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Dynamics of Religious Conflicts and its Peaceful Resolution in Nigeria

Jibrin Ubale Yahaya, PhD
Department of Political Science,
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
jibrinubaleyahaya@gmail.com
08035876786

Abstract
Nigeria faces challenges of chronic religious crisis as result of differences in religious beliefs, ethnicity, regional and political affiliations. Over the last decades, numerous 'hotspots' around the country arising from pervasive violent religious conflict have negatively impacted on the lives of millions of citizens and the peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian state as a whole. This paper attributes perennial religious crisis in Nigeria to weak leadership and sentimental elite syndrome that have the tendency to tear the country apart. The paper cited the February 2000 Anti-Sharia crisis in Kaduna, the religious riots in 2001 and 2004 crisis in Bauchi State, the dispute over a perceived insult on Islam during a beauty pageant in 2002, the riots over Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed in 2006, and the August 2009 Boko Haram onslaught as major mayhems that showed disturbing signs of this religious intolerance in the northern parts of the country.
Keywords: Religious Violence, Regional Differences, Peaceful Resolution and Good Leadership.

Introduction

Nigeria grapples with multiple crises that constantly undermine its peace and stability. The various regions in the country including the North, the South West, and specifically the Niger Delta, are in the mix of volatile insecurity, ethno-religious conflict and political instability. Thousands of lives have been killed in riots between the two major religious groups sparked by various events: aggressive campaigns by foreign evangelists; the implementation of Shari'a in 1999 and 2000 of in the 12 states of Nigeria. However, the 2002 Miss World pageant saga triggered crisis that resulted into another religious imbroglio when a local Christian reporter, Isioma Daniel, outraged Muslims by writing in one of Nigeria's National papers, *This Day*, that the Prophet Mohammed would have chosen a wife from among the contestants.

Similarly, in 2006, riots that were caused by Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed left several people dead in Nigeria (*This Day* September 2006). The attention to the role of religion in conflicts can be drawn to certain positive and negative developments, including the practice of separating governance affairs from religious activities. This, in many ways has overheated the polity resulting into religious conflicts. In Nigeria today, militant forms of religious fundamentalism are breeding in some states in the northeast namely, Borno, Yobe and Adamawa have become a threat to peace and national security has be linked to the teaching Islam. This has been denounced by many scholars in Islam as

misperception of the teaching of Islam, and declared the activities of Boko Haram as Non-Islamic. Religious diversity appears to play a complex role in these conflicts, often entrenching struggles over resources through the lenses of ethnicity and social inequality.

The Problem

The fact has shown that an average Nigerian is very religious and it was observed by many sources from scholars like Oluduro, (2010:209) and Ekundayo, (2013:29). They have argued that religion plays a critical role in Nigerian society and manifests as a potent force in the geopolitical regions of the country. This force which has been used to unite Nigerians is the same force that has led to numerous conflicts in the country. Nigeria has been engulfed in numerous religious crises and/or conflicts between 1980 and 2000's (Warner 2012:38).

However, due to their tendency to spread into other areas, ethno-religious conflicts have gained notoriety as one of the most violent crises in Nigeria. Most of these conflicts occur in the middle-belt and along the cultural borderline states of the predominantly Muslim North. They also take place between Hausa and Fulani groups and non-Muslim ethnic groups in the South (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:19). It is common to find conflicts of this nature occurring along the convergence of ethnic and religious lines. In other words, it is often very difficult to tell the differences between religious and ethnic crises because the dividing line between them is slimmer than expected. Examples of such ethno-religious conflicts are the Kafanchan-Kaduna crisis that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000 and the Jos riots of 2001 (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:19). Several lives were lost during the Kaduna crisis of 2000 and the Jos insurrection of 2001. The crises caused ripple effects that spread beyond Kaduna and Jos but in other time they spilled over to places like Kano, Jigawa and Sokoto (Enukora 2005:633).

Other historic ethno-religious conflicts include the July 1999 conflict among the Oro cultists in Sagamu in Ogun State which claimed that the Hausa women had come outside against the tradition of the cult's rites. The result was a heated argument that eventually turned into a full-scale crisis. Many Yoruba and Hausa people were killed before a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed on Sagamu town. Even as the infamy was being put under check in Sagamu, reprisal attacks continued in Kano, in Hausa city, leading to deaths and destruction of property worth billions of Naira (Kura 2010:33-34).

