

## Ethnicity and Religion: A 'Threat' to Democratic Governance in Africa?

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**Abstract :** *One major problem of administering the plural societies relates to endemic nature of the existence of primordial sentiments which manifest in various forms. These sentiments include ethnicity, religion and regionalism etc. One or a combination of the variables listed above can reinforce one another and stand as a clog in the wheel of administration of such societies. Examples are facile where democratic governance has been scuttled by ethnic and religious chauvinism. The Central African States of Rwanda and Burundi, (Hutus against Tutsis), the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, the Ibos, Hausas, Ijaws and Yorubas in Nigeria and the Giotribe, and the Moslems in the North and Christians in the South of Ivory coast (Cot de Voire) to mention a few.*

*In Africa, the nature of the sporadic and chronic conflicts has a common denominator and it is rooted in these variables. (ethnicity, religion, colour, race etc) Scholars continue to grope for solutions to the evils being perpetrated by these sentiments. At times, they find it difficult to strike a balance in their attempt to ensure justice, fair play and equity on one hand and efficiency and effectiveness on the other hand. Perhaps these attempts led to the emergence of administrative concept of federal character syndrome in sharing public offices in a plural society like Nigeria. This solution is not, perhaps perfect and its imperfection has generated controversies which often result to open confrontation of ethnically and religiously conscious communities reacting to government policies that adversely affect their religious and ethnic belongings.*

*It is in view of the community clashes and ethnic animosities that this paper examined whether or not the ethnic and religious political demands may scuttle or constitute a threat to democratic administration in Africa using the Nigerian experience. The paper submitted that*

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*existence of ethnicity, religious diversity and numerous pressure groups is not evil per se but excessive manipulation of the variables for selfish interests by citizens and organisations that is something to worry about.*

## **Introduction**

Throughout the history, human society has been faced by certain problems resulting from its division into more or less self-conscious and more or less organized groups. These groups have been and remain racial, religious, economic, social etc, and they tended to overlap. Race consciousness may and often does cut across national boundaries and economic solidarities of interest or feelings of class or ethnic unity may transcend loyalties based upon religious belief. Powers of the present day, have almost invariably been characterized by frictions, and disputes, and the desire to mitigate or eliminate these has provided one of the strongest motives for the academic study of inter-group relations. Such frictions and dispute have many sources: all groups tend to generate among their members certain common interests, habits of thought, customs, and internal loyalties, which may lead to antagonism with other similar groups. It has indeed been argued by Simmel (1955) that the very existence of a feeling of group consciousness demands and depends on a degree of hostility towards the outsider or the out-group.

The new states are abnormally susceptible to serious disaffection based on primordial sentiments. This tension takes a peculiarly severe and chronic form in the new States, both because of the great extent to which their peoples' sense of self, remains bound up in the gross actualities of blood, race, language, locality, religion or tradition and because of the steadily accelerating importance in this century of the sovereign State as a positive instrument for the realisation of collective aims. The congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on are seen to be ineffable and at times overpowering. One is bound ordinarily to one's kinsman, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer, ipso facto. The general strength of such primordial bonds and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society, at all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural or spiritual affinity than from social interaction.

In modern societies, the lifting of such ties to the level of political supremacy, though, it has, of course, occurred and may again occur. To an increasing degree, national unit is maintained not by calls to blood and land but by a vague, intermittent and routine allegiance to a civil state, supplemented to a greater or lesser extent by governmental use of police powers and ideological exhortation.

In Africa, the African State of Rwanda, the story of ethnicity and genocide was similar to what occurred in Yugoslavia. Rwanda, a sister State to Burundi- had also had her fair share of ethnic massacres. Like Rwanda, Burundi is sharply divided between the Hutus and Tutsis ethnic groups. The minority Tutsi tribe had always dominated the majority Hutus in the government and military forces of both Burundi and Rwanda.

