ are developed and members can become indoctrinated to the extent that there are ready to die just to protect group's interest.

Conceptual Clarification

Religion: The word religion is an enigmatic and elusive concept. This is compounded by the fact that it deals with immaterial objects that cannot be empirically verified. However, three elements have been constant in the definitions of religion given by many scholars and writers: belief, cult/worship and morals. Morreal and Sonn⁴ defines it as a cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relate humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements. To Ekwunife, cited in Kanu⁵, religion is man's awareness and recognition of his dependent relationship on a transcendent Being the Wholly Other, nameable or un-nameable, personalized or impersonalized expressible in human society through beliefs, worship and ethical or moral behaviour.

Humanity: This has to do with compassion, sympathy, or generous disposition. Humanity is the human race, which includes everyone on earth. This concept goes back to the period of the Renaissance and the development of humanitarianism in modern times. It has been taken alongside virtue which means moral excellence, or anything considered morally good.

Nation Building: The classical definition of a nation has to do with an aggregate of a people with a common origin, culture and historical experience living in a specified geographical location. This definition is problematic because it is difficult for the above indices to be met by people living in any geographical space and time. On the other hand, the liberal definition of a nation equates it to a state or country where a single government govern the people with the sole purpose of maintaining law and order. By the liberal definition, a nation is believed to consist of a people with a permanent territory and a government that has the legal mandate to go into bilateral relations and agreements with other states on the basis of equality.

According to Wolfgang & Folt ⁶, nation-building has to do with constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. Nation-building has to do with the unification or integration of people of diverse ideologies, beliefs and culture in a political entity. Ihuoma⁷ opines that nation-building involves the reconstruction and re-moulding of heterogeneous feelings among a nation-state into a homogenous feeling; a feeling of oneness irrespective of class, religion, culture, belief, values and orientation.

Historicising Religion and Humanity in Nigeria

Before Africa's contact with the Europeans, Africans had an indigenous religion which was sacred. Most families had private family deities whom they sacrificed to and called upon when there was a need for such. He carried it to the fields where he was sowing seeds or harvesting new crops, he took it with him to a beer parlour or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he was educated, he took his religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he was a politician, he took it to the house of parliament ⁸. Religion was a part of the people's culture because most of the African Tradition was embedded in their religion. This is why it is believed that religion enters into every aspect of the life of the Africans and it cannot be studied in isolation. Its study has to go hand-in-hand with the study of the people who practise the religion. Awolalu as cited in Kanu holds that

When we speak of African Traditional Religion we mean the indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living and practising it. This is a religion that has no written literature yet it is “written” everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the people's myths and folktale, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings. It is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshipped. It is a religion that has no zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young or old.⁹

Traditional African religion has been credited with being humanistic even though it has a lot of shortcomings and has favoured some inhuman activities that have led to its criticism by the Europeans when they arrived in Africa. It led to integration in many parts of African communities as some deities belonging to a community was sought after by people from other communities while lots of them had prominence in the pre-colonial period like the Long Juju of Arochukwu. Traditional African Religion is still being practiced in various African societies, today, even with the advent of Christianity; many Christians still practice traditional religion. This was reported by a former missionary who visited Nigeria, Harry Sawyer

I have never been able to see any actual performance, but one night, travelling by car up to the college on Mount Auroel, after the midnight hour, my wife and I encountered a woman performing strange antics in the middle of the road just above a second

crossroad. She dashed into the tall grass to avoid detection, but we identified her before she vanished. She was a regular professing Christian.¹⁰

As one of the key elements of the culture of the people of Nigeria, religion has always defined the character of the people at all times. Through religion, the values of the society are instilled in people especially the young ones. Therefore, cultural cohesion through religious practices helps regulate individual and community behaviours in Nigeria. This mental regulation of people through their religious orientation is key in instilling the spirit of communalism in the people. In community mosques and churches, the congregations socialize and members assist one another in times of need. The point being made here is that the healthy relationships that exist among the people at the grassroots are key for any meaningful and sustainable peace which are the requisites for nation-building to be unhindered.

