AN APPRAISAL OF ETHNO ETHNIC CRISIS IN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR REMEDIATION

*MOHAMMED MUSA; **SULEIMAN ADAMU; & *FELIX HASLEY

*Department of International Relation and Strategic Studies, Adamawa State Polytechnic Yola. **Department of Crime Prevention Management and Control, Adamawa State Polytechnic Yola

Abstract:

Nigeria is enmeshed in unresolved and unsetting religion conflict of great magnitude that has defied solution up till this moment with its attendant negative consequences on the socio potential and economic well-being of the country. Under the current fourth republic ushered in 1999, politicians mobilized groups based on ethnic and religion to achieve their selfish aims. Violent youth gangs and militant are formed and unleash harm on the innocent citizen through the expression of ethno-religion violence. Nigeria's political history is replete with unresolved and unsettling ethno-religious fracas and largely impotent panels to determine their causes with a view of preventing future occurrence when conflicts have not occurred, or have somehow abated; associated tensions have remained high, with all the attendant negative consequences on the socio-political and economic development in the country. Therefore, the paper seeks to address the consequences of ethno-religious crises with a view to proffer solutions. The paper use secondary school data to arrive at its conclusion and recommendations.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Ethnic group, Conflict, Ethno-religious crisis

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Nigeria consists of over 250 ethnic groupings (Arase and Iwuafor 2007). Nigeria also has three main religious diversities namely – The African Traditional Religion, Islamic Religion and Christianity Religion. The history of Islam is traceable to the trans-Saharan slave trade, the cultural and religious influences from the Arab and Middle East state. The religion receives

significant boost under the aegis of Usman Dan Fodio's and the religious Jihad of 1804- 1810. The history of Christianity is likewise traceable to the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade, and the activities of early Christian missionaries in pre-Nigeria geographical spaces like Badagry, Lagos and other southern coast states (Falola, Uhomoibhi, Mahadi &Anyanwu 2003). From the above discourse, Nigeria has a long history of ethnic and religion diversities.

Lamentably, they have turned out to be a significant source of insecurity and poses challenges to national unity. Ethnic and religious conflicts are inter-related. Several ethnic conflict takes on religious tags in it execution likewise religious conflicts mobilize ethnic sentiments (Dogara 2010). Most episodes of violence in Nigeria especially in northern states of Nigeria in the past three decades are associated with ethno–religious conflict characterized by high level of violent confrontations among ethnic and religious groups often under the influence of "settler-indigene dichotomy" and "Christian-Muslim" debacle respectively (Abdul 2000).

Since the Maitatsine of 1980, ethno-religious conflict has become prominent. In Northern states of Nigeria, matters regarding ethnicity and religion have become susceptible to violence such as killings and maiming along ethnic lines, destruction of religious centers and communal clash etc. These states by nature are heterogeneous with multiple identities and diversities. For instance, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Zamfara has a vibrant identity with about Forty (40) ethnic groups, and predominantly a population of Muslims and Christian's adherents.

METHODOLOGY

The paper drawn from copious review of literature from secondary data that employed the use of secondary data such as Journal articles, government and non-governmental reports, Newspapers, Magazines, etc. through a systematic review. In the case of the Journal articles, relevant empirical and non-empirical index peer-reviewed and non-index peer-reviewed journal articles obtained from library data base, google scholar, and web of science were selected and used for the study.

Conceptual Clarification
Ethnicity

Jakob Rosel (1995: 123) defines ethnicity as groups which see themselves as constituted by the real or imagined bonds of a common decent religion,

language, culture and history. Ethnicity defined according to Osaghae, (1992) as a social formation predicated on culturally specific practices and unique symbols. Alegbeleye (2014), defines ethnicity as a situation in which individuals in a particular ethnic group consider themselves or are considered by others to have common affinity which distinct them from other groups in the society. Abdul (2002: 146) described religion as an identity issue, which implies solidarity and setting boundaries between those who are consider believers and those that are not. This deals with issue of sentiments, and norms that are result of shared experiences.

Ethnic group

According to Otite (1990), ethnic groups are categories of people characterized by cultural criteria of symbols including language, value system and normative behaviour and whose members are located in a particular part of a new state territory.

Conflict

Coser (1956: 8) sees conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponents are to neutralize, injure and eliminate their rivals. Within the context of this paper, conflict is considers in line with the submission of Oladosu (2013: 115) "as a state in which people, ethnic or religious groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement which may or may not result in bloody confrontation. A conflict triggered under the aegis of ethnic identities is referred to as ethnic or racial conflict and similarly those triggered under the influence of religion is defined as religious conflict.

