ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA

A Festschrift For Victor Ojakorotu

Kelechi Johnmary Ani, Editor

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Academica Press
Washington-London

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Dedication
This study is dedicated to all active ambassadors of peace in Africa.
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Foreword
It is a great priviledge for me to be requested to pen down the
following few words in honour of one of the greatest academic and peace
activist of our time, Prof. Victor Ojokorotu. Let me hasten to say that the
Gods of Afrika have once again, been able to offer us a gift in the person
of Prof. Ojakorotu. His commitment to the development of Africa cannot
be more appropriate at this juncture when the continent is undergoing
some paradigmatic changes with regard to leadership and socio-economic
development. In his writings and activism, Prof. Ojakorotu fulfills what
Bantu Steven Biko wrote in his essays and I quote:
"It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is if you
realise that the only vehicle for change are these people
who have lost their personality. The first step therefore is
to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life
into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity,
to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing
himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign
supreme in the country of his birth." ~ Steven Biko.
Prof. Ojakorotu is an epitome of what Biko exemplified in the
above quotation. In his writings and editorials, he continues to show his
God given talent and also uses it to benefit Africa as a whole. Furthermore,
He is following in the footsteps of Dr. Kwame Nkruma, who once said the
following about Africa:
"Those who would judge us merely by the heights we
have achieved would do well to remember the depths
from which we started." ~ Kwame Nkrumah.
In writing more about development and peace, Prof. Ojakorotu
echoes the sentiments of Nkruma. We need academic of his stature to
make sure that Africa and the African people are no more disregarded and
humiliated. He forms the bastion of those current generation of leaders and
peoples of Africa who are called forth to pick up the flickering torch of
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African freedom, and to "refuel it with their enthusiasm and determination,
and carry it forward (to quote from Julius Nyerere).
Prof. Ojakorotu is one such example of the present academic
leader that Ntate Nyerere spoke about. He started from humble beginning
as a Graduate Assistant and swiftly rose to full Lecturer at the Department
of International Relations, Ile Ife, in Nigeria between 1995 and 2002. His

academic leadership saw him traversing South African universities such as the University of Kwazulu Natal, the North West University, Mafikeng Campus since 2011, to date. He is presently a full Professor at the North West University.

In Nigeria, at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, to be precise, he coordinated Special Elective Courses in the Faculty of Administration, 1995-2001 and became the Secretary of the Faculty Examination Committee and further went on to become the Coordinator of Africa Modules from 2007-2012 at Monash University. His dedication to the development of Africa saw him directing the school of Government Studies for Mafikeng Campus with excellence and further presented his Inaugural Lecture titled "Curing the Affliction: From the Oil Curse to Sustainable Development in Africa's Petro-States'", a lecture that shed light on the plight of the under-class in Africa.

Professor Ojakorotu went on to juxtapose issues of development in the African context, with those of Gender and behavior and as such, became the editor of the journal which is dedicated to eradicating gender based violence and gender discrimination especially in Africa. The Institute for Gender and Youth Studies at the University of Venda is very much indebted to this journal (and Prof. Ojakorotu in particular) as it continues to be our mouthpiece in exposing toxic masculinities, patriarchal relationships as well as hegemonic masculinities that continue to stalk our African communities. Through Prof. Ojakorotu, the journal further seeks to expose the scourge of gender-based violence which has become endemic. Information from different countries indicates that 35 per cent of all women have been physically or sexually abused by an intimate or nonintimate partner. While women across the globe fall victim to physical or sexual violence every day, African women are particularly vulnerable in this regard. African countries have some of the highest levels of physical Foreword xiii and sexual violence against women, as postulated in the editorials of Prof. Ojakorotu. May our African ancestors continue to bless him and to give him more years in service of his people.

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Chapter Twelve

Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Insecurity in Nigeria

Oyibo Goddey Onwuka

Introduction

Nigeria, by virtue of the amalgamation of 1914, became an embodiment of diverse ethnic and religious groups. The amalgamation brought the Southern and the Northern Protectorates with over three hundred ethnic groups together as one country. They came together with their diverse cultures, tradition, customs and religions into an entity called Nigeria. Nwaoga Nche and Olihe (2014) noted that this epoch-making amalgamation was unfortunately done without the consent of the people; hence, it has been variously criticized by many Nigerians and non-Nigerians.

