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Ethno-Religious Violence, Herdsmen and Terrorist Phenomena in Nigeria: A Hoax or a Reality

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Abstract: Nigeria has witnessed many conflicts in the last three decades, ranging from political, economic to ethno-religious conflicts. Religion and ethnicity have emerged as the constantly used elements in fueling crisis in Nigeria, due to the fact that it is a pluralistic society in terms of its ethnic, religious, cultural, economic and ecological diversities. The objectives of the paper were to see the reality or the hoax of the various ethno-religious violence, herdsmen attacks and terrorism in Nigeria. The study made use of historical and analytical methods of research to achieve the focus of this paper. It is admitted by some scholars that Nigeria is a British colonial creation "an encapsulation of pre-colonial independent nations which comprises of kingdoms, known and relatively unknown city-states, people with centralised and decentralised political systems and pastoral and agrarian social formation. To corroborate this, it is realized that "Nigeria is a country with appropriate credentials for dysfunctional conflicts". Situating these conflicts, histories, geography and mentality, these anomalies serve as the basis of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria. This paper concludes that the herdsmen's activity is a terrorist action that constitutes a major threat to the security of the nation. Consequently, the paper recommends that any act of terrorism that is a threat to the security of Nigeria should be nipped at the bud by meting out stringent sanctions on perpetrators.

Keywords: Ethno-religious violence, Fulani Herdsmen, Farmers Violence, Terrorist Phenomenon



Introduction

Ethno-Religious Violence: An Overview

In Gwamna's(2010) opinion, "religious violence means the deferring religious opinions, interest and view points between contesting religions which have often times resulted in situations of hate, anger, bitterness and even war". Violence is a natural phenomenon in plural societies and Nigeria provides fertile grounds for breeding violence including ethno religious violence". Violence is volatile, it takes time to grow and imposes itself on the human society. Ehusani(2002) opines that violence is often sought after, invited or lured. Alamu(2010) admits that violence is a long-standing romance with evil, the off shoot of an unholy alliance with death... it is the end product of deliberate acts or choices of individuals or of entire societies. Gofwen(2001) in his view sees religious conflicts from a specific form of conflict between groups which differ ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance. Thus, Nwaomah observes conversion campaigns, as in Nigeria, "by opposing religion(s) and fanaticism arising from indoctrination of the adherents, mostly due to parochial education, can also reinforce religious hostilities and thus create a conflict". Encarta Dictionaries describes violence as physical force, pugnacity, aggression, fighting, savagery, brutality, cruelty, sadism, bloodshed and carnage.

Ethno-religious conflicts' refer to those involving groups where religion is an integral part of social and cultural life, and religious institutions are representative, religion may be used to contribute to violence or peace. Violence in whatever form be it ethno-religious, economic, political and so on brings complex sets of events such as poverty, religions or ethnic grievances that can affect good relationships of the people in the society. Otite (1990) says that it is inherent in all kinds of social, economic or political settings and in business management, job and so on, characterized by ethnic, religious and other forms of pluralism. Olatunji and Adebimpe (2011) observed that there is virtually no geo-political zone of Nigeria that has not had its fair share of either sectarian or ethnic-religious or political violence. For example, in the southwest, there are several cases of Oodua people's Congress (OPC) clashing with Ijaws, Hausas or Igbo traders in Lagos among others. Places in the Niger-Delta, the militant youths had virtually taken over the



reins of governance. Killing of Oil workers, oil spillage is no longer new, while in the South East, activities of the armed group that called itself Eastern Security Network (ESN) and the armed wing of the indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) a pro Biafra movement are too numerous to mention.