Religion

There are serious problems with the definition of religion. Scholars have not been able to reach a consensus definition of religion. Little wonder Egwu (2001) argued that religion is a difficult subject of inquiry including attempts at its definition and conceptualization. Be that as it may, it is the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. According to Adeniyi (1993), religion is a body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being. This implies that religion deals with norms and rules, a behavior, process or structure whose orientation is supernatural i.e. emanated from God and which must be followed by the believers.

Ethno-religious conflict

Ethno-religious conflict is a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious and another of such group in a multiethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontations (Achumba et al. 2013; Salawu, 2010). The character of the Nigerian sate is responsible for the country's deepening ethno-religious contradiction that are presently threatening the fabric of the country, and which has become a clog in Nigeria's attempt to develop her economy (Mohammed, 2013).

Ethno-Religious Crisis in Nigeria: An 0ver view

Nigeria has had so many crisis stimulated by ethno-religious reasons since 1980s to date.

Ethnic and religious bigotry has become a serious issue undermining the very foundation of Nigeria's unity. Mutual fear and suspicion, absence of cordial relations ethnic alignment and re-alignment, ethnic affiliation and attachment have being very strong features of Nigeria since independence. Nigeria has become a theatre of war characterized by an increasing number of ethnic and religious crises. In 1980 in some parts of Kano and Maiduguri there were the Maitatsine religious disturbances. By 1984, there was the Yola religious disturbance. In 1992 the Zango Kataf crisis rocked Kaduna State. This crisis spread to Kafachan and other parts of the north central states. By 1999, the Shagamu religious crisis took place, Tafawa Balewa in 2001; Hausa, Christian and Muslim still exhibit existence of hate to date. The above is evidence of the rate at which ethno and religious crisis takes place in Nigeria. Anytime this crisis takes place in any part of Nigeria the fear of reprisal attack is always high. The Jos case is a pointer to the fear of reprisal attack. The extent to which ethno-religious crisis is going in Nigeria is alarming. It has been hijacked by a group known as "Boko Haram". This group is responsible for man bomb explosions in some parts of northern Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory. Many analysts are also of the view that Nigeria is sitting on a keg of gun power because of the activities of this Islamist sect known as "Boko Haram". They have invaded churches, mosques, markets, schools, motor parts, homes and killed and of maimed innocent citizens and have destroyed properties worth billions of naira.

The Kaduna confrontation between Christians and Muslims started in Kafanchan on Friday March 1987 and spread quickly to Kaduna, Kano and Zaria. The Yakubu Yahaya and Katsina riot of 1981, the Bauchi violence of 1991, violence in Kano 1991, Violence in Zangon-Kataf 1992 are cases of ethno-religious violence in northern Nigerian states.

Tafawa Balewa conflict of 1991, 1995 and 2001, the Jos conflict of 1994, 2001, 2007, 2008, the Kano conflict of 1980, 1982, 1991, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2001 corroborate the argument of Otite and Albert (1999) that there is high degree of religious intolerance in Kano. Religious violence also erupted in Kaduna after a market row clash between Hausa Muslims and Adara Christians in Kusuwan Magani among wheelbarrow porters where death toll of 55 was confirmed (BBC conflict on 21st February, 2000 was follow by a protest by thousand Christians against The Kaduna anti-Sharia proposal to introduce Sharia law as the criminal code in Kaduna State. Between February-May 2000 over 1,000 people died while rioting over the introduction of Sharia in Kaduna state alone. On 28th February, 2000, hundreds of ethnic Hausa were killed in reprisal attacks in Aba, Abia State. (Igbokwe 2000). In 2001, the religious violence that spread across the Middle-Belt states of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, and Nassarawa which claimed over 2,000 life's with thousands displaced (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2012). The outbreak of religious conflict in Jos created pandemonium in the Middle Belt region. In 2004, Christians and Muslims sectarian clash broke out in Jos between Fulani herdsmen and the Nigerian army. The conflict led to the deaths of many innocent citizens, destruction worship centers residential homes and burning down of seventy-two villages in the densely populated residential area of Jos (Pandem

2008: Kwaja 2009).

