INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS ON PEACE AND SECURITY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract
The persistent of ethnic identity and countless religious crises recorded so far in Nigeria in contemporary time is alarming and as such has given well-meaning Nigerians a deep concern. It is a sorry case as many begin to wonder while ethnic identity and religion which are ways of peoples' life, cohesive catalyst and cord to nation of development and unity have become an instruments for political manipulation, violence, destruction of lives and property in Nigeria (so called giant of Africa. This paper focused on causes and effects of ethnic identity and religious affiliation experienced in Nigeria before and during the advent of the colonial masters and in the last three decades. The paper equally revealed how endemic ethnic identity and religious affiliation result to frequent conflicts and insecurity thereby threatening national security and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians. The paper on the final note, recommends among others, that religious affiliation

and ethnic identity should be properly handled and channeled towards sustenance of national unity and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians. Also, government should employ meaningful and effective strategies such as quality education and inter-faith dialogue to enhance national security and peaceful co-existence in the nation.

Keywords: Ethnic, Identity, Religious, Affiliations, Peace, Security, Contemporary.

Introduction

The root of ethnic identity and religious affiliation emanated from the British colonial policies and subsequent politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria's polity. Available researches revealed that the average Nigerian is religiously drunk and ethnocentric for the fear of domination or being segregated from his ethnic root foundation. It is on account of this that Nigeria today seems to lack an articulated goal and value system (Okeke, 2018). Olowo, Aladejebi and Kumuyi (2018) argued that Lugards 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria marked the beginning of religious and political conflicts, because it had welged people of different aspirations and backgrounds together. These conflicts have threatened the unity and peaceful co-existence of the diverse people of Nigeria. Findings from researches disclosed that Richard's constitution of 1946 served as one of the weapons used by the colonial British government to cause divide and rule tactics in dividing Nigeria in ethnic cum religious affiliation which prevented Nigerians in speaking with in one voice (Agara & Tijani 2008). With this division according to Olowo et al (2018), the minority groups felt neglected and as such started clamoring for total control of the resources in their ethnic domains.

From the angle of religious affiliation, all is not well with Nigerians as Muslims and Christians often engaged in religious wars and conflict resulting to loss of lives and valuable property. Religious tension in Nigeria has taken new dimension, leading to suicide bombing, endemic insecurity of lives and property, thereby

threatening peaceful co-existence and national sustainable development among the citizenry (Ushe, 2015). Between 1960 to date, Nigeria as a nation has recorded countless of conflicts and crises which could be traced to ethnic and religious affiliations which was the fall out of the amalgamation error of 1914. In agreement with the above assertion, Okeke (2018) commented that the colonialist coaxed together small nations into a country called Nigerian with, ethnicity and tribalism still in the minds of Nigerians no matter how educated they are.

Nigeria, as a result of ethnic identity and religious affiliation is more polarized and disintegrated today than it was at independence; and the situation is getting unbearable on daily basis. Akanle (2013) submitted that Nigerians see themselves within ethnic and religious prisms rather than within national frameworks. This according to him is at the root of the several ethno-religious crises as well as the intractable massive corruption, as people see national resources as national cake which ethnic nationalities must do everything to corner. For the sake of unity, peace and security in contemporary Nigeria, there is need to put in motion meaningful and effective strategies such as inter-faith dialogue and education that embrace Nigerian value systems. Consequently, the objectives of this paper are to reflect on ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, itemize those documented between 1999 and 2015 and make recommendations to stem the high-wave of such conflicts in our society. The paper therefore, examined how endemic ethnic identity and religious affiliation result to frequent conflicts and insecurity thereby threatening national security and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

Reflection on Ethnic Affiliations and Conflict in Nigeria

Ethnic affiliations and conflict have become a bane in the Nigerian society since the civil war of the early 1960s. After independence, there was relapse of ethnic crises before the advent of democracy and long military rule in Nigerian polity (Chiedu & Onovwiona, 2018). Ethnicity has caused serious unhealthy rivalry, tension and division among ethnic groups and this cut across the various regions. According to Udeze (2010) some ethnic groups especially the

majority ones are given preferential treatment at the national level while others are marginalized and relegated. For instance, during the reign of President Ebele Jonathan, the Yoruba ethnic group claimed that they were been sidelined by the Jonathan cabinet at the national level; as none of the Yoruba occupy any key offices. In the present dispensation, the Igbo are not favored at all as none of the Igbo could be seen or heard in the high ranking offices. It could be deduced from this that members of different ethnic groups do not have equal opportunities and are often not treated equally. Ethnic identity is not only reflected in attitudes, but equally captioned in various speeches of the leaders from the dominant ethnic groups. Agara (2008) reported few of these speeches. For instance, Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tawafa Balewa, had been reported as saying that;

> Since the amalgamation of the southern and Northern Provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper. It is still far from being united. The country inhabited by peoples and tribes who speak different languages, who have different religions, different customs and traditions and entirely different historical backgrounds in their way of life and have also different stages of development. But I should like to make it clear to you that as the British quitted Nigeria now at this stages, the Northern people would continue their uninterrupted conquest (Agara, 2018:63).