Nigeria has demonstrated a very high propensity for ethnic and religious violence in the past three decades. The level of religious fundamentalism has risen resulting in several cases of religious violence. Matthew Kukah(2000) supports this view when he added that ethnicity the twin evils along with religion poses serious threats to the stability of Nigeria. He says further that "most students of the African political scene agreed on the fact that both ethnicity and religion are the most dangerous threats to the attainment of democracy in Africa".Egwu(2001) corroborates Kukah's(2000) observation, he says "ethnic and religious violence is the extreme manifestation of conflicts rooted in the crises of identity. There is no doubt that religion is compounding the ethnocentric rivalry in Nigeria and therefore could be very dangerous. Religion and ethnicity have played significant roles in fueling crisis in Nigeria, they both complement and reinforce each other.

The Tafawa Balewa violence of 1991 had a religious undertone but turned ethnic between *Sayawa* who are dominated by Christians and the Hausa-Fulani dominated by Muslims. The 1995 violence at Tafawa Balewa was political but turned into ethnic and religious violence. Similarly, the introduction of Sharia law in Niger state led to a violence resisting sharia legal code but soon assumed an ethnic dimension". Many violent clashes in Plateau state involving the predominantly Hausa-Fulani Muslims with the non-Hausa-Fulani Christians has both ethnic and religious components. In Otite's(1990) observation, he admits that in a situation of ethnic conflicts in places like Kano, Kaduna etc an Igbo Muslim may not be saved simply because he or she is a Muslim. Here, the ethnic component may become paramount.



Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria

Religious differences often reinforce ethnic divisions and fuel conflict particularly in the North Central region of Nigeria where most of these cases have occurred. Religiously induced crises have produced more IDPs than any known conflict in Nigeria. According to Jibo(2000), "one of the casual factors for explaining ethno-religious conflicts is the manipulation thesis popularized by Bala Usman, Jubril Ibrahim, Joseph Kenny and Jeff Haynes." This school of thought is of the opinion that the elite was responsible for manipulating religion to serve their personal interest. They (the elite) seize the opportunity of the vulnerability of the poverty stricken and illiterate masses to stir up religious sentiments to unleash violence against their fellow masses. It is believed ethno-religious conflicts are artificial creations to divert masses attention from the exploitation of the elite class.

Another cause of incessant ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is the resources available within the areas affected. If the indigenes are not benefitting mutually from such resources, it will cause friction and violence. The control of the market and the benefits acquiring from the resources may, in fact, be their source of destruction rather than being a source of development. A good example here are the Niger Delta people who until recently have continued to war against one another over the control of their resources. Also, the competition for scarce resources and economic advantages played important roles in Zongo-Kataf crisis in 1992 and Jos crisis in 2001. The 1991 Zongo-Kataf crisis attests to this. According to Gwamna(2010), "crisis erupted over the relocation of a market dominated by the Hausa-Fulani to a new ground from Kataf urban town which had remained an exclusive reserve for the Hausa for over 300 years. In the crisis that eventually ensued, many lives and property were lost. What started as an economic crisis took on ethnic and religious dimensions in Kaduna and its environs leaving many people displaced."

Poverty has been another factor identified for the continuation of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. The ever increasing level of poverty manifesting itself in joblessness and deteriorating infrastructures creates conditions for conflict to thrive. Gwamna(2010) opines that "in less than a



decade, Nigeria has slipped from a middle-income status nation to a low-income category and is currently regarded as one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The fact that the poverty rate is very high, many find easy recourse in ethno-religious conflicts while the sponsors of these conflicts hide in safe havens.

The lack of understanding or deliberate contempt for other people's religion and belief had resulted in several conflicts in Nigeria. For example, direct abuse and condemnation of other religious groups on university campuses is a pointer to this. Unfavorable government policies had also resulted in ethno-religious conflicts several times in Nigeria. When a group of people (ethnic or religious) feel that a particular government policy would not favor them, they may resort to violence in order to make their voice heard. For example, the people of Modakeke in Osun state demonstrated over the citing of their local government headquarters within the domain of Ooni of Ife. Likewise, many Deltans protested citing Asaba as the capital of Delta state.

