




Ethnicity and Religion as the Breeding Grounds for Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country that is constantly afflicted with the problems of ethnic and religious tensions and bickering. These two variables are, ethnicity and religion, midwives, the problems of ethnic nationalism, sectionalism, and religious pluralization, and all these inadequacies contributed to the steady epileptic political instabilities that usually occur as fearful experiences in Nigeria. Thus, the presence of ethnicity and religion in Nigeria contributes to different forms of insecurity in Nigeria, namely kidnappings, conflicts, destruction of public properties, the killing of innocent people, and the institutionalisation of many forms of criminalities. The paper tries to investigate the causes of a dependable solution to it. Then, to execute the task of writing this paper the researchers adopted the descriptive research design and phenomenological approach. Information for the research was stimulated via subordinate and foremost sources. The research uncovered that ethnic jingoism and religious bias endure in the country because it is contemplated that some political figures use ethnicity and religion to cause flux in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Ethnicity, Nigeria, Insecurity

Introduction

Nigeria is a country of about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. Unfortunately, ethnicity and religion in Nigeria serve as avenues for the hatching, breeding, and incubating of insecurity in Nigeria. Ethnicity is an occurrence that has become problematic in the country. Because of the repulsive nature of ethnicity, it has enthroned the social problems of tribalism, nepotism, and a lack of true nationalistic and patriotic spirit in the lives of many politicians. For instance, ethnicity is said to be “responsible for the downfall of the first republic of Nigeria” (Asadu 2017:280-283). Because of the ethnic politics and deep-seated corruption that characterized the government of the first republic, it ushered in the first military coup and subsequent counter-military coups in Nigeria. All these anomalies culminated in the famous Nigeria Biafra civil war 1968-1970. Highlighting the danger of ethnic politics, Ezeani (2014:23-27) notes that “it was a war that started, based on ethnic hatred and sentiments. Since, then till now, ethnicity has become part and parcel of the political genetic makeup of the Nigerian state”.

As the nation is still struggling from the wounds that ethnicity inflicted on her nationhood, another problem rears its ugly head in the name of religion. Nigeria is a heterogeneous society that advocates for the freedom of worship as enshrined vividly in the corpus of Nigerian laws. According to Ugwu (2021:6), religion “is perceived as the structure of confidence or devotion of God or gods, or level a belief scheme that contracts with faith, doctrines, dogmas, and religious persuasions that attach one to the Superlative Existence or the kingdom of celestial realism”. Unfortunately, there are still certain noticeable abuses that one can notice in the practice of religion. This abuse automatically makes religion the vehicle some extreme religious fanatics or fundamentalists unleash unimaginable sorrows, heartbreaks, and frustrations on their fellow human beings. This has been partly the story of Nigeria as far as religious troubles are concerned.

For instance, the dreaded sect known as Boko Haram has the intention of outright transforming Nigeria from a material state to a sacred state where the tenets of Islamic laws, spirituality, and principles reign supreme. Thus, its members reject any form of Western education is attainable. This terrorist group (ie Boko haram) started as a mustard seed that underwent certain metamorphosis before emerging as a renowned global (international) terrorist organization. Today, “its nefarious activities are characterised in the forms of bombings, kidnappings, destruction of properties, and the like. It is known throughout the world, and they have a strong set of ideologies, and beliefs that resemble those of other terrorist groups in the world” (Onuoha, 2014:3). Beyond the Boko Haram issue, other forms of religious violence exist in Nigeria. Although this is sometimes clothed with ethnicity, it remains a fact that religiously motivated violence is a problem in Nigeria.

In light of the above, the researchers affirm that ethnicity and religion have presented the country with steady pre-natal problems of insecurity and tensions. Therefore, the problems of ethnicity and religious upheavals are two variables that this research tries to address. The havoc these variables cause in Nigeria is always fresh in the minds of Nigerians. Needless to say, the fact that this havoc caused by ethnicity and religion is setting the country in the wrong and antagonistic direction of fighting each other. For the proper execution of this research, the researcher employed the descriptive research design and a phenomenological method. Armed with these tools, the writers are now empowered to first describe the nature of racial and sacred bickering in Nigeria. In accumulation to this, the writers hope to make the readers of the article understand the extent of the havoc that these variables (i.e. ethnicity and religion) have on Nigeria.

