NAVIGATING THE TERRAIN OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA.

HASSAN ABUBAKAR IDRIS[1]

Article Info

Keywords: Nigeria, political violence, ethno-religious politics, political intolerance, electoral process.

Abstract

Nigeria, an important African country with a diverse population, has a complex ethnic, religious, and regional divide that has fueled anxiety, suspicion, and conflicts. The study examines the impact of ethno-religious politics and political intolerance on political violence in Kaduna State, Nigeria, after the announcement of the 2011 Presidential Election result. The research utilized a qualitative approach through content analysis, employing primary data from government committees and agencies, human rights reports, and secondary data from daily newspapers, periodicals, and literature. The impact of ethno-religious politics and political intolerance was measured through instances of actions and reactions among opposing groups in the study area. The findings revealed that election violence has become a feature of Nigeria's electoral process due to the perception of politics and political office as an investment and avenue for acquisition of extraordinary wealth. These perceptions make politicians turn electioneering and elections into warfare, leading to corruption, bad governance, and political instability. The study recommends that the government should improve the standard of living of the people by engaging youth into meaningful and gainful ventures, providing free education for all, and promoting mutual understanding among diverse groups to achieve peaceful co-existence.

INTRODUCTION

Election is one of the indicators of a democratic state. it is a mechanism through which candidates compete for political positions in a country. The trend has a mixed reaction in Nigeria as a whole and Kaduna state in particular. The heterogeneous nature of the country and the clientele practice of government businesses have made election a challenging phenomenon to parties involved in adhering to the ideal practice of democracy.

---

[1] Islamic University, Malaysia

Nigeria is usually characterized as widely divided state in which major political issues are vigorously and violently contested along lines of complex ethnic, religious and regional divisions in the country. (smith and robin, 2001). Presidential election of 2011 is not an exception rather happened in a different mode, for its attracted political violence not during election but after the announcement of the result. Specifically, the research has examined the impact of ethno - religious politics and political intolerance on political violence in the study area. The study of Presidential Election Result and Political Violence in Kaduna State of Nigeria, 2011 has empoloyed qualitative approach through content analysis. The primary data were collected from Government Committees and Agencies, Human Right Reports (local and international) among others, and secondary data were collected from Daily Newspaper, Periodical Magazines of Local and international coverage, as well BBC and VOA News and the related
literature.

The impact of ethno - religious politics and political intolerance were measured through instances of actions and reactions among the opposites groups or and localities in the study area.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Election is one of the indicators of a democratic state. It is a mechanism through which candidates compete for political positions in a country.

This trend has a mixed reaction in Nigeria as a whole and Kaduna state in particular. The heterogeneous nature of the Country and the clientele practice of government businesses have made election a challenging phenomenon to parties involved in adhering to the ideal practice of democracy.

Presidential election of 2011 is not an exception rather happened in different mode, for its attracted political violence not during but after election and announcement of the result.

This research is aim to examine some of the factors that lead to political violence after the release of presidential election result in Kaduna state – Nigeria, 2011.

Specifically, the research is to answer the following questions;

- What is the impact of ethno-religious politics on political violence in the study area?
- Does political intolerance lead to violence in the study area?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
The research is vital, because it expose some factors that cause political violence in Kaduna state as well suggest to the government the importance of given attention to the problem to avoid reoccurrence. It will also contribute to the stock of knowledge on political violence with particularity to Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The objectives of the study are as follows:-

- To examine the impact of ethno-religious politics on political violence in the study area
- To expose the impact of political intolerance to violence in the study area

LITERATURE REVIEW
Many scholars have written on election and political violence especially in regard to Nigeria. However, some of the related and relevant books and articles have been critically appreciated in this study.

To begin with, violence has been a feature of Nigeria electoral process since the colonial era. But during colonial rule, they were easily curtailed due to the nature and scope of participation. However after independence, electoral violence became intense as struggle for power among politicians intensified. The sources of violence in Nigeria have been argued on various perspectives.