Lack of tolerance has continued to be another major factor for ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. The inability of a group be it ethnic or religious to cooperate and tolerate others often leads to violence. This is prominent in a situation whereby one side claims ownership of a parcel of land against the other. If this is not resolved promptly, it often led to the destruction of lives and property.

The Yoruba or Igbo Muslim is separated and identified and he or she does not have the same Muslim status as his or her Hausa neighbor or local community members. Otite's(1990) observation manifested itself in the Kaduna Sharia violence in 2000, 2001, and 2008. People from the minority ethnic groups were identified and singled out for killing by the Muslims. The ethnic mark becomes the major identity and not religion.

Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers' Violence in Nigeria

The Fulani herdsmen constitute a mostly Muslim people scattered throughout West Africa but concentrated in certain places such as the Northern Nigeria. They represent a significant



component of the Nigerian economy and constitute the major breeders of cattle, the main source of meat, the most available and cheap source of animal proteins consumed by Nigerians. Fabusoro(2007) opines that "the Fulani own over 90% of the Nation's livestock population which accounts for one-third of agricultural GDP and 3-2% of the nation's GDP. He further says that the contribution of the Fulani to the local food chain and national food security cannot be overstressed." According to Alhasssan(2013), "the Fulani with their dominance in the Sahel region are best known and most numerous of all the pastoral groups in Nigeria." The traditional and unique Fulani encampment consisting of structures made of stalks, closely knit family members and livestock is the natural habitat of the Orthodox Fulani settlement. The Fulani are primarily nomadic cattle herders who follow their livestock along migratory patterns. This wandering lifestyle has brought them into conflict with farmers in Nigeria. Clashes between mostly Fulani herdsmen and farmers or settled communities have been consecrated in north east and north west Nigeria particularly the states Benue, Plateau, Nassarawa, Kogi, Yobe, and Kaduna states.

They leave their place of abode in search for greener pasture for their cattle because of drought. They are forced to migrate for greener pasture for grazing their cattle. Violence ensued between Fulani herdsmen and farmers from the destruction of farmlands by herds of cattle. Government at various levels (Federal, state and local) have not been able to resolve the issue of adequate provision of grazing reserves to accommodate the interest of herdsmen who are always on the move to secure food and water for their herds. The socio-economic lives of both the farmers and the herdsmen revolved around land and therefore, land matters become easily conflictual.

During migration, a typical herd consisting of several family units moves in a column of up to five meters wide and two kilometers long. By the time it passes any given point, everything that stands at that point is destroyed.

Violence associated with pastoral migration and grazing conflict between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers has been reported more in the Benue and Plateau states. There is hardly any month that passes without a report of violence between Fulani and indigenous people of the two states.



The crisis has been located in the fact that the Fulani herdsmen having invaded the area unleash cattle on the farms of the Tiv and this leads to loss of farm products. For instance, in the national dailies such as The Sun and the Vanguard edition of 7th April 2020 reported that suspected Fulani herdsmen killed 28 people, injured many in Benue State, sacked 3 villages in the governor's hometown. The sun newspaper edition reported that suspected Fulani herdsmen attacked Benue community, killed several people and injured many. According to the paper, the attack left the community in ruins.

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, some form of the crisis has been reported in areas like Enugu state, Anambra and Abia States. In Enugu state in 2009, suspected Fulani herdsmen attacked Ezeagu communities in the state killing at least two women on their farm. This piece featured in The Sun newspaper of 6th June 2019. The women confronted the Fulani herdsmen against grazing cattle on their farm, this angered the herdsmen and the women were killed. The killing led to violence between the villagers and the herdsmen, and they eventually expelled the entire Fulani herdsmen from the area. This area is known for growing high-quality agricultural products like rice, yam etc. in places like Umuahia and Isuochi violence and the crisis of greater magnitude caused by the Fulani herdsmen led to their expulsion from the area.