Another ethno-religious conflict that had far reaching impacts on the people of Nigeria was the October 2000 Lagos-Kano (Idi-Araba/Oko-Oba) conflict caused by a misperception between the Hausa inhabitants and the Yoruba living in Lagos over the use of a convenience by a man from Hausa. The mayhem resulted in the death of many Yoruba. As a consequence, the O'dua People Congress (a Yoruba militia group) coming into the scene worsened the situation as the violence later spread northwards, especially to Kano (Enukora 2005:633; Kura 2010:34).

Worse still, in September 2001, ethnic friction between the Tivs and the Jukuns in the Plateau State reached a boiling point following what came to be referred to as 'mistaken identity'. 'What this means is that some Tivs took some nineteen soldiers to be Jukuns in fake army uniform. The Tiv youths captured them and slaughtered them one by one' (Kura 2010:34-35). And then the Nigerian army embarked on devastating reprisal attacks in Saki-Biam. According to some controversial report, at least a hundred people died in the army attacks (Human Rights Watch 2001). Violence spread to Jos plateau especially after a Christian was appointed as a Local Council Chairman. By the time the menace was brought under control, over 160 lives had been lost (Kura 2010:35).

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the dynamics of religious

violence and its solution to peaceful resolution in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

i. Investigating the causes of religious violence in Nigeria
ii. Finding the appropriate means of addressing the religious violence in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

The paper used mainly secondary source of data by reviewing relevant texts or literature on the subject matter in order to investigate the problem of religious violence and finding the appropriate means of addressing it.

Definition of Concepts

Religious Conflict

Gofwen, S (2004) regards religious conflict as a specific form of conflict between groups which differ ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance. In a similar vein, Takaya (1992) emphasizes the political import of religions:

i. Religions are parochial and emotional socializes. They specialize in building one-faith exclusive brotherhood communities;
ii. Religion, at some point, is politics and is the most potent and long lasting political association. Moreover, religious creeds excite and extract the deepest possible emotional and physical loyalties from their adherents when in political competition with people of other faiths.

Peace

Peace is regarded "as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence and about peaceful coexistence" (Francis, 2006; Igbuzor, 2011). Although this definition has captured elements of peace, it was criticized by scholars like Ibeanu (2006) for lacking the adequate concept of peace. To overcome this limitation Ibeanu (2006) defines peace as a "process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community".

In this respect, peace therefore connotes the absence of violence or war, the presence of justice, equality and development; the existence of rule of law, respect for human life and dignity, and tolerance among and between people; maintenance of a balanced ecosphere and more importantly, having inner peace and wholeness. To add to this debate, Johan Galtung, a renowned Norwegian theorist provides three types of violence (direct, structural and cultural) to help understand the concept of peace across the globe.

Galtung (2011) considers direct violence as the physical, emotional and psychological aggression caused by a direct attack through fighting or war thereby resulting into deaths, destruction of property, and displacements of citizens among other consequences. He sees structural violence as caused by an unjust structure not to be equated with an act of God. It involves structures that cause human suffering and death which are quite avoidable if good governance exists. In his view cultural violence occurs as a result of the assumptions that bind one to structural violence. For instance, one may be indifferent toward the plight of the poor which creates discrimination, injustice and suffering thereby leading to the absence of peace in the society. In addition, Galtung's positive and negative peace framework is the most widely used model by most scholars. While negative peace refers to the absence of direct violence, conflict and war at international, national, community and individual levels, positive peace refers to the absence of indirect and structural

violence, inequality and injustice, unjust structures and policies and inner peace at individual levels. Due to its comprehensives, this conception becomes the most widely used by peace researchers.

