ETHNO RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND STATE FRAGILITY IN AFRICA: TRENDS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Browne Onuoha,

University of Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract: This paper isolates the Mano River Basin in West Africa, Nigeria, Sudan/Chad, D. R. Congo and the Great Lakes region of East Central Africa, and argues that the structure of ethno-religious conflicts in Africa, which are largely the aftermath of colonialism, intensify state fragility, lack of capacity and inability to sustain democracy. The paper argues that ethnicity and religion in Africa are more than aspects of politics in the struggle for power. They are indications of unresolved issues of citizenship, lack of hegemony and the failure of ill-defined nation-building efforts bereft of ideology, and a compelling need for territorial restructuring as in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. Employing ‘state’ and ‘hegemony’ as explanatory frameworks in examining the complex cases of ethno-religious conflicts with respect to Africa, the paper concludes that a combination of good governance and territorial restructuring may be fundamental to Africa’s stable future and development in the 21st Century.

Introduction

Conflicts in Africa are not abating, whether ethnic, religious, or purely political. Indeed they are escalating. In the early years of political independence in the 1960s (1960s to 1980s), the conflicts led to incessant military coups (in some cases military coups led to conflicts and civil wars). However, from the 1990s to date, these conflicts have led to intractable civil wars which have resulted in severe cases of state fragility and state failure (O’Connell, 1970; Zartman, 1995; Herbst, 1996/97; Bates, 2001; Rothberg, 2001). As we shall argue shortly, many of these conflicts have remained ethno-religious – D. R. Congo, Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda and the Great Lakes of Africa, Chad, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire, Kenya, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Southern Sahara. In fact, countries like Kenya and Cote d’Ivoire which appeared stable and prosperous from the 1960s to 1990s, witnessed severe crises and conflicts in the 21st century. And these conflicts were patently ethnic, and some others ethno-religious. While there are various ethnic groups contesting for state power in individual African countries, the two predominant religious affiliations of the African peoples are Islam and Christianity.

D. R. Congo (then known as Zaire), along with the Great Lakes of Africa, witnessed the worst conflicts ever in Africa in the 1990s. Sudan has ever remained in and out of war for the past 50 years, 1956 to 2005. But instead of reduction of conflict, the country added the war in its Darfur region in 2003. Nigeria fought a civil war from 1967 to 1970 which was believed to have corrected some structural defects in the federation, defects believed to have been primarily responsible for the conflicts in the country in the early years of independence, 1960 -1966. In spite of the re-structuring of the federation into smaller units, a 36-state structure instead of a four-regional structure, Nigeria has continued to witness festering ethno-


religious conflicts which have intensified fragility as well as stalled economic development. Indeed, there was until recently a pseudo-ethnic conflict ravaging the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria since the 1990s.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that the ethno-religious conflicts in Africa are predictable and explainable. The type of ethno-religious configurations in African at independence in the 1960s could not have produced anything different from the conflicts and fragility of states for which Africa is associated. Colonial disengagement in Africa, and the eventual grant of independence, both by omission and commission, at times out of conspiracy, did not provide post colonial African the requisites for nation-building, in particular the development of nationalist leadership. Nationalist leadership could not have emerged from the type of territorial and ethno-religious contrivances which the colonial administrations left behind. And without the leadership, stability, nation- and state building efforts, and overall development became difficult.

Put differently, the structures and the conditions colonialism left behind in Africa at independence, though were not sufficient reasons, made crises, conflicts and fragility inevitable, because the structures were inherently conflicting. And in almost all the cases the reasons for conflict were the same: quest for identity, citizenship and citizenship rights; access and control of state power for self-determination, provision of social services and other rights. This paper is of the view that until the distortions in ethno-religious and territorial configurations are corrected, the waste in energy and resources trying to “fighting it out” will not allow Africa the peace and stability needed for development in the 21st Century.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part, the introduction, examines the theoretical arguments for conflict and fragility in Africa. The second part outlines the nature of conflict, identifies four cases of conflict, and the nature of the attendant fragility. The third and concluding part proposes a solution to fragility, in particular, a constitutional restructuring of African territories to allow autonomy and self-determination to nationalities where ethno-religious conflicts are intractable.

Conflicts and Fragility in Africa

Fragility is closely related to lack of political integration which Africa has suffered since political independence in the 1960s. Correspondingly, lack of political integration may be associated with three factors. Firstly, the existence of many multi-ethnic, religious, or multi-national groups, which do not have a long history of association with one another (Furnivall, Mill, cited in Lijphart, 1977). The second is the nature of the political leadership emerging from societies lacking political integration. Indeed, leadership is critical in terms of its caliber or capacity to set out to create nationalism, ideology and integration. Thirdly, modernization and economic development and the expectations that they bring about, impacting political integration and stability, that is, whether a state is fragile and unstable or it is united, stable and developing. A rigorous analysis of these factors provides an outline of a simple theoretical statement that helps to explain why African states are fragile, and not developing, even in the 21st century (O’Connell, 1966; Ake, 1996, 2000).