The Implications of the Violence

From the discussion above, the herders are frustrated due to weather events. The realities staring them in the face forced them to migrate and as they migrate, series of challenges are encountered which in turn brings frustration. Violence occurs because of the accumulation of the effects of frustration. The aggressive behavior of the Fulani herdsmen could be traced to the resource scarcity which in the long run affects their economic well-being. If a herdsman losses his flock to drought and water scarcity, he may be frustrated because of the loss of livelihood. From this reality, he may be aggressive and since he cannot channel it to the natural causes, he may in the long run channel it to any person or group that obstructs his migration to a safe area.



Also, violence usually occurs when Fulani herdsmen trample and feeds upon the crops of the farmers or other essential facilities in the region. No rational farmer can stand idle watching his means of livelihood being destroyed by herdsmen cattle. This will result in violence and confrontation. The main thrust of the violence is the loss of the means of livelihood. As earlier discussed, the middle-belt region (Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarrawa states) and the southeast, the crisis caused by the Fulani intrusion into their land has remained unresolved. We believe that violence is caused primarily by competing for scarce resources. Land and water are two major conflict drivers. The solution lies in supporting the two parties by establishing grazing reserves for livestock and increase funding the communities affected by the clashes and improving security and violence hotspots. The herdsmen and farmers conflicts are clearly damaging the president's vision of a unified Nigeria and sucking potential resources and revenues out of the country. Whatever the causes of herdsmen and farmers conflicts are, it has had great negative effects ranging from economic effects (such as loss of income or resources) to physical (such as home or farm destruction, bodily injury or even death of loved ones) and socio-psychological effects such as emotional exhaustion and others.

The Concept of Terrorism

Presently, there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism. It is difficult to construct a definition of terrorism that eliminates any just cause for terrorism because history provides to many precedents of organizations and their leaders branded as terrorist but who eventually evolved into respected government. It is important to note an age long slogan which says "a terrorist to one state is another state's freedom fighter". This slogan has created a nagging problem which made the adoption of a universally accepted definition of terrorism impossible. Although one may have a perfect cause and yet commits terrorist acts, it is still terrorism anyway. Walter Laqueur(1979), a scholar of terrorism opines that a comprehensive definition of terrorism... does not exist nor will it be found in the foreseeable future. Though, he sees terrorism as the illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective when innocent people are



targeted. According to Stephanova(2008), "terrorism is the form of violence against civilians with an asymmetrical violent confrontation against a stronger opponent, be it a state or a group of states." In the same vein, Jenkin(1985) defines terrorism "as the use or threatened use of force designed to bring about political changes. Terrorism can be explained as the use, of threat of violence by an individual or group, whether acting in opposition to established authority, when such action is designed to establish authority, when such action is designed to create extreme anxiety or fear, including effects in a target group larger than immediate victims with the purpose of coercing that group into acceding to the political or religious demands of the perpetrators". The critical elements here are violent activities intended to create an atmosphere of fear in order to further an interest. Bearing in mind the above definitions, some common features can be identified. Terrorism involves aggression against non-combatants. It is premeditated i.e planned in advance, it is political, designed to change an existing order. It is aimed at civilians and carried out by sub-national groups. In sum total, terrorism is being condemned globally though the perception of the concept of terrorism varies among nations.

Terrorism in Nigeria

It is no news that Nigeria is under the siege of terrorists like many nations in Africa. Nigeria has large groups and association agitating for one thing or the other. Such groups agitate for political, ideological, racial, ethnic and religious interests of their peoples and groups. It is pertinent to note that there are long-standing issues that have paved way for terrorist activities in Nigeria, and until these issues are resolved, Nigeria will continue to struggle to contain terrorism; with the type of terrorism, Nigeria is witnessing presently, where terrorists are ready to die with their victims. Nigeria today has become a theatre of genocide, bloodshed, and insecurity over the past few years due to carnage activities of terrorist groups. Terrorists of different groups and camps unleash havoc on the Nigerian populace. Though these groups are numerous, the most deadly is the Boko Haram sect. Recent events are an indication of emerging security trends in form of terrorism and terrorist group attacks in Nigeria. The upsurge of terrorism engineered by Boko



Haram poses grave security challenges to the nation and summons on the part of the law and security agencies synergy of strategies to combat the situation. The terrorist acts of the Boko Haram since 2009 have created a state of palpable fear in Nigeria; while the helpless posture of government is worrisome.

