
Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Implications for National Security, Integration and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria as an independent nation cannot discuss her history without recounting her sad experience of one conflict of the other. Notable among these conflicts are those of communal, ethnic, ethno-religious and political conflicts which often result in destructive violence. Out of all these, ethno-religious conflicts appear to have more implications to national security, integrations and development in Nigeria. Almost all the ethno-religious conflicts Nigeria witness since independence owing their origin to the expression of socio-economic and political deprivation of the affected ethnic and religious groups. In view of this, the paper therefore examines the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and its implications to national security, integration and development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethno-religious conflicts, National Security, Integration, Development.

Introduction

It is a well known fact that Nigeria is grappling with a rising wave of ethnic or religious conflicts (Alubo, 2006). Nigeria has several kinds of pluralisms. The present day Nigeria was brought together from diverse ethnic groups (Alubo, 2006). The main ones are ethnic, religious and political. These groups were brought together as one entity as a result of 1914 Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria. This diverse composition of ethnic and religious groups constitute a threat to national security, integration and development (Alubo, 2006).

Nigeria as a country was a malintended child. Right from its conception, "it was destined to sit on crisis" (Njoku, 2009). This was done by the colonial masters whose interest was purely economic exploitation. By incorporating Northern and Southern Nigeria protectorate into single entity in 1914. The incorporation was converted into a battle field between North and South Majority and Minority ethnic groups over the control in the allocation of resources, which due result to competition and struggle among various ethnic groups for the control of the state. This situation has therefore, led to inter-ethnic confrontations and hostilities which do transformed to ethno-religious conflicts as a result of ethnic groups identification with a particular religion.

Chazan, et,al (1999), According to them "members of the dominant class themselves" may make different uses of ethnic appeals to gain support for their claims upon the state. As they mobilize these identities for their political purposes. These eruptions of ethnic and religious conflicts lead to large scale migration of people and it also create refugee problems as well as disruptions in school, political and economic lives of people that are affected directly (Alubo, 2006).

These are signs of obstacle for peaceful coexistence, national security, integration and development. Therefore, the paper examines the causes of ethno-religious conflicts and its implications to national security, integration and development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

For a better understanding of the concept ethno-religious conflicts, it is important to know what is ethnic, religious and conflict before amalgam words ethno-religious conflicts.

The word "ethnic" is derived from the creek word "ethnos meaning a group of people who share a common and peculiar culture (Imobighe, 2003). Therefore ethnicity can be viewed as the feeling of belonging to a peculiar cultural and linguistic groups or expression of ethnic awareness in relation to other groups.

To Suberu (1996), ethnic is a group whose members are not only share objective characteristics as language, culture, ancestral myths, religion, core territory or political organization, but they also share subjective perception of common identity. He further explain that, subjective feeling of common identity is always developed only in contexts of relationship involving two or more ethnic groups.

Similarly, Lindgren (2004), defined ethnic group as people who share a common ancestry, identity, language and culture. It is a process of naming self, naming others, as well as being named by others. Nnoli (1977), refers to ethnicity as "a social Phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups". He further explain that "ethnicity exist only within a political society consisting of diverse ethnic groups".

Cohen, (1969), views ethnic group as an informal interest coalition of people whose members are different members of other groups within the same society even though they share compulsory institution like kinship, religion, economic system and also have the capacity to fully communicate among themselves. Cohen also added that an ethnic group is the existence of a distinct awareness of similarity that is normally predicated on some language, common religion and culture.

Similarly, Foster et,al citid in Odeh, (2010) defined an ethnic group as a group of people who hold in common a set of traditions that differentiate them from others with whom they are in contact. This traditions include a common ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs and practices, and language. Therefore, ethnicity is the nature, content and focus of inter-ethnic relationship existing between different ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic society. Otite, (1990) defines ethnicity as" the contexture discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated system of socio-cultural symbols".

This definition portrayed ethnicity as tool be used to served particularistic interests and undermine national security, integration and development in a society(Imobighe, 2003). Ethnicity can b a building block, and it can also be a potential stumbling block on the process of nation building. In Nigeria, ethnic plurality or diversity can be viewed as burden instead of an asset. Nigeria is made up of over 250 ethnic groups, three(3) of which are majority groups (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo). These groups because of their privilege position have consistently dominated the political as well as economic scene before and after independence in 1960 (Alao, 2015). This was regarded by ethnic minorities as a clear case of the marginalization of minorities by the majorities ethnic groups and this serves as a fertile grounds for conflicts involving individual or groups new avenue to achieve their goals (Alao, 2015).

Religion.