2. Ethnicity as a Catalyst of Destabilization of Unity in Nigeria

Ethnicity is an old Phenomenon that portrays or showcases itself as an unwanted colossus or an uninvited visitor that transverses within the length and breadth of the defined territorial boundaries of

Nigeria. The implication of this is that ethnicity functions as a catalyst that quickens the spread of violence, crises, lawlessness, tensions, arson, and insecurity in Nigeria. Amidst these obvious inadequacies that are inherent in ethnicity, it still has its strengths that if properly harnessed will contribute to the promotion of love, peace, unity, national integration, tolerance, understanding, true nationalistic and patriotic spirit imbued or internalized made to manifest in the lives of Nigeria citizens, promotion of the cultural and religious beliefs of each of the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria is inclusive.

Then because of the outright rejection of Nigerians to internalize the beautiful fruits or nuggets that ethnicity bestows on Nigeria nation, the consequence of this is that it produces an avalanche (harvests) baskets of social evils such as tribalism, nepotism, bribery, and corruption, and lack of true nationalistic and patriotic spirit in the lives of many Nigerians. These abnormalities (ailments), Nigerians pinpointed as constant variables that contribute to the steady epileptic political instability in Nigeria. The resultant effects of all these social evils are that they threaten the national bond, national integration, and socialization that Nigerians are supposed to enjoy in Nigeria.

The above reflections of Çanci and Odukoya (2013:8) inform that in Nigeria, “political parties are formed according to ethnic origins (i.e. groups) and affiliations that contribute greatly to the selling of Nigerian nation at a discount. This accounts for the emergency of unwarranted or undesired ethnic party politics that contributed seriously to weakening the foundational structure of our national edifice”. The above propositions were validated by Cohen (1968) as cited in (Canci et al. 1969) as follows: “The NPC (Northern People’s Congress) was established on the First Republic as Hausa-Fulani Party. Then, the N.C.N.C –National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon formed by Nnamdi Azikiwe was seen as Igbo political party. And finally, the Yorubas see themselves as the proved owners of A.G-Action group” (pp. 7-8). Because political parties are formed within ethnic groups or tribes in the first republic in Nigeria.

Thus, the polarization of the then-state partisan parties in the First Nation is ethnically based and this made the leaders of each of the political parties begin to develop each of their ethnic nationalities, implying that “Nigeria was alienated into three main areas- Eastern region (Igbo) Northern region- Hausa-Fulani, and Western region- Yoruba” (Eze et al 2018:2). Later on, the mid-Western region was added that comprises of Benin, Edo and Bendel states-as minority ethnic groups without thinking on how the whole parts of Nigeria will develop. This indicates that the introduction of a regional system of government or regionalism allowed each region to develop at the expense or the detriment of Nigeria as one nation. They were able to do this through the provision of social infrastructures, education, and provision of a conducive environment for the acquisition of skills and knowledge, the provision of good health facilities, the promotion of social, religious, and cultural values, economically, they empower their people through agricultural exploits and the likes.

Because of this partial empowerment by the introduction of regionalism as a system of government in Nigeria, Obafemi Awolowo (the premier or the party leader of the Action group) introduced the first television station in the whole of West Africa. And to introduce free education to his people, from primary school to tertiary institutions. And many students benefited.

Then, in the Eastern region, the N.C.N.C-National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe facilitated the provision of social amenities in the region (Igboland). Thus, the relevance of N.C.N.C was that the party used the income realized in the selling of agricultural products from palm products such as palm oil, palm kernel, and so on in the building of the second Federal University in Nigeria (after that of the University of Ibadan)- University of Nigeria, Nsukka that became the first autonomous university in Nigeria Asadu (2017:280-285).