Burundi became independent in 1962 and turned a republic in 1966. In 1972, following the killing of the deposed king, the Hutus suffered terrible massacres in the hands of the more elite and more strategically positioned minority Tutsis. Since then, ethnic hatred and political instability have been the order of the day.

In 1993, the majority Hutus happened to produce a president in a multi-party election. But the elected president was brutally assassinated by Tutsi military officers who also massacred some 20,000 Hutus. Another Hutu was again elected president in a subsequent election. This new president was again assassinated along with the Rwandan president another Hutu. Their plane was shot down as they were returning from a peace talk in Tanzania. This incident instigated further crisis and massacre ethnic of the Tutsis. Incidentally, the killing of both presidents resulted in more ethnic violence in Rwanda, which, like Burundi had witnessed massive ethnic killings in the past. Since it gained independence in 1962, political instability arising from ethnic hatred between the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis who as in Burundi were more elitist and occupy the most important administrative and military positions.

Following the shooting of the plane conveying both presidents home on April 10th 1994, all hell was let loose in Rwanda as

soldiers and Hutu militia armed with machetes started killing Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

It is sad to note that, within some weeks, an estimated 800,000 Tutsis were killed and about 2 million fled the country. These genocidal and ethnic activities only came to an end when the Tutsi government in exile managed to fight their way into Kigali and took over the government.

The Hutus in anticipation of reprisals and vengeance fled the country en masse and became refugees in neighbouring states.

The pattern of ethnicity and genocide in Rwanda was similar to that of Yugoslavia in all respects. In both countries, ethnic or religious groups were being massacred in thousands and women massively raped with official backing and encouragement. In fact the use of rape as an instrument of war was to depopulate the enemy (one ethnic group) and increase the population of the other ethnic group.

Similarly, more than 100,000 people have been killed in Algeria since 1992 when the Army cancelled legislative elections that the now-banned Islamic Salvation Front was poised to win. Three Islamic groups have been involved in the political crisis in the country including the Armed Islamic Group led by Rachid Qukali. Again, the fundamental issue still bothers on politics and religion. (Source Nigerian Tribune 19/12/1992 and Tell Magazine March 1992), as the Islamic Salvation Front is bent on turning Algeria into Islamic State if it wins the election.

Currently in Cote d'Ivoire, the issue is not very different from Burundi, Rwanda and Algeria already discussed. For instance the new faction claimed to be avenging the death of general Robert Guei who was killed in the uprising belonged to Gio tribe from where Guei hailed whose majority are in the Nimba county of Liberia just across the border to the North-west of Ivory Coast. The disarmament and demobilisation in Liberia had provided them a new job in Ivory Coast to defend their kith and kin. Furthermore, the Muslims are predominant in the north and Christians in the south. So the probability of a sectarian war



intermingled with ethnic politics is high and is likely to be another recipe for disaster in the subregion. In West Africa and in Africa in general, the nature of the sporadic conflicts and crises have a common denominator. They are either coloured with ethnic or sectarian dimension or both in most cases. For instance, it is apparent that the ethnic and religious dimension which the Ivory Coast crisis has assumed currently is intimately connected with the factor of Mr. Alassane Quattara, a leading Moslim and northern contender for the office of the president of the country. Quattara, obviously was a victim of deliberate attempt by a group to deny him access to the most powerful position in the country.

In Africa, where the tradition of civil politics is weak and where the technical requirements for an effective welfare government are poorly understood, primordial attachments tend as Nehru discovered to be repeatedly, in some case almost continually, proposed and widely acclaimed at preferred bases for the demarcation of autonomous, political units. Perhaps this is why Awolowo (1981) describes Nigeria as a mere geographical expression rather than a nation.

The primordial attachments principally manifest overtly in Nigeria in two forms (i) Ethnicity and (ii) Religion. Attention will therefore be focused on these two variables in this paper.