With the introduction of Christianity through evangelical and other missionary engagements, the Christian missions had contributed to the nation building and humanitarian efforts in the country over the years since the creation of the Nigerian state. They contributed to the establishment of schools and health facilities in every nook and cranny of the country. Their efforts have been monumental in supplementing the government's effort of providing healthcare services to the population especially in hard-to-reach areas. The execution of their corporate social responsibility in opening schools in various communities where they carried out evangelical activities is indeed well documented. However, there is the fact that these corporate social responsibilities were a means to an end as

With the advent of Christianity on one hand, came the need for indigenous evangelizers who were perceived to be necessary in the conversion of the indigenes as they understand and speak the local language and were closer to the people than the foreigners. On the other hand, the desire and need for

clerks in government administration so as to facilitate the proper administration of a large geographical area such as Nigeria encouraged the zeal to introduce a system of education that would enlighten the indigenes and make them useful in the propagation of the British activities in the period¹¹.

Samuel Agubosi¹² argues that Christian missionaries carried out extensive propaganda against traditional medical practice and urged their followers to patronize modern medical and health services. The missions used religion to change the perceptions of the people. For instance, through the diction “Cleanliness is next to godliness”, Agubosi makes the point that the valuable message of personal hygiene was inculcated into the people. The point we want to drive home here is that such a cost-effective strategy of preventive health care service to the communities saved the government enormous capital.

In some areas, the Islamic religion served as a catalyst for what Khaldun¹³ refers to as 'group feelings' to be cemented and help create a sense of belonging and inclusion for the inhabitants of the area. In Northern Nigeria for example, Islam has become a unifying religion that helps bring the Muslims to not only see themselves as Nigerians but also those of the same 'Ummah.' The point that is stressed here is that Islam and Islamic jurisprudence could have been better exploited to instil a solid sense of national cohesion within a greater supranational federation where tolerance for others becomes a bedrock of inter-group relations. The same applies to areas where a majority Christian domination is the case.

In recent times, religion has been used to galvanize public opinion in the country when some issues of national interest are at stake. For instance, once in a while, people hear some Imams and pastors praying for peace to prevail in the country. Such efforts of the

religious leaders give comfort to the population as they are urged not to despair. Some pastors make certain predictions when the country's Super Eagles are to participate in major football tournaments. For the fact that a good number of followers believe in their religious leaders, hope is instilled in them whenever they hear from their spiritual heads. Thus, we can submit that through the contribution of the religious leaders, the drive towards nation building is enhanced because it calls for concerted efforts of all with a common goal and spirit.

Challenges of Religion and Humanity in Nigeria

The major challenge of religion and humanity has played out in various forms in Nigeria and has posed a serious threat to her achievement of nation-building. This places religion as key among the challenges to nation building in Nigeria as many atrocities perpetrated along religious lines have made religion to become credited with vice in Nigeria. The three main religions practiced by people in Nigeria are: Islam, Christianity and Traditional African Religion. Members of Islam and Christianity embark on evangelization as a means of converting people to their respective faiths. Religious crises do arise in the process of evangelism. This may be as a result of preaching against the other religions or converting the adherents of each other. In some extreme cases, believers of the different faiths fail to tolerate one another and recognize that religion is more or less one's personal relationship with its creator. This lack of understanding among the diverse people of the country makes inter group relations sour thereby creating room for the escalation of tensions among the people.

In some countries, identity in terms of ethnicity is fluid but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. People are easily identified as Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa-Fulani based on their names and places of origin. These people have developed inter-group relations for many centuries before and during the colonial period. Two main theories have been propounded with regard to how the pre-colonial Nigerian people interacted among themselves. The theories of unity in diversity and

fundamental diversity¹⁴ are used by historians to argue that the people had nothing to do in common and to stress the point that common bonds existed among the Nigerian people before the British amalgamation of 1914 and the subsequent integration of Nigeria into the colonial establishment. Despite the fact that Nigeria is a heterogeneous country, one would assume that the cultural and religious diversity of its people will be a healthy tool for cultural integration and cohabitation.

