

RE-VISITING THE RESURGENCE OF ETHNO RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This article examined the resurgence of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria. Using Structural Conflict theory by Karl Marx the chapter revealed that structural violence that manifests through struggle over political interest, resources, fear of religious domination, allegations of blasphemy and a host of inequalities are the major triggers of ethno-religious conflicts in the country. The article also noted that multicultural nature of the Nigerian society with its sharp ethnic and religious differences has generated various versions of ethnic identity which has threatened the existence of Nigerian communities by turning to ethnic conflict, and have created dangerous suspicion, distrust and conflicting antagonistic relationship among the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. This in turn is affecting the successful operations of democracy, because, religion and ethnicity are

manipulated by the Nigerian political class for their own personnel gains. The work further interrogated why ethno-religious conflicts have become a recurring decimal in the political landscape of Nigeria and posited that the problem is deeply rooted in the lack of social justice and inclusion and a perceived sense of marginalization which are products of bad politics and bad governance. The article recommends that proactiveness, attacking the root causes of ethno religious conflict and providing quality and responsible leadership among other factors will reduce the menace of ethno religious conflict in Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most diverse and heterogeneous countries in the world as it has over four hundred (400) ethnic groups belonging to different religious sects and denominations and with different historical antecedents and languages (Ogu. 2022). Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has grappled with the challenge of ethnic diversity on the one hand, and the problem of ethno religious conflicts which it breeds on the other. Most of these conflicts are constructed from differences in religious and ethnic identities. These differences have led to conflicts leading to huge losses in lives and property, economic decline, state collapse and failure. At the heart of these crises, are contestation for control of state powers, unequal distribution and allocation of resources, citizenship issues (indigene/settler crisis particularly in the Jos and Mambila Plateaus). Nigeria has been troubled by recurrent crises of regional or state illegitimacy, which often hinders efforts at promoting democracy, social and economic transformation, national cohesion, unity and stability.

The challenge of ethno religious conflict in Nigeria has history, and begins with an understanding that the present day Nigeria was home to a number of independent societies that lived side by side, before the arrival of the Europeans in Africa. Most of these societies were heterogeneous in culture, traditions, norms and religions. There were great kingdoms such as the Kanem-Borno Empire, with known history of more than a thousand years as well as the Sokoto Caliphate, which existed for nearly a century before it was conquered by Britain. It had ruled most of the Savannah area

of Northern part of Western Nigeria (Crowther, 1976 & Ibezute, 1999). There were also kingdoms of Ife and Benin; the Oyo Empire, the people of the Niger-Delta and the Igbo of South-East. As part of these empires, caliphates and kingdoms, there were small chiefdoms who agreed to live within the Kingdoms with submissive allegiance. There was also commercial and cross-cultural contact between the diverse groups (Rodney 1972).

The colonialist for economic and administrative convenience and not with the support of the locals amalgamated the country. The Amalgamation Ordinance was enacted in 1914, even though it was only in Nigeria that the British colonialists used the word "amalgamation". The term had not been applied to any of their other colonies in Africa or elsewhere, and as Okafor, (2018) noted further:

The decision of Lugard to create a unified Nigeria on 1st January, 1914 did not result from the pressure (consent) of local political groups; in the north, the powerful emirates were against it, as it was feared that a centralized administrative system would weaken their power, which was actually dependent on the British rule, while in the south it was feared as it could have led to the introduction of an unpopular system of indirect rule and destroyed few political rights. (Okafor, 2018, p.4).

The amalgamation therefore was derived from considerations of administrative convenience and to facilitate colonial exploitation and not to foster unity and prepare Nigeria for nationhood, Amuwo, Agbaje & Suberu (2003, P.35) collaborate this better: “ the Nigerian state therefore, was initially not designed to be a permanent state with a strong and formidable structure and features that would give birth to an integrated nation. It was rather designed for administrative convenience and to facilitate colonial exploitation”. Little wonder late Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Daura of Sokoto in his book entitled “My Life” opined that the 1914 amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria was a mistake and that the north could have been allowed to go on their own way (Tella, Doho & Bapet, 2014).