Election violence in the country is primarily due to the perception of politics and political office as investment and as an avenue for acquisition of extraordinary wealth through corruption, which is otherwise not possible through any form of legitimate vocation and enterprise. As a result of this perception and reality, Nigeria politicians turn electioneering and elections into warfare in which violence and other forms of primordial sentiments and prejudices are employed. It is against this background that former president Obasanjo O. counselled his party members to see election as do or die affair (Etanmbi 2011) In Nigeria , "the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics.

Politics means money and money means politics" (id).Thus, "Once politicians recognise or know the probability of having power, the party (and the individual members) naturally uses the same government to stay in power. The leadership becomes a self recruiting oligarchy and no self recruiting oligarchy has been known to tolerate oppositions to itself" (ibid) In this circumstance, violence becomes instrument for seeking power. In Nigeria, politicians and parties rigged elections " in most blatant fashion … violence, corruption, arson, and brigandage were employed in the mad desire to win and retain power both in the region and at the centre."(Political Bureau 1987)

Expounded to the nature of Nigerian democracy and predicament to political violence right from 1960 to date, the conceptualisation of democracy and democratic government seen to coincide with the view of Laski (1980) that "Democratic government is doubtless a final form of political organisation in the sense that men who have once tasted power will not, without conflict surrender it" (Olaopa 2009). Corruption and bad governance are factors to political instability, However, " in an ethnically differentiated polity, where ethnic competition for resources drove much of the pervasive corruption and profligacy." (Omolulu 2007) The political gladiators constantly manipulated the people and political process to advance their selfish agenda.

Political gladiators "vie for power and control over the vast spoil of office". The so-called godfathers cultivating personal militias (thugs) to secure their positions by promoting local arms race in some regions(ibid). Attempt at consolidating democracy in Nigeria (1960-1966, 1979-1983, 1999-date), shown some indicators that the task is faced with a lot of difficulties. Fifteen of these are indentified as historical limitation, military intervention in politics, leadership problem, apathy on the part of citizens, poverty, gender inequality, politics of godfathers', ineffective civil society, weakened legislature, state of economy, unemployment, corruption, incessant executive-legislative conflict, tendency toward democratic despotism and failure to accept democratic defeat (ibid)

Violent uprisings have become a veritable tool of power politics. There is a growing army "gainfully employed" youth ready to perpetuate heinous atrocities at the behest of politicians. Election rigging is the commonest factor. To rig election is an easy operation in Nigeria, since the ruling party commands the loyalty of the official responsible for the conduct of election.

The April election poll holds a high promise of following precedents in the country. Bribery, manipulation and violence are common tools in the ceaseless struggle for spoils making the democratic norms weak (Lekan 2011) In 19791983 experience, corruption and abuse of office to dominate and perpetuate in power were factors responsible for political instability. This has been supported with the missing of 2.8 million naira crude oil sale, Shugaba deportation to cow the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) supporters by the government (Paul 2010)

It has been buttressed that, some rigging of result and failure of courts to redress the rigging and the president of the country to purge corrupts ministers were some reasons for the political instability in 1983(Christopher 1993). This fact has attracted the military overthrew of the government and resumed control.

From the fallout of previous electoral exercises, election in Nigeria are either undemocratically guided or organised to fail standard by the political class. They are deliberately marred by fraud. There were serious and blatant cases of stuffing of ballots boxes, over bloated of voting register, special treatment of voters and election

officials, distortion of result, grand standing of political sponsors (or godfathers), intimidation of voters and political opponents by law enforcement agents and thugs as well as related violence, arson and killings(id).

On lesson from Nigeria 2011 election, It was reported that, the violence was predetermined by northern elites to use unemployed youth as foot soldier if 2011 result is negative to their expectation (ACG 2011). However, inability of government to engaged youths into gainful economic activity, education for all and affordable health services created the avenue the manipulation of the youth by selfish politicians.

In another perspective, the crisis of electoral system will be better understood if situated within the context of the nature of the political economy of the Nigerian state. The Nigerian state plays a dominant role in the national economy in the face of development of private capitalist enterprises. This throws up state as a primary instrument of accumulation. The Nigeria state is major owner of the means of production. Buoyed by the expanded oil revenue of the early 1970s, the state dominated all aspect of the national political economy (Kunle, 2010).This made the state not only the biggest spender of resources but also the largest employer of labour.