The Boko Haram insurgency poses a severe threat to national security and socio-economic life in present day Nigeria. The consequences of its violent activities of wanton destruction of lives and properties, suicide bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, abductions and palpable fear and suspicion it generates among Nigerians are weakening structures of the society causing anomie condition as it affects every facet of life, threatening the social well-being of the Nigerian people in an already overstretched and polity. According to Adesoji and Onuoha(2011), "Boko Haram can be understood as an Islamist insurgency that has risen from political and religious discontent within Nigeria. This extremist sect threatens the security, sovereignty, and stability of Nigeria, particularly Northern Nigeria by a range of high-profile attacks on the military, police, schools, political figures and other infrastructure. Boko Haram led by Mohammed Yusuf who championed the sects extreme doctrine since its emergence in 1992, and whose driving objectives largely relates to waging war against the Nigerian law enforcement agents; with a view to establishing a wrongfully perceived 'pure religious state' with their so called brand of shariah, which most Muslims do not actually subscribe to; and perceived their action to describe them as rejection and throwback. Moreover, Boko Haram's wishful thinking as pointed out by Walter is to overthrow the constitutional government of Nigeria, with the aim of replacing it with their own brand of Islam in a Sharia state. He went on to say that the national and state assemblies according to Boko Haram's doctrine are to be headed by a Sharia council of Ulama. The forces that fought Maiduguri, the capital of Bornu state were drawn from peasant families and had been given pieces of land to reside and in the end almost consumed the people.



Factors Associated with Boko Haram Insurgency

Socio-economic factors were the major influences responsible for the insurgency. These ranged from poverty, joblessness, bad governance occasioned by leadership deficit, corruption, deception, and injustice seemed as the root causes of the insurgency. According to Bintube(2015), a blatantly weak governance, the existence of private militias, as well as large presence of almajiris who were usually used to ignite and sustain crisis in Borno, is another factor responsible for Boko Haram. Moreover, parents nonchalant attitude of not being conscious of their children's movement and the kind of clerics they associate with in the quest to learn, contribute as a factor. The children follow groups like that of Boko Haram in good faith in order to learn more about their religion, unfortunately, get trapped as they fall into wrong hands.

Conclusion

Ethno-religious violence has created an atmosphere of negative peace in Nigeria caused by intolerance, frustration, poverty, joblessness, bad governance and the likes. It is discovered that lack of tolerance for one another cause groups to become engulfed in crisis. Religious identity in itself is not evil, but the way people use it to relate with others can cause negative reactions; using religion to demonize society can lead to deadly violence.

This work discussed the nature and key causes of violence between herdsmen, ethnic groups and terrorists in Nigeria. The resurgence of ethnic conflicts gave birth to ethnic militias in Nigeria with different security implications considering the attributes of the groups and individuals involved.

Other causes of the violence include marginalization, corruption, victimization, the breakdown of traditional institutions and the use of the military troops in managing conflict. There should be provision for enough funds to procure modern gadgets and train enough security personnel to curb any ugly incidence of ethno-religious violence. Providing jobs for the youths that are unemployed particularly in the Northern part of Nigeria can go a long way in curbing any kind of violence.