Obaro Ikime, one of the pre-eminent scholars of Nigerian history, observes that Christian Missionary activities and Western European education led to the emergence of an elite Nigerian group which spread unevenly in the different parts of the country¹⁵. He does well to remind us that the Fulani jihad in the northern part of Nigeria also led to the emergence of a distinct “religio-political edifice”¹⁶ that the Sokoto jihad created in that part of the country. The point being stressed here is that there is some fluidity in the identity creation in Nigerian societies as some would see themselves as Christians due to their adoption of Western European religion and education while those who were exposed to the Arabic culture became Islamized. Thus, identity formation was no longer based on ethno-linguistic lines but also along religious lines. The net effect of this identity creation was that instead of Nigerians to see themselves as one people with a common goal of living harmoniously in one nation, the Nigerian Muslims and Christians became strange bedfellows who find it difficult to see eye to eye¹⁷. This created monumental challenges for nation-building in the country as the diverse peoples could not to a large extent put the national interest before their separate narrow self-interests. It therefore became a great obstacle for the national leaders to preside over a country where unity in diversity is an invaluable asset for nation-building. In other words, anytime there is a need for a national consensus on any key sociopolitical and economic trends, religious differences become impediments to the achievement of such goals and aspirations.

A close observation of events in Northern Nigeria suggests that some

of the northern elites manipulate religion for political and economic gains and the net effect is that inter-group relations has been hampered causing problems in the areas of unity and peace in Nigeria. The issue of Sharia and the crises it has generated as a result of some efforts to make it an instrument of state adjudication in a secular state creates enormous challenges for nation building in Nigeria. Moral decadence which was traced to the advent of Western education and capitalism in Muslim Yoruba communities is seen as a major cause of corruption in Nigeria, a situation which has hampered the economic development of the state. However, this argument lacks merits because some people try to use the dynamics of religion to get both political and economic capital amid intense strife for supremacy in all spheres of life in the country.

After the conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate, and the pacification of the people in the region, the British established their administrative control over the people of the area. During this process, different levels of administrative structures were put in place to re-organize and alter the boundaries of the former emirates¹⁸. New provinces and emirates were created for administrative convenience. The point being made here is that new identities were created as people began to see themselves as inhabitants of a different geopolitical entity. Certainly, the net effect of this was the emergence of a new Nigerian with a different outlook of himself from a religious and an ethnolinguistic perspective. The personal and collective feelings of the people had not helped knit the people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Religion ultimately became a defining factor in identity creation in many regions and communities in Nigeria. Some people began to see themselves as Muslim Nigerians while others saw themselves as Christian Nigerians. Those who are neither Muslims nor Christians continue to practise their traditional African religion. Some of the political elite exploited such differences of the people for political and economic gains. Thus, the result is usually the intensification of hostilities among the people who are usually brainwashed by the

political elite, especially during the canvassing of votes during elections. Due to the division along geopolitical lines, Nigerian leaders continue to grapple with how to unite their people despite their different religious orientations and instil the notion of one nation, one people in the populace.

The deliberate attempt by the British to protect Northern Nigeria from Christian missionary activities and western Christian education had attracted the attention of many historians who study Nigeria¹⁹. After the amalgamation of Nigeria, some scholars are of the view that the British conferred the privilege of a 'political veto' on the northern region²⁰. There is also the view that the federal system in post-independence Nigeria encouraged, and indeed, fostered the politics of regional rivalry nurtured in mutual suspicion and the fear of northern domination. To date, the fear of northern domination of Nigerian politics, deeply resented by many southern politicians, was reinforced by the attempt to institute Sharia in some northern states. What is clear is that the recent reports of violence against the population in the northern region indicate that the federal government is to a large extent unable to amicably govern the area and maintain absolute security of the lives and property of the people living in the area.

Most of the scholars have argued that inter-group relations and other cultural unity issues in Northern Nigeria were negatively exploited²¹. Thus, to a large extent, Nigeria became dichotomized along religious lines which have always posed immense challenges for nation-building in the country. The point being made here is to support the view that the colonial policy of divide and rule along religious lines continues to resonate in Nigeria's post-independence politics. The political and religious elites of the country used and continue to use religion to get political and economic gains at the detriment of a cohesive national agenda that should guarantee stability and sustainable socio-economic development for the country and her citizens.

