

THE STATE, THE ECONOMY, ORDER AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA: THE SOLUTION TO THE ROOTS OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

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Abstract

The primordialism of ethno-religious identity in Nigeria's political system is as old as the country's creation that has created an 'epidemic of hate' between the various tribes and religious sects, culminating into conflicts, which have generated insecurity, uprooted lives, destroyed communities and reversed years of progress and sustainable human development. Through secondary data, the paper takes a dialectical view of the evolution, growth and expansion of ethno-religious attachments and the anomic political engineering for nation-building. Our findings have inter-alia being that, the explanation of crises of identity and religion in Nigeria lies in the very foundation (economy) of social life and the character of the state arising therefrom. In the final analysis, we advocate among other things, economic and state-centered approach towards addressing the problems of ethnic and religious jingoism, which have caused more harm than good in the country's search for democratic governance.

Keywords: Order and security, State and Economy, Ethno-religious Conflict, Security, Democratic governance, Political engineering.

Introduction

Conflict has been the reality of Nigerian society over the years that cannot be wished away. There is an uneasy calm in the country today as every sphere of life witness's one kind of crises or the other. This 'epidemic of hate' has resulted in serious violent ethno-religious conflicts, that have generated insecurity, uprooted lives, destroyed communities and reversed years of progress towards achieving development. Bellicism in the words of Kukah (2002:2) is:

The most ubiquitous, defining expression of democratic Nigeria. While every area of our national life is seemingly in deficit, the investment in violence reaps bounteous dividends, and while the positive fruits of democracy are in short supply, the negative and rotten fruits of violence are in abundance.

Why then is it that, societies that have co-existed for centuries, have similar cultural backgrounds, close and strong ties through inter-marriages, have maintained traditional methods of settling disputes etc., do more often than not experience disagreements that defy possible solutions? Is it because conflicts are inevitable? Or is it because modernity has destroyed the traditional mechanisms of settling conflict? These are some of questions this paper intends to address.

However, it is the contention of this paper that the state and the economy are central in creating order and security that is germane for peaceful co-existence and development of any society. It is equally the position of this paper that, the nature and character of the Nigerian Economy and state has often aided the intensification of ethno-religious violence leading to the breakdown of order and security that has stifled development over years. Stamping analytical order on the issues in perspective, the paper following a brief introduction delves into conceptual clarifications, some causes of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria,

manifestations of these conflicts and the erosion of order and security, the role of the state and economy in these conflicts, the implications of these conflicts on Nigeria and recommendations for managing these conflicts.

Conceptual Clarifications

The State

Theorizing on the concept of the state has been quite problematic as it is difficult to arrive at a single universally acceptable definition. However, the notions of the state are broadly classified into, the liberal school of thought and the Marxist approach. The liberal view sees the state as the political organization of human society, which consists of institutions designed to make and enforce laws that have binding effects on persons within a defined territory. Macleaver, (1984). In essence, the above conception of the state means, it is a benevolent arbiter that is meant to nourish the interest of all in a society. On the contrary, the Marxist perspective sees the state as a set of public institutions that reflect in its activities the interest of the dominant social class. In Nigeria, because of the dominant role of the state in all facets of the society and growing disequilibrium in the distribution of wealth, the state in the Marxist sense is more appropriate hence it is adopted in the analysis of this work.

The Economy

In this paper, the economy is seen as the production of material wealth that provides the basis for the development of society. The focus here is on the economic relations among people in the production process; relationships that harp on the form of ownership of the means of production, the position of various classes and social groups in production and the forms of distribution of mineral wealth. While the primacy assigned to the economic base as the starting point of any scientific analysis in the actual life process has been seriously queried, the pervasiveness of material conditions in explaining social life provides as sufficient ground to rely on the mode of production and distribution of wealth in society as the starting point for further analysis in this work.

Order and Security

As used in this paper, it is simply a reference to the state, making laws and enforcing them in a manner that there will be safety and peaceful co-existence of citizens in a society. Such tranquility can only exist when the laws are made and enforced in such a way as to enhancing the wellbeing of the entire citizenry.