The consequence or effects of all these is that it has entered the psyche of most people in Nigeria that anybody who acquires the power to rule this country

sees it as an opportunity for ethnic nationality that was neglected by previous administrations well now have their share of national development their area, at the detriment of other ethnic nationalities. In addition to this, they see it as their turn to steal or embezzle massively from the national treasure. Thereby, seeing themselves as the owners of the government, by showing a high rate of bribery and corruption that they display with impunity. This makes them to be sacred cows (i.e untouchables) because they run to the patronage of the laws enacted that give them protection not to be prosecuted or to suffer for the offenses that they committed. Thus, this supports the views of Lewis (2007:2) who pinpointed the root cause and the cancerous position of ethnicity in Nigeria as contributing to the unstable nature of our country he strongly expresses “that elected government in Nigeria supports ethnic chauvinism and accelerated ethnic division through the model of traditional or cultural norms”.

Ethnicity breeds notorious groups that persistently unleash terror in the Nigerian state. it was an ethnic rivalry that “provided natal to many pressure clusters such as the O’ dua People Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), Igbo People Congress (IPC), Arewa Peoples Congress (APC), and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)” (Eze et al 2018:2; Eze, 2016:14). These are not ethnic groups, but they are pressure groups that have ethnic origins and orientations. To pursue the interests of their different ethnic groups. “Since liberation, Nigeria has suffered a mass of ethno-religious clashes that produced loss of souls and destruction of property” (Hurd, 2024:1). Hurd went further and noted that “the ferocious nature of ethno-religious struggles, which often take the formula of unrests, disruption, killing, armed scuffles, insurgent rivalry and separation in Nigeria, have insinuations on the political and economic expansion of the state” (Hurd, 2024:1).

In Niger Delta, Militant groups have turned the government into a toy, and it has continued to hamper peaceful serenity in the area. Militancy

threatens the peace and security of the nation. Militant activities in Niger Delta are mostly motivated by deep-seated frustration caused by depriving the people right to enjoy the natural resources such as oil that are situated in their place. This denial pursues them to begin to destroy or attack the facilities of oil firms in their place to draw the attention of the government that they are serious.

A clear case of the instances between the nexus and insecurity in Nigeria was seen in the saga between the federal government and the renowned leader of IPOB-Nnamdi Kanu whom the central government accuses of igniting the fire of insecurity in Nigeria, especially in South-Eastern Nigeria. The nasty and nefarious activities of IPOB in southeastern Nigeria have attracted the attention of international activities. The massacring of the masses especially security personnel willful destruction of their properties and the obstruction of socio-economic activities have inflicted unbridled turbulence on the masses. Every “Monday” is presumably taken as a public holiday in the sense that people are not expected to go to the market, go to school, and go to work, everybody is expected to stay at home. The same scenario is obtainable in the Northern Nigeria. Boko haram in northern Nigeria and insecurity.

Religion instead of being an agent of unity has become an agent of division. And the religious sect that is notoriously known or identified for carrying out these mayhem or atrocities in Nigeria is Boko Haram. Then, collating the magnitude of the mayhem that these religious fanatics have caused us can be rounded up in the words of Agi (1996) cited in Udoh (2015) which he expressly noted that “religion has often been used as a tool for the destruction of life and properties and have often given rise to breakup of internal accord leading to foreign interference”(4).

In Nigeria specifically, the Boko Haram sect was not the originator of religious riots or insecurity. Religious revolt can be traceable to the Maitatsine revolution in 1980. Maitatsine’s name is identified as Mohammed Marwa, and he was a legendary Islamic prophet and vicar who wanted to infuse his irrelevant religious principles into Nigerians. Then,

etymologically, Maitatsine in Hausa dialects stands for or means the one who dams as “Yan-Tatsine-that is those who are destined to be saved”. They started attacking the places of worship of other religious bodies in Nigeria in 1980, and human lives which statistically were pitched at the neighborhood of five thousand persons were exterminated and properties valued millions of naira were ruined. This led to “the placement of the Nigerian Army that induced to infatuation the unstable spiritual revolt that arose” (Canci et al, 2013:11).