It would be recalled that Nigeria gained her Independence on October 1, 1960 with three principal regions - The North mostly occupied by the Hausas, Fulanis, Kanuris, Nupes, Tiv and Udoma to mention a few while the West was mainly occupied by the homogenous Yorubas, Edos and Urobos and the East was occupied by heterogeneous nationalities Ibos, Ibibios, Efiks, Ijaws, Calabaris etc. Furthermore, the Nigerian society is trichotomised into three main religions, thus we have the Moslems in the far North, the Christians in the Middle belt, East and partly West. The Moslems also occupy a sizeable location in the West while the African Traditional (believers) adherents intermingled others in various parts of the country especially in the South. This condition, perhaps, has explained why Nigeria has not been politically stable since her independence. A theoretical explanation can thus be offered.

### **Theoretical Exposition**

It has been theorised by eminent scholars that the reasons why a unilingual state is stable and a multilingual state unstable are quite obvious. A state is built on fellow feeling. What is this fellow feeling? To state briefly, it is a feeling of a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin. This feeling is a double-edged feeling. It is at once a feeling of "consciousness of kind" which, on the one hand, binds together those who have it so strongly that it overrides all differences arising out of economic conflicts or social gradations and on the other, severs them from those who are not of their kind. The existence of this fellow feeling is the foundation of a stable and democratic state.

It is this crystallisation of a direct conflict between primordial and civil sentiments - this "longing not to belong to any other group" - that leads to tribalism, parochialism, communalism and so on, a more ominous and deeply threatening quality than most of the other serious intractable problems the new states face.

Here we have not just competing loyalties, but competing loyalties of the same general order on the same level of integration. There are other competing loyalties in the new States. Such ties include - ties to class party, business, union, profession or whatever conflicts among them occur only within a more or less fully accepted terminal community whose political integrity they do not, as a rule put into question. No matter how severe they become, they do not threaten governments or even forms of government, but they rarely at best - and then usually when they have become infused with primordial sentiments threaten to undermine the nation itself, because they do not involve alternative definitions of what the nation is. It needs to be understood that economic or class or intellectual disaffection threatens revolution, but disaffection based on race, language or culture threatens partition, irridentism or merger, a redrawing of the very limits of the state: a new definition of its domain.

Civil discontent finds its natural outlet in the seizing, legally or illegally, of the state apparatus. Primordial discontent strives more

deeply and is satisfied less easily. The actual foci around which such discontent tends to crystallise are various and in any given case several. They are usually involved concurrently and sometimes at cross-purposes with one another. They are stated below:-

### **1. Assumed Blood Ties**

Here the defining elements in quasi-kinship are too small for even the most tradition-bound to regard them as having more than limited significance and the reference is, consequently, to a notion of untraceable but yet sociologically real kinship, as in a tribe. Nigeria, Congo and the greater part of sub-Saharan Africa are characterised by a prominence of this sort of primordialism.

### **2. Race**

Clearly, race is similar to assumed kinship, in that it involves an ethnobiological theory. Here, the reference is to phenotypical physical features especially, skin, colour, but also facial form, stature, hair type and so on. "Negritude" clearly draws much, though perhaps not all of its force from the notion of race as a significant primordial property and the parish-commercial minorities - like the Chinese in Southeast Asia or the Indians and Lebanese are similarly demarcated.

### **3. Language**

This has sometimes been held to be the altogether essential axis of nationality conflicts. It is worth stressing that linguism is not an inevitable outcome of linguistic diversity. As indeed kinship, race, and the other factors to be listed below, language differences need not in themselves be particularly divisive. They have not been so for the most parts in Tanzania, Iran, the Philippines or even in Indonesia, where despite a great confusion of tongues, linguistic conflict seems to be the one social problem the country has somehow omitted to demonstrate in extreme form. Furthermore, primordial conflicts can occur where no marked linguistic differences are involved, as in Lebanon, among the various parts of Batak-speakers in Indonesia and to lesser extent, perhaps between the Fulanis and Hausa in Northern Nigeria.