At Nigeria's independence, therefore, the state never really acquired any enduring legitimacy or trust from the various indigenous communities following the end of colonial rule because the nation-state was an artificial conglomeration of diverse communities and loosely united ethnic and religious groups that were built by conquest and subjugation (Falola, 1998). As a result of this lack of proper national integration, the post-colonial Nigeria has witnessed ethnic and religious conflicts, which have given birth to many ethnic militias like Movement for the Survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP), Oduá People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Bakassi Boys, Arewa People's Congress (APC), Farmers/Herders crisis, the Egbesu Boys; the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) and most recently the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB)

With the emergence of these ethnic militias and the deep divides between the various ethnic groups, religious intolerance has become more violent and bloody with more devastating results using the ethnic militias as the executors of ethno-religious agenda. It is interesting to note that about forty percent (40%) of ethno-religion based conflicts are credited to the fourth Republic of Nigeria. The fact that there is a recent increase in the number of ethno-religious conflicts in the country makes it a relevant issue of discussion in the contemporary Nigeria and lesson for other nation in the world that are multi-ethnic and multi-religious in their composition. It is against this backdrop that this chapter examines the resurgence of ethno religious conflict in Nigeria, in the pursuance of this objective the article shall attempt a conceptualization of key concepts and situate the work within a theoretical base.

Conceptual Issues

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a sense of collective belonging that ties together ethnic group based on a common language, history, culture, race, norms, values, traditions, religion, nationality and ancestral descent (Hassan, 2018). Therefore, an ethnic group is a group of people that have the same culture, race, language or dialect which differ them from others. However, ethnicity is more than skin colour or physical characteristics, more than

language, song and dance. It is the embodiment of values, institutions and patterns of behaviour, a composite whole representing a people's historical experience, aspirations and world view. It focuses more on sentiments of origin and descent, rather than the geographical considerations of a nation. Edoh (2001) observes that of all the groups that man attaches himself to, ethnic groups seem the most encompassing and enduring. It can be a building block, but also a potential stumbling block on the road to modernity and no ethnic group remains isolated. Ethnicity encourages segregation, discrimination and polarization of the society characterized by “We” or “Them” (Usman and Garba, 2019)

Ethnic Conflict

Ethnic conflict is a disagreement, misunderstanding, whether violent conflict or non violent between or among various ethnic groups. Nnoli, (1995, p.4) explains that “ethnic conflict emerges as a result of common group awareness to live or urge to achieve some objectives that are seen to be of great value and which are perceived as being top. Ethnic conflict in Nigeria is persistently happening because of the fact that ethnic loyalty serve as the pillar of ethnic conflict, ethnic loyalty in Nigerian context is a feeling of attachment to ones ethnic group. This loyalty carries along with him the willingness to support and act negatively or positively on behalf of the ethnic group having an elective attitude towards those regarded as “outsiders”. Ethnic conflict is very sensitive, complex and difficult to resolve, because the affected persons experienced loss of lives and property which are traceable to some people or individuals, that still see them when justice is not meted on them, may lead to grudges, nursing an ambition of revenge, hatred towards the perpetrators of such violent ethnic conflict, this results to counter attack, and the reemergence of the ethnic conflict.

Religious Conflict

It refers to phenomenon in which religion is either the subject or object of conflict behaviour. All the religions of the world contain narratives, symbols and metaphors of violence and war. Religious conflict is conflict that is motivated by, or in reaction to, religious precepts, texts, or

the doctrines of a target or an attacker. It includes violence against religious institutions, people, objects or events.

Ethno-Religious Conflict

Ethno-religious conflict means a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. According to Salawu (2010) in Nigeria, it is interesting to note that ethnicity and religious bigotry have become a fulcrum of various forms of nationalism ranging from assertion of language, cultural autonomy and religious superiority to demands for local political autonomy and self-determination. All these sometimes lead to some forms of contextual discrimination of members of one ethnic or religious group against another on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols and religion. Therefore, in a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse society like Nigeria, with some forms of contextual discrimination, relationships between people may be characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear as it is the case among the ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. In fact, this mutual suspicion and lack of cordiality among the various ethnic and religious components explains why ethno-religious conflicts have become a permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation as far back as 1980s to date.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are a major component of research, they help in the explanation of scientific and social phenomena. This study is anchored on the Marxist Structural Conflict Theory which was first propounded by Karl Marx in 1848. In this study, the theory is used to explain the conundrum of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. First, Karl Marx, widely regarded as the father of classical social constructs, whose works have continued to influence successive social theorists, propounded the structural theory of conflict. One fundamental belief on which Marx anchored his works is that the existence of human on earth is characterized by endless class struggle. His major view was therefore that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Njoku and Kolapo, 2022, p, 3370).