Presently, in Nigeria, there is an emergency of dread religious terrorist group that champions terrorism, chaos, anarchy, arson, and the deliberate termination of human lives. And the religious sect (or terrorist group) that carries out these nefarious activities is known as Boko Haram. Then, what is Boko Haram, what stages of its development and provenance of this groups, its activities, and effects in Nigeria?

What is Boko Haram? The word Boko Haram, in the view of Cook (2011) cited in Ugwuoke (2015:199) “is a combination of Hausa (Boko-Book) and Arabic (Haram-Evil) words which means Western education is bad or evil and is to be completely avoided or forbidden. Then, expounding more on the description of this religious sect”, Onuoha (2014) affirms Cook’s description of Boko Haram by saying:

Boko Haram Ideology is based on extreme Islamic teachings which reject most Western ideas and institutions as un-Islamic. This rejection earned the group its popular name: Boko Haram means “Western education is forbidden”. Its core objective is to replace the secular Nigeria state with a government that adheres to strict sharia law applicable throughout the entire country (3-4).

He aptly described this religious sect (i.e Boko Haram) by emphatically saying that this is a terrorist group (i.e Boko Haram) that started as a mustard seed, that underwent certain metamorphosis before emerging as a renowned global (international) terrorist organization whose trademark of nefarious activities characterized in the forms of bombings,

shootings, destruction of properties, assassinations or killings of perceived enemies and the likes. It is known throughout the world, and it has strong links in terms of ideologies, beliefs, and resemblance in their mode of operation with other sister terrorist groups like ISIS, ISWAP, and the like.

Then, concurring with the above propositions of Onuoha Boko Haram started as a mustard seed that underwent some metamorphosis and provenance that marvels everybody. Educating on this issue, Onuoha (2014:3) gives us a “historical narrative that captures the incubate stages of Boko Haram in Nigeria which he narrates as follows: that the actual era of the emergency of Boko Haram is not known”. But based on a common agreeable narrative the group traces its origin as far back as 2002. Then, Mohammed Yusuf, who was known as a gifted preacher (and Cleric) assumed the position of the leader. Then, another school of observers (i.e. Nigeria's intelligent community that comprises journalists, security personnel, army, navy, and the like) informs us that the true historical formation of Boko Haram goes as far back as 1995. When Abubakar Lawan founded the AhluSunnawal’ Jama’ ahijra or Shabaab group (i.e Muslim Youth Organization) in Maiduguri, Borno State. At this incubation stage, the organization or group existed as a non-violent movement. But it was not so again when Mohammed Yusuf assumed the leadership position of the group. Boko Haram in its infancy stage was identified or known with the following nomenclatures (i.e names) such as the Muhajirun, Hijrah, Ahlissunah waljama’a, Yusufiyyah, and Nigeria Taliban.

Onuoha (2014:4) in his historical narrative went on to inform that “the intrusion of the use (or spirit) of violence entered the curriculum of the sect or group as far back as 24th December 2003”. When the members of the religious sect attacked police barracks and public houses in the towns of Geiam and Kanamma in Yobe State. The Clandestine actions of the group reached a disturbing point when they were able or were successful in persuading students who were in higher institutions in 2004 in Borno and Yobe States and they stopped going to school. some even discarded or destroyed their

certificates. This implies that they rejected Western education, and they desired to be members of the Boko Haram sect, which the greater majority of them did.

Then, unfortunately, on 30th July 2009, Muhammed Yusuf was arrested in his place (i.e in his house) in Maiduguri. After staying for a few hours in the police facility, the law enforcement agent (i.e. Police) exterminated his life without any recourse to any law court to verify, examine, and convict him of all the atrocities that he was alleged to have committed. The police said that he was court-marshaled (or extra-judicially) exterminated when he was trying to escape from their facility. Thus, with the demise of Mohammed Yusuf, his die-hard assistant, Abubakar Shekau replaced him and assumed the leadership position of the group. He is the leader who revolutionized the incubating stage of Boko Haram and elevated it to be known within and outside the confines of Nigeria. therefore, posing a serious security threat whose nefarious activities send shivers of fear to the spine of every living thing that breaths in Nigeria.