The lumping together of various peoples into one country has made her to be caught-up in the vortex of intractable conflicts and wars fought along ethnic and religious lines. Nigeria as a country has experienced many devastating and traumatic conflicts in different parts of the country. Some of these conflicts have shaken the very foundation of the country that some even threatened to secede from the federation. The threat to secede because of conflict is however not a recent development in the political history of Nigeria. It happened in 1953 when Chief Anthony Enahoro moved a motion for independence. In the crisis that followed, the Northern region threatened to secede. That was before independence.

Soon after independence, there was a major political crisis which led to the first military coup in Nigeria. The crisis escalated and led to the

secession of the eastern region as the Republic of Biafra. The events that followed gave birth to a brutal civil war that lasted for two and half years, before eastern region was reintegrated into the country. The effects of that war have not been forgotten in the mind of Nigerians especially from the Eastern part of the country. In 1993, when the June 12, presidential election was annulled, Nigeria boiled as there was threat that the western part of the country would secede and Nigeria will be no more. But that did not happen.

None of these conflicts mentioned is as delicate and all-embracing as ethno-religious conflict which is the focus of this article. Conflicts are related to religion when some of its protagonists are religious organizations, mainly churches or Islamic groups or when the protagonists have strong religious affiliations. In this case the stakeholders advocate a religious agenda. Ethno-religious conflicts cut across borders, tribes and it divides families where there are different religious beliefs. Even political conflicts in Nigeria are given ethnic or religious interpretations thereby promoting faith-based sentiments. There are three major religions in Nigeria. These include Islam, Christianity and traditional religion. Among these religions, Islam and Christianity are always at 'war' with each other. Nigeria was rated the most religious country in the world in 2004.

With ninety percent of the population believing in God, praying regularly, attending religious services and affirming their readiness to die on behalf of their belief (World Religious News, 2004). According to Ogunbado (2008), in Nigeria, most Hausa – Fulani in the North are Muslims, most Ibo people in the South-East are Christians, while the Yoruba people in the South West are both Muslims and Christians with Muslims slightly in the majority.

Ethno – Religious Conflict

Wikipedia defines ethno-religious group as an ethnic group whose members are also unified by a common religious background. Salawu (2010) defines ethno-religious conflict as 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, fear and a tendency

towards violent confrontation. The major difference between ethnoreligious conflict and other social or political conflict is that ethnoreligious conflict involves ethnic groups which are of different religious

beliefs.

The history of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era. Though the purpose then may be different from what obtains now. The first known ethno-religious conflict in pre-colonial Nigeria was the jihad of Uthman dan Fadio in 1804. The Jihad led to the conquest of the pre-colonial Hausa States and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Jihad also led to the overthrow of Hausa kings and the enthronement of Fulani Kings. Islamic religion was introduced and it replaced traditional religion in Hausa land. The jihad later spread to the pre-colonial Yoruba States of South West Nigeria, as they were also conquered and Islamic religion was introduced there. Though this is not a forum to discuss everything about the Jihad of Uthman dan Fofio, suffice to say that it had economic, social and political causes. The Jihad also had ethnic and religious characteristics as the Fulani Muslims took up arms against the adherents of African Traditional Religion in Hausa land.

Odeh (2005) noted that ethno-religious hostilities, tribal and communal conflicts have become seriously dangerous with their attendant barbaric act, threatening the unity and stability of Nigeria as a nation. This situation is compounded because sometimes political anarchists hide under religious umbrella to settle or showcase unresolved issues. They use religion because of its volatile nature. Thus, a conflict that begins as an ethnic or political conflict may end up as a religious conflict. It will not be possible to mention all the ethno religious conflicts that have taken place in Nigeria, but some of them as presented by Toyin Falola (1999) that occurred between 1980 and 1996 include in 1980, the Maitatsine crisis claimed thousands of lives (the government conservatively estimated the death toll at just over four thousand) and caused millions of naira in property damage. On the last day of October 1982, eight large churches were burned in the prominent city of Kano. A major riot in Kaduna that same year claimed at least four hundred lives. In 1984, violence sparked by Muslims in Yola and Jimeta killed approximately seven hundred people (including policemen) and left nearly six thousand people homeless. In the

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first week of February 1986 at Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, Palm Sunday turned disastrous as Christians clashed with Muslims, leading to the destruction of three churches.