A foremost factor which must not be ignored in examining fragility in Africa is the role of the colonial administration in preparing for political independence. The colonial masters represented a power interest group for itself and for favored African ethnic groups during the process of power allocation in the colonial territories. Before political independence, colonialism had sown seeds of discord through the ‘divide and rule’ policy which set African groups against each other. In the negotiation for independence, the colonial masters in many respects restricted and falsified power struggles among African groups by skewing the power structure and its allocations to favored groups. According to O’Connell who examined the case in Nigeria (O’Connell, 1966), the restricted political process produced a constitutional framework that failed to reflect the relative strength of the various groups within the states. Apt examples are all over Africa: Nigeria, Burundi and Rwanda, Sudan, Chad, D. R. Congo, Kenya, Cote d’Ivoire, and others. Colonialism also tended to keep politicians from gaining the experience which could teach them
that power must normally be limited in its use to prevent politics from destroying those who take part in it (O’Connell, 1966; Lloyd, 1970; Mamdani, 2002; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). The favoritism by colonial masters planted suspicion and distrust among the African groups. At independence the skewed power structures became difficult to sustain, and expectedly were fiercely and bitterly challenged by un-favored ethnic groups. In most cases this led to conflicts and in some others civil wars: Nigeria, Chad, D. R. Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Cote d’Ivoire, and others.

The way Colonial interest destabilized Africa and continues to create fragility is worst manifested in the manner ethnic nationalities were partitioned and/or amalgamated (Aghemelo and Ibhasiebor, 2006). In Africa the colonial masters partitioned or amalgamated disparate ethnic and cultural nationalities without regard to cultural identities or pre-colonial territorialities. According to Asiwaju (1984; 2003), in the case of African partitions, the concern is with culturally coherent territories where people of definite cultural identities have had to be split into two or more units, each fraction being placed in the area of jurisdiction of a distinct state which functions to integrate such a part of pre-existing cultural area into a new socio-economic system removed from the original cultural whole (Asiwaju, 1984: 2). Most parts of Africa were affected by this historically destabilizing exercise. The colonial masters did not bother about the human factors of partition or amalgamation, in particular, the behavior of the ethnic groups in the situation of partition or amalgamation, or their responses to the new cultural partitions and amalgamations. It also did not bother the colonial master about the collective impact of partitions and amalgamations on nation-building and national development efforts thereafter. And more importantly, the people were neither involved nor were they consulted in the partition and amalgamation exercises (Asiwaju, 1984: 8-9). As a consequence, many ethnic groups in Africa have citizenship crises, are denied fundamental human rights, while many more are refugees in their homelands (Lemarchand, 1996; Young, 1993; Herbst, 2002).

For the sake of emphasis, the most questionable event of colonialism was the territorial boundaries in Africa which forced ethnic unions and in many cases forcefully divided ethnic groups. And understandably because there were no ideologically imbued hegemonic leadership before or after colonial rule, building nations out of the disparate ethnic groups became difficult. Instead, conflicts erupted as a result of the incompatible amalgams and divisions of ethnic nationalities, most of whom at independence had no experience in handling such conflicts. And these conflicts have left the states fragile and unstable to this day.

In addition to the foregoing analyses, or indeed prior to these, Furnivall, and Mill, in different studies both examined in Lijphart (1977), had warned against the difficulty of people of diverse cultures being forcefully ruled together as one political entity. According to Furnivall, members of plural cultures based on language, religion, custom, race, ethnicity or assumed blood ties live side by side but separately within the same political unit; they are strictly a medley (of people) because they mix but do not combine (Lijphart, 1977: 17). Plural societies are characterized by cultural differences. Each group holds its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways (Lijphart, 1977: 16-21). And according to Smith, heterogeneity automatically imposes the structural necessity for domination by one of the cultural sections; it necessitates nondemocratic regulation of group domination (Smith, 1969: 14). John Stuart Mill goes further to observe how such structure frustrates institutionalization of democratic practice: free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist (cited in Lijphart, 1977:18; Onuoha, 2004).

These studies reveal the obvious impediments many African countries with heterogeneous cultures and peoples would face being partitioned or amalgamated, and ruled under one common state. But these did not seem to be of consideration during the colonial partitions and amalgamations, in spite of the evidence of inherent contradictions.

Therefore, it may be argued that the role of the colonial masters in the forcible unions in Africa were the strongest reasons for lack of political integration in Africa. Also, the activities of the colonial masters
prepared the ground for the emergence of poor, parasitic and ineffective political leadership. The colonial administrators’ divide and rule policy, at independence turned the African political leaders against each other in the process of the struggle for power, referred to as ethnic politics (Nnoli, 1978). The same policy denied the Africans the emergence of nationalist leadership, because most of the leaders relied on ethnic and sectionalist ideologies as the only means to gaining and maintaining political power (Colman, 1972; Markovitz, 1977; Nnoli, 1978). At present the African political leaders are confronted with the problem of building new nations out of the mosaic of partitioned and amalgamated cultures, with which they do not seem to have the capacity to address. The many ethnic and ethno-religious conflicts and wars in most parts of Africa, suggest that colonial partitions and amalgamations did not and perhaps could not have laid solid foundation for nationhood in Africa, and without nationhood (or nationalism) no meaningful development may be achieved.

