ROLE OF THE STATE IN RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL MOTIVATED CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The central thrust of this paper is to trace the incidences of religious and political induced conflicts in Nigeria and analyze the role played by the state in ameliorating or aggravating the quarrels. The paper espouses the concepts of conflict, politics and religion and tried to locate areas of discord in a multi-cultural cum religious society-Nigeria. It is well known that Nigeria is facing serious religion insurgency which is all consuming; the role played by the state in the ongoing unrest is succinctly examined. The insistence of the government not to negotiate with the insurgent religious groups and thus constituted recalcitrant and intransigent on the part of the state and hence, aggravating the conflict. Also the paper unravels areas where politics has been introduced into the conflict, thus making the conflict intractable. The paper's conclusion is that for a peaceful resolution of religious and political motivated conflicts the state must be actively engaged through impartial and objective intervention in the crisis and the study shows that pacific rather than force is the quickest means to bring a lasting solution to the political/religious crisis facing the country.

Key words; religious sects, insurgency, prebendal politics, poverty, terrorism, conflict

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria with population of over one hundred and sixty million is the most populous country in Africa. It is a member of the organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) It has over 400 ethno linguistic setting with diverse religion affiliation but dominated by Islam and Christianity. However, most conflicts and crisis has manifested in religion championed most time by Muslims and Christians, especially in the Northern states.

Nigeria is a colonial created entity, came into existence in 1914 with the Amalgamation of the Northern and southern Protectorate. However, despite addressing the two entities as Nigeria, the two regions live under completely deferent Political, economy, social and religious orientation. Various efforts to keep the country as one have only succeeded in widening the gap between them. Some of the founding fathers of the nation have demonstrated the desire to be separate at one time or the other and a practical attempt was made at particular point in time (1967). When we viewed some of our first republic leaders' opinion of Nigeria, citing from Coleman's "Nigeria, Background to Nationalism*" where Awolowo a leading Action Group from the western Nigeria was quoted as saying*

that; "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh' or 'French' The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not". (Coleman 1964, Soyinka, 1996)

In the same vein a leader of the Northern elite, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa equally raised the question that; "*The southern tribes who are now pouring into the north in ever increasing numbers...do not mix with the northern people in social matters and we...look upon them as invaders. Since 1914 the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs, and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite. So what it comes to is that Nigerian unity is only a British intention in the country*". (Coleman 1964)

One can also quote the Sardauna of Sokoto (Sir Ahmadu Bello) who sees the Nigeria project as "the mistake of 1914" (Ejiogu, 2001, 1) Equally Dr Azikiwe the first President of Nigeria in 1960, was quoted asking Sir Ahmadu Bello" Bello let forget our differences of which the Sardauna of Sokoto answered no, let understand our differences."
Increasingly, since attainment of independence in 1960, various forces has been pulling the nation at both ends. At a point the political crisis in the western Nigeria after 1964 regional election culminated into the military coup of 1966. The fear of Islamic hegemony was alleged to have contributed to coup in January, against the northern dominated Federal Government. The Successive coups heighten ethnic and religious tensions and led to over 30 years of military rule. (Olsson, 2010) While the north actually felt that the Nigeria project should be jettison in the 'Araba' or secession of the Northern Region from the rest of Nigeria in 1966- resulting from General Ironsi Centralization of the country's polity (Ukegbu, 2011). Paradoxically the same northerners also fought assiduously to unites the country in the wake of Biafra secession in 1967-1970. (The Eastern region attempted to secede from the country)

Nigeria has faced many conflicts resulting from political issues right before independence. In later years, issues having religious undertone dominated the societal landscape. No election was ever conducted in Nigeria since 1965 without some skirmishes here and there most tending toward religious and sometimes ethnic division; 1979, 1983, 1993 up to 2011
Since 1999 however, the country has faced serious challenges arising from violent conflicts, whether religious, political, social, ethnic and environmental e.t.c. which is consuming more and more resources on a continuous basis. The most disturbing security challenges were does of the 2011 election and the Islamist Insurgence in the Northern part of the country.

The activity of the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, (Boko Haram) was most devastating in the history of religion and political conflict in the country since the end of civil war. As a result several face off have occurred between especially umbrella bodies of the two religions- Jama'atu Nasrul Islam (JNI), and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), to the extent that the CAN body wrote to the United States Secretary of State, Mrs. Clinton prior to her visit to Nigeria cataloguing series of attacks by the Islamist sect on Christians and their places of worship (the Sun 2012) in anticipation that the American would intervene in what is seemingly an internal conflict.