Conflict

The definition of conflict like peace is also contentious. However, most scholars are of the opinion that conflict usually reflects a class of interest or goal between parties, which may be individuals or group of individuals, or ethnic groups or states. Conflict according to most of the scholars occurs "when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. He further explained that conflict emerges whenever one party perceives that one or more goals or purposes or means of achieving a good or preference is being threatened or hindered by the activities of one or more parties." Put together, in conflict, parties perceive or treat each other as a stumbling block that results in frustrating the other in attaining a set of goals, or even furthering one's interest through their attitudes, behaviors or actions (Akpuru-Aja, 1997). Generally, the conflict has been considered an obstacle to progress, political stability, economic prosperity and overall socio-economic development of any society because of its destructive capacity when not address early. This, therefore, means that conflict must be timely averted or managed properly as failure to do so will reflect a determined action or struggle over a goal, which may be overt or subtle; manifest or imaginary.

Inter-religious conflicts

Inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria form part of the dynamics of identity politics. Political elites in Nigeria have always sought to reap advantages from the multidimensional identities. More so, during electioneering periods this often results into social conflicts and instability. This politicization of religious identities during contests for political office often lacks any sustaining unifying ideology. Somehow, politics in Nigeria are framed in religious colours. As a consequence, religion attains the level of activities that is difficult to challenge or overpower. In their quest to assume power and state resources, the elites constantly modify patterns of political domination. In this perpetually changing pattern of domination, fears and anxieties are bred that motivate an upsurge in struggle and intolerance (Ibrahim and Kazah-Toure 2003:18; Okpanachi 2010).

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has continued to experience recurring volatile ethno-religious conflicts. Although some of these struggles are low-intensity contestations and rancorous wars of words, others have degenerated into open sectarian fighting. Thousands of Nigerians have been left dead, wounded and homeless over the years due to constant religious strife pitting people of different religions against each other (Okpanachi, 2010).

The main forms of inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria are between the Muslims and the Christians. The conflicts are sometimes so intense that they have turned into wars in different parts of the country, and they range from the Kano revolt (1980), Bulunktu Bisarre (1982), Kastina crises (1999), Samfara conflict, Kaduna revolt, Bauchi crises and Sokoto massacre (1999). More recent examples are the Jos crises and the current conflict by Boko Haram against Christians and moderate Muslims. These are only a few examples of inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Inter-religious conflicts are brought about by a number of factors. One of these causes is the clash of interests of those in authority. The ruling class has applied a number of processes to express their dissatisfaction with exclusion from important decision-making processes. The methods employed include religious violence and military coups d'état. A majority of the religious conflicts in the

Northern Nigeria are reported to be due to the large number of rich Southerners who reside there. Many Northern elites are hurt by the business inventiveness of the Southerners and employ religious calls to incite people to destroy property belonging to non-natives. The results are wars fought under the pretense of being religious (Falola, 1998).

Empirical Concepts

Religious Conflict and Its Manifestations in Nigeria

Before delving into the discussion of religious conflict in Nigeria, it will be useful to devote some space to introduce the country's religious communities that form the conflict parties. Nigeria has three major religions. These are African Religions (Afrel), Christianity and Islam. With a population of about over 200 million, Muslims are estimated to be 50%, Christians 40% and practitioners of African Religions are put at 10%. This estimation excludes practitioners of alternative religious ideologies from the eastern world. The current population estimate is being disputed by the Christians and African Religions, who argue that the long (1966-1979;1983-1999) domination of the nation's polity by military dictators, who are mostly Muslim from the Northern part of the country, placed them into the best positions to manipulate the figures in favour of Muslims.

Christianity was introduced to Nigeria via the southern part of the country, obviously due to its coastal nature. There were, however, three stages of its introduction. In this vein, Aderibigbe, (1988) suggests:

> Christianity found its way into Nigeria in different stages. The first contact came probably through Christian Berbers or Tuaregs. The second came through the Portuguese in 1488 in the neighbourhood of Benin and Warri but failed to make lasting impact. Finally, Christianity began to take permanent root in Nigeria as from 1842 with the coming of the English speaking Christian mission in Badagry.