Religious violence erupted with a Muslim protest demonstration on 10 May 2004, as a protest against the killing of over six hundred Muslims in the small town of Yelwa in Shendam Local Government area of Plateau State (Olasope 2012: Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2012). The Miss World contest of 2002 in Kaduna and Abuja over a columnist comments that the Holy Prophet Mohammed would likely support the pageants, an event some Muslims felt was indecent. The 'blasphemous' article suggested that the Prophet Mohammed would have liked to marry a Miss World beauty queen (The Straits Times 2002). Some Islamic fundamentalists perceived this as an insult to Islam and eventually led to

riots in which many people lost their lives. More than 2,000 people died in the rioting that followed. In 2006, riots over Danish cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammed led to the deaths of nearly 200 people in several Nigerian Northern cities (Hill and Asthana 2006).

The emergence of "Boko Haram" has worsened the crisis in Nigeria especially in north eastern part of Nigeria. This group is responsible for many bomb explosions in some parts of northern Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory. Many analysts are also of the view that Nigeria is sitting on a keg of gun power because of the activities of this Islamist sect known as "Boko Haram". They have invaded churches, mosques, markets, schools, motor parts, homes and killed and of maimed innocent citizens and have destroyed properties worth billions of naira.

Ethno-religious clashes occur in Jamaa local government area of Kaduna State where six were confirmed dead (Vanguard 2018). Killing also occurred in Gwar East District of Benue State in North Central Nigeria where 19 death was reported (Vanguard 2018), 73 death recorded in Makurdi in 2018, 15 Villages were destroyed with mass-slaughter of Christians in the conflict that ensues in North East of Adamawa with over 80, 000 internal displaced camps (New York Times, 2018)

Causes of Ethno-religious Crisis in Nigeria

Many factors can be held responsible for the rampant cases of ethno-religious in Nigeria The followings are some of the factors:

Firstly, leaders have failed woefully in terms of provision of infrastructure and as such produce large number of frustrated youths that can be used easily by selfish people. Secondly, high population of Almajiri students who are left to fend for themselves. Majority of these children are used by the extremist to foment trouble in our society. Thirdly, weak national security system that make it possible for the influx of foreigners who bring their ideologies due to porosity of our borders. Fourthly, Unemployment is also a factor responsible for ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria.

Large numbers of Nigerian youth are without any legitimate source of livelihood. Most of the recent ethno-religious and communal conflicts in Nigeria can be explained from the angle of joblessness and intense competition over scarce resources and services both in urban and the rural areas. The mass of unemployed youths are ready made instruments

to be motivated to partake in riots, demonstration, reprisal attacks, violence, armed robbery and other sundry acts.

Fifthly, The persistent ethnic chauvinism exhibited by Nigerian elites has grave effects on the psyche of the various ethnic nationalities to an extent that those groups that are even benefiting now lay claim to marginalization at every attempt to reverse the status quo. This is nonetheless the causes of the plethora of violent crisis rocking the Nigerian state. Today, according to Mohammed (2013), the body language and actions of all the regions in Nigeria claim to be marginalized.

Sixly, Religious factors cannot be left out of the causes of the crisis. In Nigeria today, two religions predominate; Islam and the Christianity and these two religions have different conceptualization. For instance, the Christians want man to give unto Caeser what is Caesers and unto God what is God in an apparent segregation between the worldly and the spiritual. Islam on the other hand, addresses the Here-and-Now in the perspective of the hereafter (Abdulfadi 1992).

Causes and Cases of Ethno-Religious Conflict in Northern States

The history of ethno-religious conflict dates back to the colonial government that forced various ethnic groups under different authorities of Empires, Caliphate and kingdoms together to create protectorates and colony and finally amalgamated in 1914 to become an entity known as Nigeria (Essien 2009: 153).

The inevitability of ethnic and religious conflict was argued by Nnoli (1980: 87) that the differential treatment of ethnic groups during colonialism was responsible for the intense competition in Nigeria society. The intense competition has thus led to violent confrontations and bloodletting today. Ethnicity and religion are contested over the year in Nigeria political relation and public spaces. Essien (2009: 154-155) captures the historical and contemporary perspective of the subject matter In the case of the Northern states and the implication of ethno-religious crisis, the entire social order in the north has transited from its humane and friendly character of the past into a hostile seedbed of violence and uncontrollable destruction of lives and property in recent times (Bashir 2005). Ethno-religious conflicts in northern states of Nigeria are traceable to the politicization of the duo. The politicization of the ethnicity and religion creates a separate identity for Nigeria politics. Political supports are garnered along ethnic and

religious rather than creating a national perspective of the political process by the "elite class". Bala Usman (1987) contends through his "manipulation thesis" that the "elite" are the major force manipulating religion and ethic consciousness to serve their individual or group interest. "Ethnic identity and diversity are not inherently negative rather, they are reality of individual identity and an attempt to erode it might leads to identity conflict (Bashir 2005). By implication, politicians exploit ethno-religious diversities and consciousness of the populace.