The conflict in the country is beyond the two main religions, as believer of both faiths suffered great attacks, while the Muslims receive the deadliest. Therefore the Government should look beyond the religiosity in the incidence and treat the insurgence group in isolation of the other muslims.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Despite the difficulty in defining politics a few sense can be made out of the various definitions polemics, for instance, Bernard crick sees politics as "activities having to do with efficient organization and judicious administration of collectives' affairs of an organized human community" (Crick, 1973, 19)

Politics was equally seen in the angle of power and influence, notably in line with Machiavelli (1469-1527) where power is generally understood "as ability backed by control of means of coercion, of an individual or institution to compel another person or group to accede to an action that is contrary to his interest". While influence on the other hand refers to the ability of a person to persuade another to agree to similar request based on advice or reasoned argument making him to change his mind.

Thus power and influence is an important concept in politics that may explain prevailing conflicts and crisis been experience in Nigeria. Because power is generally viewed by many political scientists as been the quintessence of political phenomenon. Hence at the bottom line of any conflict be it political, ethnic, social and religious e. t. c one can see a trace of politics

That is why David Easton definition of politics becomes paramount, when he conceives politics as "activities by which scarce collective resources and values such as wealth, status and position are allocated or distributed among member of a society" and that is why majority of conflicts in Nigeria; whether it take the form of religion, ethnic or social mostly occurs prior to or after elections

However, Politics can also be viewed as disagreements on issues, ideas, means and ends of a society. To Afolabi, (2008) politics is associated with disputes, competition and conflicts over methods and goals of society. Afolabi (2008) assumes that values and resources such as wealth, status and positions are scarce and can never be distributed to the satisfaction of all persons or group that wants them. In essences scarcity set off disputes, competition and conflicts just as we are witnessing in Nigeria today.

Conflict is endemic to all social life. It is an inevitable part of living because it is related to situations of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation. Because of its ubiquitous and pervasive nature, the concept has acquired a multitude of meanings and connotations presenting us with nothing short of a semantic jungle. Like other terms, conflict generates considerable ambivalence and leaves many scholars and administrators quite uncertain about (1) its meaning and relevance and (2) how best to cope with it. Woodhouse gives the definition of conflict as: " a situation that arise when individuals or groups identify a goal they want to secure in order to satisfy material interests, needs or values and these perceptions lead to actions that come up against the interests, needs and values of others (Woodhouse, 1)

On the other hand the Mial, Woodhouse and Ramsbotham define conflict as: "an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change, it is an expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs that arises as new formations generated by social change come up against inherited constraints" (Mial, Woodhouse and Ramsbotham, 1999)

Conflict is a dynamic process in which structures, attitudes and behaviours are constantly changing and influencing one another. A conflict emerges as parties' interests come into disagreement or the relationship they are in becomes oppressive. The parties then begin to develop hostile attitudes and conflicting behaviours. The conflict formation starts to grow and develops, thus the conflict may widened, deepened and spread. These complicate the task of addressing the original, core conflict. Eventually, resolving the conflict must involve a set of dynamic, inter-dependent changes that involve de-escalation of conflict behaviour, change in attitudes and transformation of relationships or structures (Woodhouse and Duffery, 2000)

Conflict according to Francis (2006) is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence; however, violent conflict is not inevitable and as such is an anomaly. Buttressing this view, Oyeshola observed that "conflict is common to all persons, yet experienced uniquely by individuals. It is a visible sign of human energy and often results of competitive striving for the same goal" (Oyeshola, 2005)

In their opinion the term conflict refers to "*a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural religious socio-economic, political or other) is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what appears to be incompatible goals*" (Dougherty and Platfgraff, 1971)

Igwe conceives conflict as, "*a universal and permanent attribute of nature, life and society, necessary and understandable when, in terms of dialectics they serve to advance the positive evolution of phenomena, and unnecessary and avoidable when irresoluble and their consequences are negative for society and man*". (Igwe, 2004) in support of this view, Foltz (1991) expressed the fact that conflict stems from the basic fact of human interdependence; he said for individuals to meet even their basic need they certainly depend on the active participation of other individuals. Foltz suggestion is based on the facts that conflicts may turn violet, violent is not an inherent aspect of conflict, but rather a potential form that conflict may take place.