The quick spread of this faith in the region, especially Badagry and Abeokuta, was facilitated by some freed slaves who had been converted to Christianity and decided to contribute in its propagation. Following the establishment of Christianity in the southern part of Nigeria, it was introduced to the Northern part of the country. The introduction and spread of Islam in Nigeria is somewhat more difficult to describe. According to Olurode (1989), as summarized herein, it appears that Islam first came into Nigeria through Bornu in about the 13th century but was confined to the cities along the Trans-Sahara trade route. Islam spread beyond the cities following the conquest of the Hausa States by the Fulanis. A dominant presence of Islam was noticeable after the Fulani conquest in 1802, which left the conquered Hausa States to be governed as Islamic States. The Fulanis also spearheaded the gradual spread of Islam to the South via the Ilorin axis. Olurode further suggests that the Fulanis were initially invited by their Yoruba friends who desired their (Fulani) Chief Priest, Alimi, to exert some control on the rule of Afonja, a Yoruba warrior. Subsequently, the Fulanis imposed civil leadership on the Yorubas of Ilorin and eventually Islam took root in the interiors of Yoruba, the southern community where it currently has a large number of followers.

However, between 1987 and 2011, numerous religious conflicts, resulting in the death of tens of thousands of persons, destruction of Churches and Mosques and property worth millions of dollars, have been documented in Nigeria (Gofwen, 2004, Minchakpu, 2006, Nwaomah, 2010:). The most recent of these conflicts are the post-elections conflicts and terrorist attacks that have been traced to the Boko Haram,

an Islamic group with possible links with other terrorist groups outside Nigeria. These conflicts and attacks have largely occurred in northern Nigeria and they have been attributed to many causes. Though these conflicts are religious in nature, other factors, which are non-religion have also been identified as contributory or even fundamental to the crisis. The myriad of causes-remote and immediate-could be summed into (i) religious, (ii) socio-political, and (iii) economic.

Religion is a poignant issue in Nigeria, possibly because of the fundamental quest for dominance between the Northern and Southern parts that for contingent historical reasons are dominated by Islam and Christianity, respectively. There is also the incessant protest of marginalization by the Northern minorities who profess Christianity in contrast to the Hausa/Fulanis who are largely Muslims and hold political dominance. The Boko Haram crises, though seen by some as a reaction to the failure of political leadership, nonetheless, has deep religious overtone (Nwaomah, 2010). Acknowledging the significance of religion in the Nigerian conflicts, Ndukwe, according to Boer (2004b) stresses that one cannot talk about the political situation in Nigeria without relating it to religion. Every political programme or event always has a religious overtone. Passion for religion also affects the economic climate of Nigeria. However, while to analyst the significance of religion in Nigerian politics is unquestionable, the political leaders prefer to deny the religious connotations of these crises.

For instance, reacting to the riots of 1987, Kukah (1993) observes that President Ibrahim Badammasi Babangida denied the religious basis of the riots, arguing that the trails of destructions of lives and property in Kaduna, Zaria, Katsina and Funtua and other places in Kaduna State were politically motivated. Further, Babaginda as cited in Kukah (1993) note was quoted to have said the riots were … carefully planned and masterminded by evil men who saw the incident in Kafanchan as an opportunity to subvert the Federal Military Government and the Nigerian nation. Similarly, Binta Faruk Jalingo, a Muslim women leader argued "I want the common man to know that their leaders want to use them for their selfish interests in the cover of religion. A lot of these leaders are only using religion to make money and to enrich them…." (Cited in Boer, 2004a:72)

Furthermore, in the 2000 Kaduna riots that followed the introduction of the Sharia law in the Northern States of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara authorities insisted that the Kaduna crisis was beyond religion. It is not religion. It is politics (Awowede, 2000 citing Boer 2004a:92).

But Kenny argues that religion in the politics of 1970 onwards was basically a tool which the politicians used for secular interests (citing Muslim Christian Relations in Nigeria 2008). This might be because of the regional dominance of the two major religions in Nigeria - Islamic North and Christian South and the gullibility of the masses when greedy political leaders appeal to threat on their religion as an easy excuse to protect political status. Gofwen (2004) identifies four reasons that inflame the religious bigotry prevalent in Nigeria. These are:

(i) The differing political philosophy of the major religions in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity.
(ii) The mutual suspicions and fear of domination between the two religions.
(iii) Mutual ignorance of the beliefs and teachings of each other's religion and sometimes even of one's own faith.
(iv) Provocative acts of pronouncements which hurt the religious sensibilities of people of other faiths, whether they are intended or inadvertent"