The Concept of Conflict

In this paper, we conceive conflict as a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts could take place between individuals and political collectivities. Inter-group conflicts which are our basic concern in this exposition are perennial features of social life in Nigeria.

The Concept of Ethnicity and its Etymology in Nigeria

Scholars like Hembé (2000:3) argue against the position that, for a real understanding of African socio-economic problems, there is no alternative to class analysis. The late erudite scholar believed that very often ethnicity appears to be a better explanatory scheme than Marxism in explaining the socio-economic problems of African Nation-States. Ethnicity in the words of Omu (2000:3) “applies to the consciousness of belonging to, identifying with and being loyal to a social group distinguished by shared cultural traditions; a common language, in group sentiments and self-identity”. It is thus, a pattern of relationship, which tends to develop among members of distinct ethnic groups when they co-exist and interact. Invariably, ethnicity is a function of inter-group relations and a manifestation of the conditions and realities of the group's existence.

The fundamental aspect of this relation is revealed in a two-way flow of influence; how does one see his neighbor and how does the neighbor see him? The evolution of this way of thinking (ethnicity) in Nigeria bears reference to the consolidation of the political economy of imperialism. What began as the Lagos Crown Colony in 1861 metamorphosed into the “geographical expression” that is today Nigeria? By the “mistake of 1914” opined Bello (1962:135), the British coalesced the desperate communities into a Nigerian Nation under the superstructure, of the colonial state.

By the stroke of pen, the British decided, in 1939, to re-divide the country into three, this time splitting the south into two: The Eastern and Western Nigeria. Administrative convenience was the rationale for this seemingly innocuous act, yet its consequences continue to hunt Nigeria since then. For it was this act of administrative expedience, according to Gana (1990:12) that sewed the seed for regionalism and ethnicity in Nigeria politics which remains resistant to even the most revolutionary assault on it some thirty years later.

This primordialism of region was granted constitutional legitimacy in the Macpherson Constitution of 1954, which introduced regional legislatures and unleashed the regional tendencies that were to dominate the politics of the First Republic. If 1914 was a mistake, 1954 was certainly a tragedy which only 1967 was to attenuate. For in the heat of the “war to keep Nigeria one”, Gowon sought to undermine the primordialism of 'tribe' by destroying the territorial basis of this form of parochialism. Eke (1972:10) puts epically, “in terms of their significance for shaping the political orientations and fortunes of Nigerians, the 1954 constitutional arrangement and the May 1967 creation of states are close competitors in our national history”.

Explanations of this crisis of identity have been primarily in terms of the colonially implanted myth of the African society as characterized by savagery, a society dominated by the primordialism of tribe. When radical scholarship challenged these characterizations, a conceptual shift took place and 'tribalism' exorcised in the vocabulary of the modernizers, replaced by the more elegant but equally mystifying concept of ethnicity. Regardless of this conceptual shift, the reality of a dependent capitalist social order such as ours, is the reality of a society in which politics seizes to be the mechanism for the resolution of conflict, but more fundamentally, for the control of the collective resources of the society, as a means for consolidating class power Gana (1983:67).

Thus from the civil war of 1967-70, through the religious war of 1987, the Sharia controversy of 2000, the Niger-Delta storm among other conflict manifestations, the central issue has never been the collectives, variously called tribes or ethnic groups, but the material interest of what in the popular literature is called the “power elites”, but what is more accurately tagged the 'ruling class'.

Some Causes and Manifestations of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

One principal source of ethnic-religious conflicts in Nigeria is the growing inequality in the distribution of resources among component societies and within societies. As a result, fear often unclear and intangible, not always of immediate threats but also of more distant ones against which reassurance may not be possible account for the persistence of conflict. One of these resources is political power, and as Nnoli (1978) notes, “the division along regional, ethnic and religious lines reinforced each other pitching groups against one another in the struggle to control political power and economic resources”. There has also been a fundamental crisis of legitimacy in the political structure and command of the Nigerian state because those who govern either came in through military or civil coup via stolen election results. Consequently, as Kukah (2002:10) notes, illegitimacy cannot but beget illegitimacy. As a result, so many contradictory pulls and strains abound, which would be considered normal elsewhere. But for Nigeria, since the state itself is so inherently weak, ordinary issues of politics and other forms of social relations generate tension and spillover to violent situations. Under this condition, no general sense of nationhood has emerged, and so ordinary citizens of this country fall back on their ethnic or religious groups as the basis for their identity and as long as the sense of nationhood does not emerge, people will continue to subordinate the nation to the whims of their communities.