One of the area that mostly brought people into conflict are in the view of Easton allocation of scarce resources in the case of Nigeria that is why conflict is so endemic and sometimes intractable. Ever since the nation became independence in 1960, how to share the nation's resources has continually brought the people into collision. Thus, the dimension usually takes different means, i.e. ethnic, regional, religion, and social conflicts as the case may be, but they all sprout from political only manifest in the aforementioned cases.

The word religion refers to any system of faith and worship, i.e. Muslim religion; Christian religion e.t.c. (Etete, 2010) defines it as "Recognition on the part of man of a higher power having control of his destiny hence can entitled obedience, reverence and worship" religion is concern with the relationship between the transcendent and man, and is perceived as an awesome but fascinating mystery to which man owes total submission and absolute obedience. It is the totality of man relationship to God. According to Microsoft Encarta (2009) sees religion as belief and worships, it portrays it as "people's beliefs and opinion

concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity … and divine involvement in the universe and human life".

One may ask if religion is total submission to the will of God; why then should believers fight each others. While religion seemingly simple to practice but there are tendency to deviate to the extreme i. e Religion fundamentalism. Religion fundamentalism was first used to refer to Christianity as claimed by Mbah (2006) who cited its use in debates in America Protestantism in the early 20th century. Thus, fundamentalism connotes a stage when religion was introduced into politics. Hence religion fundamentalist according to Mbah (2006) is associated with zealot ready to maim, and kill at a moment notice whoever they considered less than adequately enthusiastic about a particular viewpoint or religion

Religion fundamentalism has been used through the ages. It is seen as expression of Nationalism through other means in 16th and 17th century Europe. In France one has to be a catholic to be considered authentically French, while to be Catholic in England was coterminous with treason. Religion fundamentalism in Nigeria has over the years takes several dimension, but have taking a significantly dangerous and destructive trends lately.

Security challenges in Nigeria; in an address delivered at National Institute of Policy and Strategic Study, by former Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, on the challenges of security in Nigeria (2004) clearly shows that the greatest threat to the current democratic dispensation is insecurity. As he rightly observes, in addressing the challenge to the survival of democracy in Nigeria, it is pertinent to consider security issues and problems that have affected the attitude, confidence and cooperation of all groups and segments that make up the Nigerian federation. Oyebode echo this position of Abubakar in his comment on the imperative of insecurity. He declares: it is self-evident that without security, hardly is anything possible. He however, encourages; "that security should go beyond law and order by encompassing meaningful existence for the generality of the populace" (Oyebode, 2011).

Putting it more succinctly, Ezeoha (2011) in Causes and effects of insecurity in Nigeria declares that Security means stability and continually of livelihood, predictability of relationships, feeling safe and belonging to a social group. In the same token, Oshodi (2011) argues that one sure way of tackling the insecurity situation in Nigeria is to accord the field of psychology a pride of place in policy formulation and implementation to promote national cohesion and integration.

Many other contributors take critical look at the possibilities and difficulties of achieving sustainable peace in our embattled nation. For instance, Jegede's "Back to state of nature? (2011) and Adahi's what hope for the common man? Put the Nigerian ruling class to task on its competence to get us out of the woods. To Jegede, the insecurity situation in the country has led many to wonder if Nigeria has not returned to the state of nature where, according to Hobbes, life was solitary, nasty, brutish and short. Adahi compliments Jegede's position with her observation that public functions are now held amidst tight security and that the Nigerian government has failed to secure itself not to talk of securing the "common man" as enshrined in section 14 (2c) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Our sense of security by Ogunyemi (2011) attempts to refocus issues of insecurity from the prehistoric times, he draws from Frantz Fanon's dimensions of violence to argue that explaining the emergent security problems in Nigeria must recognize the physical,

structural and psychological violence unleashed on the people over the years by a tiny class of oppressive and manipulative rulers of the Nigerian state. While agreeing with Oyebode and others that security goes beyond maintaining law and order, Ogunyemi argues that the strength, wealth and security of our nation reside in expanding people's choices in every relevant way (Ogunyemi 2011).