The activities of this religious sect have diffused from its states of origin (Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, even to Abuja which Cummings (2014) cited in Onuoha (2014:4-5) did the narration of the nefarious activities that “the sect exhibited at Abuja the hub of the nation’s political power, on how they detonated a bomb that filled a car at a crowded motor park in Nyanya, an outskirt of the city of Abuja”. The effect of this mayhem or explosion extinguished the “lives of over seventy-one individuals, had twenty-four casualties and damaged more than forty cars. These bloody events happened on 14th April 2014” (p. 4-5). On this day, the members of the group forcefully went to a government boarding school in Chibok, Borno State, along the border with Cameroon, and Kidnapped over two hundred and fifty female students. This was shown in a video clip by Abubakar Shekau on May 5, 2014. And he threatens that the abducted girls are going to be auctioned by the members of Boko Haram. This wicked act of the Boko Haram sect towards, these defenseless female students attracted a lot of barrels of criticism to the

Nigerian government from international organizations like the United Nations Organization (U.N.O) and foreign countries like the United States, France and Foreign countries like the United States, France and so on. The emergency of this act of terrorism spurred the above-mentioned European countries to begin to help towards the release of the abductees in the form of technical arms and ammunition, sophisticated security gadgets, security advice, and the like. Thus, the act of abduction of these Chibok girls and their deliberate desire to bomb the United Nations headquarters, and Police headquarters in Abuja (Edet's building). All these barrels of terrorist attacks made the group globally known as one of the most dangerous terrorist gangs or groups in the world today.

The presence of Boko Haram in Nigeria resurrected (exerted) a lot of untold hardship effects or consequences in Nigeria and to the good Nigerian citizens. These unpalatable sorrows, anguish, and psychological trauma of Nigerians were succinctly captured by Human Rights Watch (2014) cited in Onuoha (2014: 7-8) that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reports that "no less than six million inhabitants of Borno Adamawa and Yobe states have been directly affected by the menace of the Boko Haram attacks. The volume of violence caused by the members of Boko Haram contributed adversely to the geometrical growth of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees an issue that is on the constant increase. Expounding more on the issue, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) fixed the number of IDPs in Nigeria at the approximate number of six hundred and fifty thousand victims or more".

4. Impact of Ethno-Religious Nationalism on the Socio-Economic Expansion in Nigeria

Predominantly, "ethnic chauvinism has meant continual danger to political stability and socio-financial growth in Nigeria. There are concerns and accusations all the time since the start of the fourth republic in Nigeria" (Ake, 2011:9). It has always posed a risk to democracy and decent governance. "this is because it is tasking to achieve democracy

in a country where there is political instability" (Oyedare, 2014:5).

Again, the occurrence of ethnic jingoism has given rise to the display of ethnic "mercenaries all over the country, such as Odudua People's Congress (OPC) for the Yoruba race, Arewa People's Congress (APC) for the Hausa/Fulani people, Bakassi Boys for the Igbo race and Egbesu Boys for the Ijaw population" (Aluko, 2014:27). These ethnic guerrillas have also meant an upsurge in the level of political ferocity, insurrections, and skirmishes, which consistently disturb the socio-economic expansion of the country" (Aluko, 2014:28). More also, Nnoli (2006:64) observes that "the interchange of ethnic xenophobia has in accumulation made the distribution of the national returns a much more unstable and complex issue".

Last, is the detachment of the municipal society in Nigeria. Oyadare (2014:51) contends that "Nigeria's problem is visible and hence reflects in the antagonistic nature of the civil society itself. The civil society in Nigeria is divisive most predominantly along ethnic, religious, and linguistic positions".

5. Solutions to the Problem of Insecurity in Nigeria

➤ The Nigerian government and its people will try as much as possible through the Ministry of Orientation Agency to enlighten the Nigerian citizens not to allow the evils inherent in ethnicity to become their sense of reasoning and social justice. Even those who are appointed to be in ministerial positions and those responsible for this will not allow a particular group to dominate the federal executive council judicial council of Nigeria and so on. Then, the members of these bodies like those that constitute the examination regulatory bodies such as JAMB, WAEC, NECO, Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), National Civil Service Commission, and so on) should not be drawn from one particular ethnic group. They should be people of impeccable character to the extent that they will not be involved in any case of fraud, bribery, or corruption.