#### **4. Regions**

Although a factor nearly everywhere, regionalism naturally tends to be troublesome especially in geographically heterogeneous areas. Tonkin, Annam and Cochin in pre-partitioned Vietnam, the two baskets on the long pole, were almost purely in regional terms, sharing language, culture, race etc. The tension between East and West Pakistan involves differences in language and culture too, but geographic element is of great prominence owing to the territorial discontinuity of the country. Java, versus the Outer Islands in archipelagic Indonesia; the North East versus the West Coast in mountain-bisected Malaya and Nigeria in the early 60s and even now are perhaps other examples in which regionalism has been an important primordial factor in national politics.

#### **5. Religion**

India partition seems to be the outstanding case of the operation of this type of attachment. However, Lebanon, the Karens and the Moslems Arakenese in Burma, the Toba Bataks, Ambonese and Minahassans in Indonesia, the Moros in the Philippines, the Sikhs in Indian Punjab and the Hausas in Nigeria are other well known examples of its force in undermining or inhibiting a comprehensive civil sense. In Nigeria, for instance, the practical introduction of Sharia by some State Administrations has been resisted violently by the non-Muslims residing in such states leading to physical, confrontation between the parties.

#### **6. Custom**

Again, differences in customs form a basis for a certain amount of national disunity almost everywhere and are of special prominence in those areas in which an intellectually and rather sophisticated group sees itself as the bearer of a civilization amid a largely barbarian population that would be well advised to model itself upon it. The facile examples are: the Bangalis in India, the Arabs (as against the Berbers in Morocco, and the Babanda and Bunyoro in Uganda).

The construction of a typology of the concrete patterns of primordial diversity that are found within the various new states is severely hampered by simple lack of detailed and reliable information in the overwhelming majority of the cases. However, one common and relatively speaking, simple pattern seems to be that of a single dominant group set over against a single strong and chronically troublesome minority.

Another pattern is a bipolar one of two nearly evenly balanced major groups as in Malays and Chinese in Malaya or Christians and Muslims in Lebanon or Sunnis, Chiis in Iraq and Christians and Muslim in Nigeria. Furthermore, there is the pattern of a relatively even gradation of groups in importance, from several large ones through several medium-sized ones to a number of small ones, with no clearly dominant ones and no sharp cut-off points. India, the Philippines, Nigeria and Kenya are also good examples. The last to be considered is simple ethnic fragmentation as Wallestein has called it with multiple small groups. It is important to note that the conflict in most cases is inherent in the socio-political configuration of the countries of Africa. It is on this note that the Nigerian situation will be addressed.

### **Nigeria: A Conglomerate Society**

It could be recalled that the image of Nigeria as the 'last stronghold of democracy' in Africa was dramatically shattered when the military junta overthrew the Balewa Government on 15th January, 1966. The constitutional crisis which followed the Federal polling of 30th December, 1964 was the springboard of the military coup. What then caused the sudden and violent breakdown of the constitutional government at the beginning of 1966?

Nigeria had been formed by the gradual incorporation of different contiguous areas and peoples into the British Empire from 1861 and taking its final shape by 1914 when the celebrated 'amalgamation' by Lord Lugard established the administrative pattern of a coastal colony and in practice an administrative polarisation between the Northern and Southern Provinces and later in 1939, three Regions were so created.

Among the foremost proffered explanations of the truncated democracy were the destructive twins-tribalism and regionalism. The whole problem was simplified to the assertion that the bitter North-south controversy which arose from management of the election reflected little more than the degree to which the progressive Southern Ibos mistrusted his conservative Muslim, Hausa-Fulani countrymen in the North. The longstanding mistrust and mutual suspicion was expressed in terms of violence and killings during the election. The North, was anxious to exert its full weight while the South, with its minority position within the federation, stood on winning 'at all costs' rather than seeking victory by free competition.

Similar syndrome under the Military disguise was brought into political scene in 1993 when General Babangida single handedly annulled the June 12 election purported to have been won by the Late Moshood Kashimawo Abiola, a presidential candidate from the south. The annulment gave way to a chain of reactions by the South West and a renewed social mobilisation of the aggrieved South Western states. This mobilisation in the words of Deutsche (1966) is to promote the consolidation of States whose people already share the same language, culture and major social institution while the same process may tend to strain or destroy the unit of state whose population is already divided into several groups with different languages or cultures or basic ways of life.