Another factor which impeded political integration is the failure of economic growth to meet the expectations of the people. The failure of economic growth created frustration that exploded against the governments in many countries of Africa. The failure of economic growth led to the inability of the leaders to meet their election promises. Also, the people watched in utter frustration the corrupt and opulent life of their leaders in the midst of abject poverty of the people. Lack of economic development, corruption and parasitic leadership intensified frustration, conflicts, fragility and state failure.

Expectedly, the nature of state that emerged at independence had limited autonomy (Ake, 1985). This was the case because in order for political leaders to continue to have access, control and maintain power, they needed to capture or seize the state, make it private, and ensure their private interests in the political process within the state (Ake, 1985; 1994). Such nature of state in turn reproduced fractured leadership which could not provide the environment for the building of hegemony that would ensure a common ideology needed for nation building. The cases examined below outline some of the intricate conflicts in the African experience.

**Ethno-religious conflicts in Africa**

Conflict may be viewed as a form of tension arising from mutually exclusive or opposing actions, thoughts, opinions, or feelings. It is evident when individuals or groups evaluate situations or reach judgment from different perspectives which stem from incompatible differences in their education, religion, ethnic or social background or socialization, or knowledge of the issues in contest. Often conflict occurs when people or groups perceive that as a result of a disagreement there may be a threat to their interests. On the other hand, conflict may protrude from misinformation, stereotypes, prejudices, contradictory perceptions of justice, differing socio-cultural traditions, personal beliefs or ideologies. Also, conflict may be racial, sectarian, ethnic, religious, ideological, cultural, economic, political, or social (Kriesberg 1973, 1-57; 2006).

In Africa, most of the conflicts brought about severe and frustrating fragility of the state. By fragility we refer to the weak, unstable, porous and unacceptable unreliability of institutions and agencies of the state. As most of the cases of fragility in Africa became prolonged, they led to what scholars later referred to as ‘state failure’ (Zarthman, ed. 1995; Herbst, 1996/97; Bates, 2001; Rothberg, 2001). Situations where states became very insecure, and the governments lost almost every capacity to govern.

Most of the cases are considered ethno-religious when the reasons bringing them about are a combination of both ethnicity and religious. And in many of those cases, the conflicts occur firstly in the struggle for identity and citizenship, and secondly in the struggle for access, management or control of political power (Markovitz, 1977; Nnoli, 1978, 1998; Young, 1993; Herbst, 2000) Often the latter is used to secure the former and to address other cases of perceived injustice, especially in area of allocation of scarce resources and other rewards ( Post and Vickers, 1966; Herbst, 2000; Young, 1993). This is the case in Liberia/Sierra Leone/Cote d’Ivoire and the Mandingo ethnic group of the Mano River Basin of West
Africa; the Hausa-Fulani Muslim and the other ethnic groups in Nigeria; the Zaghawa ethnic group of Sudan/Darfur/Chad and Central African Republic, and the Tutsi of Burundi/Rwanda/D.R. Congo and the Great Lakes of East/Central Africa. In those respects, most of the conflicts ended up being political, because most times their mediations were through some form of ‘politics’, or politics in another form, that is war, as the cases below demonstrate.

The Mandingo of West Africa

The Mandingo are found in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire, all surrounding the Mano River Basin of West Africa. The conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire revolve around the Mandingo claim to citizenship, identity and political rights in each of those countries. In Liberia, and indeed Cote d’Ivoire, the Mandingos form the core of the insurgencies responsible for the conflicts in those countries. They give support to their kin across the borders around the Mano River Basin. The Mandingos are not accepted as full citizens in each of the countries. In Liberia they are seen as more Guineans than Liberians (Onah, 2008). This sense of discrimination largely explains the part played by the Mandingo in the wars that devastated Liberia between 1989 and 1997 (Crisis Group Africa Report, 2005). They formed the core of the rebels and fighting forces in United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). In the second Liberian war the Mandingos were behind United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). In both wars the Mandingo fought for the right to be accepted as Liberians and to participate fully in the politics and government of Liberia (Crisis Group Africa Report, 98: 2005).

In Cote d’Ivoire, the Mandingo (known as Dyula) are the reason for the war in the North of the country. The Mandingo Ivorians (Dyulas) bordering Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso were denied being Ivorians and refused Ivorian identity papers (Onah, 2008). In the 1998 general elections, Alassan Quattara, a Northern politician and Mandingo (Dyula) was stopped from contesting election because both his parents were not Ivorians. The frustration of their being denied citizenship rights led to the formation of New Front military insurgency in 2002 by the Dyula in the North of Cote d’Ivoire. They still control that part of the country even with the yet disputed election of 2010. Thus the near ten-year civil war in Cote d’Ivoire is interconnected with the Northerners (the Mandingo – Dyula) fighting against what they consider discrimination on the grounds of their names and origin (Onah, 2008).