In the same line of thought, Marx and Engels (1848, P. 8) further highlighted how the struggle between exploited people and those who exploit them has underlined the histories of successive human societies. Indeed, one fundamental finding of theorists such as Marx is the connection between class formation and conflict.

Thus the Marxist Structural Conflict theory holds that human society is structured in a way that supports oppression, inequality, and domination of one class over the other. The theory further explains that the struggle over limited resources, power, and influence, and the quest to sustain dominance over the disadvantaged and powerless in society is at the root of conflict within human societies. In other words, it examines how groups within a society compete for scarce resources (Marx, 1970, cited in Eze, 2021). Consequently, according to Coser, (1957), angry and unsatisfied groups seek to expand their share of power, influence, and status in the prevailing system. Theorists of the Marxist school of thought have also highlighted the inherent likelihood for states and their institutions to perpetrate violence against their own people (Ho-Won Jeong, 2010).

Therefore, in line with Marx's structural conflict theory, most conflicts in Nigeria have been traced to the roots of structural issues that have manifested through struggles for resources, power, resistance to religious domination, or protection of religious belief. This is because these factors confer advantages in Nigeria's socio-economic and political spheres characterised by competition and class struggle. Struggles over these issues, especially in Nigeria made up of over 250 ethnic groups, have often manifested in conflicts of ethnic and religious nature. So, the emergence of such groups as Boko Haram, Niger Delta Militants (MEND), Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), and bandits are ripple effects of the competition over power, resources, influence and to assert religious influence. Salawu, (2010) noted that the accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, dominance, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism, and bigotry that result from structural framing that induces exploited groups against each other are key sources of what we currently see as ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

In addition, the fact that Nigeria's political environment is susceptible to ethnic and religious influence has made inciting one group (ethnic or religious) against another for political objective a potent weapon in the hands of the political class. Consequently, often time, in the quest to take or retain political power, political leaders leverage on ethnic and religious linings to further their political interests. This often results in ethnic or religious conflict with their attendant damage to properties and the loss of human life. This resonates with the view of Banton when he noted that "a shared ethnic origin may be a basis on which individuals are mobilised for collective action" including violence (Banton, 2000, P. 481).

According to Marx, domineering and oppressive forms of human relations which he christened 'class struggle' is at the root of structural conflicts (Marx, 1848). Also, oftentimes, these patterns of conflicts are propelled by forces other than the conflictants. Besides structural issues, most conflictants have no grounds to be in conflict in the first instance. Marx's writings suggest that structural conflicts can only be solved if structural issues underlying them are addressed. Thus, oppressors need to identify ways of conceding to the demands of the oppressed as sustaining the status quo can perpetuate structural conflict. In the case of Nigeria, structural issues at the root of incessant conflicts of ethnic and religious backgrounds are embedded in the fundamental political and economic structure of the country which has given rise to poverty, suffering, misrule, exploitation, mutual distrust, frustration, and aggression. Addressing these issues is therefore vital to solving protracted conflicts in the country.

Manifestations of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

There have been many ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria ranging from Maitatsine riot to Boko haram insurgency. This work summarizes some of the conflicts that have taken place from 1980 to 2017. Reflecting on cases of ethno- religious conflicts in Nigeria, Adebayo (2010:251) wrote that the 1980 Maitatsine riot in Kano metropolis was said to have claimed 4,177 lives. Quoting Imam (2004) he complained that the Maitatsine uprising of Bullum-Kuttu in Bornu State, which took place from 26th - 29th October 1982 claimed four hundred lives with property worth over 3 million naira destroyed or looted. He further stated that, the Jimeta Maitatsine crisis

of 26th February - 5th March 1984 took one thousand and four lives, five thousand, nine hundred, and thirteen families were displaced; while over one hundred people died in the Gombe Maitatsine uproar of 26th – 28th April 1985.