Oxford Advance learning Dictionary seventh edition (1997), defines religion as "the belief in the existence of a God or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them". It is undisputable that human existence is premised on religion. In another way, Alanamu (2005) sees religion as the "consciousness of one's dependence on transcendent Being and the tendency to worship him" Religion is belief in an unseen power called supernatural (Ololobou, 1999). In another sense, Frazer says "Religion is the propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are belief to direct and control cause of nature and human life." Marx viewed religion as the opium of the masses". Cited in (Alao,2015).

Abdusalam (2002)cited in (Alao, 2015) also defines religion as man's interaction to that which he regards as holy regardless of whether the holy being is supernatural or even personal to the individual.

It is a known fact that religion controls man, his value and environment. It is also a known fact that some individual will die for it (Odeh, 2010). Africans particularly Nigerians are generally regarded as committed religious people even if the practice has not translated to peaceful Coexistence, harmony and progressive socio-economic development (Alao, 2015). In Nigeria the most popular religious are Islam and Christianity which this paper limited itself to.

Religion that supported to promoted peace and salvation has been used to mar rather than make our nation Nigeria.

This was possible because of the powerful controlling influence the religions has in human existence. With this religion is used as a veritable tool of "political mobilization, fulfillment of parochial and selfish interest and ethno-sectional aspiration" (Odeh, 2010).

From the foregoing therefore religious values are now manipulated by political anarchists to perpetuate violence and terror by making it as an avenue for expressing socio-economic and political grievances. Dopamu (2002) also pointed out that "the question of personal gain, political, selfish ends, egocentrism, quest for power to dominate," made the agitators to use religion as a cover.

Ethno. Religious conflicts.

Conflict has been defined by scholars in different forms, but it's origin comes from the Latin word "Configere" which means to strike together, but on technical level it is defined as "opposition among social entities directed against one another" (Wright, 1990) quoted in Albert (2001).

This means that either people in the society are in "cooperation" or in opposition. Therefore, in anywhere human beings exist, conflict becomes inevitable. Similarly Aboki (2004) defined conflict as " a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources". Oyeshola (2005) viewed conflict as" disagreement, disputes held by two or more individuals or group". Therefore conflict is the manifestation of dissatisfaction among individuals or groups.

Conflicts is about incompatibility among values, where the achievement of one value can be realize only at the expense of some other values (Schmid, 2000).He further stated that conflict is serious competition between two or more groups, each of which aim to gains

advantage of power, resource interests, values, need over the others. With the believes of one groups that, the conflicts over a set of mutually incompatible goals. (schmid 2000). There is a general agreement among scholars that conflict is a normal character in the interaction between human beings, whether in their individuals capacities or in groups (mobighe, 2003). And the aims of the opponent or group is mainly to "neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals" (Bercoritch and Zartman, 2009).

From the foregoing ethno-religious conflict can be described as those ethnic conflicts that assume to religious conflicts. This transformation of ethnic conflicts to religious is a result of ethnic groups identification with a particular religion. Nigerians who are in the privilege positions in order to perpetuate themselves in those positions they used ethnic and religious as cover. Obasanjo (2000), remarked that. The elite in the country are most times the brain behind ethnic religious conflicts.

Theoretical Framework

Social scientists have always devised theories in their attempts to explain the nature, causes, and effects of events in their societies. To this end therefore, the theoretical framework which is deem. Much relevant, suitable and appropriate to this paper is structural conflict theory. The theory provide adequate explanation,

Predictive justification for the frequent occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts and the tendency to provide necessary insight for the ways resolving them (Alao,2015).The theory comprises of two branches the radical structuralists and liberal structuralists. According to Faleti (2006), the radical structuralisms are mostly from marxist dialectical school comprising the likes of Marx, Engel and Lenin. The liberal structuralisms include Ross (1993) Scarborough (1998), and Galtung (1990).

The main argument of the structural theory is that social conflicts arise due to the ways societies are structured and organized. The theory views social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, exploitation, inequality, as sources of conflict (Faleti, 2006). This has strong leaning on Marxists theory of historical materialism. The structuralist opined that societies with unjust and exploitative organization that makes one class to dominate another, especially when the dominated class constitute the majority are prone to conflicts (Faleti, 2006).The liberal structuralists call for the removal of structural defects through new policies with human face.

The concerns of structural theory is about how the competing interests of group tie conflict directly into social economic and political structure of society, as well as the nature and power of social networks within and between ethnic groups(Faleti,2006). Normally, ethnic rivalries and conflict arise from a desire of one group to exploit another with the exploited seeking independence and self determination of which the exploiter is surely disposed not to give, there by making conflicts inevitable (Odeh, 2006) .

The wish of major ethno-religious groups in Nigeria is to dominate the manorities group is what we call internal colonialism. Alabi (1999), argue that the manorities shall be given more access to the political space in Nigeria since power of the state are limited due to the over concentration of power at the centre stage. Furthermore to attain national security, integration and development in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria, much effort is needed by government to ensure equal opportunity, access to political economic, social and educational institutions.