In recent times, the Boko Haram insurgency has plagued Nigeria's nation-building efforts. What is interesting about the insurgency is that those who propagate the institutionalization of Sharia in some parts of Northern Nigeria through jihad distort Islam for their own egocentric political and economic agenda. Since the inception of the instability in Northern Nigeria, it does appear increasingly difficult to completely stamp out the violence that has led to and continues to be responsible for the killing and maiming of many innocent people. The failure of the presidents Obasanjo and Jonathan governments to stop the Boko Haram threats and attacks from their early existence signifies that the Nigerian state has a weak capacity to protect its citizens. Even under the Buhari administration, there are still signs that the nation-building efforts in the country continue to be challenged and constrained by instability in the North through intermittent Boko Haram attacks now coupled with herder-farmer conflicts which some believe has ethno-religious dimensions.

Notwithstanding the enormity of the sociopolitical and economic impacts of the Boko Haram insurgency in the country, created a unified national response to some extent. For once, both peace-loving Muslims and Christians are united in condemning those who are bent on maiming innocent Nigerians under the pretext of religion. This collective feeling is somehow unprecedented and therefore could be seen to enhance nation building which cannot be fruitful when people are divided along ideological lines and on the premise of narrow personal feelings that are hinged on religious orientations.

After the 2015 Presidential elections which saw a peaceful transition of power from incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan to General Muhammadu Buhari, many observers have rightly expressed optimism for the de-escalation of the Boko Haram crisis and other religious related problems that hinged on the *sharianization* of the Muslim dominated areas of the country. There has been marked success in the counter-insurgency campaign in the northern parts of the country and there seems to be some gains in crippling the Boko Haram movement and its operations in more recent times. Both

Muslims and Christians continue to give moral support to the victims and their families. This combination of efforts from people of both faiths signifies that in the face of adversity, Nigerians can put their differences aside and speak in one voice when their collective interest is threatened.

The British attitude of favouring the North played a key role in intensifying tensions between Muslims and Christians in post-independent Nigeria. The failure of the British to allow Christian missionaries due access to build schools and embark on their missionary activities in the northern territories only helped to cement mistrust and hostility among the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Thus, the British attitude culminated in what was a varying degree of exposure to Christian western education for people in the different regions. Those native Nigerians who embraced western education eventually became integrated into the colonial civil service and this eventually led to the nationalist struggle for political independence. The reverse was the case for regions that were adamant in embracing and patronizing western education. The cumulative effect was that of unequal ethnic, regional and religious representations in local and national leadership at all levels. Eventually, some northern and eastern elites used the religious card during the nation's infancy to gain political capital. Therefore, inter-religious animosities became entrenched and intensified, making many to be narrow-minded and pursue their interests to the detriment of a collective national interest based on a solid national consciousness. Indeed, these religious animosities made it difficult to reach a consensus in decision-making at all levels of government, especially the federal level. Thus, even after 1960, the early political elite of Nigeria continued to thread on narrow ethno-religious affiliations forgetting that nation-building requires a comprehensive utilization of the peoples' differences for holistic and sustained national cohesion. Instead of embarking on a comprehensive reform agenda that would relegate religion to the periphery of politics and governance, some of these elites felt that they could use the religious card to achieve their political aspirations.

This negative development resulted in pseudo-religious nationalism coupled with narrow ethnic consciousness which continue to be major impediments for the country as she tries to survive as a viable nation capable of uniting people of different linguistic backgrounds for a common good. What we have seen in Nigeria in recent times, for example, is a people divided on religious lines even though the religions they each believe in teach them peace, love, and compassion. The northern Hausa-Fulani Muslim, for instance, is sometimes so dogmatic in his Islamic orientation that he finds it difficult to accommodate his Christian Igbo neighbour for any peaceful cohabitation among them as a people. This situation is the case in many regions of the country and it has made it extremely difficult to forge ahead as a nation. There cannot be any meaningful socioeconomic transformation of any Nigerian community in whatsoever region if the indigenes are divided along religious lines.

The political will to curb religious impediments to nation-building seems lacking from both state and federal levels. This has led to divisions along religious lines and made it sometimes difficult for those in the factions to see one another as one people who are bound by a common history. There is indeed a need for a more vibrant and dynamic leadership that will make tough choices and decisions that can galvanize the citizenry of the country to understand that it is the combination of their actions that can lead them to create a nation where everyone will feel safe. That nation should have the capacity to put in place mechanisms that will create functional public institutions that will operate according to set legal frameworks that will enhance nation-building and solve the issues of religion as a divisive tool for national unity and integration.