In March 1987, Christians and Muslims in key northern towns and cities such as Kaduna, Katsina, Zaria, and Kafanchan clashed with devastating consequence. In 1988, Christians and Muslims turned the

Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria into a battlefield on which a hundred people were injured and one person lost his life. In 1991, the religious crisis in Bauchi State reached the breaking point, leading to numerous deaths and massive destruction. In 1992, large scale violence returned to Kaduna State, with severe clashes in Zangon-Kataf, Kaduna, and Zaria. Two 1994 incidents in Kano and Sokoto revived the tension. In May and June 1995, a new crisis erupted in Kano, sparking sporadic attacks on Christians and southerners. In May 1996, eight people lost their lives when police clashed with a group of Muslim students.

The rate of increase in ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria in recent times has made it a topical issue of discussion in conferences and workshops organized by scholars. This is in an attempt by proffer solution to the ugly trend and give other nations of the world that are multi-ethnic and multi-religious in their composition an opportunity to learn lessons. Religion is so sensitive, powerful, co-extensive with life and a controlling influence in human existence has been used to mar rather than make our nation Nigeria. Thus, religious faithful commit heinous violent crimes and acts in the name of their 'god' by slaughtering innocent souls and destroying property (Alamu, 2004). It is important to note as Adebayo (2010) pointed out that no religion teaches violence and shedding of innocent blood. Rather every religion teaches endurance, peaceful coexistence,

and neighbourliness, sanctity of life and protection of property.

If this is the case, it means that all religions have their common meeting place especially when it comes to virtues. What then are the causes of ethno – religious conflict if all have good virtues?

Causes of Ethno Religious Conflict

The causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are multifarious. Before identifying some of these causes, it is important to point out that it

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is not a recent development in the political history of Nigeria. It existed in pre-colonial era, though the purpose then may differ from what obtains now. The Uthman dan Fodio Jihad of 1804 which led to the conquest of the pre-colonial Hausa States and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate was ethno-religious in nature. The Hausa Kings were overthrown and Fulani Kings enthroned while Islam replaced traditional religion. The Jihad later spread to South- west where the Yoruba States were conquered and Islamic religion was introduced. Among the causes of that Jihad were religious fanaticism, economic opportunism, political adventurism and tribal parochialism (in the case of Abiola). In recent times

however the purpose may differ but elements of the remote causes of the jihad are replicated in the contemporary causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

One of the causes of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria today is lack of good governance. A situation where leaders fail to make good policies that will promote economic and national integration, many citizens of that state will lack employment and hence remain poor. An idle mind they say is the devil's workshop. Therefore idleness and poverty can lead many into unimaginable crime. The poor and unemployed are ready tools in the hands of religious warmongers. Omipidan (2010) while commenting on the ethno-religious conflicts in northern Nigeria noted that all these problems would have gone if only the money realized by the northern governors within the last eight years were used to improve the agricultural sector as well as create few industries that would have employed many graduates we produce every year from universities, polytechnics, and other tertiary institutions. Being poor and unemployed, some of these people feel they have nothing to lose if they die and so are ready to offer themselves for any cheap means of getting ends meet. They are ready to be recruited to fight in a battle they never knew the cause without minding the consequences. They are ready to kill and or be killed provided there is a promise attached to their actions. The activities of members of Boko Haram involved in suicide bombing are a case in point.

British colonial legacy is also a factor to be considered in identifying the causes of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state with over 250 ethnic groups and

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many religious beliefs. These ethnic groups were amalgamated in 1914 in such a way that a rough estimate, will show the Hausa-Fulani as making up approximately 35% of the population, Yoruba and Igbo 25% and 20% respectively while the remaining 20% is made up of the minorities spread all over the country (Anugwom, 2000). In terms of religion, most Hausa-Fulani in the north are Muslims and most Igbo people in the South-east are Christians while Yoruba in the Southwest are both Muslims and Christians with Muslims slightly in the majority (Osunbado, 2008). Practitioners of the African Traditional Religion are spread among all the ethnic groups while some are involved in mixed worship.

