

UNHOLY TRINITY: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGION ON NATIONAL IDENTITY IN NIGERIA

Daniel Egiegba Agbibo and Andrew Emmanuel Okem

The struggle to accommodate ethnic and religious differences among its people is arguably Nigeria's biggest problem today. This paper employs the social identity theory to explore the impact of ethnicity and religion on the emergence of a true national identity in Nigeria. The central thesis of this paper is that political mobilization drawn along ethno-religious lines has undermined the sense of national identity in Nigeria. The paper draws on colonial policies with a view to assessing the historical processes that have nurtured deep divides in the Nigerian society and suggesting options for intervention.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously and even violently contested along complex ethnic, religious, and regional lines.¹ The disparate and often warring ethno-religious groups in Nigeria subscribe to a model of conduct that elevates ethnicity and religion over the broader interests of the nation. Time and again, efforts at nation building have been undermined by Nigeria's complex ethno-religious configuration. Today, a true national identity in Nigeria remains elusive. Indeed, "since its creation via a 1914 amalgamation by the British, Nigeria has continually gone through the motions of searching for a more participatory and cost-effective political order without, in fact, getting anywhere close to this goal."²

The overarching aim of this study is to critically examine the impact of ethno-religious identity on national identity in Nigeria. Our thesis is that

PEACE RESEARCH

The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies

Volume 43, Number 2 (2011): 98-125

©2011 Peace Research