This circumstance has led to misinterpretation of national events and issues. For example, when President Shehu Shagari openly received Pope John Paul 11 in 1982, Muslims such as Kukah (1993) sees such 'fraternization' as a reason to question the "Muslimness" of President Shagari, claiming that Islam was losing out to Christianity and the President was losing grip of asserting himself as a Muslim leader. On the background of mutual ignorance and misinterpretation, adherents of either religious group have tended to assert themselves or even to react violently when they felt their religion was threatened or its heritage was being ridiculed. Thus, violent conflicts in which lives were lost and property was destroyed were caused by acts like the misquotation/interpretation of the Quran or the Bible, the construction of a church or mosque, religious assemblies, inciting statements and/or publications and even the protest against alleged prosecutions of religious fellow members in other countries.

Socio-Economic Factors and Conflicts in Nigeria

Another factor at the root of most religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria is what could be classified as socio/political-economic issues that have continuously provoked conflicts between the northern minorities and their Hausa/Fulani neighbours. Government and religious leaders frequently appeal to this factor as the principal cause of the many religious crises that have plagued this part of Nigeria. An aspect of the socio-political factor in the Christian-Muslim conflicts in Nigeria, in the view of Boer (2004a), is "internal colonialism and indigenousness". This refers to the dominance of indigenous minority tribes, who are mostly Christians by the majority Hausa/Fulani, majority of whom are Muslims. However, Nwaomah (2010) observes that the resurgence of the cultural identity of the minority and indigenous ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria - who now resent… economic and political domination of the Hausa/Fulani, have also contributed to the crises.

Offering an explanation on the Zango-Kataf riot, an indigene, Yohanna Madaki, argues that the cause of the riot was socio-political. In his words: "The main issue in this whole crisis is that of oppression. Boer (2004) quoting Madaki alleges that the issue is that of internal colonialism which is being rejected… the outcry against domination is age-long and successive governments in the State have done nothing". His voice echoes that of many others who share the same view and the same reason is given as a primary cause for the 1991 Tafawa Balewa riots in Bauchi State and the Plateau riots of 2001, 2002-2004, 2009-2011. The "indigene and "non-indigene" notion, where a Nigerian is not considered a citizen/indigene of his place of birth but of the tribe of his paternal ancestry and thus denied certain rights in the community of his birth, has played a considerable role in the multi-crises in Northern Nigeria. Commenting on this predicament, the Human Rights Watch (2005) reports:

> Throughout Nigeria, groups considered "indigenes", or the original inhabitants of an area, are granted certain privileges, including access to government employment, scholarships for State schools, lower school fees, and political positions. To secure access to these privileges, they have to produce an "indigene certificate" which is granted by the local authorities. "Non-indigenes" or "settlers" are denied these certificates and the accompanying privileges. The definition of the term "indigene" is commonly understood to be based on person's place of origin, but many people born and brought up in a particular area are not accorded the status, even though they may never have lived in any other part of

> Nigeria…. The concept of "indigene ship" has been exploited by various groups to further their own interests (Human Rights Watch the Conflict in Plateau State).

Nwaomah (2010) argues that this predicament of "indigeneship" is used to rationalize agitations such as access to land, "animal grazing rights, quest for or sustenance of political position or local rulers hip, commonly referred to as chiefdom in the Northern part of Nigeria and even the location of social amenities and industries by the governing authorities". Consequently, religion in Nigeria is a mobilization and manipulative tool for socio-political and/or economic disagreements.

The Effects of the Conflicts/Crises in Nigeria

The resultant effects of religious conflicts in Nigeria are enormous. It pervades all the sectors of the economy. Generally, conflicts breed insecurity, discrimination, mutual distrust and slow economic and educational development. This is the case in Nigeria where in addition to the gratuitous killings and maiming of thousands of persons, properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed. Certainly, these huge losses have deprived the nation of needed manpower and services for the growth of its wobbling economy.

Religious conflicts in Nigeria have also left its effect on investment options in the crises ridden areas. The political instability, arising from the insecurity and uncertainty that pervades the region, does not inspire the confidence of foreign investors and thereby deprives the nation of the economic gains. In some instances, the enterprising Southerners who had established thriving businesses in the troubled areas in the North have relocated to other and safer places. Further, religious conflicts in Nigeria have left in its trail a broken society: communities that hitherto co-existed peacefully now treat each other with mistrust and latent or open aggression. Consequently, settlement patterns begin to follow the boundaries of religion in these areas so that adherents can be swiftly mobilized in the event of future riots. The disrupted social harmony is sometimes felt in places far from the crisis scene and thus account for the reprisal riots in other parts of Nigeria.