The Kafanchan tumult of March 1987 which started in College of Education over a crusade been organized by Christian students spread to Funtua, Kaduna metropolis, Zaria and environs. In this crisis 25 people died, 61 were injured, property valued at ₦75million was damaged. About 47, churches, 3 mosques, 46 private houses, 19 vehicles and 30 hotels were destroyed. Adebayo (2010) again noted that in 1990, the Muslims opposed the invitation of Reinhard Bonnke, a German Christian preacher to Kano; they were not happy because Ahmed Deedat, a Muslim preacher from South Africa was not allowed to come for the same purpose. The result was crises which took place between 11 and 14, October 1990 leaving over 500 lives lost and hundreds of millions of naira worth of property destroyed (Onah, Diarra and Uroko, 2017).

Other riots include Zangon-Kataf riot of 1992, Futua 1993, Jos crisis of April 1994. Another riot was also witnessed in Kano in December, 1994 triggered by the beheading of an Igbo Christian known as Gideon Akaluka who was alleged to have desecrated the Koran (Ugorji, 2017). These crises though religious in their connotation had touch of ethnic confrontation in them. Lives lost to such sectarian clashes between 1980 and 1994 were well over 10,000 and property destroyed were enormous (Uka 2008). Kaduna riot in Feb. 28, 2000 over the attempt to implement Sharia law led to the killing of about 300 people within the first two days of the crisis (Ugorji, 2017).

In Jos Plateau State, the crises between the predominantly Christian Berom, Anaguta and Afizere regarded as indigenes and mainly Muslim Hausa-Fulani regarded as settlers have been going on for decades and have blossomed into dangerous dimension since 2001. According to Krause, no fewer than four thousand (4,000) and possibly as many as seven thousand (7,000) persons have been killed since late 2001, when the first major violence in more than three decades broke out in Jos. Plateau State has lost thousands of her citizens to this crisis.

Again in September 2001 ethnic tension erupted when some Tiv took some nineteen Junkuns militia who were in fake army uniform and parading as soldiers. The Tiv youths captured them and slaughtered them one by one. The reprisal attacks by the men of the Nigerian army in Zaki Biam were devastating (Ugo, 20202) .

From July 26-30, 2009, the Boko-Haram Islamic sect unleashed mayhem in Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe. Over 700 persons were killed; 3,500 persons internally displaced; 1,264 children orphaned over 392 women widowed and several properties destroyed (Ugo, 20202). Jos, Plateau State, 2010 Christmas Eve bombing left many injured. On Christmas Day 2011 bombing in Madalla Niger State left about 50 people dead. January 20, 2012 bomb attacks at Kano left at least 250 persons dead (Okpaga, Ugwu, Eme 2012). In Maiduguri, in August 2013, a Christian student reported an attack by Boko Haram on her university accommodation: the men were murdered; the women separated into Muslim and non- Muslims, and the Christian women systematically raped (Ojo, 2016). Also in Maiduguri, six Christian women were abducted and repeatedly raped by insurgents who claimed this as sexual 'jizya', a tax paid by Christians under Islamic law (Ojo, 2016).

The Abduction of over 200 girls from Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Bornu State on April 14, 2014 by Boko Haram is still vivid in people's minds. On 9 July, 2016, a female preacher Mrs. Eunice Elisha, the wife of a Redeemed Pastor was hacked to death in Abuja by suspected Muslim fanatics (SaharaReporters 2016). .According to the governor of Borno State, The recent attack of December 2016 by Fulani herds' men in Southern Kaduna where 808 people and properties worth billions of naira were destroyed is another case of violent conflict in Nigeria (Ugo, 2022). This conflict in Southern Kaduna continued in February 2017 with many people killed. Other conflicts have taken place in the country leading to loss of lives and destruction of property and more suffering for women.

In 2017 the Benue State enacted the Anti-Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law to as a tool to prevent clashes between herders and farmers by limiting the unrestricted grazing of cattle and called

for ranching of cattle and other livestock. This law has become another cause of incessant attacks on Benue communities basically due to the rejection of the law by some herders. On the New Year Day of 2018, the Fulani herdsmen attacked and killed over one hundred and twenty people in Benue State (Forum on Farmer and Herder Relations in Nigeria, 2018). It is instructive to note that these unwarranted attacks on Tiv people by the Fulani herdsmen have continued up till today.

