

Ethno religious crisis in nigeria: causes and remedy. assignment



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ETHNO RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN NIGERIA: CAUSES AND REMEDY. BY MUHAMMAD
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Introduction Nigeria is no doubt a populous nation of over 88 million (1991 population census) but as at now Nigeria's population is estimated to be above 120 million people of diverse ethnic groups and many religions. Its people are differently distributed in the 36 states that made up the nation. In addition to this, the nation is blessed with many economic potentialities which help in the movement of the various peoples through the process of economic inter-dependence.

Though abounds with human and natural resources, the country has since independence witnessed a number of inter and intra ethnic and religious crisis which continue to be an impediment to its overall development. The causes of conflicts between and within ethnic and religious groups could be seen in a number of factors, such as ways of propagating the religions, mistrust and suspicion between the followers of the various religious and ethnic groups, selfishness ignorance and intolerance amongst the two groups.

References are made in the holy books, such as the Glorious Qu'ran and the Holy Bible on their teachings showing how if fully adhered to, the nation will be in peace. In this respect, the prevailing crisis might not be un-connected with the deviation of the teachings of these religions by their followers. In the paper, causes of these crises are discussed and some suggestions are provided which if properly implemented will serve as remedies to both ethnic and religious crisis in the nation. Ethnic Crisis In Nigeria.

In the words of Eleazu “ the people of Nigeria are many and varied” 1.

Actually, a nation with a population of over 120 million people now and about 391 different ethnic groups² with divergent socio-political, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds could be termed a nation of many and varied peoples. With this heterogametic nature. Nigeria has thus, become a melting pot where social conflicts and especially of ethnic nature are bound to occur. Causes of ethnic crisis in Nigeria are many comprising of both long and short term factors.

There had been in the past for example, serious inter-ethnic rivalry to secure slaves for both domestic use and trans-Atlantic slave trade and secondly, there were wars of expanding the territories of the various states, kingdoms and empires that made up what is today Nigeria. These wars were the predominant activities of the various ethnic groups which became a factor of bitter relationship amongst them in the past. This situation of enmity between the various ethnic groups was according to Ryder From the 18th century onwards when the slave trade supplied weapons that made these conflicts more destructive.

Internally, a sharpening of divisions within societies is well attested³. These wars caused serious insecurity so that many old towns were relocated in mountainous areas or mass defensive walls were constructed to avoid the intrusion of enemies. It is worth noting that these earlier conflicts were sponsored by the European slavers. In this way one could say, the seed for such conflicts was planted right in the period before colonial rule. Slave trade on its own was an inhuman act and therefore a terrorist act.

In the colonial period, the colonial system of dividing what is today Nigeria into three administrative units had contributed greatly in shaping the present day relationship of suspicion, fear and mistrust among the divergent ethnic groups in the country. The administrative units were:-Lagos colony, Southern Protectorate and Northern protectorate, in this arrangement, the north was excluded from the central administration. This exclusion was to later have a serious implication on the relationship between the people of the north and those of the South, (East and West).

The implication became more pronounced when in 1914, the three administrative units were amalgamated. This action was marked by mutual suspicion and sometimes open conflict between the diversified ethnic groups. One could say at this juncture that, this suspicion and fear still shapes the relationship between the peoples of these various corners of the country. This is also the genesis of the subsequent crisis of ethnic nature in Nigeria. Today, Nigerians feel insecure in the regions other than their own.

The sectional feeling further manifests itself clearly in the unhealthy competition in all aspects of the government between the peoples of the North, West and East. Tensions between these peoples become more and more intensified with each trying to protect its sectional interest. On this note, Awolowo, cited in Ekeh, P. P. and Osaghae, E. E. eds blamed the British: For dividing the North from the South so thoroughly and effectively that the two were divergently and almost irreconcilably oriented⁴

With Federalism which was instituted to primarily to avoid one ethnic group dominating others and also protecting the interests of the minorities, the

nation was once again split into regions, each with its autonomous power. In this political arrangement also, it was observed that: The colonial administrators have passed on to the Nigerian wards the prejudices which had enabled them think and act in the belief that this informal federation was a marriage of convenience between incompatibles 5.

With this impression in the minds of Nigerian peoples, it becomes very difficult for them to work harmoniously together without such tribal conflicts. Each of the tribes of the country today works only for the interest of its people and not the nation, thus in these blind competitions of each trying to dominate the other, conflicts of ethnic nature always occur. Clear testimony to this was that the political parties of the first Republic were regionally organized; Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), was for the North, Action Group (AG) was for the West (Yoruba) while National

Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was for the East (Igbo). Equally the major parties of the second republic were only the reincarnation of those of the first republic, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) for example replicated the NPC, United Party of Nigeria (UPN) was the AG incarnate while the National Peoples Party (NPP) replicated the NCNC. Each of these worked tirelessly to protect the interest of its geopolitical zone, and in so doing, conflicts occur.