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria

Aside from the long drawn out civil war in Sudan (North and South), which has been ethno-religious, Nigeria in West Africa is one country in Africa with a long standing history of ethno-religious conflicts, though sometimes subterranean (Lloyd, 1970; Nnoli, 1998). The North/South divide of the country provides a Muslim dominated North, and a Christian dominated South. Equally the North is largely Hausa-Fulani ethnic group and the South, though more ethnically diverse, is comprised of two large ethnic groups of Igbo and Yoruba. In other words, Hausa-Fulani is largely Muslim (in the North), while Igbo/Yoruba are largely Christian and in the South (Kukah, 1991; Onah, 2006). Major conflicts have been ethno-religious, exacerbated by the frustration of, and resentment by Muslims about perceived desecration of Muslim religious values by the Christians, and at times Muslim insistence on the adoption of Muslim religious values by everyone in the country (Kukah, 1991). The conflicts are incessant as well as sporadic; but more intriguing is that most of the conflicts in Nigeria occurred when political power was predominantly in the hands of political or political-military leadership of the ethnic groups from the North. In other words, conflicts are provoked by the ethno-religious group in control of political power. Ethno-religious conflicts have not arisen because of fear of being dispossessed or denied access or control of political power in the federation, or because of being denied citizenship. This factor is peculiar to ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria (Llyod, 1970; Kukah, 1991).
There are over twenty major cases of such conflicts since the end of the civil war in 1970. They include:

Maitatsine religious riots in Kano, December, 1980;
Maitatsine religious riots in Bulunkutu, Maiduguri, October, 1982;
Maitatsine religious riots in Jimeta, Yola, February, 1984;
Maitatsine religious riots in Gombe, April, 1985;
The University of Ibadan, Ibadan religious riots, May, 1986;
The Kafanchan religious riots, March, 1987;
The Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna religious disturbances, March, 1988;
Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria Sharia religious clashes, June, 1988;
The Kano religious riots of April, 1991;
The Zango-Kataf (in Kaduna) religious riots, February, 1992;
The Zango-Kataf (in Kaduna) religious riots, May, 1992;
Kaduna religious clashes, June and September, 1996;
Kaduna Sharia riots, February, 2000;
Gombe religious riots, February, 2000;
Kaduna Sharia riots, May, 2000;
Bauchi religious crisis, June, 2001;
Boko Haram religious disturbances in Bauchi, February, 2006;
Boko Haram religious disturbances in Bauchi and Borno, July, 2009; Borno, October, 2009; Yobe, October, 2010; Borno October and December, 2010; and Bauchi, December, 2010.

(Compiled from Nigerian daily newspapers; See also Dickson-Okezie, C. E. (2006). Effects of ethno-religious conflicts on governance: A case study of Nigeria. A research project submitted as part of the requirement for the award of the Bachelor of Science (B. Sc. Hons.) degree in political science of the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos).

As already pointed out, most of the riots took place in the Northern part of the country, which is predominantly Muslim. In some cases, like in February, 2006, there are retaliatory attacks by Christians in the South. The most destructive of the conflicts in terms of the loss of lives and property were the Maitatsine disturbances of the 1980s, the Sharia riots of the early 21st Century (2000), and the current Boko Haram riots. Indeed, the Boko Haram (meaning “Western education is evil”) has been the most dreaded, ubiquitous and the most persistent so far since it first struck in Bauchi in 2006. Religious
uprisings by this sect have erupted several times in the Northern part of Nigeria since 2006. The sect has been involved in many violent activities, acts of terrorism, burning of police posts and prisons and forceful release of prisoners in the Northern states of Nigeria, particularly in Bauchi, Borno, Yobe and Plateau states. It has also bombed military barracks and other locations in Abuja the capital city of Nigeria. Boko Haram in particular has demanded the replacement of the Federal Government of Nigeria with an Islamic government. There are suggestions that the Boko Haram in Nigeria may be connected with the organization of Al-Qaeda (The Taliban) in Africa.

In some cases the religious disturbances in Nigeria are manifestations of political grievances, or of dissatisfaction with resource allocation or provision of services. Also, they may be indications of objection to political appointments or government restructuring of state boundaries, local government creation/limitation, or as forms of civil disobedience. But each time these are expressed in forms of Islamic religious demands, for instance, the sects would insist that values which are not of Islam are evil. In addition, the religious conflicts get intermeshed in ethnic colors since religion follows ethnic lines in most of the geographical areas as indicated above.

However, the activities of the Boko Haram in themselves have not constituted any threat to the Nigerian state. But the mayhem committed by the fanatical religious group constitutes some security threat to the government. Though, none of these forms of violence may be said to have a serious wider objective of successfully taking over political power from the Central Government of Nigeria.

Nevertheless, there is a minor citizenship conflict in Nigeria (the “indigene/settler” crisis in Plateau State). This is more political than real citizenship crisis, or demand for citizenship rights as we examined in the cases of the Zaghawa or the Tutsi. The case in Plateau, Nigeria, is a situation where claim to being an “indigene” may enhance ones chances of political/electoral positions. At the same time a “settler” may be discriminated against in term of the same political post; as well, if the “settler” is being nominated for an electoral contest in the area, a “settler” status becomes a disadvantage. Nevertheless, this struggle has led to major bloodshed between the indigene and the settlers in the Plateau since 1999 (Banjo, 2009).