In fact, in Nigeria, people are mobilised and become aware that they are living in a system which bound together many ethnic groups but at the same time does not have their commitment to their group 'eroded', and does not "break away" from their old setting. Rather, their primordial loyalties are intensified, as Awolowo suggests, by their realisation that their section was in competition with others in a common political system.

So, right away from Independence, Nigeria found herself divided into three regions each of them composed of a majority cultural section and a number of minorities, with the former well consolidated. Thus at the regional level Nigeria was (is) clearly a stratified society in the sense of the term used by Morris (1966) in which "every member of the society concerned is forced into

relationships of incorporation with some members of the society and into relationships of transaction that are also relationships of superiority and inferiority with all the other members of the society in respect of jointly and sectionally held assets or values."

This social phenomenon becomes more pronounced and has taken a new dimension as organizations like Oduduwa Peoples Congress, (OPC), Arewa, Ijaw Youth Association and religious bodies were formed to champion either ethnic or religious (Sharia) values especially during democratic administration of President Obasanjo and even during the despotic military administration. The question here is to determine whether or not these organizations are threats to the nascent Nigerian democratic governance, and this leads to consideration of the concept of democracy.

### **Concept of Democracy**

In the words of Churchill (1947) democracy is the "worst form of government except all those forms that have been tried from time to time". This assertion has also been supported by Macpherson (1973) that until a hundred years ago democracy was a bad thing while Giovanni Sartori rounded it up and said "democracy is more complex and more intricate than any other political form".

The import of the above scholars' views is that there is difficulty in an attempt to define the concept. This, however, does not imply that there is no agreed definition among scholars but it seems some definitions are so vague. Linguistically, the word 'democracy' means government by the people but it appears this leaves a great many problems unsolved. For instance, no political system at anytime, democratic or not, has ever provided for all the people even to choose the government. Much less to exercise governmental powers.

In different times, and in different countries, citizenship has been restricted on a number of grounds, age, sex, social status, colour and religion have call at one time or another barred certain people from the enjoyment of political rights enjoyed by others. Although, there exist divergent views and misunderstanding of



what the concept implies, it is still within possibility to supply at least a minimum requirement for democracy. It is a set of institutions, that fulfils at least two essential requirements. It must, first be able to elicit as accurately as possible the opinion of as many people as possible on who shall be their representatives and on how the country ought to be governed. This, in effect, means a minimum universal suffrage, political parties, the organization of free voting in uncorrupt elections at relatively frequent intervals.

It must provide way of ensuring that those chosen by the public do infact what the electorate wants them to do or that they can be replaced if they do not, even between elections. This simply means that the process of government in a democracy is essentially a dialogue between rulers and the ruled. The above minimum requirement of democratic governance lends credence to Sargent's view (1975) when he itemised elements of democracy as follow:-

- (i) citizens' involvement in political decision making.
- (ii) some degree of equality among citizens.
- (iii) some degree of liberty or freedom granted to or retained by citizenry.
- (iv) a system of representation; and
- (v) an electoral system - majority rule.

How effective the dialogue between the ruler and the ruled will be depends largely on national habits and circumstance as well as on the kind of machinery by which the contacts are maintained. It is in the light of the foregoing that we have to consider the effect of religious and social organizations formed on primordial sentiments on the nascent Nigerian democratic governance. This raises a theoretical question of how much opposition is required for effective democratic governance? In a democratic set up there appears an agreement on the need for an opposition, essentially when an election cannot be a choice, in any real sense of the term, unless at least two possibilities are open to electors: As Mayo (1970) puts it :

*The existence of political opposition by individuals and groups, by the press and above all, by organized parties is the litmus paper test of democracy.*

What can be inferred from the above quotation is that, without adequate stimulus from critics, governments can become stack, authoritarian and complacent or even corrupt. However, while organised oppositions are preferred and serve as inputs into democratic governance, such oppositions act directly outside the machinery of political parties, provided it is ancillary to the opposition provided by organised political parties seeking power. Furthermore, opposition expressed in the press by pressure groups, by associations supporting various specific causes by demonstration- these and other forms of propaganda and protests are essentially ancillaries because they do not directly seek power.