A case to mention here was the coup and counter coup of January and July 1966 which came about as a result of the heedless pride, greed, selfishness and shortcomings of the members of these three regions. The wound inflicted by the Nigerian civil war did not heal properly as there are still moves for secession in the country. Minority issues in Nigeria are also seen

as one important phenomenon which causes ethnic conflicts in the country. These minority tribes were once neglected in the socio-political and economic affairs of the country.

Nigeria was seen and regarded as the home of only three tribes; Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. But later even Arthur Richard cited in Ekeh, P. P and Osaghae, E. E confirmed that: It is only accident of British suzerainty which has made Nigeria one country or one nation socially, economically and even politically, there are deep differences between the major ethnic groups. They do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent stages of culture. 6 From the 1950s till date, the reality of Nigerian problem started to unfold.

Many minority ethnic groups began to feature in the sharp competitions in the entire aspects of government. This is done through the formation of their own political parties and associations in order to out do the activities of major ethnic groups whom they regard and see as threats to their economic and political aspirations. This suspicion and fear by the minority tribes over the major tribes remain a prominent feature in the Nigerian socio-political and economic activities and have in no small measure helped in intensifying ethnic crisis in the country.

The desire to harness and utilize the God given economic potentials distributed in all parts of the country made the movements and permanent settlement of different tribes in different regions of the country inevitable. Socio-political and economic relations that follow, crisis of leadership result in serious clashes between many tribes. In 2002 for example, there was a

serious conflict between the Yoruba and Hausa over the leadership of a cattle market in Bodija, Ibadan and in Jos, the conflict is still on between the Hausa and some tribes over who has the legal right of chieftaincy.

Cases of this nature are numerous and too many to be mentioned here. One can also still see the traces of the British administration in Nigeria on the issue of sectionalism. It is worth mentioning that after forty four (44) years of independence and despite several calls for national unity, associations of purely tribal interest are established in the country. In the West, there is the Ooduwa Peoples' Congress (OPC) for purely Yoruba people, in the East, there is the Ohaneze (Ndi Igbo) purely for Igbo people, while in the North, there is Arewa Consultative Forum for the northern peoples.

It should be noted that all these associations have been established to directly and openly protect the interests of their respective peoples. Where their interests clash, it results to conflicts. Many ethnic crises in Nigeria are as a result of the activities of these associations. It is very disheartening to add that these tribal associations and other purely tribally motivated movements are directly supported and sponsored by top serving and retired government personalities.

These supports only help in fueling crisis of ethnic nature in the country. Worst still, is that security and law enforcement agents always take sides when performing any national assignment of peace keeping. These agents openly support their people even if they are the offenders. This issue is no doubt causing further ethnic crisis and even escalating the existing ones. One cannot also delink this problem of ethnic crisis with the activities of the “

area boys” who emerge suddenly as the result of the growing unemployment in the country.

These groups of unemployed, misguided, disgruntled and unpatriotic teenagers unnecessarily cause commotions and misunderstanding under the pretext of tribal issues to enable them loot and steal private and public property. Area boyism is therefore a force to reckon with in causing tribal conflicts in the country. But it is worth mentioning here that some of the activities of these area boys are mostly engineered and sponsored by the selfish, greedy and unpatriotic politicians who by all means and at all cost want to win election or cause unnecessary commotions.

Under the pretext of tribalism, they therefore incite such crises in the country. Wrong and exaggerated information by the press and the media houses sometimes form the background for tribal conflicts in the country. Such exaggerated news will only spark up some ethnic groups to avenge on some innocent victims. Almizan of 16th Zulkida 1420 for example reported that over 2000 Hausa people were killed by the Igbo in the East to avenge the killings of Igbo in Kaduna⁷. The Igbo took this action because the nation was erroneously informed of the Kaduna crisis by the Today Newspaper of 21/2/2000. Following this, other major towns in the country started brewing with tension. No one can quantify the extent of damages caused by these ethnic crises in Nigeria. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost leaving behind them so many orphans and widows, many were maimed and wounded, private and public property worth millions of naira were damaged. Also the tribes of Nigeria are left in a terrible state of perpetual psychological insecurity and fear especially those settling in a region other than their own.

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In this way, the spirit of national cohesion which is the bedrock of peace and stability still remain a dream, Nigerians therefore remain in either cold war or open war with one another. Religious Crisis In Nigeria (Causes) The causes of religious crisis in Nigeria seem to have been an event that occurs as a surprise to all concerned citizens of the nation. The crisis are mostly centered on religion though with some hidden motives. Religion which is often used as cover up is considered as one of the major causes of the crisis in Nigeria.