- Nigerians are advised not to use the forum or the areas of religion to create crises or conflicts in Nigeria. Religion is supposed to be a veritable tool for the personal relationship with the Supreme Being. And is a recognizable force to reckon with in the binding and the communal happening of the individuals; and should not be used as an instrument of destruction, especially human life, and properties. To deepen more on this, the Nigerian government will sincerely advocate to the full the implementation of the principles of freedom of worship as stipulated in the Nigerian constitution. And will not allow one particular religious body to threaten the cooperative existence of other religious bodies.
- Then, the Nigerian security operatives are to be properly maintained. This can be done through prompt payment of salaries and allowances and other motivational incentives should be implemented by the government. Thus, the government should make an extra effort in investing capital to provide security outfits or attires for the security personnel in the army, navy, Air Force, police customs, and so on, for proper execution of services. And there will be proper maintenance of their place of habitation like barracks, offices, and the provision of office materials, and gadgets that will enable them to function properly.
- The Nigerian government should make a conscious effort to provide sophisticated arms and ammunition to its security personnel to enable them to be able to combat these masquerading terrorists and be able to suppress them.
- The Nigerian government through the legislature such as the Senate and the House of Representatives members at the federal level and members of the States House of Assemblies at the state levels are expected to enact laws that will guarantee the proper protection of lives and properties. The total ban on some groups of ethnic nationality from being allowed to carry around dangerous arms and ammunition in Nigeria, and even not be allowed to take their cattle to destroy the farm crops cultivated by the local farmers. And to the culprits, deserved punishment should be meted out for any herdsman who allowed his cattle to destroy any farmland. Then, to forestall this, the cattle are to be kept in an enclosed environment (i.e ranching). The enacting of these laws will bring positive development, security, concord, and understanding in Nigeria.
- The Nigerian government should try to provide modern security gadgets like CCTV cameras in strategic places or major cities, towns, and villages in Nigeria. Or that will be made available to cover the territorial boundaries that Nigeria had or shares with her neighbouring countries.
- Nigerians should be convinced to know that they do not have any other country apart from Nigeria. Because of this, they should make a collective effort to preserve the national bond of the nation called Nigeria and not allow religious fanatics or those who are biased or prejudiced to succeed in their divisive tendencies to destroy our national bond. This can be done or is realizable by making sure that the proper eschewing or the eradication of evils of ethnic politics, nepotism, bribery, and corruption will be made possible in Nigeria, and in conjunction with this, the political leaders will uphold the principles of the rule of law, and that of freedom of worship as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. Thus, all hands must be on deck, or everybody is invited to cooperate to save this nation from the hands of these titans. To add support to the proper realization of this dream, there is this clarion call that Nigerians will embrace the fruits of core values (that is inculcated in them) like patriotism, trust, accommodating, honesty, punctuality, tolerance, nonpartisan politics, discipline, oneness, and accountable. Then armed with these core values or inculcating them in Nigerians will enable or facilitate the dream of having a new Nigeria possible or attainable.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a country that is endemically sick and is suffering from many ailments- like ethnicity, religious bickering, tribalism, nepotism, bribery and corruption, insecurity, kidnappings, leadership tussles or problems, embezzlement of public funds, and so on. The implication of this is that Nigeria is a nation that is deeply affected by the above-mentioned inimical human-created activities that if, not properly checked will snowball to destroy or crumple Nigeria as a country. That is the reason the meticulous application of the solutions that the writers enumerated will go a long way in pleasing out the dark spots or the great harm that these sicknesses like ethnicity, religious tensions, tribalism, nepotism, bribery, and corruption, insecurity, kidnappings, and so on had done to Nigeria.

Conflict interest

The author(s) declares that he/she has no personal, professional or financial interest that may have inappropriately influenced the outcome of this research.

Ethical considerations

The author(s) declares that this article was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and principles for research.

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