

Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Insecurity in Nigeria's 4th Republic

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Abstract: - Most of the conflicts in Nigeria, both past and present, have been linked to religion and ethnicity. Today, aside from the alarming case of underdevelopment in the country, the upsurging waves of violent conflicts and crimes have left much to wonder. This study seeks to examine ethno-religious conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria's 4th Republic. The study relied heavily on secondary data sources. Findings revealed that ethno-religious conflicts have brought about instability, loss of lives and has disrupted the peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian people. The paper concludes that there is the need to take the fight against insecurity to the next level where all hands must be on deck and every individual and institutions must join in the fight to restore security in Nigeria. The study recommends, among others, that some non-military approaches should be adopted to compliment the efforts of the Nigerian Military. Also, religious leaders, traditional rulers and chiefs, the media and other stakeholders should lend their supports to the government by sensitizing the youths on the need for unity and peaceful co-existence. State policing should also be considered, with adequate strategies to funding it, as well as eliminating any form of political interference.

Keywords: Conflict, Ethnicity, Fourth Republic, Religion, Security, State Police.

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Nigeria is an African Country that is located on the Gulf of Guinea. The country is blessed with numerous human and natural resources and landmass of 923,768 sq. kms, the size of many countries (like Netherlands, France and others put together). Before the advent of colonialism, one interesting thing about the geographical territory now known and referred to as Nigeria was her affluently diverse cultural outlook. To say that the country was rich and highly-varied would be to say the least. From the North to the South and from the East to the West, the rich heritage of the country spoke volumes of how versatile, hospitable and industrious the Nigerian people were. There was unity in diversity and respect for individuals irrespective of linguistic, cultural and ethnic differences (Okoro, 2016).

However, from the time un-concerted efforts were made to bring Nigeria together, series of problems were created as a result of some actions and inactions of the colonial masters, who were more interested in the natural resources found in the territory, without adequate plans to manage the conflicts that

were generated during the exploitation process. Colonialism may have long ended in Nigeria, but the disparities it created among ethnic groups persist (Duke, 2018). Colonialism has contributed, in more ways than one, to the security problems faced in Nigeria because whatever the colonial masters did in Africa in those twilight days, including the amalgamation of 1914 was solely to the advantage of the Whites and for administrative convenience (Abeeb, 2017), and before independence in 1960, the shadow of ethnicity had grown so tall in Nigeria that groups within the country began to see themselves as distinct from each other and not as a nation. Regrettably, Nigeria already had two opposing religions (Christianity and Islamic religion), this compounded the problem and caused more division (Smith, 2001; Mohammudzodeh, 2016).

Sadly, these ills of colonialism, ethnicity and religious differences met a country with more than 250 ethnic groups, diverse cultures and languages; and found a fertile ground for ethno-religious conflicts of diverse magnitude in the country. Presently, even politics in Nigeria is played along ethnic and religious lines; tribalism and nepotism are still present during appointments into public offices, inter-group relationships seem sour as people are particularly careful in their association with others (especially those perceived to belong to the out-group) (Ukiwo, 2005). Ethno-religious disparities, which have gradually become the major source of conflict in Nigeria has claimed thousands of lives and have destroyed properties worth millions of Naira in the country. Nigeria's national security has been affected in more ways than one. Its culminative effects have been felt in villages, businesses and investments. Unity in diversity and nation-building in Nigeria have met stiff hindrances. Hence, there is need to examine critically how these problem can be fixed and how ethnicity and religious sentiments can be made to become things of the past in Nigeria (Onoji, 2000). As several military efforts have proven insufficient in the fight to eliminate this menace, this study will suggest some non-military approaches that will help in the fight to eliminate insecurity, as caused by ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Further, the study will briefly explain the relevance of State Policing and structures that must be put in place for State Policing to succeed.