The “settler/indigene” problem is a fallout of internal migration during the colonial days during which time migrants from a particular ethnic group (the Hausa-Fulani) settled in large numbers in the Plateau (Onah, 2006: 167-8). This may date back to the 1920s and 1930s. There are other obnoxious socio-political arrangements, especially during the over thirty years of military rule in Nigeria, in particular 1975 to 1999, which sharpened the political struggles among the indigene/settler groups. These include the attempt by the military to create special political territorial space for the “settlers” in the midst of geographical space known to belong to the “indigenes”.

Put another way, most of the conflicts in Nigeria presently are largely a mixture of anomie, social frustration, and rejection of bad governance and official corruption. The cases of social frustration and bad governance are true of the widely publicized oil-rich Niger Delta region, where the conflict which appears pseudo-ethnic has been ongoing since the 1990s. The militants in the Niger Delta have been fighting against the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Multinational Oil companies which are prospecting mineral oil in the Delta. The militants are fighting the major oil stakeholders because of years of neglect and lack of social amenities in the communities of the Delta. The conflicts have taken the form of kidnapping of oil workers, especially expatriates, and the destruction of oil exploration/drilling facilities. However, the Nigerian Government recently gave a firm resolve to correct the years of neglect suffered by the people of the Niger Delta by the provision of social amenities, partly through the establishment of a ministry in-charge of Niger Delta. The government also granted amnesty to the militants, absolving them from criminal charges arising from the course of their insurgencies in the Niger Delta. These recent measures are returning peace to the Niger Delta.
Other more complex ethnic insurgencies and conflicts in quest for citizenship rights, identity and self-determination, and access to state power are examined below in the experiences of the Zaghawa of North Central Africa and the Tutsi of East Central Africa.

**Sudan/Darfur/Chad and the Zaghawa ethnic group**

The conflicts in Sudan are in two parts. The first is the conflict between the Central Government in the North (Khartoum) and South Sudan (Juba). The conflict began in 1956, and appears to be coming to an end with the referendum of January 2011 which has voted to grant independence to South Sudan. The second part is the conflict in Darfur region of Southern Sudan, which may be said to have started effectively in 2003. That conflict is still raging.

Modern day North Sudan is made up of a blend of Nubia, Nilotic groups from Southern Sudan and some complex mix of Arab elements from Egypt. Indeed, ethnicity in Sudan is very complicated; it is often cultural and linguistic. The people of North Sudan are fundamentally Muslims. On the other hand, the major ethnic groups of South Sudan are the Dinka, Nuer Bari and others. They are African, black, traditional worshipers and animists. They became Christians by conversion through European missionaries who followed the tracks of colonial explorers (Flint and Waal, 2008).

It is not misleading to suggest that the major reason for the prolonged ethno-religious war between the North and South of Sudan was British colonial masters’ design in 1956 to leave both regions of Sudan as one country to be governed by the South (Sharkey, 2003). This was against the glaring heterogeneous ethnic and religious composition of the territory which would be obvious reasons of conflict at those times when both peoples had not had sufficient time of associating together. Prior to that date, the North and the South were governed separated under colonial rule.

At independence in 1956, the Khartoum Government breached an understanding that a federal system of government would be established. Contrary to this agreement, a unitary form of government and Arabic as official language were imposed by Khartoum, and Sharia law instituted as the legal system (Sharkey, 2003; Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2005). The South felt disenfranchised and cheated; it claimed it lost identity, autonomy, self-determination and citizenship. Thus, it began a war of self-determination and independence in 1956 which ended in 1972 (known as Anyanya One). A second civil war, Anyanya Two, began in 1983 and ended in 2005. Anyanya Two is described as one of the longest and deadliest wars of the late 20\th century. Both wars were reported to have claimed over two million lives, and more than four million forced to flee their homes, displaced in the forests at one time or the other during the war; and many others as refugees in neighboring countries. The civilian death toll was put as one of the highest of any war since the Second World War (Randolph, 2002).

With respect to Darfur, the Fur people of Darfur are said to be surrounded by Arabic/quasi Arabic nomads in the North, the Northwest and the East. The African population is found in the Southwest along Chadian southern border. In terms of religion, the people of Darfur are largely Muslims. So, while the war in the South of Sudan might be more ethno-religious, that in Darfur is more ethnic than ethnic-religious because the major contenders are principally Muslims. However, ethnicity in Darfur has a significantly different configuration, involving a particular ethnic element, the Zaghawa ethnic group.

The Zaghawa ethnic group is found in Sudan, Chad and Central African Republic, bordering Darfur region of Sudan. Though a minority ethnic group even in Chad where they control government, their collaboration with their kin across Sudan/Central African Republic borders has enabled them to struggle for power and control government in Chad, while still fighting for autonomy in Darfur (Onah, 2008). The primary reason for the Zaghawa struggle for political power is to resolve issues of citizenship in the countries where they find themselves. Firstly, in Chad, Idris Deby, a Zaghawa took over power as
President in Chad in 1990 with the support of his kin in Sudan and Central African Republic. The capture of power in Chad by this group became a design to ensure the consolidation of their Zaghawa citizenship in Chad. Control of power in Chad was also to strengthen the citizenship of other Zaghawa wherever they live in Sudan like in Darfur, as well as in Central African Republic. Indeed, Deby’s grand military campaign plan envisioned a “greater Zaghawa” which would include Central African Republic (Onah, 2008).