Additionally, there appears to be political mobilization of the electorate along ethno-religious²² in Nigeria and this has precluded the emergence of a true national identity which is a necessary precondition for Nigeria's nation-building efforts. For example, politics in the northern region which is predominantly Muslim populated is mostly along religious lines as some Muslim voters are

usually more likely to vote for a Muslim presidential or gubernatorial candidate even when the opponent a non-Muslim is better qualified. The same applies to some Christian voters. This attitude of some of the voters in Nigeria does not in any way enhance nation building because the end result is usually putting square pegs in round holes especially when it comes to the holding of public offices in the country. Therefore, such incompetent leaders do all that is necessary to entrench themselves in power. Since their political capital lies on the religious domain, they use religion to side-line their opponents and create mistrust among their subjects. Hence, with a slight provocation among the contending rival supporters, tensions erupt and all developmental and nation-building efforts come to a standstill as no meaningful socio-economic activities can be viable during instability.

Conclusion

This paper explicated the dynamics of religion as both a catalyst and a problem for nation-building in Nigeria. By looking at religion as a major impetus for ethno-political conflicts in the country, the paper reached the conclusion that such conflicts are correlated with, but not limited to, the desire to express cultural identity while projecting a strong national government that will respond to the needs and aspirations of the citizenry irrespective of their political, religious and ethnic inclinations. The ethno-political dynamics cannot simply be resolved by use of force alone. In the process of resolution, multi-level efforts are needed by regional, state and federal government actors to be responsive to the underlying causes of intra-state religious factors that adversely impinge on nation-building in the country.

The paper also argued for the need for genuine inter-group relations among people of different religious orientations in the country and pointed out that peoples' relationships need to be characterized by mutual understanding which is a necessary precondition in consolidating the country's stride towards nation-building. Responsible leadership is vital to bringing the different ethno

linguistic groups together through reconciliation efforts that promote nation-building. At all times, this should be a top priority. The submission therefore is that the politicization of religion by the political elite should be a battle of conscience that every true Nigerian should be ready to fight. It is on this premise that genuine and sustainable development can be achieved now and in the future. With the collective efforts of the people coupled with astute political will of the leadership, a stronger and more vibrant nation will emerge.

Undoubtedly, religious manipulation in Nigeria has led to the perpetration of inhuman activities in the country and this has made people to attribute violent acts carried out in the country to religion, even when such are carried out along ethnic, economic or political lines. It has been argued in this paper that religion has always been both a catalyst and an impediment to nation-building in Nigeria. When religion is used for the common good, its benefits to individuals, families, communities and the country are monumental. This paper has highlighted the contributions of Christian missionaries through their evangelical works and humanitarian endeavours such as the building of schools and health facilities across the nook and crannies of the country. Such developmental efforts contribute to humanity and have enabled many citizens to get access to basic services that require them to have decent lives and contribute their quota to nation-building without undue hindrances.

In this paper, it was seen that the religious diversity of the country makes it difficult for a consensus to be reached as regards national issues which have religious undertones. The bid to *sharianise* some parts of the country has for instance created untold socio-political crisis in the country as manifested in the Boko Haram insurgency. This religio-political crisis has made some parts of northern Nigeria almost ungovernable creating more challenges to nation-building in the country in recent times.

From our consideration, it is clear that some Nigerian elite have always politicized religion and used it to gain both political and economic power.

To such ones, when the people are divided along religious lines, they become pliant thereby making it possible for pseudo-religious affiliations to be used to perpetuate egocentric socio-economic agenda with impunity. The fact that Nigeria is a secular state means that no religion should have supremacy over another and that everyone should have the constitutional right to practice the religion of his or her choice without any undue interference by any person or group of persons. Thus, the paper revealed that some elite have used religion as a divisive tool of oppressing others through manipulations that has made it possible for them to project individual interests over the collective interests of the populace. This often culminates in the mammoth challenges to nation-building. Despite these challenges, religion has been responsible for promoting some humanitarian endeavours. This means that all hope is not lost.