The expansion of petroleum production and resultant increased in revenue heightened "the centrality of the struggle for resources for personal advancement and group security". Under this circumstance, access to the state becomes a flat form for primitive accumulation (id).The immensity and ubiquity of state power under this situation," the state is everywhere and its power appear boundless. That makes the capture of state power singularly important" (Thad, 2011).

This character of the Nigeria state encourages clientele politics which exist," where state controls opportunity for commerce and a wide range of jobs" (id). Within this context, politics means more than competition for political power but assumes the character of a desperate struggle, the struggle for state power is reduced to warfare by factions of governing elites. Commitment to public service and ethic of governance becomes secondary.

Thus, political (state) power does not represent the licence for wealth, it also "the means to the security and only guarantor of general well-being" (Toyin, 2009)The elitist theory has unfold the machination and manipulation of political parties by elites in such a way that political parties are elitist in operation and the process of power acquisition which no doubt has impacted negatively on electoral process both in intra and inter party level (Omodia, 2009)

Scholars of competition model argued that, post African democratization has introduced elections into context that often lack restraints upon behaviour of candidates, resulting in the emergence of voters' intimidation, vote buying, ballot fraud (Paul and Petro, 2011). The electoral competition relies on a symmetric game with assumption as the incumbent has no alternative advantage over the challenger but have an equilibrium between a weak challenger who uses violence, a weak incumbent who uses repression and stronger incumbent facing competition will prefer to use bribery or ballot fraud. However, this model is limited to political violence during election.

In conclusion, suggestion were made by scholars in order to redress and maintain violent free democracy in the country, among the recommendations are adherence to the basic tenets of democracy and constitutionalism, tolerance of political opposition, transparency and accountability, reform electoral system, organisational restructuring, improved litigation process and free education.

However, there are some salient issues that need further finding in order to help policy makers avoid violence reoccurrence in the country. These issues includes the strength and position of the laws that prohibits rigging of votes and thuggery and possession of small arms and light weapons.
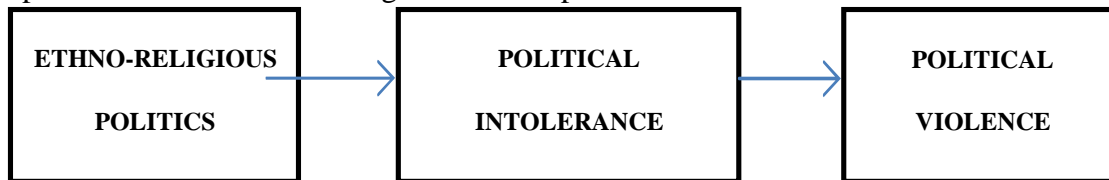
THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Class struggle theory is adapted to the study, class struggle or class conflict as propounded by Karl Marx and modified by Ralf Dahrendorf explains a tension or antagonism which exist in society due to competing socio-

economic interest and desire between people of different classes that may result to conflict in form of direct violence or indirect violence.

The theory postulated the relationships that exist between people in imperatively coordinated groups, thus originating in social structure. However,dichotomous, there is always an authoritative hierarchy on one side and those who are excluded on the other side. Within any imperative group are those who are superordinate and those who are subordinate.

Meanwhile, superordinate and subordinate thus form separate quasi group of shared latent intent. On the surface, members of these groups and their behavior may vary considerably, but they form a pool from which conflict groups can recruit members. With leadership, ideology, and the political (freedom) and social condition of organization being present, latent interest become manifested through political organization and conflict.

Independent Variable Intervening Variable Dependent Variable -DV

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS POLITICS	→	POLITICAL INTOLERANCE	→	POLITICAL VIOLENCE

HYPOTHESIS

Based on the theoretical frame work the following hypothesis has been drawn;

- Ethno-religious politics influence political violence
- Political intolerance can lead to violence

OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

Ethno-religious politics means Hausa and Non-Hausa ethnic as well as Muslims and Christians religion sentiment in politics. Political intolerance means rivalry between People Democratic Party and Congress for Progress Change Political violence means collusion between rival political groups that may lead to loss of lives and properties.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on Presidential Election Result and Political Violence in Kaduna State of Nigeria, 2011 has used primary and secondary data sources. The primary source includesofficial data from government committees and agencies, Human Right reports (both local and international). In the case of secondary source, Daily Newspaper, and periodical Magazines of local and international coverage as well British Broadcasting Cooperation News, Voice of America News. In addition, published works of scholars in the field has also constituted part of the secondary data.