Also in the same vein, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the blessed memory was also quoted as extolling the virtues of his ethnic tribe by saying that "it would seem that the God of Africa has specially created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages. The Igbo nation cannot shrink from this responsibility" (Akaruese, 2003 & 2017).

Considering the above assertions from the founding fathers of Nigeria as an independent country, one can conclude that the root of ethnic identity after independence and the ethnic crises that threatened the nationhood in Nigeria and Africa as whole could be traced partly to the colonial period (Tijani, 2008).. Nigeria

as a nation has experienced conflicts of dangerous impacts and dimensions between ethnic groups and religious groups, communities as well as political parties. The unresolved issues such as marginalization, domination, inequality, fairness and justice among ethnic groups cum socio-political matters have generated a lot of controversies which threatened the peace and wellbeing of Nigeria as a nation (Olowo, 2013). In agreement with the above, Akanle (2012) and Edun (2013) revealed that Nigerians are unable to relate well with one another as every Tom, Dick and Harry identify themselves as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw. Tiv or Fulani than Nigerian.

Impact of Religious Affiliations and Security Challenges in Nigeria

Adamolekun (2000) asserts that religion covers a wide variably of behavior, practices and beliefs. Hence, religion is not in any way a means of promoting conflicts, rather it is a means of encounter with the Supreme Being and interaction with the supernatural order to cope with life crises. Most religions of the world proclaim peace, love, harmony and have served the cause of peace. Contrary to the above assertion, religion has been the causes of many wars in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Findings that religion is sometimes one of the major causes of wars is borne out of the fact that some of the current international conflicts have religious undertones. For instance, Arab/Israel conflict, the Iraq/Iran war, the civil war in Sudan, Lebanon and Northern Ireland are all fought under religious affiliation banner. In Nigeria likewise, the Maitatsine disturbance of 1980, 1982, the religious disturbances in Kaduna in 1987 and Boko Haram killing in 2010, 2011 and 2012 were great threats to peace and national unity in Nigeria (Ladan, 2013).

Over the years, Nigerians had been witnessing high rate of ethno religious crises, inter-tribal crises, political crises, kidnapping, killings, insurgency, bombing, human trafficking and hosts of others which claim countless lives and property of the innocent Nigerians. Between 1999 to 2015, Dada (2016) recorded forty-five (45) religious violence in Nigeria where thousands of lives were wasted

on account of religion. These religious violence were mostly between the Christians and Muslims. These two major religions according to Akinseye (2000) seems not to tolerate or forebear each other as a result of their attitudes of intolerance and lack of forgiveness. Oyebode (2011) as noted by Ogundele, Musa and Jimba (2015) opined that nobody will forgive the mind that had destroyed the life of the bread winner of a family.

Considering religious affiliation trend in Nigeria, all is not well as religious crises have almost put the entire country apart as religion is used as a political weapon by selfish politicians. With the population size of over 180million, Nigeria have three hundred and fifty ethnic groups with diverse religion, history, culture, dialects and languages. Of this figure, the major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani) compose only fifty-seven percent of Nigeria's population. The remaining forty-three percent are the minority groups. These minority groups according to Dada (2016) do not have political voice, nor do they have access to resources or the technology required to develop economically. As a result of this, they often consider themselves being marginalized, neglected, relegated and oppressed in all ramifications. These among other factors usually fuel religious crises in Nigeria as each ethnic groups and religious fundamentalists will usually want to have their ways at all cost.

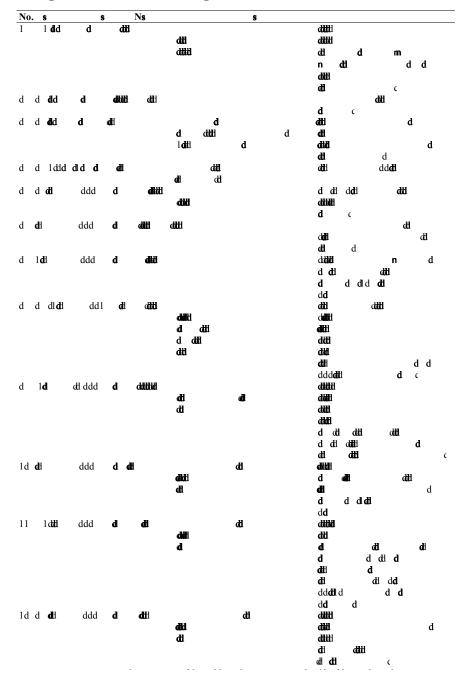## Religious Violence in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015

As a result of numerous and countless ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria, it is somehow difficult to account precisely for the number of ethno-religious clashes as Nigerians have no exact statistical data on the occurrences. For instance, Olu-Adeyemi (2006) recorded about forty-ethno-religious conflicts between May 1999 and September, 2000 out of which twenty-nine were communal/ethnic clashes while the remaining eleven were mostly between Christians and Muslims. Dada (2016) in his studies identified forty-five religious violence between July 1999 to 2015, with another twenty seven cases reported by Adegbite (2015). The implication of this is that religion in the contemporary Nigeria has not really promoted love, unity and peace in the real sense of it. Rather, the

nation has been full of division, injustice, fanaticism, conflict and prejudice.