II. CONCEPTUAL EXPLANATIONS

2.1 Conflict

Conflict is an unaligned contradiction in opinion and perspectives between two or more persons or groups (Bagaji, 2012). Conflict, especially, in developing countries have often been perceived negatively by many. However, what determine the direction of conflict are the attitudes of the people involved. Therefore, when managing conflict, it should be perceived as an opportunity to change, as in the Chinese tradition. Else, there is bound to be destructive or negative results. Conflict is embedded in the pursuit or quest to achieve an incompatible interest by different groups. This is usually expressed through struggle by the parties involved to gain advantage, to the detriment of the other party (Oyeniyi, 2011). Conflict, as a social phenomenon, appears almost in every sphere of human interactions and relationships. This relationship could be social, economic, religious, political or a combination of two or more. Conflict in Nigeria takes place mostly as a result of ethnicity, religious diversity, resource control and power sharing. Violent conflict is when either or both parties resort to ferocious means to gain dominance by destroying the opposition group and its ability to push its interest further (Adamu and Ben 2015).

2.2 Ethnicity

The word ethnic is used to describe people of the same origin, language or culture and most times, people who are found largely within the confine of a defined territorial boundary (Uzuegbunam and Nwofia 2014). Ethnicity is driven by the consciousness of having a common origin (Fenton, 2003). According to Adebayo (2010), it is a gloss of ethnic identity i.e. when people share in common historical and cultural antecedents. It is a social formation that is built around certain cultural practices and unique symbols. Ethnicity usually influences groups' social relationship and personal identity as a result of its complex social construct (Aleyomi, 2012). It is a discrimination that exists between members of the in-group and out-group. Ethnicity is the feeling or actual practices of alienation. It is an identity which characterizes both international and intra-national relations (Odeyemi, 2014, Ojo 2016). This identity is often employed in order to gain advantage in specific situations. Here, people are classified based on their social backgrounds instead of nationality (Edewor, Aluko and Folarin 2014). The practice of ethnicity has been seen by Ayatse and Akura (2013) as a conscious and deliberate one, and this sentiment has often been tied to language, cultural value and fate.

2.3 Religion

Religion has been defined in many ways. Shabi and Xwe (2001) see it as relating to what is pure and what is not pure. It is an emotionally influenced system of belief, thinking and feelings of concerned persons (Alegbeleye, 2014). There are three religious identities in Nigeria; Christianity, Islamic and Traditional worshipers (or free thinkers) (Osaghae and

Suberu, 2005, Ambe-Uva, 2010, Duke, Odey and Etim, 2017). Majority of people in Southern part of the country are Christians, while the North is dominated by Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Religion is concerned with rites, truths and laws that make man subordinate to, and belief in the existence of a Supreme Being (God or Allah) (Egwu 2001; Fawole and Bello, 2011). It could be seen as man's intuition. It is sacred and involves doctrines, myths and in many cases sentiments.

2.4 National Security

The concept of security is a highly contestable one. Several debates exist as to what security is and what it is not, what should constitute its threats, among others. Many existing literature take a narrow view of security as the absence of violence and threats to violence against lives. Although this definition is not totally wrong, it fails to highlight other important aspects of security like food security (Etim, Duke, & Ogbinyi, 2017), health security, environmental security, etc which are vital to the peaceful and healthy existence of people within a defined geographical territory. Before conceptualizing security and for a better understanding of what the concept connotes, it is pertinent to explain insecurity from different perspectives. Insecurity in itself is the antithesis of security. It is linked to the present of wants of confidence, safety, and presence of uncertainty, hazard, instability, trouble, chaos, and the absence of adequate protection (Achumba, Ighomereho, Akpan-Robaro, 2013).

Insecurity is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger. "It is the breach of peace resulting either from individual or corporate illegal activities capable of affecting the lawful economic and social activities in the country (Beland, 2005). Insecurity stands against the actualization of economic plans, the tranquility and well-being of citizens of a country (Oladiran, 2014). In the question of insecurity, the military perspective proves grossly incapable of matching up with the emerging reality and it becomes necessary to adopt some non-military approaches to solving insecurity in Nigeria, as will be discussed in the later part of this research. It is advisable to view security in a state with nationality crisis in terms of contending groups, organizations and individuals, as the prime object of security" (Oshio, 2009).