In order to explore the relationship between presidential election result and political violence in Kaduna StateNigeria, 2011, the research looked at the impact of ethno-religious politics and political intolerance among the people of the State. Though, general trend of phenomenon hasbeen presented on Nigeria at large.

In terms of approach to analysis, the study is basically a qualitative in nature, and data are presented through Content Analysis. The impact of ethno-religious politics and political intolerance were measured through instances of actions and reactions among the groups in the study area.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS POLITICS

Post-election violence in the northern Nigeria protested the victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, who is a Christian from south. More than 150 people were killed in the violence in Kaduna city of Nigeria. Rioters also burnt churches in the city, the runner-up in the Presidential race, General MuhammaduBuhari charged that there

were widespread irregularities in the election, he also alleged in Voice of America radio station that his supporters in the southern part of country were not allowed to vote.

According to British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news of 20th April, 2011, Nigeria is divided by rivalry between predominantly Muslim north and the mainly Christian south – so much so that the presidency has often rotated between people who come from the two halves of the country, in an attempt to keep the peace.

Civil right Congress chairman, ShehuSani argued that, Nigeria is home to more than 250 ethnic groups, the majority of the Muslim population live in the north, while the south is predominantly Christian, although sizeable minorities live in both regions. Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) is being seen as a Muslim party and the People Democratic Party (PDP) is being seen as a Christian party. Whichever election goes, there is going to a problem.

The establishment of ethno-regionalism had a significant impact in Nigeria political arena. Theoretically, Ake (2000) content that, even the formation of political parties, their manifestos, system of leadership and campaign strategies were originated from ethnic and geographical sentiment.

Aljazeera reported that an attacked was on mosque and Muslims in the southern Kaduna (Christian area) a day after report surfaced of attacks on churches by Buhari's supporters. "there are millions of people in Nigeria, particularly in the northern Nigeria, who did not want Jonathan to run in 2011".Correspondent Ndege said.

There is an informal agreement that rotates the presidency between northerners and southerners to hold the presidency in 2011.Nigeria, a nation of 164.5 million is roughly divided between Christian-dominated south and the Muslim north and this strongly affect the politics of the country. While Alolu (2003)observed that since the beginning of Democratic system of government during the first republic, Nigeria political parties were forms into position supporting three major ethnic groups-the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. In similar vein, the third republic of Nigerian Democracy follows the same train. The model indicate clearly that Nigerians are more loyal to their ethnic background than the State.

Lewis and Bratton (2000) obverses that "Religious and Ethnic identities are more fully formed, more holistic and more strongly felt than class". Accordingly, Daily Times agency report that Goodluck Jonathan was declared winner of the presidential after obtaining about 57% of the total votes cast, with 22.5 million votes, to Buhari 12.5 million votes, in an election that was declared by international observers as free and fair. The protest which degenerated into violent riots in the 12 northern states caused the displacement of 65,000 people based on the estimate by relief officials.

Muslim rioters targeted and killed Christians and members of ethnic groups from southern Nigeria, who were perceived to have supported the ruling party (PDP). In the Christian communities in the Kaduna state, mobs of Christian and non- Hausas retaliated by killing and burning mosques and properties.

POLITICAL INTOLERANCE

The Human Right Writer Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) in Africa Outlook Newspaper said that as persons who swore to uphold the tenets of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, State Governors and Police hierarchy were obliged to respect the constitution that guarantees civil and political right as fundamental rights.

The non-governmental organization made the observation in reaction to the Niger State Police Command and Ebonyi State Governor Mr. Martins Elechi banned on the General MuhammaduBuhari-led Congress Progress Change (CPC) and the Dr. OgbonnayaOnu-led All Nigeria People Party (ANPP) from holding political rallies in Niger and Ebonyi States respectively.