Most of the ethnic classes in Nigeria are manifestation of jealousy and feeling of relative deprivation. Some other coloration, like religion in such conflicts, seek to mask the underlying fundamental causes of the crisis. Religion as Adejo (2002:249) points out “is often a ready weapon employed to gain advantage or obtain a victim status in the unending ethnic quest for social, political and economic advantages”.

The nature of unequal access to resources and unequal treatment of minority ethnic communities by dominant ones have long stirred suspicion and hatred leading to ethnic-religious conflicts. The competition between the groups for access to power in the polity has inherent conflict situations. The consequences are contagious ethno-religious activism and the emergence of ethnic elites willing to mobilize their Kith and Kin in response to changing political opportunities and resources. In many northern cities in the country, large pools of uneducated, more or less homeless youths are conspicuously visible. Although, many attend Koranic schools, they easily have constituted over the years, the bulk of what Edol (2001:89) calls “the available non-elites” that are usually at the vanguard of the killings, lootings, arson and other political anionic behaviours and hooliganism that have become almost endemic to the Nigerian state. Another major factor

responsible for ethno-religious crisis and, which if not adequately addressed could lead to more serious crisis is the issue of poverty. "The economic depression, leading to serious economic problems, which have aggravated in employment, sense of frustration and abandonment among the people has created veritable tools for mischief-makers. The poor are vulnerable and are easy targets for cynical manipulation by the rich and desperate politicians.

The struggle for chieftaincy positions has also led to open confrontation in several parts of the country. These matters have their roots in the social structure of the society; the superior and inferior categorization embedded in politics. Tied to this is the emergence of what Adejo (2002:249) calls 'stranger elements' or better known as non-indigenes in some communities. Recent developments in Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba States attest to this disposition.

The manifestations of ethno-religious violence in the country are quite glaring. The sharia controversy, ethnic diatribe and hatred that have engulfed Nigeria in contemporary times are quite frightening. In the Niger Delta area, there are armed community gangs terrorizing and abducting personnel working for foreign oil companies. Their activities are potentially capable of choking-off the economic life-wire of the country. There is also the Odudua People's Congress (OPC) an armed Yoruba group campaigning violently for the restructuring of Nigeria to give more power to the federating units. The growing influence of the activity of the movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP) and movement for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB). All these blood bath and loss of property show the degree of disorder and insecurity in the Nigerian state.

The Role of the State and the Economy in Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Any meaningful attempt to understand the crisis of state formation in Nigeria in relation to the problem of identity based on religious conflicts has to be historically contextualized, in terms of the system of rule and domination instituted by the colonial powers. In many instances, the colonial authorities, relying on the finding of colonial anthropologist, ranked ethnic groups on the basis of their culture as perceived to be suitable to the colonial quest for domination. Nuna (1998:83) states that the construction of 'Northern Nigeria' identity from inception of colonial rule was rigidly defined as 'Islamic' and 'Hausa' thus, elevating these social categories into a more politically dominant position within the area, in other instances, ethnic groups with centralized political organization were considered more amenable to law, order and civilization. Consequently, groups that lacked such centralized power arrangements were either subjected to the rule of groups that had centralized state structure leading to a situation of 'internal colonialism' for the former. Partly for the same reason and partly for their 'stubborn resistance' to colonial conquest, a number of minority groups like the Tiv, were placed under the rule of their more 'civilized' neighbours.

Arising from independence, the post-colonial state became a relic of the colonial past, its personnel that control and operate the apparatuses of the state became bearers of specific class, ethnic, religious and regional interests, while its conception of order and the essence of the political community reflect the narrow power calculation of the ruling elite.