On the other hand, there is a very real danger to democracy in proliferation of uncoordinated strikes and demonstrations if they come to be regarded, not as an ancillary but as a substitute for organized opposition by political parties. The replacement of dialogue through regular and qualified representatives by direct pressure from demonstrators recruited more or less at random, or by direct pressures from sectional bodies that disregard the effect that the granting of their demands may have on the rights of others, constitutes a return to forms of action that are both primitive and anarchic. They do not permit the coordination of sectional interests within the general framework of national interest.

It is on this background that we look at the activities of the social protests in form of religious and primordial organizations formed before and since the inception of President Obasanjo's administration.

**Table 1 : Statistics of Social Protests in Nigeria - May 1999 To-Date**

<i>S/n</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Social/Religious Organisation</i>	<i>Nature of the Protest</i>	<i>Effects</i>	<i>Location</i>
(i)	26/9/99	Communal Clash. Yoruba/Hausa	A Yoruba was hit by Hasua cow and he Yoruba man died and the Mallam was granted bail.	20 people died	Ibadan West
(ii)	23/6/99	Unity 99 (A Group)	The group alleged President Obasanjoof contravening the Army act of 1960 and Military Decree of 1990 in the appointment of Service Chiefs.	Ethnic Chauvinism	North
(iii)	08/6/99	Itshekiri/Ijaw and Urhobo Youth	Niger Delta Crisis over Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission	Formation of Oil Mineral Producing Areas Commission	South West
(iv)	09/6/99	Itshekiri Ijaw and Urhobo Youth	Killing one another with sophisticated weapons freely used.	(i) 300,000 people displaced. (ii) Shoot-at-sight order was issued by the Federal Government.	
				(iii) State of Emergency declared. (iv) Youth sacked the Police	S.W. Warri
				Station and got away With ammunition in the among of the Nigeria Naval Base at Umalokun.	

(v)	29/2/2000	Igbo Youths	Reprisal violence in response to killings in Kaduna State over the proposed adoption of Sharia.	Igbo Youths waged war with Moslems residing in the East	Aba East
(vi)	28/2/2000	Byelsa	State Violence on the People of Odi (Federal Government ordered shoot at sight).	Human destruction	Bayelsa State
(vii)	28/2/2000	Religion	Sharia and Kaduna Riot	Human destruction of Moslems and Christians	Kaduna
(viii)	23/2/00	Religion	Kaduna State imposes 24 hour curfew.	Freedom of movement restricted and economic activities paralysed.	Kaduna
(ix)	14/2/00	Odua People Congress.	Police-OPC face-off in Lagos.	Violence.	Lagos.
(x)	11/1/99	Ife and Modekeke	Principle of self-determination on the part of Modakeke, which Ife resisted.	(i) Unresolved killings. (ii) Arson. (iii) Avoidable destruction and violence escapades.	West
(xi)	8/3/2000	Mob action	Sharia.	3 people killed	Sokoto
(xii)	1/3/2000	Youths Rampage	Reprisal violence in Kaduna.	Destruction of property believed to be owned by Moslems in reactions to killings in Kaduna.	Uyo.

Source; Sunday Magazine, February 27 2000

Unarguably, the Statistics of Social/Religious/Communal protests is alarming and unhealthy for a nascent democratic State of Nigeria. A cursory look at the protest statistics indicates three main objects of protest. They are:-

- (i) Sharia issues (religion).
- (ii) Location of Headquarters of Local Government; and
- (iii) Marginalisation of the minorities.