Thus in 2003, the Zaghawa and other ethnic groups in Darfur region of Sudan claimed that their citizenship rights were being denied then by the Khartoum Government. The Darfur were also encouraged by the war between Khartoum and South Sudan, which they reasoned would weaken Khartoum and make the Government ready for peaceful agreement that would favor citizenship and autonomy for Darfur (Onah, 2008). Accordingly, Darfur expected autonomy extended to them as a result of a possible comprehensive peace agreement between Khartoum and South Sudan. Such agreement was not reached when The North and South of Sudan signed a peace agreement in 2005.

However, partly because of limited resources, the Derby military campaign from Chad has not been successful in achieving Darfur/Zaghawa autonomy from Sudan. It is also suggested that President Derby may not be seriously involved in Darfur/Sudan conflict because El Bashir, the President of Sudan, helped him to power in Chad in 1990 (Onah, 2008). At present many Zaghawa in Chadian army have been directing their attack against President Derby because of his inability to fight the cause of the Zaghawa in Darfur. A lot more of the Zaghawa soldiers are in camps based in Darfur from where they launch attacks against President Derby and the Chadian Government. The latest of such attacks was in February 2008 (Onah, 2008).

Meanwhile the war in Darfur is still raging, referred to as the worst genocide in Africa, and creating the ‘world’s greatest humanitarian crisis’ (Prunier, 2005; Flint and de Waal, 2008:126). Indeed, the International Court at The Hague has not lifted the arrest warrant on El Bashir for war crimes in Darfur imposed on him in 2009. Meanwhile, the Zaghawa struggle for citizenship in Sudan is still unresolved, similar to the case of the Tutsi of the Great Lakes Region of East Central Africa.

D. R. Congo/Rwanda and the Tutsi of Great Lakes of East Central Africa

Almost immediately after independence in Congo (D. R. Congo) in 1960, secession and ethnic wars ensued, with three separate governments proclaimed: the central government in Kinshasha (Leopoldville) under Patrice Lumumba, Katanga Republic under Moise Tshombe, and Republic of Kassai, under Albert Kalonji. The war was in search of self-determination and independence for Katanga and the other ethnic nationalities which made up the Congo (Lemarchand, 1964; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). The war claimed the life of the first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. The Katanga rebellion could not be contained until 1965 when Lt. Col. Joseph Mobutu Sese Sekou, with Western backing, took over power in a military coup. Mobutu Sese Sekou ruled Congo from 1965 to 1996. His rule was also marked by series of insurgencies by ethnic militias; the most notable were still the Katanga rebellions, referred to as Shaba rebellion because of the change of name from “Katanga” to Shaba” (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003).

In 1977 and 1978 Katanga erupted again as Shaba I and II, organized across Congo/ Angolan border. At the end of both wars over 50,000 soldiers and civilians were killed. Mobutu’s government carried out reprisals which led to mass exodus of refugees, thereby creating further instability in the Congo itself (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). There were other attacks by the Shaba nationals in 1984 and 1985. In 1993 the regional Governor of Shaba Province, Anthoine Gabriel Kynuguwa Kunwanza again proclaimed Sahaba’s autonomy from Congo. He launched a wave of ethnic pogroms against other ethnic groups, especially the Kassai Luba (Baluba) people. This resulted in the death of thousands of people, and mass expulsions of none Shaba ethnic groups (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). Mobutu’s rule for over three decades
in the Congo is described as the most gruesome, enduring, and one of the most corrupt; the worst form of personal rule and neo-patrimony in Africa (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003; Shraeder, 2004).

The ethnic conflicts in Zaire and the attempt to topple Sese Sekou from power in the 1990s reignited the Tutsi struggle for citizenship in the countries of the Great Lakes region of East and Central Africa where they live as minorities. The Tutsi ethnic group is found in the countries of the Great Lakes region which include D. R. Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania (Lemarchand, 1996; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). The ethnic conflicts involving the Tutsi arose from their quest for citizenship in those countries, especially in Rwanda from where they were expelled and stripped of citizenship in 1961 by the pre-dominantly Hutu ethnic group. Colonial policies skewed political power in favor of Tutsi minority in Rwanda. But with democracy at independence in 1960, the Hutu majority took power and displaced the Tutsi. By 1961 a majority of the Tutsi fled Rwanda because of alleged persecution by the Hutu. They found abode with their kiths and kin around the Great Lakes including Burundi where they (the Tutsi) still held on to power (Lemarchand, 1996). Meanwhile, the Tutsi exiles from Rwanda were stripped of Rwandan citizenship at home, and not allowed to return to Rwanda, an aftermath of the struggles in 1960/61. So while in exile they were supposedly stateless and without citizenship. Intermittent conflicts through military invasion occurred between 1964 and 1988 in the attempt by Tutsi exiles to return to their home, Rwanda. These attempts produced more Tutsi exiles from Rwanda. As the number of Tutsi refugees increased and Rwanda continued to deny them citizenship, pressure began to mount on the Tutsi refugees in the various countries of refuge. The most disturbing to the Tutsi was their expulsion from Uganda in 1982 where they had previously enjoyed citizenship law, and were well accommodated. Ethnic persecution of the Tutsi is said to arise partly as reprisals meted on them by other ethnic groups who considered the Tutsi to have had control of power disproportionate to their number under colonial rule (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003; Mamdani, 2002; Onah, 2006).