Security is the freedom from danger. Providing national security for the lives and properties within a sovereign state is a vital social contract between the masses, the government and the state. A secured state allows for human capital development while an unsecured nation allows for easy attacks on the foundation(s) that builds human capital development and promotes the destruction of human capacity of a state" (Ani & Saliba, 2010; Oriakhi & Osemwengie, 2012). National security is more than territorial defense and should focus on the physical, social and psychological quality of life of a society and its members, both in the domestic

setting and within the larger regional and global system. Put succinctly, the tranquility and well-being of a society are pre-conditions for security (Al-Mashat, 1985)

III. ETHNO RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC (1999-2018): A BRIEF OVERVIEW

We can trace these conflicts to the Maitatsine revolt in 1980, when Mohamad Marwa made attempts to force the Sui-generis religion on other religious groups in the country. The military later became involved in the conflict which claimed over 5000 lives and destroyed properties worth hundreds of millions. It is difficult to have a comprehensive list of all the ethnic and religious based violence in Nigeria due to many factors which include, but not limited to, inadequate media coverage and documentation. However, efforts will be made to highlight some of the most important ones. Nigerians have been known to be very religious. This has led to intolerance and various conflicts, especially among the two dominant religious groups in the country (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Most of these conflicts develop a ripple effect and spread outside their territories of origin (Enukora, 2005), or cause a reprisal attack (Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 as Olusegun Obasanjo emerged President. This also marked the beginning of Nigeria's 4th Republic. It was believed that the return to civilian rule will unify the country, but this was not the case, as ethnic and religious divides deepened. It started on the same day Obasanjo took his oath of Office (May, 29th 1999), when residents of Arimom were sacked by the Ijaw Youths. This was the beginning of ethno religious violence in Nigeria's 4th Republic. The same year, some Hausa and Yoruba group's clashed in Shagamu, in Ogun State; there were also other religious conflicts in Ogun, Aguleri and Umelreli groups also destroyed around Obafemi Awolowo University (Albert, 2001). The Ijaw's Ilajes and Yorubas fought and killed more than 500 people in Lagos (Oyelede and Akinteye, 2001). The introduction of Sharia legal system also spurred Muslims youth into deadly actions. For instance, Zamfara and Kwara states had alarming cases of religious intolerance which claimed lives had and worship centres were destroyed (Amor, 2002). Uyo, Aba and Port Harcourt had their experiences of ethno-religious conflicts (Amor, 2002). The sitting of a Church in a Muslim dominated area in Borno State also led to a serious conflict, lives were lost and properties worth millions of Naira were damaged.

The year 2001, witnessed the pirate youths terror in Delta State, Command War in Nassarawa State, Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) menace in Lagos, indigene-Fulani feud in Plateau with about one thousand dead recorded, the Borno Tiu and TarabaJukim's clash (Mohammed, 2001). The OPC remained in the headlines in 2002, followed by the Massacre in Abuja and Kaduna, were over 150 people lost their lives, with the alleged blasphemy against Prophet Mohammed. The year 2003 had less of ethno-religious conflicts. However, in 2004, Tarok (Christians) and Yelwa (Muslims) began a fresh

fight in Plateau state. General Chris Ali (Rtd) administered the state for six months. The fight between Muslim and Christian students in Bauchi resulted in several death and destruction of Churches. The year 2005 witnessed violence in Borno (see Nwakaudu, 2005), Adamawa state (see Ande, 2005), Ebonyi and Cross River State (see Agbo, 2005), Katsina State (see Nwakandu, 2005), Kaduna State (see Akhaine, 2005), Ondo State (see Oladoyibno, 2005), Delta State. In 2006, we had an ethnic intolerance which affected Gombe, Borno, Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, etc and claimed several lives and properties; we also had the Onitsha Prison Break (see Ameh and Lartey, 2006).

In 2009, we had the attack on Postiskum in Yobe state while Plateau experienced many attack in 2010 (see Duke, Agbaji and Basse, 2017). BH brutalized the country in 2011 and effected Kaduna, Bornu, Bauchi, Yobe, Plateau, Abuja, Niger, Kano, Gombe and Adamawa States, several lives and properties were lost and destroyed respectively. BH has terrorized Nigeria from 2009 till date. This dreaded group has left many people homeless and hopeless, causing poverty and hunger among innocent citizens. In Damatum, about 128 died. Also, multiple bomb blast killed about 14 in Maiduguri (Duke, 2018). Herdsmen also took their turn from 2016 and till now, lives are lost on monthly basis to this deadly sect that has channelled its aggression towards farmers and villagers (people residing in remote areas of the country).