Religious identity

Nigeria is the most crowded African country with a population of about 182 million by 2015 (World Population Prospects 2015:21). A majority of the scientific academic sources accept that the half of the population is Christian, the other half Muslim. However, there is uncertainty about the exact percentages; hence various sources give different figures. In a report published by Pew Research Center in 2010 the numbers from different sources are compared in the report's Appendix B. If we mention them chronologically for instance, the 1963 Census certified 36% Christian, 48% Muslim and 16% other. However, the Demographic and Health Survey gave 53% Christian, 45% Muslim and 2% other in 2008. Similarly, Afrobarometer found 56% Christian, 43% Muslim and 1% other, also in 2008. And finally, Pew Forum declared 46% for Christians, 52% for Muslims and 1% for others in 2009 (Pew Research Center 2010). Whatever the exact percentages are, it is clear that Nigeria is a country with very large Christian and Muslim populations. This situation makes this country a potential fault line between the two different identities and even civilizations. In this sense, Nigeria, with the largest Christian plus Muslim population in the world, can be defined as a 'cleft country' and then a 'test case' of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis (Paden 2007; Olojo 2014:7)

Although the general presumption is that ethnic identity is a more prominent and stable source of identity in Nigeria, some researchers have demonstrated that

religion was more significant than ethnicity as a source of identity and conflict in Nigeria (Ruby and Shah 2007; Pew Research Center 2010; Green 2011). In fact, in the Hausa-Fulani North, religious identity is more pronounced than ethnic identity and only serves to stimulate ethnicity (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:10). Therefore, of the two major ethnic groupings in the country, the Yoruba are more likely to identify themselves with their ethnic group than are the Northern Hausa-Fulani (Lewis and Bratton 2000:20; Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11)

Nigeria has three major religious identities: Christian, Islam and traditional religions (Omorogbe and Omohan 2005:557; Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11). Traditional religions are the most politically inactive of the three groups, 'numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and sub-groups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses' (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11). On the other hand, Christian and Muslim identities have continued to be the backbone of religious disparity and conflict (Lewis and Bratton 2000:5; Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11). This differentiation underlies the North-South cleavage.

It is worth noting that, within the wide Christian and Muslim categories, there lie many sub-cleavages and intra-group conflicts that have either been active politically in the past or have a potential of being salient in the future. Among the Christians, sub-cleavages include the Protestants (Anglican 10%, Baptist 8%, Methodist 5%, and Lutheran 5%), the Catholics 15%, the Evangelical Church of West Africa 2%, Jehovah's Witnesses 5% and a myriad of other local (Aladura, Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial Church of Christ 20%) and Pentecostal churches 30% (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11).

The Pentecostal churches form the fundamental division of Christianity in Nigeria which has experienced rapid growth in numbers of followers in the last few years with the majority of adherents, especially the youths, joining the church from the older and more traditional denominations. The church has played an important role in civil society in anti-military struggles and democratization. This has been made possible through umbrella bodies such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), and the Catholic Bishops Conference (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11). However, politicization of Christianity has been reliant on moves by the Muslims and the interventions of the government. Still, Protestant-Catholic cleavages have continued to play an important role in elections among the Igbo communities living in the Southeast of Nigeria (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11).

Muslims also belong to a number of sub-cleavages that include Ahmadiyya 12%, Sanusiyya 5%, Tijanniyya 3%, and Quadriyya 8% which have in turn been in conflicts. And as among the Christians, the Muslims also have umbrella bodies which aim at propagating different understandings of Islam. Notable among these organisations is the Jamaatu Nasril Islam (JNI) which was established by Sardauna of Sokoto in 1961. Following events in Iran during the Islamic revolution of 1979, radical fundamentalist activities increased among Muslim youths. These conditions resulted in the formation of fundamentalist Muslim factions such as the Maitatsine, the Isala movement, the Shiites, the Talibans and most recently the Boko Haram (Fayemi , 2011) which demanded the establishment of a purist Islam based on Sharia law, the abolition of unorthodox innovations, and the creation of an Islamic theocracy (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11). These relatively new sentiments that depend on a unique and radical interpretation of Islam provoke conflicts with the traditional and/or more moderate understandings.