Factors Responsible for the Resurgence of Ethno Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

A major cause of what we now see as a resurgence in ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has to do with the accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry. In every nation (Nigeria inclusive), there is no complete agreement on how wealth, power and status are to be shared among individuals and groups. There is also no agreement on how to effect necessary changes and reforms. This is because, different groups and individuals have diverse interests in which case, some groups will have their aims met, while others will not. What this means is that conflict (ethno religious ones inclusive) usually occur when deprived groups and individuals attempt to increase their share of power and wealth or to modify the dominant values, norms, beliefs or ideology (Salawu, 2010). Thus, in Nigeria and going by the various examples of ethno-religious conflicts cited earlier in this paper, there seems to be a divisive interplay of politics, ethnicism and religions, which has consequently led to the rising nationalism and militancy of various ethnic and religious movements. It is interesting to note that the overall consequence of this is the escalation of various ethno-religious conflicts that are witnessed all over the country today which are meant to correct any perceived form of marginalization, oppression or domination.

Fundamentally important to the resurgence of ethno religious conflict is the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governance, forge national integration and promote what can be called real economic progress, through deliberate and articulated policies, that have led to mass poverty and unemployment. According to (Ikpe, 2017) this failure of the

state to provide good governance has resulted into communal, ethnic, religious and class conflicts that have now characterized the Nigerian nation. Poverty and unemployment have therefore served as nursery bed for many ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria because the country now has a reservoir of poor people who warmongers as mercenary fighters. What this means theoretically is that poverty and unemployment increase the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given course at token benefit. This explains why all ethno-religious crises that ever occurred in Nigeria have a large turnout of people (including the under-aged) as fighters.

A very important explanation for the surge in ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is the breakdown of such vehicles of social control that characterized the traditional African societies such as the family, education, law, religion and political system that cared for the well-being of all citizens. Indeed, the malfunctioning of all these important institutions has actually increased ethnic and communal conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, the inability of many homes to make ends meet with the family income tends to increase immorality, broken fatherless/motherless homes, divorces and drunkenness, leading again to a large reserve of youths who could be employed for execution of ethno-religious conflicts. According to Okafor (2017) the school system in Nigeria today is in shambles and cannot impart even sound knowledge, let alone instill discipline and desired type of morality. The religious institution is also not playing its expected roles, while the law enforcement agents indulge in crimes, demand bribes and collect illegal levies from motorists openly and, shamelessly. All the above constitute a wrong signal to the social and encourage social vices in the society thereby laying the foundation for conflicts in general.

It should be understood that the problem created by the new Muslim ideology was not limited to the Middle East as the increasing feelings of relative deprivation and alienation around the world makes developing states with large Muslim populations susceptible to militant forms of Islamism in the Middle East. This explains why the increased rate of religious violence in Northern Nigeria (a Muslim dominated region) since 1980s can be understood from this perspective. The influence of foreign

factor on ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria becomes obvious in 1983 when the then Nigerian Minister for International Affairs attempted to link the development crises in Nigeria to the global political economy. It was the opinion of the Federal Government of Nigeria that many of the ethno religious crises had foreign backing and as such ordered that aliens without valid permit must leave the country within a fortnight. The main reason given for this expulsion order was that the presence of the aliens at the time threatened the economic and political security of Nigeria (Albert, 2005). Particularly referred to as the justification for the government action, was the 1980 maitatsine riots led by Marwa, a Camerounian by nationality. In 1985 too, major General Tunde Idiagbon pointed to the foreign

connection in the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. In this regard, he alerted Nigerians about the impending crisis and the foreign supports some religious fundamentalists were receiving (Ali and Yahaya, 2019).

The foreign connection in ethno-religious crises in Nigeria is also evident in the involvement of non-Nigerians in a number of urban insurgencies. These foreigners have been found to actively participate in the ethnic conflicts around the country and particularly in the Northern part between the Hausa- Fulani Muslim hosts and their Christian dominated southern Nigeria 'strangers' who reside in their midst. A scuffle that started between an Igbo trader and a Fulani security guard at the Sabongari Kano market developed into city-wide ethno-religious conflicts in which many non-Nigerians from the neighbouring African 'states were arrested fighting on the side of the Hausa-Fulani Muslims (Salawu, 2010). In recent times the rise in international terrorism is no doubt one of the precipitating factors that galvanized the emergence of Boko Haram terrorism, the success of Al Qaeda Islamic Movement in the Maghreb region (AQIM) and Al-Shabab have deeply contributed to ethno religious conflict in Nigeria.