Causes Of Ethno-Religious Conflicts In Nigeria

Nigeria's current ethno-religious conflicts have been shaped by the developments in the country's recent and distant past. According to Sanda (2003) "In Nigeria, violent conflicts have become part of the Landscape since independence in 1960". Sanda, further stated that, despite the civil war experience, the state of conflicts cannot be said to have changed for good. Instead conflicts become more frequent in Nigeria which posts a greater threat to the national security, integration and development in Nigeria.

The frequency occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria over the years was as result of the return of democratic rule as Nigerians exercised their "freedom" of expression, association, etc. It is Obvious that, in the last few years, Nigeria Witnessed series of conflicts. Among of the prominent ones are: Zangon Kataf in Kaduna state, Tiv-Jukun in Wukari, Taraba State, Ogoni-Adoni in Rivers state, Itsekiri-Ijaw/Urhobo in Delta State, Ife-Modakeke in Osun state Aguleri-umuleri in Anambara state, Yoruba-Hausa community in Shagamu, Ogun State, Ijaw-Ileja conflict in Ondo state , the intermittent clashes in Kano, in kano state hausa/Fulani sawanya in Bauchi State, Hausa/Fulani in Jos and Fulani/Irigwe and Yelwa Shedam, both in plateau state and the Hausa/Yoruba clashes in Idi-Araba in Lagos State (Imobighe, 2003). Ethno religious and inter communal conflicts have become very common that there is hardly any part of the country that has not been affected.

Lack of trust among various ethnic group as a result of deep rooted misconception, lack of religious tolerance, poverty and fear of economic and political domination, media reporting and government inability to take action in previous happening are the causes of ethno-religious conflicts (Fwa, 2003).

Religious intolerance is the failure to recognize and accommodate views and opinions of other is one of the major sources of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Nigeria religious adherents, especially the Muslims and the Christians have demonstrated intolerante attitudes which have resulted to violence outburst that spill over the political and economic lives of the citizens (Alananmu,2005). Like the introduction of Shariah (the Islamic law) in Zamfara State on 27th October, 1999. Following the Zamfara example so many states in the north such as Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Niger, Yobe and Borno made their intentions to adopt similar measures. The move by the Kaduna state house of Assembly to pass a Shariah bill led to a series of anti-Shariah demonstration by Christians on 21st February, 2000(FWA, 2003).

Another catalyst for ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is political deprivation, the neglect of the democratic principle of equal participation in public affairs management in the country led to the frequent cry of marginalization by various ethnic group and bitter rivalry by each groups to control power (Imobighe, 2003). Most of the ethno -religious conflict in Nigeria are as a result of political struggle for the control of state power and resources. Such struggle normal result to accusation and counter accusation of denied the opportunities for affective participation in the political and economic affairs of the country (Imobighe, 2003). It is also refers to as political and economic deprivation.

According to Usman (2003) the conflicts are " used to seek to attain concrete political economic and other goals." The Zango -Kataf riot of February, 1992 which was about the relocation of market, was viewed as the Kataf resentment of Hausa – Fulani domination of cultural, political and economic life in Zango - Kataf (Suberu, 1996). Fwa (2003) also pointed out that the Huasa - Fulani Community who are settlers controlled the market and the Kataf Community who see themselves as the real indigenes, were becoming increasingly angry about this and the control of the territorial administration by the Zaria emirate.

Also, the Jos Crisis of September 2001 and November, 2008 are a result of struggle between indigenes and settlers to have access to decision making, political representation and economic control that led to the crisis. The absence of a democratic practice in Nigeria have encouraged people to compete among themselves for access to the state and for influence in politics. In the course of this, ethnicity and religion become a vital tool to be used in the achievement of these objectives (Fwa, 2003).

Poverty also account for the bulk of ethno-religious conflicts due to such problems, like unemployment. inadequate housing, physical and social infrastructures (Obateru, 1994). The present unequal distribution of scarce resources in Nigeria Societies has created the problem of poverty which is partly responsible for the creation of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are the manifestation of conflicts rooted in the crisis of identity (Alananmu, 2005). It has been pointed out that the issue of indigenous and settlers peoples is at the heart of ethno religious conflicts be experienced in the country. According to Sanda (2003) "settlers" versus "indigenous" is the dichotomy and pathological mistrust between those who claims they are indigenes on the one hand, and settlers or non-natives, on the other.

Sanda (2003) Further explain that, in Nigeria today, certain ethnic nationalities have come to be identified with definite territorial locations.

Citizenship in the Nigerian constitution is defined biologically, not socially. That is why, the problem of indigenes has become dominant in controlling group relations in defining identity and in acquiring greater shares of public resources and status, for example the ethno-religious conflicts experienced in Plateau State from 2001 to date was as the result of these claims and counter claims over land ownership and access to political office between "indigenes" and the "settlers".