Major causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria

Unlike other forms of social conflicts, ethno-religious conflict entails different ethnic groups that belong to different religions. It is essential to advert that both religious and ethnic causal agents have always acted together in the majority of social conflicts in Nigeria. At different levels and times in the past, the Nigerian people have complained of religious and ethnic discrimination. Most ask for religious and ethnic rights within their state. Another cause of the conflicts has been the state's use of religion and ethnicity in political discourse or action. Therefore, it is clear that accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression and domination are the major causes that fuel ethno-religious conflicts (Ikelegbe 2001:14; Kura 2010:35-36; Salawu 2010:348).

Nigeria, like many other countries in the world, lacks a consensus on how necessary changes and reforms are affected. This is caused by the fact that different religious and ethnic groups have varying benefits in which case some groups will have their interests met while others will not. This means that tension raised when individuals who feel that they are deprived attempt to increase their stake of power or wealth or to alter the central beliefs, values, norms and philosophies. In Nigeria therefore, there appears to exist a contentious interaction of politics, ethnicity and religions, which has resulted in an increased sense of belonging and militancy. It is important to note that the general outcome of this is the intensification of numerous ethno-religious struggles in Nigeria. And this intensification can be seen as the main source of ongoing discrimination, subordination and domination in this country (Kura, 2010:36).

From one perspective, the 'failure' of the Nigerian political elite to enact good governments, promote national integration and foster good economic progress via thoughtful and pronounced policies has resulted in massive unemployment. This has in turn led to the rise of communal, ethnic and religious conflicts that are characteristic of the Nigerian politics. Since poverty and unemployment have acted as the mainstay for various ethno-religious conflicts in the country, an accumulation of pauperized people can end up acting as paid militants. This could be the reason why any conflict in Nigeria is usually characterized by a large number of fighters (Kura 2010:36; Mu'asu 2011:19-20).

There is a correlation between ethno-religious conflicts and low standards of democracy due to protracted military interferences in politics. This appears to legalize the application of coercion and violence as tools for social change and for the achievement of anticipated desires and objectives (Kura 2010:37). Based on this understanding, it is common in Nigeria to observe that as a consequence or an after-effect of a military period, the application of both force and intimidation as a means of settling a misunderstanding has become very frequent. When this is coupled with easy acquisition of illegal fire arms, violence erupts more quickly and there is more difficulty in negotiating peaceful settlements.

The absence of vehicles of social control that were characteristic of traditional African societies, such as kinship, religious and political systems concerned with the well-being of the community, has led to the escalation of ethno-religious conflicts. The failure of these institutions is partly to blame for the ethnic and communal conflicts witnessed in Nigeria today. Broken families and the inability to make ends meet in many homes have led to an increase in the level of immorality while at the same time providing a reservoir of youths who readily take up arms to execute ethno-religious conflicts at a fee.

Conclusion

In this paper, consideration was given to the causes and consequences of Christian-Muslim religious conflicts in Nigeria; it highlighted the tension between the reactions of the Christian community towards these conflicts and the content of Christian faith. The study indicates that the

remote causes of these conflicts could be traced to the pattern of colonial administration adopted by the British in order to sustain its presence. However, the contemporary causes of these conflicts could be traced to political manipulations, quest for economic power and mutual ignorance of the deep religious virtues of Christianity and Islam by those who claim to advance the cause of their various religions. Christians and Muslims in Nigeria are, however, called to show understanding in their reaction a virtue taught by Christ.