Definition of Religion. Religion according to the Oxford Dictionary is defined as “ one of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular God or gods: Jewish religion, Christian Religion, Islamic religion and other world religions⁸. It is also defined as, a particular interest or influence that is very important in one’s life ⁹. Christianity is the belief in Christ, the man that Christians believe is the son of God and on those teachings the Christian religion is based.

The prayer book 1998 states: the Christian faith is based on the belief in one God summarized in what is popularly known as Nicene Creed thus reads: We believe in one God, the father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the father, through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man.... ⁰ Islam as a religion is an Arabic word and connotes submission, surrender and obedience to the laws of Allah. Islam is to enter into peace and Muslim is one who <https://assignbuster.com/ethno-religious-crisis-in-nigeria-causes-and-remedy-assignment/>

makes his peace with Allah and man's peace with Allah implies complete submission to his will and peace with man is not only to refrain from evil, injury to another man but also to do good to him. Christianity and Islam as religions of peace preach peace and co-existence among their adherents. The Bible says in the Book of Prophet Isaiah 9: 6 Proclaimed Jesus Christ as "the prince of peace" 12.

It will be absurd to see the followers of this prince of peace breaching the peace that was announced. Based on Islamic peace teaching, Al-Ezzati observed, that: The task of guiding the misled to virtuous behavior and persuading them to stop doing wrong (Al-amir bil-al-ma-rouf wa-al-nahy anil-munkar) is laid on every Muslim and this is why every Muslim is supposed to preach righteousness and decency¹³. Religious crisis in Nigeria seems to be as a result of digression from the teachings of both religions.

Prophet Isa (Jesus) (AS) displayed a good model and requested all his followers to emulate. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul in his admonition to the Romans in chapter 12: 9, 10 & 18 charged them: Let love be without dissimulation, abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another. If it is possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men¹⁴. In Galatians 5: 22 peaceful co-existence is described as one of the Christian virtues.

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) have shown in theory and practice too, the right of neighbours both Muslims and non-Muslims, in a Hadith which states: Whosoever happens to be such that his (or her)

neighbours do not feel secured of being afflicted from his evils, will not be admitted into paradise¹⁵. Another Hadith states : By Allah he has not acquired Iman (faith) and by Allah he has not acquired Iman. So it was said “ who is that person O ye messenger of Allah: He said, that one whose neighbours do not feel safe from the evil in him or (her). Bukhari narrated ¹⁶.

The above traditions teach harmonious relationship that is to be encouraged by both followers of the two faiths especially the Muslims. To buttress further from the Christian side, the Holy Bible, in Peter 3: 11 says: Let him eschew evil, and do good, let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil ¹⁷. If such teachings are emulated by both Muslims and non-Muslims of the world, and Nigeria in particular, there will be no religious crisis.

Most if not all of the crisis occurred out of ignorance. The present society tends to neglect all the above teachings and behave recklessly as explained above. Umar Ibn Khattab the second caliph said when sending troops to the battle field. Destroy not fruit trees, nor fertile fields in your path, be just and spare the feelings of the vanquished, respect all religious persons who live in hermitage or convents, and spare their edifice¹⁸. Ezzati further explains how caliph Umar protected the people of the Book.

The killings, destructions being done in the process of fighting each other is not religious. In one of Jesus' last sermons to his disciples in John 14: 27, He said: Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you¹⁹. As mentioned

above, the religious crisis in Nigeria are mostly manifested out of none adherence to the teachings of all the religions, since all the Holy books like the Qur'an and the Bible teaches peaceful co-existence of the people. The Qur'an openly states in chapter 2: verse 190 Fight for the sake of those that fight against you, but do not attack them first.

Allah does not love aggressors²⁰. It is therefore not true to say that the Muslim leaders or Christians of Nigeria are ignorant of such verses and the relationship that existed at the early state, which is supposed to be emulated by the present society. Qur'an 2: 256 states: There should be no compulsion in religion²¹. Another verse states 109: 6 Unto you your religion and unto me my religion²². The above verses shows that many religions could co-exist in harmony without conflict since followers of every religion are enjoined to stick to their religions.

For example, in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), some religions existed side by side with Islam, and the prophet himself accorded much respect to the followers of these religions. The Qur'an is full of teachings in which no doubt about it, a guidance to those who are pious, who fear Allah and very much abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which Allah has forbidden, and performance of good deeds which He has ordained. Several crises occurred in many parts of Nigeria from the initial stage as tribal and later turned to religious crisis.

But the question is, were all these actually religious crisis, if they were, were the forerunners of these crises ignorant of such teachings of the glorious Qur'an and The Bible? One may likely say that such crisis were not religious

as such, since the holy prophet states in one of his traditions that the blood of a brother Muslim is only lawful in three ways: 1. When a Muslim kills a Muslim brother, he will be killed. 2. When he commits apostasy (Ridda) and warned to repent, if he refused, he will be killed. 3. When a married man or married woman commits adultery he or she will be killed.