Thus, having been expelled from Rwanda (1961), and stripped of citizenship in that country, and expelled from Uganda in 1982 by the Second Obote Government, the Tutsi across the borders in the Great Lakes got involved in alliances among their kin to fight for citizenship in Rwanda, Uganda or D. R. Congo at different times between 1964 and 2006. Accordingly, the Tutsi formed the Rwandan Patriotic Army in 1990 which was an outcome of the Tutsi citizenship crisis in Uganda that year. The Patriotic Army invaded Rwanda in 1994, installed a Tutsi government. It was the invasion that brought about the most horrendous genocide in Africa, the Rwandan genocide (Mamdani, 2002; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003; Onah, 2006). Earlier, it was the Rwanda Tutsi who formed the core of the National Resistance Army in Uganda between 1981 and 1986 which overthrew the Second Obote Government in 1986.

In other to avoid yet another expulsion, this time from the Congo, the Tutsi became involved in the formation of Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL-CZ) in 1996 (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003; Onah, 2006, 2008). The Tutsi alliance fought to overthrow Mobutu Sese Sekou and the installation of Laurent Kabila as President of D. R. Congo in 1997. The Tutsi also formed another alliance, Rally for Democracy, (during the great wars of the Congo) with the support of the governments of Rwanda and Uganda (their kiths and kin) which overthrew Laurent Kabila. The Tutsi fought Laurent Kabila because he no longer protected their citizenship interests in the Congo. Great wars of the Congo, also known as Africa’s Second War involved over eight African countries led by Rwanda and Uganda (Mamdani, 2002; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003; Turner, 2007). The war raged on till a peace treaty in 2006 which installed Joseph Kabila as President after a democratic election.

Therefore, put in perspective, Sudan/Darfur/Chad/Zaghawa on the one hand, and D.R. Congo/Rwanda/Tutsi ethnic wars together with the Rwandan genocide on the other, have demonstrated the ugliest and greatest evil reminders and consequences of colonial partitions and amalgamations in Africa (Asiwaju, 2003; Aghemelo and Ibhashebor, 2006). The impacts of these ethnic wars make state fragility inevitable: fragility characterized by insecurity of life and property, problem of migration/refugee, poverty, disease and crime, and lack of capacity to govern. State fragility frustrates
the emergence of nationalist leadership, and the development of a nationalist ideology with which to build the nations of Africa. The implication is that restructuring, nation-building and the creation of nationalist leadership with nation-building ideology are indispensible in any meaningful resolve to prepare Africa for development in the 21st Century.

**Conclusion: Conflicts Fragility and Prospects for the 21st Century**

The African cultural and ethnic divide and the problems which the various colonial administrations made out of them through partitions and amalgamations are so overwhelming for the Africans and the world that agreeable solution appears not readily feasible even in the 21st Century.

This paper has isolated four major areas and peoples of ethno-religious conflicts. It is being suggested that there is a need to systematically study and re-examine the pre-colonial boundaries of some clearly problematic African ethno-religious contrivances. It is the view of the paper that autonomy/self-rule or independence be granted to those ethnic nationalities which have ethnic, cultural and religious differences that are irreconcilably tied to the states which presently have not allowed them self-determination. Interestingly at the time of writing, the case of South Sudan has been resolved, except to add that the nearly fifty-year blood bath was avoidable. Accordingly, Darfur should be granted autonomy and self-rule from North Sudan.

The current constitution of D. R. Congo appears to allow some degree of autonomy to the new 26 provinces (Turner, 2007). But it may still be too early to know whether an answer has been found to D. R. Congo’s over forty years war in search of citizenship. The current President, Joseph Kabila, is a young man. Will he be prepared to step down from office after a second term, or fiddle with the constitution to allow him extended time in office, as is common with most Africa leaders? Perhaps, it is at that juncture that we may begin to better appreciate whether or not self-determination has been allowed the ethnic nationalities which now make up D. R. Congo. The criticism against the current constitution is that it is silent on many vital issues relating to autonomy, self-determination and citizenship (Turner, 2007). The view of the paper is that D. R. Congo needs to grant self-determination to major ethnic nationalities including Shaba Province to reduce conflict and allow for development of the region. This is contrary to the findings of Turner (2007) which suggests that a majority of the people favor united D. R. Congo, to spite foreigners (the Tutsis) who are accused of being responsible for the conflict in the Congo.

Beyond their primary nation-states of Burundi and Rwanda, the Hutus and Tutsis are scattered all over the Great Lakes Region. As a way of getting over their conflicts, and because both Burundi and Rwanda are already small in territory, it may be suggested that ‘Switzerland’ type of federation be constructed in Burundi and Rwanda (Fahrni, 2003; Church, 2004). In the arrangement, the Hutus and Tutsis each should be allocated real and full autonomy in each part of the country as federal states. In this stead, political power is fully devolved to the local/provincial ethnic units. Each should have visible seat of government with provincially elected body of legislators, with a provincial/local police, as obtains in a federal arrangement of provinces/states. The details of these require the support of the African Union and United Nations for them to be fully developed, and assistance provided by both bodies for the enforcement and supervision of the procedure, in order to ensure the success of the arrangements. For instance, Rwanda is still fragile, and according to Mwambari and Schaeffer (2008), the peace is certainly tenuous.