Attitudes of the press in reporting conflicts is another source of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. The main objective of mass media is to inform, entertain and educate the society. In Nigeria, experience has shown that the mass media reports, news analysis and features are capable of a positive or negative role in the interaction between ethnic and religious depending on the journalist concerned. The actions or reactions of muslims to christians to muslims are determine by the mass media reports (Alananmu, 2005).

In Nigeria, in many occasions the embers of ethnic and religious conflicts are fanned by such negative and sectional press report and news analysis for example the April 1991 religious riot of Katsina was caused by an article titled "would you marry a known prostitute turned born again" Funtimes, Written by Orland Emmanuel Giwa Atanda (Giwa, 1991). The role played by mass media in reporting the 1987 Kafachan riot was also negative. Members of the society were grossly misinformed by the press with bias reports, which created another crisis between Muslim and Christians Bidmos (1993). Even as at today, the unbridled actions of Nigeria press towards ethno-religious conflicts are capable of causing violence.

Failure of government to take action in the previous happening, is another cause for ethno religious conflicts. There is no conflicts in this country that was not investigated by an administrative or Judicial penal, either by state or federal government to find out the remote and immediate causes of such crisis. And also to take appropriate measures against those involved in the act. It is unfortunate that most of these reports were never made public, talk less of their implementation. Therefore the political will to implement such recommendations

was always lacking. The resultant effects is to compound the ethno-religious crisis in our hand" (Fwa, 2003), by some groups or individuals who feel that they are above the law.

Implications for National Security, Integration and Development in Nigeria.

Security is generally about feeling safe from harm or danger (Francis, 2006). He further stated that security is more concern about survival and the condition of human existence. National Security means capabilities or struggle to overcome internal and external aggression, others consider a nation as secure once it is free from military threat or political coercion (Aliyu, 2012).

A nation is said to be secure to the extent that it is not in a position to lose its core values of life, property and liberty, if it wishes to deter aggression or win war when it is unavoidable (Aja, 199). It is important to note that when the issue of ethno-religious conflicts is not well managed it will continue to threaten the peaceful coexistence of the nation state.

Integration is the high degree of comprehensiveness (Ojo, 2002). Integration "can be regarded as a conscious process of creating and interlocking and vertical relationship between and among" the different nations, (Sheriff et al, 2014). National integration involves an understanding, respect and appreciation of the differences of the entities being integrated (Nkom, 2008). National integration is the process of governing these different ethnic and religious groups on the basis of equality and justice.

Therefore, national integration refers to the objective control which the central authority has over the entire territory under its jurisdiction. For integration to be achieved, people must be aware of knowledge of both their historical past and culture which makes it possible for them to integrate (Akwaru, et al, 2013).

Development is a concept that has no single accepted definition. Some argue that development should be in relative time, place, and circumstance, it should not be reduced to one universally applicable formula. Even though, increased economic efficiency, expansion of productive capacity of nation's economy, and technological advance are generally accepted as necessary requirements for development to a sustainable one. Development as defined as the fulfilment of the necessary conditions for the achievement of the potential of human personality, which transforms into reductions in poverty, inequality, and unemployment (McLean, 1996). Therefore, development simply means increasing satisfaction of basic needs of human being.

Economists viewed development not only as social and technological progressive but also an increase in the production and how goods and services are produced which affect the increase or improvement in the standard of living of the nation (Igwe 2010). While political scientists see development to mean the increase in structural differentiation, cultural secularization, equality, and capacity (Ake, 1982).

The objectives of any government of a nation is to provide safety security and accessible justice through these strategies:

- to make sure that people are safe from conflict and intimidation in their communities, homes, work and schools.
- to make property secure from theft and damage, and
- to ensure that everybody has access to system which dispense Justice fairly, speedily, and without discrimination (DFID, 2000).

The persistence of the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria which the resultant effect within the nation is disagreement, disunity and distrust, collapse of economics, political system, threat to health conditions, displacement of people environment degradation, destruction of Land and agricultural produce and other natural resources (Adesanya, 2005).

Therefore, these effects of the ethno-religious conflicts are the greatest impediment to achievement of national security, integration and development in Nigeria. The attainment of integration and development are only possible in a peaceful society.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, it is now clear that the cause of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are as a result of socio-economic and political deprivation in the society.

The paper also find out that, the resultant effects of ethno - religious conflicts has serious implications on the national security, integration and development of the nation. So in solving these conflicts of dissatisfaction from the various ethnic and religious group, there should be effective mobilization and utilization of resources in a way that gives room for balanced growth and development. For the problem of insecurity, lack of integration and development to be solve Nigeria have to provide Job opportunities, organization of social re-orientation, religious tolerance campaign and awareness. May be this will minimize the conflicts, rivalry, controversies that are associated with diverse ethnic, religious and cultural attitudes in Nigeria.

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