The group also added that the Imo State traditional rulers' council for publicly cajoling voters to vote for only People Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party.

The Media added that commissioners of police and some overzealous state Governors are using crude means to frustrate credible political opposition candidates from holding their campaign rallies in some state of the federation are dangerous signal of the widening dimension that political intolerance has assured Nigeria ". The unconstitutional and illegal conducts of these officers and Governor will encourage political militancy and violent if some people genuinely perceive that their political and civil rights are being curtailed and abused flagrantly even by the members of the police". The Group observed.

While, vanguard Newspaper has it that security source said the violent demonstration which has claimed some lives started when supporters of the presidential candidate of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), General MuhammaduBuharirtd claimed that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) created hurdles which would ensure his defeat, surreptitiously smuggling into 2011 electoral law a clause that requiring any candidate that would win the election must not only win with majority but also win 25% of the votes in 2/3 of all states in the country.

It was reported by same media that trouble started during the Muslim prayer (Magrib) at about 7 p.m. when an Islamic cleric told his congregation in the mosque in UngwarRimi area of the metropolis that General Buhari was being rigged out of the race through the alleged introduction of the clause in the electoral act. Thereafter demonstration started which consumed two chapels in Federal College of Education Zaria and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria accordingly.

It was also argued by the Arewa voters Assembly (AVA) that General Buhari has urged his supporters in Kaduna and Niger to deploy violence if the outcome is not favorable to his party. On 17th April, 2011, warming short of the postelection violence was fired in Katsina, Buhari's immediate constituency. 27 vehicles destroyed and churches burnt.

The Presidential Committee on the 2011 Election Violence and Civil Disturbances headed by Sheikh Ahmed Lemu submitted its report to President Goodluck Jonathan on20thMay,2011, the 22-man panel was mandated to examine the causes of the post-election violence in parts of the country, and make recommendations to forestall recurrence. Hundreds of people were reportedly killed and properties worth millions of naira destroyed in the violence that erupted following the declaration of the results of the presidential election.

Findings of the panel noted that the widespread desire for change in the political makeup of the country was one of the major causes of the violence when it became apparent to many people that the change was not forthcoming. Other principal causes of the election violence, according to the Committee, include the subsisting culture of impunity, bad governance, inciting political statements, insecurity, poverty, corruption, unemployment and the extravagant lifestyle of political office holders.

Lemu said that manipulation of the Peoples Democratic Party (ruling party) zoning arrangement and the eager by politicians to win election by every means also contributed among causes that hampered the nature of the presidential election in a contest viewed, particularly in but not peculiar to the North, in ethno-religious context.

The committee added that the incessant charge by top politicians to their supporters to 'guard their votes' appeared to have been misconstrued by many voters to include recourse to violence.

The salient aspect of the report is expressed in the strong alarming that the present condition of affairs in the country could bring a social revolution if adequate measures are not taken by government to elevate the living standard of Nigerian. The determined effort of those who now control the levers of power, to hold on to them at all costs, fair and foul, mostly the latter, certainly contributed to fuelling the violence. Whether or not they were asked to 'protect their votes', the electorates were un-amazingly bound to react negatively even if violently, when they felt satisfied that a grand design was meant to rig the elections.

Unless the conduct of elections in Nigeria is considerably seen to be free and fair, voters would always be disposed to reacting to any attempts by politicians to alter electoral processes. The committee stated the obvious when it found that the remunerations and allowances of legislators are generally looked outrageous in when compared to the emoluments of Nigerian workers, noting that the manner in which political office holders make their positions appear attractive was also an issue among other causes that led to the violence.

President Jonathan response in expressing the government's desire to implement the panel's recommendations should not end there. It is true, as he pointed out, that preventing a future occurrence would be preferable to punishing those who took part or aided the last one.

There is widespread discontent in the country, and this is not limited to particular geographical areas; the entire country is involved. Looking ahead is important, but the president must keep in mind the dangers of sustaining the culture of impunity that is currently pervasive in Nigeria, among politicians and by those who have taken to criminal acts.