Again the messenger of Allah (P. B. U. H) said: A thief will not commit theft at the time he/she commits it while he is still a Mumin and drunkard will not drink at the time he/she drinks while he/she is still a mumin, and the armed robber will not commit robbery of the precious thing, with people watching him at the time he commits robbery while he is still a mumin²³. The above Hadith illustrated the situation in Nigeria about those who call themselves religious and yet engage in such irreligious crisis. As pointed out above, the immediate causes of which can therefore be attributed to: A.

Pretentious ignorance of followers of the dominant religions in their religious tenets coupled with lack of proper adherence to the teachings of their religions. B. Due to Lack of Allah's consciousness ethno - religious crisis arising from economic consideration from the leaders of Nigeria, many of the crisis are economically ignited, e. g. with all Nigeria's oil wealth, what has been done to alleviate the sufferings of the majority masses. In such a case, uprisings occur in the name of religious crisis where the frustrated Nigerians will take laws into their hands in the name of protecting the interest of their various religions.

Though Muslims cite example of a hadith which says: If one sees an abomination he should correct it with his hand and if that is not possible, he

should correct it with his tongue and if that is not possible he should hate it in his heart, the later being the weakest degree of faith²⁴. The above Hadith shows the level of correction to be embarked upon by any good Muslim, not the correction through destruction as it is done in Nigeria. This is the correction that is done, not with the loss of lives or destruction of public property C.

Although Nigeria is a secular state, yet some top government officials take biased decisions in favour of their religions, especially on employment and other government affairs. This action always provokes the followers of other religions which consequently result to crisis in the name of religion. An example is that of complains by Christians about the Arabic inscriptions in the Nigerian currency, while on the other hand the Muslims too complain about Friday not being work-free day just like their Christian counterparts enjoy Sundays as work free day.

D. Misunderstanding of the concept of shariah: Some Muslims and non Muslims in the country are ignorant of the entire concept of shariah and therefore, see it as an instrument of oppression and abuse of human rights. With this erroneous conception of shariah, some Muslims and non Muslims oppose its implementation openly and in so doing conflicts of religious nature occur. To this end, remedy to these problems must be sought in order to create a peaceful social environment for the overall development of our country, Nigeria.

Suggestions As Remedies For Ethno-Religious Crisis In Nigeria. We have seen that the socio-political history of Nigeria has been bedeviled with series of

conflicts especially of ethnic and religious nature. These conflicts are also varied, sometimes within a given religion or between religions, so also is the case with ethnic crisis. These crisis are seriously hindering the nation towards achieving one of its desired objectives of unity and stability which is the basic pre-requisite for any meaningful development.

Below are a number of suggestions which would serve as remedies to the frequent ethnic and religious crisis in the country. 1. The method of imparting to the Nigerian citizenry the spirit of patriotism should be revisited. Nigerians should be fully acquainted with the ethics of patriotism. They should be made to take the nation first before any sectional interest. 2. Followers of both religions should value and adhere strictly to the teachings of their faiths since all religions are peace-loving, the spirit of tolerance and cooperation will be developed so that Nigerians can work with one another peacefully. . The basic aim of the Federal Character Commission should be observed with all sense of seriousness. The aim is : “ to give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the federal Republic of Nigeria”. If this aim is fully implemented, all Nigerians irrespective of language, religions or sex will have a sense of belonging and fuller participation in all government affairs without discrimination.

In this way the feeling of one tribe or religion dominating the other will be discarded. 4. Formation of associations of purely tribal nature should be out rightly discouraged. 5. Inter-faiths Mediation Centers should be developed at all levels of government. 6. Law enforcement and security agents should be

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re-oriented on the importance of being neutral when putting down crisis of any nature in the country. 7. Standards should be set for preaching on all religions. In this way rampant preaching by the scholars of various religions could be controlled. 8.

The supreme bodies of various religions in the country should enforce the law guiding the adherence of their belief system. Muslims for example should be made to apply Shari'ah. In the same vein application of ecclesial law should be encourage . In this way conflicts within and between religions would be reduced. 9. Media houses and the press should always be fair in their reports, especially when it involves crisis of ethnic and religious nature. 10. As some of the crisis are caused deliberately by area boys and certain movements, this is actually reflecting the economic situation of the country.

Effort should be done to reduce the activities of area boyism through employment and equitable distribution of the nation's wealth. 11. There should be total war against the debilitating problems of ignorance, poverty and disease, therefore promoting the well being of the individuals that make up the nation. Notes And References 1. Eleazu, U. " History and Geography of Nigeria" in Eleazu U. Ed. Nigeria: The first 25 years, Lagos Heinemann. 1985 -p3 2. Abdul Basir, A. A. & Bala, U. K, " In search of Lingua Franca/National Language Towards Sustainable Democracy for Nation Building".

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