Recommendations

Recommendations on ways forward on what should be done in order to eradicate ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria is discussed here. Though, the government of Nigeria needed the concerted efforts of all meaningful and reasonable citizens to achieve its aim in eradicating the threat of terrorism and herdsmen activities. The government on his part should learn to be transparent and people at the helms of affairs in the country should be responsible and responsive to the populace. They should conduct themselves in an open-door policy. It is the government's insensitivity to the needs of the masses and introduction of unpopular policies among the populace that often result to violence. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure that policies to be implemented are in the best interest of the beneficiaries of such policies. This amounts to carrying along the masses during the process of formulating such policies. There should be enough and proper consultations before implementing any serious decision that has direct bearing on the masses. This can checkmate violence in form of misunderstanding.

For example, the activities of the Boko Haram were not given a serious attention by the government initially before 2009. Reason has been based on assumption that Boko Haram was harmless because it started as an Islamic organization whose teachings were the purification of Islam and it was not the only one with the same objective in the Northern axis of Nigeria. The government insensitivity and inability to monitor the activities of Boko-haram did not allow the government to see the early warning signs in order to prevent the outbreak of the crisis. This also happens in other conflicts that have threatened the peace of Nigeria. Efforts are still on with the view of trying to dialogue with Boko Haram for peace to reign in which this paper can say the turn out for the dialogue by this present government, has been very low due to the fact that this present government is romancing with the Fulani herdsmen in a way because none of these herdsmen that had attacked different cities had been brought to book. It is hoped that with the destruction of the main base of the sect in Borno state, they will have to surrender to the Federal military forces. Furthermore, the Government still needs to put an end to the crisis over farmers and herdsmen problems in different parts of Nigeria. The law guiding land ownership should be



explicit on right and privileges of all Nigerians. Nobody should be denied of his or her right of residence in any part of Nigeria but the rights of different ethnic groups should also be protected. Land is probably the most important resource needed by man for his daily existence because human livelihoods or activities are dependent on land directly or indirectly. Farmers and herdsmen conflict should be addressed through educational intervention. Awareness should be created concerning land use regulations and the benefits of the need for peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding.

Traditional rulers/leaders should be involved in finding permanent solutions to farmer/herdsmen violence. The government did nothing about the eerie alarm raised by an ex General in the Army in person of Ajibola Togun that some foreign Fulani herdsmen and bandits of Tuareg extraction have perfected plans to invade some communities in the south west, masquerading as pepper sellers and commercial motorcyclists. Togun had revealed that "There would soon be a problem in the Southwest. These foreign Fulani herdsmen would soon come for the purpose of taking over Nigeria. This is because they (Fulani) have the backing of some people in government to take over Nigeria as a heritage that Allah has given them." The person of General Togun, a military intelligentsia should not have been ignored by a responsible government; but they did nothing until invaders struck in Igangan in Ibarapa North Local Government of Oyo State in June 2021.

The government of Oyo State, under the leadership of Seyi Makinde, promised that the recent attack and killings carried out by suspected killer herdsmen would not repeat itself, but because there was no follow-up, it happened repeatedly. The presidential aloofness at this time is not the way to justice; some residents even claimed to have seen a helicopter dropping firearms to bandits in the forest.

The government needs to ensure the provision of essential welfare needs of the people and this must be spread throughout the nation. It is noted that violence often erupted as a means of agitation for basic needs of life such as good roads, electricity, potable water, well-equipped hospital and the likes. It is believed that ethno-religious violence can be reduced drastically if not



eradicated completely if these recommendations are upheld and implemented. In sum total, as discussed earlier terrorism is goal-directed though may as well be corrective, it is also devastating and should, therefore, be eradicated. Though ethno-religious violence, terrorism are not new in Nigeria, many variables that support its development is manifested in the country. Therefore, the problem of ethno-religious violence, herdsmen/farmers or land owners and terrorist phenomena are not just hoax but real.

There is the need to embrace African way of life which is 'live and let's live' as a country, the place of tolerance must be swayed away, we must learn to love each other without any biased mind, through this, violence, crisis among others will become the things of the past in Nigeria.

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