During the colonial era, the colonial administration noticed the ethno-religious incompatibility and discouraged intermingling of religions. The colonial Governor, Donald Cameronn in 1931 advised the

Christian Missions to thread softly in Muslim areas so as to maintain the stability of indirect rule. This in effect shows the colonial masters knew they were planting a time bomb that was due to explode after their departure.

The indigenous ruling elites that took over governance of the state lacked the vision to forge a united entity out of the mosaic of nationalities welded together by British colonialism. Instead of protecting national interests, the elites concentrated on sectional interest in order to perpetually legitimize their privatization of national resources under the pretence of representing the people's interest (Aduba 2012). Hence no sooner had the colonial administrators left than the 'time bomb' started exploding. It was first noticed during the first military coup of January 15, 1966. The nature of killings in the January 1966 coup was interpreted as Christian South against the Muslim North or Igbo coup against the North. The reason for such interpretation was because most of the army officers that planned and executed the coup were Igbo and most of the Igbo political leaders like Nnamdi Azikiwe were not killed while Balewa and Mohammed Bello from the north were killed. The July 1966 coup was like a revenge by the Muslim north against the Christian south.

Government actions sometimes also lead ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. For example the introduction of *Sharia* in Zamfara State and some parts of northern Nigeria elicited crisis in those states. The crisis started

from none adherents of the Islamic faith upon which the Sharia is based. Nigeria is a secular state where all citizens are free to practice their own religion without intimidation. Therefore, imposing a religious law on a people is likely to cause conflict especially on the non-adherent of such a religion.

Wrong interpretation of the holy books also cause ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. Some religious leaders who claim to have knowledge of the holy books sometimes interpret the holy book to suit their selfish end. By so doing they capitalize on the ignorance of unsuspecting followers and transform them into religious fanatics.

The method adopted for spreading the religious beliefs to none adherents could lead to a religious conflict. The religious crisis in Kano in 1991 was caused as a result of a planned crusade by a renowned German evangelist, Richard Reinhard Bonnke. The planned crusade tagged 'Kano for Jesus' led to riots by the Muslims in Kano. The Muslims claimed that the then Kano State Governor had earlier denied a Muslim preacher from South Africa the opportunity to preach in Kano, thus there was no rational

for a Christian to come preaching there.

Misconception in religious beliefs leading to deviation from the teachings of the founders of Christianity and Islam is another cause of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. The Christians' holy book, the Bible made it clear in Exodus 20: 13, where it stated 'thou shall not kill'. Even the Quran of the Muslims does not encourage its adherents to kill in the name of religion, it is true that Islam teaches that if a Muslim dies in the course of Jihad, paradise is the reward but how do you define a jihad? If you are killed innocently, for no just cause, the Quran says heaven is your reward but not when you arm yourself with bomb and take your life with that of others it is a straight way to hell (Amori 2012).

Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Conflict does no man any good. Ethno-religious conflicts are almost inevitable in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like Nigeria. Ethno-religious conflict leads to loss of human and material resources. Ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has led to the loss of thousands of lives. Gaer, Felice *et al* (2010) in their report on the US Commission on

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International Religious Freedom claims that 12,000 Nigerians have been killed in sectarian and communal attacks as well as reprisals between Christians and Muslims from 1999 up to 2009. The number killed may even be more because sometimes official figures of victims in time of conflicts are often reduced. This excludes the number of people wounded and displaced during conflicts. NIPSS (2004) reports of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria noted that in addition to the irreplaceable loss of lives, some survivors have permanently lost all they labored for in their lives. New armies of the unemployed, the destitute and highly aggrieved are added in the streets with its attendant consequences.