There is a need for massive and sustained efforts by the Nigerian elite to sensitize the population on the need for all citizens to stop ethno-religious sentiments. Policies and programmes should be designed to foster unity and progress among the people in the communities. Religious leaders should be sensitive about the content of their sermons and strive to encourage having good relations with others who have different religious orientations than those of their denomination. The federal government should take bold and tough decisions to put an end to religious skirmishes that continue to cause untold suffering to people in the areas where insurgents operate with impunity. The letter and spirit of the federal constitution with regard to the secularity of the state should not be compromised and should be enforced using whatever means. If these points are addressed, there is hope that in the future, nation-building will improve in the country.

Endnotes

1 Emmanuel Oladipo Ojo, “Nigeria, 1914-2014: From Creation to Cremation?” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 23, (2014): 67-91.

2 Ademola Ajayi, “From Amagamation to the Quest for National

Integration in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects” A paper delivered at the 40th Anniversary Lecture, Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin on the 18 of May, 2007. Nigeria: Unilorin, 2007.

3 Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Trans. Franz Rosenthal. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1967.

4 John Morreall and Tamara Sonn. *Myth1: All Societies Have Religions. 50 Great Myths of Religion*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

5 Ikechukwu A. Kanu. African Traditional Religion in a Globalizing World. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education* 1, no 8 (2014):4-12 retrieved from www.arcjournals.org. 26th September 2018

6 Karl Wolfgang & William, J. Folt. *Nation Building In Comparative Contexts*. New York: Atherton, 1966.

7 Ihuoma Chinonso. “Boko Haram and Nation Building”. A Seminar Paper, Presented in Nigeria and the Problem of Nation Building Class, University of Ibadan. Ibadan: 2017.

8 John Samuel Mbiti. *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.

9 Joseph O. Awolalu. What is African Traditional Religion? *Studies in Comparative Religion* 10, No. 2(1976)1-10. Retrieved 26th September, 2018, from www.studiesincomparative religion.com

10 Kwesi Dickson. & Paul Ellingworth. (eds.). *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*. New York: Orbis Books, 1969.

11 Kwesi Dickson. & Paul Ellingworth. (eds.). *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*. New York: Orbis Books, 1969.

12 Samuel C. Agubosi. Christian missions and the development of modern health services among the western Niger Delta Peoples 1901-1960. In *Readings in Nigerian History and Culture*. Eds. G.O. Oguntomisin and Samuel Ademola Ajayi. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd, 2002. 115-128

13 Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Trans. Franz Rosenthal. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1967

14 Ademola Ajayi, "From Amagamation to the Quest for National Integration in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects" A paper delivered at the 40th Anniversary Lecture, Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin on the 18 of May, 2007. Nigeria: Unilorin, 2007.

15 Obaro Ikime. *Can Anything good come out of History?* Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2018.

16 Obaro Ikime. Through Changing Scenes Nigerian History: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan on the 26 of October 1979. Ibadan, IUP, 1979.

17 Ademola Ajayi, "From Amagamation to the Quest for National Integration in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects" A paper delivered at the 40th Anniversary Lecture, Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin on the 18 of May, 2007. Nigeria: Unilorin, 2007.

18 Fred E. Ayokhai, M. H. Suleiman and Talla Ngarka. Retaining Social Change in Nigeria: Historicizing Emirate and Colonial Rules in the Muri Area of North- Eastern Nigeria, 1817-1960. *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 22, (2013): 158-177

19 Fred E. Ayokhai, M. H. Suleiman and Talla Ngarka. Retaining Social Change in Nigeria: Historicizing Emirate and Colonial Rules in the Muri Area of North- Eastern Nigeria, 1817-1960. *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 22, (2013): 158-177

20 Obaro Ikime. Through Changing Scenes Nigerian History: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan on the 26 of October 1979. Ibadan, IUP, 1979

21 Obaro Ikime. Through Changing Scenes Nigerian History: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan on the 26 of October 1979. Ibadan, IUP, 1979

22 Daniel E. Agbiboa. Ethno-religious Conflicts and the Elusive Quest for National Identity in Nigeria. *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no 1(2013):3-30.