Samuel (2001) traces the numerous cases of urban violence including ethno-religious violence to the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme in the 1980s. Similar position was reached by Tunde Olawuyi (N.d) who considers the 1980 as a unique period in the history of Nigeria due to the frustrated hopes and societal tension caused by the failure of Nigeria second republic (1979-1983) and the introduction of harsh economic measures under the Structure Adjustment Programme of 1980s. From this period onward, Nigeria experienced a militarization of ethnic and religious conflicts beginning from the 1987 Kafanchan riots which introduced which introduced severe dimensions of religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in what is referred to as civilian equivalent of a coup d'état (Dogara 2010: 5). Salawu (2010) identified some of the causes of ethno-religious conflict such as religious fundamentalism, High level of poverty, illiteracy, youth unemployment, ethnic idea of "political favoritism". Otite (2001: 1-33) also enumerate the causes of ethnic conflict such as land space to which both indigenes and settlers lay claim, communal boundary disputes, ethnic, sectional or individual competition over access to political power economic resources and clash over cultural interest, values preferences and perception. Albert (2001) also identified factor leading to religious conflict such as superiority complex of a religion adherents, misconception of one's and other religion, aggressive and insulting methodology in the course of propagation, fanaticism and overzealousness and misinterpretation of religious text. In Nigeria, ethnicity and religious bigotry has become the fulcrum of various forms of nationalism ranging cultural autonomy, religious dominance and demands for local political-autonomy and self-determination.

Victor Dike (2001:87) argued that ethnic and religious conflicts are common "currency" in the volatile Middle Belt axis. Similarly, Kano State in the north-eastern axis has a high propensity of ethno-religious violence. In 18th

-29th December 1980, a series of religious riots broke out in Kano and spread to other three northern state, recording a death tolls of 5000 with many unaccounted death. On 30th October, 1992, a related outbreak broke out in Bulunkutu near Maiduguri where another 4000 people were killed, over 2000 were left homeless and over three million worth of properties were destroyed. Yola and Jimeta in the former defunct Gongola State is another vivid case Violence broke out in February 1984 with nearly 1000 lives claimed and destruction of Jimeta only modern day market with total property damage worth five million on the 26th April, 1985 in Gombe (Falola 1988 137-193).

Effects of Ethno-Religious Conflict

In all parts of northern states of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts occur in an alarming rate in the past three decades and the probability of future occurrence remains high amidst socio-economic and political strife facing the country. It has occurred in state of Kano, Bauchi, Nasarawa, Jos, Taraba, Kaduna, Niger, Borno, Maiduguri, and Benue State respectively. Ethno-religious identities have become disintegrative and disparaging social rudiments menacing the peace, stability and security in Nigeria. The frequent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes have posed a major security challenges. The long protracted ethno religious conflict leads to destruction of lives and properties. The number of lives and properties consumed because of these crises cannot be statistically determined. The skirmishes which follow the major confrontations, leaves several people wounded and several thousand people displaced from their homes. Ethno-religious conflicts have brought about economic shocks and political instability in spite of natural resources abundance in these states. Ethno-religious conflict leads to the loss of human and resources capital.

The increase of internally displaced persons (IDP's) is another consequence of ethno-religious conflict. The apparent intractability of this conflict has made it difficult to know the exact figure of IDP's in Nigeria. The Yeldam-Shendam conflict generated large number of IDP's in the history of ethno-religious conflict with over 60, 000 IDP's and over 800 women and girls either abducted, raped, sexually assaulted, or turned to slave labour (Dogara 2010). Internally Displaced Person's spreads across all the thirty-six state of the federation. Over 1.6 million are fleeing violence while 2

million in North East lived in hunger (Punch 2018). An estimation of 10,000 Kano residents, mostly Christians flee from their homes in troubled parts of the city, took refuge at the main military and police barracks on 11 May 2004 (Vanguard of 16 May 2004). At least 57,000 people fled their homes following sectarian violence involving Christians and Muslims in north-central Nigeria. More than 30,000 Christians were displaced from their homes in Kano (Dogara 2010). In addition, over 27,000 displaced people had sought refuge in Bauchi State following a massacre of Muslims by Christian gangs in the neighboring Plateau State earlier in May 2004 (Mashood 2014)

Ethno-religious conflict has reduced the state Foreign Direct Investment. The high level of insecurity prevents investors from making huge investment in the economy due to their unguaranteed safety from ethno religious violence. Onwumah (2014) posited that in economic terms, ethno-religious conflict damages resources and facilities, which took the government time to acquire. No foreign investor will like to invest funds in a country that is prone to communal and ethno-religious conflicts (Onwumah: 2014).