3.1 Brief Relationship between Religion and Violence in Nigeria

There has been diverse forms if violence in Nigeria, even before independence in 1960. Most prominent among these conflicts include the Christian-Muslim feud. Interests for elective offices and power allocations have been built around religious affiliation and loyalty. Conflicts in Nigeria, from independence till date, have been linked to religious disagreements (especially between the Christians and Muslims). This is evidence in the following; First, the interpretation of "secularity. Second, the drafting of Nigeria's Constitution of 1976. Third, the admittance of Nigeria into the OIC. Fourth, General Elections. Fifth, the agitation for an Islamic state of Nigeria. The list goes on and on (Olojo, 2014). From records, it appears that the Muslims have adopted more of militant approach in this struggle for dominance than the Christians (Falola, 1998). This could be seen in the agitations and agenda of some of this groups (etc, Boko Haram).

3.2 Impacts of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

It is no news that ethno-religion disagreements and violence in Nigeria has destabilized the country in many ways. Nigerians have been affected politically, socially, economically and psychologically. The losses accrued as a result of the recent cases of ethno-religion clashes in the country are immeasurable, ranging from loss of lives and properties to internal displacement. Groups and families have been separated (Egwu, 2001). The image of Nigeria has been

damaged internationally, as many countries now issue travel warning to their citizens planning to visit Nigeria (Avalos, 2005). There have been countless cases of human rights violations, psychological trauma, fear, tension and oppression by violent groups. This violence has resulted in loss of jobs, poverty and hunger. As a country Nigerian has lost several monuments of historical value to violent conflicts. Investment has also been lost as was seen in 1984, when Saudi Arabia offered to lend Nigeria 2.5 billion Dollars, but the deal was unsuccessful owing to ethno-religion disturbances (Ojie, 2004). This is one in several cases; ethno-religious conflicts have also affected the political economy of Nigeria, as many local and foreign investors are scared of doing businesses in the country. Those currently operating in the country are trading with caution and are unwilling to re-invest a good portion of their profits in the country due to fear of insecurity. This situation can be seen in the current level of capital flights experienced in Nigeria between 1999 and 2018. Of course, investments are aimed at generating profits for investors and owners of capital and there is a big problem where the reverse becomes the case. Where insecurity abounds, businesses are bound to collapse. It beacons therefore, on any good government that has the interests and well-being of its citizens at heart, to ensure that threats to lives and properties are reduced to the minimum, if possible eliminated in its totality.

IV. SUGGESTED NON-MILITARY STRATEGIES TO CURB ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

There are several non-military strategies in managing ethno-religious conflicts. These include, but not limited to the following:

- *Dialogue:* This is an effective communication that takes place in-between the conflicting parties. According to Best (2007), dialogue could be a means to solving the dispute or may constitute a basis for bargaining. Using dialogue demands the recognition of the core values of conflicting parties and the free flow of communication. Dialogue in itself is aimed at enabling people with different views and perceptions to work together. Dialogue has been applied at different points of conflict resolution in Nigeria. For instance, the Herdsmen-Farmers clash in Benue State has been approached using dialogue between the two parties. Here, one of the things to be held to a very high esteem is the neutrality of the representatives of government as well as the readiness of the other party (Herdsmen) to settle for peace. In the overall, this looks like a step to the right direction.
- *Bargaining:* Bargaining forms one aspect of negotiation, which occurs when conflicting parties resort to diplomatic ways of resolving their dispute, as against military means. This usually requires a high level of compromise. Whenever a conflict affects a nation, a willing government must convince the adversary that it poses a greater resolve and is

ready to bare or tolerate a higher risk than the other party(s). (Williams, 1976).