It is important in this regard that government must act fairly to identify and prosecute suspects in the law courts.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria has witnessed the transition from the military regime for a quite long time to a democratic system of government since the year 1999, Nigeria failed to resolve its ethno religious and political violence which contributed to the weakening of democratic governance andnational integration.

As a multi-ethnic nation, with diverse religious and cultural background the political system is expected to cope with and control of both human and natural resources effectively, but in contrast this diversity becomes the source of ethno-religious and political violence. The issues of ethno-religious violence have tended to occur constantly in Nigeria since colonial era during the period where organized ethnically based actions with their ethnic and regional agenda escalate into series of violent conflict.

Findings of the study realizes that, the state of the economy of the country has served as the cheap instrument by the political elites to mobilize militias base on the ethno-religious sentiment in their struggle for power and thus led to political intolerance and political violence.

However, the study recommended to the government to improve the standard of living of the people by engaging youth into meaningful and gainful venture, free education for all shall also help in the mutual understanding among the of the divides that can lead to peaceful co-existence.

REFERENCES

Christopher Hart, (1993). "Nigeria Election of 1983" Journal of Africa Institute, vol.60, no.3

Dibie Raymond, (2000) Understanding Public Policy in Nigeria: A Twenty First Century approach, (Lagos: Mberi and Associates, Nigeria)

EtanmbiEnest (2011). Post- Election Violence: Emerging Trend and Lesson. Abuja: CLEEN Foundation Nigeria

EyeneOkpanachi,(2012). Ethno-Religious and Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Idahosa S.A.,(1997). "Issues in Problems in Nigeria Politics – Tribes ,Ethnicism and Regionalism" in R.F Ola (ed) Nigeria Political science, Output and Environment (Benin City: Imprint service)

Ibrahim Jibrin, (1991). "Politics of Religion in Nigeria: The Parameter of the crisis in Kaduna State," Review of African Political Economy, vol.45 no.6

Jega A.M., (2002).Tackling Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria, The Nigeria Social Scientist, vol.5, no.2

KunleAnimashaun, (2010)."Regime Character, Electoral Crisis and Prospect of Nigeria Electoral Reform" Journal of Nigeria Studies, vol.1, no.1

KazahToure,(1999). "The Political Economy of Ethnic conflict and Governance in Southern Kaduna, Nigeria (De) Constructing a contested Terrain" Africa Development xxiv 1&2

LekanAkinnoshaun,(2011). election in Nigeria: Violence of Manifesto (Lagos: Nigeria world)

Lewis, P.M., (2011). Nigeria Votes: More Openness, More Conflict. Journal of Democracy, vol.22, no. 4 Lesson from Nigeria's 2011 Election, (81) Crisis Africa Group Briefing, 2011

Olaopa O.R and AkinolaOwalabi, (2009). "The Nigeria State, Political assassination and Democratic Consolidation: Historical Exploration", Africa international Journal of Political Science and International Relation, vol.3 no.2

OmoluluFagbadebo, (2007)."Corruption, Governance and Political Instability in Nigeria", Africa International Journal of Political Science and International Relation, vol.1 no.2

Omodia S.M.,(2009). "Election and Democratic Survival in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria" Journal of Pan Africa Studies, vol.3, no.3

Paul Obi, (2010). Nigeria: shehuShagari's Presidency 1979-1983 (Lagos: Aboki Publishers)Report of the Political Bureau, 1987:25

Paul Collier and Pedro Vicente,(2011). "Violence, Bribery and Fraud: The Political Economy of Election in Sub-Sahara Africa" Journal of Public Choice, vol.153, no.12

Thad Dumming, (2011). "Fighting and Voting: Violent Conflict and Electoral Politics" Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol.55, no.3

ToyinFalola,(2009). Colonialism and Violence (Blomington: Indiana University Press)

Osunah O. and Okar P.,(2009).Implementation of Millennium Development Goals and National security (Lagos: Hargis publishers)

National Population Commission (2006) population Census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Abuja Nigeria

Salamu Bashir, (2010). "Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposal for New Management" European Journal of Social Sciences, vol.13 no 3