The malfunctioning nature of the industry in northern Nigeria can be attributed to ethno-religious conflict as it is out of logic and reasoning to embark on tourist tours in a violence zone area. Onwumah (2014) also affirms that ethno-religious conflict portrays Nigeria in a very bad light internationally. Nigeria is perceived as unsafe and indeed not conducive in terms of security caused mainly by communal and ethno-religious crises.

Ethno-religious conflict has a devastating effect on Nigerian socio–economic structures and infrastructures such as education, agriculture, and health. The incessant abduction and raping of school children affect the growth of education in the state. Burning of schools, churches and mosque, destruction of community projects are problems that do not only affect the community involved but compiled the national problem of Nigeria underdevelopment. In the agriculture sector, farmers desert their farm lands to safety zones where there is no probability of getting new farmland, food insecurity and prices increases as a result of farmer inability to farm. This has a great deal of influence on Nigeria agricultural sector, which has been the mainstay of the economy.

Ethno-religious conflict also leads to psychological problems. Victims of ethno-religious conflict suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome

(PTSS) (Dogara 2010: 94). Onwomah (2014) asserts that conflict periods bring forth the worst instincts and impulses in man. Socio-economic vices such as increase level of crime rate and struggle over scarce resources.

Lastly, farmers in some places are no longer engaging in agriculture due to the fear of being killed or kidnapped. This has affected Nigeria food security with a devastating effect as prices of agricultural products have sky rocketed in the markets.

Conclusion

Ethno-religious conflicts pose a major challenge to Nigerians security situation. The paper examined the factors and effect of ethno-religious conflict as a threat to the peace and stability of the nation. That the nation is on the verge of collapsing or heading to state failure. This is because the monster is still persisting as effort made by the government in curtailing security challenges is not much to be desired. Furthermore, the government seems to have done little in the control and spreading of the menace as those involved or found to have sponsored have not been presented or punished. That they do these nefarious activities with impunity. Due to this posture of government, the insecurity levels have continued to pose great lost to the lives and property of the people thereby jeopardizing our effort in development in all sectors as a result of insecurity, many lives have been lost and property worth billions destroyed leaving people destitute and homeless.

The study conclude for an advocacy for inclusive role of the government, religious bodies, leaders, and civil society to incorporate ethnic and religious consciousness towards promoting national integration, cohesion, development and democratic sustainability. Furthermore, Religious and ethnic diversities should not be a source of conflict in Nigeria considering the rise of global citizenship identity. As this, necessary preventive mechanism, early warning mechanism, conflict management and prevention should be employed as ultimate tactics of governmental, civil societies and non-governmental bodies.

Recommendations

This study recommends the followings:

  i.   Government should strengthen judiciary ensuring justice is dispensed irrespective of class among the people of Nigeria. This

will go a long way in bringing sanity to the system. Politicians should fear God and be just in their conduct in pursuing their political aspirations. That they should not cause trouble when they are vying for any positions as there is a day of reckoning.

ii. Religious leaders should teach their followers message of peace and love so as to guide and control their followers so as not engage in dastardly.

iii. National orientation agencies in collaboration with state and local government agencies should vigorously pursued the policy of national unity and integration by constantly making advert, jingles, in the various respective places of domain. This will go along way in mobilizing and conscioustising the people on the need to stay together.

iv. Religious leaders should discourage and condemn any act of intolerance or violence from their adherents towards other religious groups.

v. Seminars, conferences and workshops that focus on promoting the teachings of love and peace should be organised by various religious bodies in Nigeria, where trained religious leaders, traditional rulers, scholars, counsellors and other professionals would assist in propagating an anti-violence campaign.

vi. Finally, the Nigerian government should implement the principle of power-sharing at both the federal and state levels as surrogates for ethno-religious identities. The government should make copious efforts to disassociate itself from any form of inclination to any religion because it is a secular state.

I think if the above recommendations are taken it will go a long way in addressing some of the problems.

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