The above issues call for concern bearing in mind that almost similar characteristics ruined the First Republic in (1960-1966). Another area of worry rests on the nature of the protest which cuts across the geographical locations in Nigeria - the West, the North, and the East. Perhaps it could be asserted that this is one of the negative inheritance of the military administration' in Nigeria. For instance, the politics of communal clashes - Ijaw - Iteshekiri, Ife-Modakeke, Zango-Kataafi was a creation of the military. This cannot be discountenanced in the recent occurrences of bloody clashes among communities which is a result of divide-and-rule tactics of the erstwhile military government in which an already sited Local Government Council Secretariat was being relocated to another area only to cause disaffection among the people of the area. Ife-Modakeke episode is a case in point in the West.

Furthermore, the statistics also shows that, the last couple of months have produced a traumatic and unhealthy upsurge in the number of communities which clamour for rights and priviledges within the Nigerian polity shouting that a giant percentage of national earnings should be allocated to their area because their lands produce oil, the main stay of the Nigerian economy. Finally, religious intolerance has also played a significant but negative role in the social protests most especially in the North.

Worried by the statistics of wanton destruction of lives and properties arising from implementation of Sharia, the House of Senate advised that the implementation of Sharia should be suspended. It can be argued that suspension of the implementation is only a palliative measure, for now. In author's views, the lasting solution is rooted in tolerance and give and take (symbiosis)

among the ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. Table I shows communal and religious clashes in Kaduna State over the introduction of Sharia, an Islamic legal system in a secular state. It also shows property that were burnt down during one of the communal protests in Nigeria.

**Table 2: Statistics on Loss of Lives and Property**

Death Toll	567
Houses Destroyed	2,224
Cars, other vehicles	770
Churches Burnt	124
Mosques Burnt	47

*Source:* The Guardian of 25th March, 2000.

### **Conclusion**

What the paper has tried to examine is to look at the role of ethnicity and religion vis-a-vis democratic governance in Africa using the Nigerian experience. The attempt which touched theoretical framework of primordial sentiments in the African States was particularly directed to Nigeria's nascent democratic dispensation. Furthermore, governance was considered as ability of the Governor to interpret, to reconcile, to respect the rights of all, allow freedom of expression to every opinion, to summon courage to rectify mistake, to be patient, and ability to ask for and listen to advice.

However, governance is effectively carried on in a peaceful environment. While the right to agitate is an attribute of participatory democracy, but in a situation where the protests are so frequent and overwhelming, then the environment becomes hostile. This condition may become a threat to democracy even to the most authoritarian military regime when its environment is very hostile.

It is submitted therefore that the existence of ethnic chauvinism, religious diversity, and numerous pressure groups is not evil per se and may not necessarily constitute threats to democracy but the excessive manipulation of these variables by the citizens and organizations for their selfish interest is something to worry about. So the leaders of these organizations must realise that protests based on sentiments, irrationality, primordial loyalty and religious acrimony can be counter productive to democratic governance. In Nigeria for example, Sharia as an Islamic legal system which had been included in the Nigerian Constitutions of 1963, 1979, 1989 and even 1999 should not be a source of political instability, as Section. 6 (3) of 1979 Constitution recognised Sharia Court of Appeal of a State while Section. 260 of the 1999 Federal Republic of Nigerian Constitution also established the Sharia Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. So the issue of Sharia, an Islamic legal system should not be manipulated, as it had been in Nigeria, to cause dissatisfaction among the citizens and consequently undermine democratic dispensations.

In order to obviate a threat to democracy, rational organizations should be formed to champion developmental objectives rather than individuals and groups hiding under religion or ethnic organization to perpetuate evils and champion their own selfish interests. Such organizations that are coloured with primordial sentiments or religious affiliations should be proscribed. There is need to collectively and jealously guide democratic institutions from heading to a collapse because of frivolous agitations from unpatriotic citizens. Nigeria cannot afford to embrace democracy without committed "democrats" who will jealously guide her democracy.



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