The This Day Newspaper's editorial (2011), titled Soldiers as security men, observes that the current state of insecurity in Nigeria has left the Federal Government to deploy troops in such a manner that all our roads are littered with soldiers in combat ready fashion. The impression one gets is that security can be created by merely posting soldiers on the roads. But given the temperament of soldiers, many have questioned the wisdom of such a large scale deployment. As noted by This Day, the menace of terrorism no doubt calls for a new approach that will be founded on credible intelligence gathering". Nevertheless, the deployment of policemen to guard political office holders, private homes and individuals who have the financial muscle and influence in government circles has led to a situation such that there are very few left to fight crimes in the street.

Insecurity: Consequences for investment and employment, according to Okorie (2011) who laments that Nigeria would not be able to tap into about $1. 4tr investment capital which circulates around the world for as long as the insecurity situation persists, his main concern is the need to examine what the rising insecurity portends for the country particularly in the areas of foreign investment and employment generation. Insecurity is a risk factor which investors the world over dread and makes them to move elsewhere. Okorie (2011) equally argues that the severe security threat to life and property all over the country sends wrong signals to the international community; stating that economic globalization is not just an historical evolution but also a process.

Will there be peace in our time? This is the question pointedly raised and addressed by Fasan (2011), in his piece culled from the Vanguard newspaper. His thesis is that, going by the magnitude of the social and political upheavals around the world, one will not be far from the truth to assert that there is never a period in human history more turbulent than today. He posits that peace couldn't have been farther from our doorstep.

Apart from the economic and social problems, we are bedeviled constantly today with fears of one attack or the other by one extremists group or another. Hostage taking, bomb throwing and violent crimes are now part of our daily life that we only shake our heads to acknowledge the events and move on as if nothing has happened. He concludes: with all these troubles of daily living, finding food to eat and paying bills in the midst of direct attacks by those propagating one extremist view or another, there is no word for it but that we are in troubled times (Fasan, 2011).

Synthesis of politics and Religious conflict in Nigeria; most conflict develops from objective factors, subjective factors and trigger factors. Objective factors are factors such as fighting for control over territory or resources. Subjective factors can be factors like religion, race, ethnicity or language. Trigger factors 'may be instantaneous or act as a trigger (but in themselves they do not explain the causes of conflict). These events may include political assassination, new enforced discriminatory policies, electoral fraud, or manifested in longstanding political and socio-economic structure of society.

The present political and religious conflict ongoing in Nigeria, first the crisis follows the 2011

general election and continuous carnage ongoing in especially northern part of the country could not in themselves be explain from religious perspectives. In this regard Paden (2012) noted that disaffection of the northerner on the outcome of divisive president election of April 2011 in which a Christian from the south defeats a Muslim widely popular candidate from the north. The election was followed by widespread violence, including attacks on northern dignitaries perceived as supporting the incumbent. Thus a kind of 'tit for tat' violence later resulted in the destruction of Christian's places of worship in the north and ethnic cleansing of rural Muslims by Christian militias in places such as southern Kaduna. The crisis is rather arises from buried disturbance from inabilities of average Nigeria to support even the smallest unit of household.

Although Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002) views communal and societal conflicts emerging as a
result of" new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity often structured around ethno-religious identities" .Thus in all parts of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts have assumed alarming rates. It has occurred in places like Shagamu (Ogun State), Lagos, Abia, Kano, Bauchi, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Ebonyi and Enugu, Yobe, Borno, Kaduna, Gombe Niger States among others. Groups and communities who had over the years lived together in peace and harmony now take up arms against each other in gruesome "war".

The claim over scarce resources, power, land, chieftaincy, local government councils, control of markets, "Osu caste system" and Shariah among other trivial issues have resulted in large scale killings and violence amongst groups in Nigeria. In these conflicts, new logics of social separation and dichotomy have evolved in many communities in Nigeria. There is the classification of the "settler" and "indigene", "Christian" and "Moslem", and "Osu" (slave) and "Nwadiala" (free born). These ethno-religious cum political conflicts have become disintegrative and destructive social elements threatening the peace, stability and security in Nigeria.

Politically Based Violence; politics in the current civil dispensation like the previous Republics have displayed politics of anxiety which has played down on dialogue, negotiation and consensus. The anxiety is as a result of perceived or real loss of power by an elite stratum. Put different the quest for political power is among those elites that won it before, those that lost it and those who want it back.