It is instructive to say here therefore that in Nigeria and from the various examples of ethno religious conflicts cited earlier, religious discrimination and religious grievances based on such discrimination affect the level of protest and/or rebellion in which the various ethno-religious groups in Nigeria engage. In the case of the introduction of Sharia in Zanfara State and some other parts of the Northern Nigerian for instance, it

was the religious framework that caused a group to take actions, which affect groups that do not subscribe to the same religious framework. Such actions as we have seen infringed upon those other groups and provoked a conflictive response. This is true irrespective of whether the group that is infringed upon occupies a dominant or subordinate role in society. This analysis is also true of all the ethno-religious conflicts that we have witnessed in Nigeria.

Towards a more Realistic Approach to Managing/Combating Ethno Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Owing to the failure of previous government intervention models to resolve the diverse crises in Nigeria, there is the need to formulate competent conflict resolution strategies capable of addressing several of the country's troubling and persistent crises and the following are suggested as more realistic approach towards combating the menace of ethno religious conflicts.

Proactiveness: One fundamental flaw of conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria is that they are all reactive instead of being proactive. To stem the tide of incessant conflicts, governments at various levels must lay emphasis on prevention rather than reacting after outbreaks. Thus having adequate security around crucial flashpoints, rather than waiting for an ethno-religious crisis before deploying them will go a long way to prevent the outbreak of conflicts. This is because the presence of the military in an area for instance has proven to deter would-be trouble makers.

Implementation of a Non-Partisan Federal Character Principle: It is undeniable that one of the immediate causes and root of ethno religious conflicts in the country is the flagrant disregard of the provisions of the federal character principle. The principle as contained in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution seeks to ensure that appointments to public offices fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic diversity of the country. This is to prevent the predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the affairs of government. The principle demands, therefore, that favors and privileges attached to the Nigerian citizenship should not be dispensed with according to religion and

ethnicity. Implementing without bias and prejudice the provisions of this all-important principle will ensure that Nigerians irrespective of religion and ethnicity feel a sense of belonging and thus share in the Nigerian dream. This will help reduce attachments to ethnic and religious cleavages.

Inter Faith Dialogue: Nigeria is a deeply religious country. Religious leaders should work together with their members to douse tension and imbibe tolerance, peace, and love of neighbours which their religions preach. The best way of achieving this is to expand the activities of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), which has so far underperformed. Leaders of ethnic groups who are often at the centre of ethno-religious crises should be included in NIREC dialogue and peace building activities. This is against the backdrop of the fact that being deeply religious people, Nigerians are known to respect, trust and obey their religious leaders who they see as the representative of the Supreme Being rather than the government. Years of broken promises, corruption and exploitation have engineered a massive distrust and suspicion of the government and its policies. It is also important for leaders of ethnic groups to meet regularly to build bridges of trust, friendship, and understanding. Such programmes and intergroup dialogue should be made to include high-ranking traditional rulers (who have the trust of their people).

Political and Economic Inclusivity: It is a given that the Nigerian state is one characterized by structural inequality, normalized group deprivation, and domination of the poor by the super-rich and political class. The structural conflict this anomaly has caused can only be addressed through inclusivity, equal political rights, religious tolerance, education, equal distribution of resources, provision of medical services, employment, and security. Furthermore, fair access to political institutions and economic participation are integral to solving structural social problems. Thus, the provision of basic human needs and equal access to political and economic resources to all Nigerians, particularly the downtrodden will go a long way in solving the problem of incessant ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria where it is a regular occurrence.

Evolving a Sustainable Peace Approach: Resolution strategies currently applied to ethno-religious conflicts in the country reinforce ‘negative peace.

Those strategies – deployment of police and the military, setting up committees to investigate the causes of conflicts, etc –have often prioritised ending hostilities without addressing the root cause of conflicts which is structural. It is therefore necessary to evolving a sustainable peace approach which goes beyond the immediate causes of conflicts to develop new resolution models for ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria

Value Re-Orientation: The government must be proactive in using an early warning system to check the potential outbreak of conflict before they erupt into major ethno-religious violence. In addition, Nigerian government, religious institutions, the private sector, and civil society groups should invest more resources in promoting peace education, including reorientation programs that inculcate the value of peaceful coexistence. Peace education will help youth better appreciate the value of peace, making it more difficult for extremists to use them to foment trouble. Peace education should be integrated in the educational curriculum of schools, from primary to tertiary education. Youth radicalization and insidious ideologies that underpin violent extremism also can be curbed through enlightenment programs delivered through radio, television, jingles, and group discussions. The Nigerian government, civil society groups, and the private sector could partner with Nigeria’s film industry to produce movies and support radio and television programs in the three major languages (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) designed to specifically counter narratives and messages promoting youth radicalization. Agencies such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and National Orientation Agency (NOA) should be charged with this responsibility of reorientation of citizens, especially in rural areas on the importance of peace and coexistence..