Ethno-religious conflicts in Africa are not of the same magnitude. Some are fairly manageable, and are being fairly accommodated by the states and the ethnic cultures involved. In those places and situations where the ethnic relations are not so conflicting, Asiwaju (1984: 12) has suggested that “border regions” be deliberately carved out as special and distinct regions wherever such colonial partitions were made across ethnic peoples who now live their lives across two different countries. The “border regions” should be carved out by Africa as special areas, recognized with African specially approved border features and
regulations. According to Asiwaju, the special “border regions” should be allowed the idiosyncrasies of border societies, particularly in those borders with strands of ethnic groups on both sides of border linking two different countries (Asiwaju, 1984: 13). He further suggested that Africa should develop special “border region policy” which would encourage cohesion among divided ethnic groups particularly where it is not possible to create fully different entities likes regions, provinces or new states for such groups (Asiwaju, 1984: 11-13). It is with regards to this type above that we suggested ‘Switzerland’ type of federation.

The emphasis of this paper is that the non-violability of the African boundaries, contained in the charter of the former Organization of African Unity (OAU)(Brownlie, 1971: 3) is no longer tenable (Asiwaju, 1984: 13; Bello, 2001), particularly with current global emphasis on self determination, and human and peoples’ rights. Africa and the international community should systematically and methodologically study African pre-colonial borders and boundaries of ethnic nationalities with the aim of providing solution to lingering ethno-religious conflicts.

The cases of the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia of the recent past are apt examples to Africa in having the political will, and deciding to grant autonomy to nationalities, not only to ensure peaceful co-existence, save lives and resources, but also have time and resources to develop the nations. The former Soviet Union got broken into fifteen independent countries; the former Yugoslavia, by 2008, had been broken into seven countries; and the former Czechoslovakia broken into two republics. In spite of the bloodshed experienced in the processes leading to independence in some of the new entities, there is no doubt that the self-determination achieved by the ethnic nationalities in the three former socialist countries identified, could not have been tolerated further, and has compensated for the bloodshed that was a consequence. The unification of Germany in 1990 is also a justification of the argument of this paper. This is in the sense that the unification is a correction of the partition of one nationality which Germany suffered at the end of the Second World War.

African leaders of the 18th to 20th centuries lost a historic chance of establishing hegemony which could have assisted nation-building and created nation-states and ideologies of development as in other regions of the world like Europe. The activities and nation-building efforts of Othman Dan Fodio (Nigeria) in the 18th and 19th centuries( Last, 1970), Old Oyo Empire (Nigeria), also in the 18th and 19th centuries (Smith, 1989); the Buganda Empire (Uganda), late 19th to early 20th centuries (Denis, 1966) and Shaka de Zulu (South Africa), also during the 19th century (Omer-Cooper, 1966), were examples of attempts at nation-building which could have reproduced nation-states in Africa, and which possibly could have resisted colonialism and/or built a sense of nationalism before colonial encounter.

Those attempts were the type of historical processes which produced the European states that emerged at the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). The treaty marked the beginning of modern European nation-state system (Holsti, 1992), which was later transferred to the rest of the world. The D.R. Congo/Great Lakes wars of 1996 to 2005, including also the Rwandan genocide of 1994, were no worse than the European wars (of ‘blood and iron’) which produced the Treaty of Westphalia (Holsti, 1992). But it is instructive to observe that the Treaty was not negotiated without territorial studies, and special note taken of nationalities and statehood through borders and boundary adjustments.

From the example of Europe, and drawing from the examples of the ethno-religious conflicts analyzed herein, the future of Africa indeed will require boundary restructuring to allow hegemony, ideology, nationalism and citizenship to develop. The present state structures found in different parts of Africa will not readily allow good leadership and good governance to develop. Most African countries as structured at present will not develop in the foreseeable future the capacity to manage the vast territories they claim to govern because of the incessant conflicts. For example, from Kinshasha, the capital of D. R. Congo to Bunia at the North East of that country is the same distance by air as from Paris to Moscow (Western to Eastern Europe). Which African leadership and in which time frame will have the capacity to develop
such vast territory as D. R. Congo? This is the problem with many other countries in Africa, particularly as size in some cases is synonymous with complexity and heterogeneity of ethnicity and religion. Like Eastern Europe, Africa will require constitutionally based territorial restructuring in order to begin to develop the environment that will create peace, stability and development.

Africa will not benefit in the midst of cases of unprecedented ethno-religious hatred, mistrust, and mutual suspicion. These negative variables of social relations discourage nation-building or the development of the national economy, no matter how long the ethno-religious groups live together. In the 21st century Africa will be the better for it, if self determination, autonomy or independence, as the case may be, is granted ethnic nationalities wherever it becomes compelling. This is crucial, if nations must be built in Africa, and if there must bea prospect for African development in the 21st Century.

References