- *Mediation:* This involves the intervention of an external force (third party). In mediation process, the third party is expected to be neutral in order to elicit cooperation from the conflicting parties. The target of a third party(s) is to promote lasting peace (Sani & Jatam, 2014).
- *Reconciliation:* this is the harmonization of interest, by conflicting parties, through dialogue.
- *Arbitration:* This method of conflicting resolution, conflicting parties agree to be banned by arbitrator's decision, which has a legal undertone. Arbitration is a quasi-judicial strategy to conflict resolution.
- *Collaboration:* Here, conflicting parties work together to find solution to the problem. These parties try to listen and understand themselves. No one seeks to gain advantage of the other; rather they make efforts to reach an all-encompassing solution and satisfaction. This non-military strategy provides that conflicting parties take full charge and control of the process leading to peace, as well as the outcome itself.
- *Compromise:* In compromise, parties sort for a mutually accepted solution. Here, concessions are made. This usually occurs when it is perceived (or it becomes obvious) that reconciliation will be impossible without one party hosing something. This may not solve the problem in totality, but can save as a palliative (Ojiji, 2007).
- *Problem Solving:* Here, parties listen to each other, with the aim of knowing the fundamental cause(s) of the conflict and how best to deal with it. This approach requires mutual respect and has little concern about who is right and who is wrong (Ojiji, 2007).

V. STATE POLICING

The issue of state policing has been recurrent in national security debates, especially in this era where Nigeria is facing diverse cases of security threats ranging from the Boko Haram menace to the Fulani-Herdsmen brutality. However, arguments abound on the pros and cons of state policing. Prominent among these debates include the issue of financing, state autonomy, and federal influence on the state police. Some scholars have mounted their intellectual weights on the need for state policing, while others strongly oppose the motion with the argument that it will amount to a duplicated function of the Nigerian Police. No matter the perception, some things are certain; there is the need to boost up security in Nigeria; there is the need to stop the killing of innocent citizens, women and children in the country; there is the need to put a stop to the destruction of properties in the country.

At this point, two options are inevitable; First, the need to boost up the Nigerian Police with adequate number of personnel. Secondly, the creation of state police to

compliment the efforts of the Federal police. The second option will lead to job creation and will reduce unemployment to an extent. It will also lead to the utilization of unemployed youths within conflict areas. Most importantly, the people who will make up the state police should be residents of the state who understands the terrain. The police has the duty of preventing crimes, protecting lives and properties, enforcing law, maintaining peace and order as well as providing a wide range of services to the citizens. Therefore, for any state to own a police, it must be capable of providing for the financial needs of the force. This buttresses the need for resource control and state autonomy. The duo must be carefully considered before the creation of state police.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there is a strong correlation between ethno-religious conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria. This is because ethno-religious conflicts often take a violent approach and attacks are often made on social places like churches, parks, Mosques, schools, including homes and farmlands thereby claiming several lives and properties. Also, that the Muslims and Christians blame each other for the woe posed by the conflicts and are ever ready to defend their belief system and co-worshippers. Further, people are most likely to become hostile to strangers during and after ethno-religious conflicts; people experience nightmares and fear during the conflicts period. There is usually high tension and panic among the people, lives are not safe, and there is absence of peace of mind. Some victims resort to hard drugs, others develop some mental disorders as a result of hard drugs, and there are also cases of high blood pressure, especially among the elderly people, in the process.

Nigeria must take the fight against insecurity more seriously. There is the need to take the fight against insecurity to a level where all hands must be on deck and every individual, institutions (be it political, religious, governmental, NGOs, military or paramilitary), the media, neighbouring countries, International Organizations, among others, must join in the fight to restore security in Nigeria.

Finally, State Policing will be an effective tool in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria, only if factors like external influence from the Federal Government and internal influence from the State Government will not be allowed a place in the programmes and activities of SP. Also, SP should not be assigned to politicians and influential persons in the society as personal guards. State Governments should be allowed to control state resources and pay the SP. State Policing will be more effective when the states are granted autonomy to control their resources as well as pay the SP. This is because; it will amount to granting more powers to the Federal Government over other tiers of government, if the state police are left under the watch and payroll of the Federal Government. It may become a useful instrument in the hand of the Federal Government to fight or haunt states who do not

share in the political ideology of the centre as seen in the case of Benue State.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. Religious leaders, traditional rulers and chiefs, the media and other stakeholders should lend their supports to the government and the Armed Forces in the fight to curb ethno-religious conflicts by sensitizing their youths, giving out useful information that will help solve misunderstandings, preach unity and peaceful co-existence, and discourage the use of violence as means to settling disputes among groups and individuals.
- b. Politics in Nigeria should not be played along ethnic lines, rather credibility and integrity should be given priority.
- c. State police should be established after state and local governments have been granted autonomy to control their resources to enable them to fund the police.
- d. There should be tolerance and respect for every religion in the country

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