Currently, politicians are already strategizing about the control and retention of power come 2015 elections. To this end, inter and intra-political party conflicts have become rife in which politicians are deploying large resources to out-do each other, changing the rules and legislations of the political game, distorting laws and employing violence and political assassination to settle political scores. Party meeting, campaigns and conventions have become war threats in Nigeria where small and light weapons like guns and cutlasses are freely displayed and used to rig elections, harass and intimidate electors.

Also, spates of politically motivated killing are rife. The most shocking of these killings was the murder of Chief Bola Ige, Funsho Williams, Dikibo, Ogbonna Uche, and Marshall, Alhaji among others Onyemaizu adds that "a resort to violence, including armed militancy, assassination, kidnap, et cetera, have somewhat suddenly become attractive to certain individuals in seeking to resolve issues that could have ordinarily been settled through due process. The end-products of such misadventures have often been catastrophic. They

include the decimation of innocent lives, disruption of economic activities, and destruction of properties among others". (Onyemaizu, 2006)

The predilection of most of the politicians is not for election but selection. This lack of party internal democracy was revealed in the party primaries, and "selection" of national executive officers of the parties. Even politicians themselves are usually afraid of what any forthcoming general elections portend. An atmosphere of political insecurity is fast engulfing Nigeria's nascent Fourth Republic.

Dissident Islamists are a significant force in countries such as Nigeria, where there is a ready social foundation, deep inequities, and a broad failure of governance. Conditions that foster radicalism—poverty, unemployment, social dislocation, cultural polarization, and a large pool of disaffected young men—are evident in abundance. Among Muslims, social grievances often find religious expression through fundamentalist appeals to piety, or through Islamist challenges to the political status quo. Both trends are evident in the country's political and religious landscape, and Islamist pressures may become a serious danger. There is no doubt that religious polarization and the spread of fundamentalism pose major challenges to Nigeria's fledgling democracy. The movement toward Islamic assertion through the expansion of Shariah law in the northern states could also have serious consequences for the stability of Nigeria's Federal system.

THE STATE RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS /POLITICAL CONFLICT AND THE WAY OUT

Despite the deep-rooted and protracted nature of religious cum political conflicts in some section of the nation, the Nigeria state responses to protect lives and properties of its citizens are usually conservative and militaristic. This mostly resulted in the deployment of heavily armed military personnel to the cities, township or the conflicts environs. Maina (2010) describes this in operational term as Military Aid to Civilian Power (MACP). This in conformity with their constitutional stipulated role in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 217 ss 2c; "suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authority to restore order when call upon to do so by the president; but subject to such conditions as may be prescribes by an Act of the National Assembly"
However, how to have peace in line with recent conflict and crisis in Nigeria transcends the deployment of the military alone based on the continually or sometime escalation of hostilities at the present of the military personnel.
In a report of the Institutes for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) in collaboration with DFID, UNDP, USAID and World Bank in 2002, the report outcome faulted state responses mechanism to conflict in Nigeria , it pointed out that the approach is rather escalating than mitigating the various conflicts in the country.

CONCLUSION

While most conflict in Nigeria might take the form of religious and others the timeline base of it are usually politics and the struggle for a bit on the national cake. Governance in Nigeria has since been personalized thus every political elite/leader joggles for whatever share could be derived from their participation in the country's politics. That is why no nationally elected, anointed or selected leader ends without disappointing the common man.
When the burden becomes too large to bear it usually boost into violent conflict and depending on the region it occurs, it took religion –either Muslims attacking Christian or

Christians attacking Muslims. For instance, while the re-introduction of Shariah system in the first tenure of the Fourth republic was rightly or wrongly associated with loss Federal power by the northern leaders as a reason. The facts still remain that the Shariah law affects only the Muslim and might even be a remedy to the average Nigerians recklessness. Moreover, the major demand of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, (Boko Haram) was Shariah in the Northern region signifying that what we purportedly have now justifies what the former President Obasanjo calls political Shariah. Additionally, there are too many idle hand and ready recruits for fomenting political or religion troubles. Since corruption has becomes an open endeavor and leaders has no qualms misappropriating the common wealth amidst majority suffering 'without'.

Categorically, the Nigeria political elite/leaders are only being saved from gigantic revolts as a result of multi religion cum ethnics setting of the country which they ready use to thwart any genuine people's demands.

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