Properties worth billions of naira are destroyed during conflicts and some victims among them are no longer able to raise capital to start their businesses anymore. In this state of insecurity, potential investors will flee with their capital to establish in areas that have relative security. Commenting on the effect of Boko Haram activities in Northern Nigeria, Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) noted that the indiscriminate and sporadic bombing seem to make Northern Nigeria increasingly unsafe and has compelled most non-indigenes of the region to relocate especially the Igbo. Many from various ethnic groups also joined the Igbo people in the mass exodus while businesses and other economic activities in the areas affected, suffered drastically.

Ethno-religious conflicts also lead to civil disturbances and social insecurity. It breeds an atmosphere of fear and inter-ethnic distrust, suspicion and destructive rivalry among ethnic and religious groups in the country. It also triggers ethnic sensitivities and this pose a serious threat to peace, progress and national integration.In fact the impact of ethnoreligious conflict in Nigeria can be summed up in the words of Chief Obasanjo (2004), Nigeria's former president in his nationwide broadcast after the ethno-religious crisis in Jos. He started that violence has reached unprecedented levels and hundreds have been killed with much more number wounded or displaced from their homes on account of their ethnic or religious identification, schooling for children has been disrupted and interrupted. Businesses lost billions of naira and property worth much more destroyed. Visitors and investors have fled and are fleeing Plateau Chapter Twelve 205

State and the neighboring states have had their economics and social life disrupted and dislocated by the influx of internally displaced persons.

Recommendations

Our study has revealed that ethno-religious conflicts are without being pessimistic inevitable in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like Nigeria. In view of the damage it has done to the social and economic life of the nation, successive governments have tried to eliminate it without success. The frequency of its occurrence and the destructions associated with it is challenging to the government. Previous adhoc management strategy of drafting armed forces and the police to conflicts zones have not been very efficient and successful because the troops sent in most cases lacked the training needed for effective resolution of the conflicts.

In the light of the above, government efforts should be geared towards conflict prevention rather than conflict management and resolution. This will help to minimize the rate of occurrence and the huge cost of conflict resolution. Towards this end, government should put in place security men in every state trained and armed with modern security facilities that will enhance quick response to any ethno-religious conflict in their areas of jurisdiction.

A coalition between the government, religious organizations, security men and other stake holders should be put in place to dialogue with the aim of finding out the causes and possible remedies to ethno - religious conflicts in Nigeria. Good governance should be promoted at all levels of government. When there is no good government, the ruling elites can manipulate the youths into ethnic and religious wars. Therefore a transparent and accountable government should be introduced in the

country.
Employment opportunities should be created for the army of
unemployed youths in the country. When the youths are gainfully
employed they will not be ready tools in the hands of mischief makers for
it is the idle mind that is the devil's workshop.
Government should introduce free and compulsory education at
the primary and secondary school levels. This will help to reduce the high
level of illiteracy among the youths who are used by selfish individuals to
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achieve their selfish goals. Education will enable the youths know the
implications of involving themselves in conflicts. Education will expose
to the youths several other peaceful means of resolving conflicts, rather
than resorting to violence. This in effect will help reduce the rate of
occurrence of violent conflicts in the country.Nigerians must be
committed both personally and collectively to peace, unity and show
respect for human rights. They must work towards attaining these goals
and learn to appreciate the virtues of dialogue.

Conclusion

The task of nation building is a very challenging one, especially
in a multi-ethnic and multi -religious nation like Nigeria. In Nigeria as it
is in other multi-ethnic and multi-religious states, religion has been shown
to be an issue in many conflicts. Some conflicts which started as ethnic
conflicts end up being ethno-religious, especially in the northern parts of
the country. The study identified some government actions, wrong
interpretations given to religious books, the fanaticism associated with the
method of spreading religious beliefs and misconception of religious
beliefs as some of the major causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.
The paper noted that ethno-religious conflicts have caused a lot of damage
to national development. Many human and material resources that would
have aided the social and economic transformation of the country were
lost to ethno-religious conflicts. People now live in suspicion, fear and
insecurity in different parts of Nigeria. There is lack of trust among the
various ethnic groups. The paper conclude that good governance, creation
of job opportunities, introduction of free and compulsory primary and
secondary education and respect for fundamental human rights of citizens
will go a long way in reducing the rate of occurrence of ethno-religious
conflicts in Nigeria.

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