Religion contains an overwhelming and complex variety of positions. This is as a result of conflicting truth claims. Religion particularism is a unique feature that cuts across nearly all matters relating to every religious belief system. It implies a belief that one's own religion is a special or distinctive religion, hence such religion is believed to be the best that gives assurance of salvation to man. The fact remains that this is the exact position in Nigerian society. Nigeria being a religiously pluralistic society inhabited by different religious adherents, often competes for their faiths, assert and superimpose them over one another. African traditional adherents claim superiority that African religion is the original religion in the world. On the other hand, the Christians adherents emphazises uniqueness for Jesus Christ and Christianity as the only way to salvation. Suffice it to say, some of the Biblical claims usually put up by Christians are contained in (John 3; 16, 14; 6; 7, 15; 5). Two of the references state thus "He who believes in the son has eternal life, he does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rest upon Him". "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and in Him, he is that bears much fruits, for apart from me, you can do nothing".

The Muslim also believes that Islam is the only true religion of mankind. According to Quran 3; 19; "surely the true religion with God is Islam". Quran 2; 132 also state, that "Oh my sons, God has chosen the religion for you; so die not unless you are Muslims". Another area pertaining to unreasoning and excessive enthusiasm in the pursuit of religious claims is through religious bigotry. This is an act when adherents of one religion proceed to use their religious doctrines as a basis to pronounce slam and damnable judgment upon the religious adherents of other religions. In reaction to this, verbal and physical confrontation usually ensued from such havoc and horror to the people of this country. The enormity and frequent occurrences of ethno-religious crises can be appreciated in the following comprehensive data.

Religious violence in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015

13

1   1   11

                                                                                              1

1   3   3

                                                                        1
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                                                                                                1

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1   1   1   13

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                                                                              1

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                                                                              1
                                                                  3

    1   1

                      1

    3   1   1

36

3   3   6

3   3   3
                                                                                          6
                                        explosion

3   3

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6 3

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3   3

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57	5		7
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5	5		5
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5 7	5		
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7	5		
7	5		5
7	5		
7	5		5
7	5		
7	5		

Source: Adopted from Dada (2016) and Adegbite (2015).

Religious violence aside from ethnic differences equally have negative effect in Nigerian political process or system. Part of what caused political tension in Nigeria in 1993 presidential election was Muslim/Muslim ticket of late Chief M.K.O Abiola and Alhaji Babagana Kingbe. The same scenario repeated itself at all levels of elective political positions in Nigeria's polities at different levels that year. Indeed, religious violence have had adverse consequences on the growth and nation-building, apart from diversion of public funds from socio-economic development to security, abuse of human dignity and rights and losses of resources and desecration of property and many others (Dada, 2016).

Conclusion

As religion is central to life generally; therefore, it should not be toiled with in the society irrespective of her compositions. . Consequently, the levels of religious and ethnic affiliations among Nigerian citizens are supposed to unify people of diverse culture together as one is an aspect that divides members of multi-national state. This paper concluded that religious and ethnic affiliations cannot be eradicated, but should not be abused. Nigerians should equally see themselves within national frameworks rather than ethnic and religious prisms. Also, since education is life, Nigeria government should employ meaningful and effective quality education and inter-faith dialogues to enhance national security and peaceful co-existence in the nation. Nigerian leaders both seculars and religious, should shun ethnic statements/speeches, chauvinism and religious sentiments.

Way Forward

Based on the foregoing, the researcher proffers the following suggestionss:

> Religion should not be seen as do or die affairs by adherents, it should rather be seen as the way of life and as such, no religion should be held supreme to others. Nigerians should adhere to the constitutional provision of freedom of religion. This will equally enable religious adherents to be free to choose the religion of their choice without fear and prejudice.

> For peace and unity of our great country Nigeria, all tribal or ethnic, religious, sectional heroes, elders and politicians, whistle-blowers should be made less important and less heroic in order to let secessionist fade away in our nation.

> Religious leaders and political stakeholders should shun ethnic and religious sentiments in their speeches either during religious services and political campaigns Choice of words that can escalate trouble should not be made publicly.

> Governments at all levels should not take side with religion or ethnic affiliations. They should see themselves as national figures and fathers of all. Also, religious affiliations should not

influence political positions cum appointments; it should at least cut across all ethnic groups regardless of ethnic and religious affiliations.

Quality education cum full-scale employment opportunities should be provided to the teeming youths who often hide under unemployment to perpetrate religious and political violence having being brainwashed by the selfish and desperate politicians.
The general public especially religious followers should be enlightened through Mass media, seminars and workshops on the inherent dangers of ethno-religious violence and political instability with uncountable implications on national cohesion and integration.

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