The State Must Provide Security for All Citizens: Another crucial factor to the development of new conflict resolution strategy is the need for the Nigerian state to revamp its security apparatus and its ability to protect vulnerable citizens beyond what has been the norm. The modern states, such as Nigeria has failed to play its protective role and preserve the ‘identity needs’ of oppressed groups as the trigger of conflicts of varied forms. Consequently, Nigeria must further develop its capacity to guarantee safety, right to existence, and personal development which is some of the most

fundamental needs of all people. As a way of example, improving Nigeria's capacity to meet the security needs of its citizens and address structural imbalances in socio-economic and political spheres would address the core reasons behind the agitations by most groups. This is because the conduct of these groups is driven by their search for fundamental needs security, equality, and justice.

Employment Generation: Since unemployment has been a major galvanizer of ethno religious conflict and constitute an obstacle to national development, the challenge of unemployment will have to be addressed. Employment generation can take the form of the establishment of agro allied industries, cottage industries and other labour intensive enterprises. Relatedly graduates of tertiary institutions should be employed or at least given loans to enable them start some business ventures. Government should also provide the enabling environment for a sound business takeoff. At local, state, and federal levels, the government should establish demonstration farms or workshops to give youth vocational skills or knowledge that allow them to be self-employed in gainful enterprises. A special youth empowerment fund or financial facility should also be created; such a facility should be robustly structured to enhance transparency and accountability in its management to avoid unnecessary bottlenecks and patronage considerations that prevent youth who genuinely need such interventions from accessing them.

Poverty Reduction: Since poverty nourished ethno religious conflict, its reduction will certainly ameliorate the situation. Government at various levels must come up with genuine poverty reduction programmes aimed at building capacity among the vulnerable groups in the society-farmers, the unemployed, women etc. Government must also put in place policies that are sincerely targeted at achieving transparency and accountability. Genuine poverty reduction must intersect with other development and social change initiatives of the government. Poverty can therefore be reduced through the establishment of cottage industries (that will provide jobs for the unemployed), improved supply of fertilizers and availability of agro-chemicals to farmers. The above if done, will surely reduce the incidence of ethno religious conflict in Nigeria.

The Leadership Factor: For all the above to be achieved, the leadership factor must be addressed. Like Achebe has said there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the Nigerian climate or people but our problem is squarely that of leadership, there is therefore the need to institute selfless and accountable leadership that puts the people at the centre of development. The provision of quality and responsible leadership that sees governance as service to the people has a tendency to quell the various agitations and above all achieve national integration.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the problem of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria with emphasis on its resurgence. Using Structural Conflict theory by Karl Marx the paper revealed that structural violence, that manifests through struggle over political interest, resources, fear of religious domination, external religious occurrence or even allegations of blasphemy and a host of inequalities are the major triggers of ethno-religious conflicts in the country. The article argues that the factors that underpin the resurgence of ethno-religious conflicts, are multi-dimensional, and includes, accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry; the inability of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governments; breakdown of traditional vehicles of social control; the long history of military intervention in politics, which legitimizes the use of force and violence as instruments of social change and attainment of set goals and demand; and historical antecedent.

In spite of the widespread of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and their long history, the paper has shown that the Nigerian governments (past and present) have failed to tackle this problem through articulated and well organized policy actions. The country record in conflict management has been poor as the government continues to rely on coercive method and always resorts to the use of whitepaper emanating from them are often not implemented. This paper concludes that ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has transitioned into one of the most dangerous forms of terrorism, which means that the existing conflict management, settlement and resolution strategies are weak and ineffective. Based on this fact, a paradigm shift in

the development of policies that are aimed at managing, resolving and preventing conflicts with ethno-religious issues and components is proposed. This new approach places emphasis on proactiveness, attacking the root causes of ethno religious conflict and providing quality and responsible leadership that will respond to the needs of the people thereby engendering peace and development

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