However, despite some exceptions, such as the Yoruba being made up of both Christian and Muslim segments, ethnic identities generally overlap with religious identities in Nigeria. For that reason, it is difficult to distinguish ethnic conflicts from religious ones in this country. However, it can be said that ethnic differences in Nigeria would not have been such a prominent cause of conflict if they had not overlapped with the religious identities, or vice versa. In other words, in many instances, religion provides a mobilization frame for conflict and this effect is amplified when religious and ethnic cleavages run parallel. And there is no doubt that inter-religious conflict in Nigeria form part of the dynamics of identity politics. As stated above, while some sources (Lewis and Bratton 2000) reveal the importance of ethnicity as a causal factor of cleavages, others (Ruby and Shah 2007; Pew Research Center 2010; Green 2011) underline religious identities as a more determinant element in the perception of difference. The diversity in the scientific findings and literature was probably caused by researchers focusing on different groups in Nigeria. Basically this means that for some groups ethnicity is more binding, while in others religion plays a dominant role in group identification and a sense of belonging. Since this paper has been mostly concentrated on conflicts in the North, the religious factor might be highlighted – due to the decisive religious cleavages in this region.

Recommendations

The numerous religious conflicts in Nigeria have left adverse effects on the social, political and economic life of the nation. It is this regard that we seek to make recommendations in the quest to diminish religious conflicts/crises and enhance a peaceful co-existence between Christian and Muslims in Nigeria. The recommendations are made with the understanding of the psychological demands they might impose. However, it is necessary to note that it takes two parties to resolve conflicts; thus we hold that harmony amongst the adherents of the two religions is very essential for the development of Nigeria, the following suggestions need to be observe:

i. The government at all level needs to have the political will to announce and take appropriate actions to on the reports of the various panels that were established to investigate past religion-related crises. Some of these include the Babalakin Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Bauchi Civil Disturbances, Karibi Whyte Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Kafanchan Disturbances, Niki Tobi Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Plateau State Disturbances, Sankey Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Wasai and Langtang Disturbances and Justice Disu Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Plateau State Disturbances and lately the Ahmed Lemu Investigation Panel on the 2011 Election Violence (Onuorah, 2011). Furthermore, where people are indicted, such persons need to be prosecuted if such steps are taken by the Nigerian authority, it might deter some perpetrators of these unpleasant situations that have caused huge loss of human lives and property, thereby making the Nation unsafe in the future time.

ii. The Christian and Muslim leaders in Nigeria need to continue to reach out and sustain the dialogue processes, spearhead inter-religious education and seek every opportunity to educate its followers and others on the ills of violence and both Muslim and Christian should shift ground and from bad alternatives to the culture of retaliation to the space of negotiation and apology among each other. It also behoves the Christian and Muslim communities to reject the manipulative acts of some political leaders, who constantly seek ways to flame the nation with violence under the guise of religious patriotism, for their selfish political interests. It is only sustained efforts in these directions that will build the Nigerian nation despite the different religious ideologies espoused by its people to lives as one strong united country that can compete with any nation in terms of technology, industrialization and quality leadership.

iii. Christian and Muslim leaders should endeavour to impress on their followers the teaching on the solidarity of humankind. This solidarity is couched in the common teachings of the two religions that all humanity, our religious and political ideologies notwithstanding, have one source of existence-the creative act of God. This common existence ascribes to all humanity a common divine source, as Nwaomah (2004) opines "is founded on the essential image of God in every person". A recognition and active cultivation of this solidarity will enhance regard for fellow human life, promote, tolerance and forgiveness. Speaking on the importance of forgiveness, Martin Luther King Jr., as cited by Kunhiyop (2004), opines:

> We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love… It is also necessary to realize that the forgiving act must always be initiated by the person who has been wronged, the victim of some great hurt, the recipient of some tortuous injustice, the absorber of some terrible act of oppression.

iv. The culture of forgiveness needs to transcend words but reflected in social relationships and even influence government policies which may require putting in place social and physical structures that symbolize such forgiveness and unity of decision to emphasize forgiveness rather than retaliation. Thus, sermons at Christian services and other gatherings and Muslim kutbas at mosques and other Muslims gatherings should be devoid of incitement against other religious adherents. These occasions for religious admonitions should be reconciliatory in nature and engender peace and cordiality amongst Nigerians towards national development. The Nigerian government should also begin a process of the inclusion of subjects and/or courses on civic responsibilities and patriotism in the educational curriculum at all levels. These courses should be made compulsory for all students irrespective of religious and cultural affiliations. The contents of these subjects/courses should include but not limited to the common heritage we share as Nigerians, principles of nation building and the impact of violence on national development.

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