In appreciating the central role of the state in construction of political identity, we must begin with the analysis of the role it plays in the organization of economic production and the regulation of society. Alavi's (1972) seminar contribution points to the relative autonomy of the post-colonial state and its overdeveloped nature. Because of the absence of a strong local entrepreneurial class, the state that emerged in post-independent Nigeria was of necessity a development and interventionist state. By implication, it is a state that plays a dominant role in the process of economic reproduction and the organization of the entire society. It is this pervasive and dominant, role of the state that explains its central role in the process of identity construction and conflicts.

The first significant feature of the state in Nigeria useful in the analysis of the state-conflict relationship is the authoritarianism of the tendency to centralize power and resource. In most instances, authoritarian rule survives on patron-clientele ties and relationships ethnically based. In such instances, state domination is perceived as being exercised by a particular ethnic group, region or religion. As stated by Egwu (2007:42), power is perceived in the country as being controlled by those defined as ethnic majorities to the exclusion of minority groups, either at the national or local level. This leads to struggle for self-determination is fueled by different political dynamics which overtime, has led to the transformation of ethnic minority consciousness. Ethnic minorities such as the Ogoni, Ijaw and Urhobo, for example, consider the acute poverty and neglect of

their region as well as ecological devastation despite the huge deposits of crude oil which has remained the lifeblood of the Nigerian state to be a consequence of their minority status in a country in which the construction of state power is understood to be predicated on the interests of the ethnic majorities.

The weak structure of the Nigerian state is another element in the account of the prevalent internal conflicts in the country. The tendency of the state to become more repressive, increase in its coercive and extractive capacities makes it to score very low in terms legitimacy, hegemonic position and the delivery of development and welfare services. Consequently, there is a fraying character of state-society relations, lack of trust from the citizens', extensive administrative and bureaucratic structure, widespread use of public funds for the personal enrichment of civil servants and politicians, political authoritarianism that shows the failure of the state to perform the most basic task.

The imposition of neo-liberal macro-economic reforms which began with the Structural Adjustment Programme in the mid 1980's, as correctly appreciated by Akav (2006) has further reduced the capacity of the Nigerian state to deal with the challenges of development and welfare. The consequences are the mounting unemployment problem, inflation, widespread poverty and the tendency to constitute ethnic and religious identities into rallying points in the struggle for all kinds of space. Also, the protracted ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria can be explained in the central role the state plays in the construction and reconstruction of political identities as basis of power in the federation. The connection between politicization of identities and conflicts in Nigeria according to Egwu (2007:428) can be established from the exercise of power and access to resources, the construction of citizenship on the basis of ethnic and regional identity, and the deliberate manipulation of difference by the elites in power to fragment and weaken resistance to domination. In enhancing ethnic difference, an 'indigeneity' clause in power was introduced into the constitution. And the constitution defines an indigene of a state in terms of descent, which an individual trace through his grandparents, and who must belong to a community indigenous to the state or local government. The effect of this was to introduce a distinction between "natives" and "settlers" as basis for exclusion. The consequence has been that in many that in many states and local governments, different ethno-cultural groups are pitched against one another in deadly confrontations.

The politicization of religion in Northern Nigeria, through the introduction of the Islamic code since 1999 has triggered-off insecurity among the non-Muslims/Christian minorities leading to suspicion, tension and violence. Not surprisingly, therefore, religious violence and mass destruction of lives and property have greeted the introduction of Sharia in key Northern cities such as Kano and Kaduna.

In terms of the linkage between the economy and the upsurge of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria, one considers the indirect and systematic manner the economy affects the socio-cultural and political spheres of the society leading to skirmishes among groups. Given the low level of development of the productive forces, the state takes the position of accumulating economic power. In that context, the premium on political power is very high as politics becomes warfare, with politicians exploiting ethnic and religious sensibilities to acquire political power.

The Implications of Ethno-Religious Violence on Nigeria

The major implication of ethno-religious violence on Nigeria is the general sense of insecurity and disorder of society today. Development cannot be anchored on disunity and religious bigotry which is the fate of Nigeria today. Tied to this is the primordialism of tribe and religion, which has de-emphasized the spirit of nationalism and patriotism in the country, resulting in the fact that after about 60 years of Nigeria's corporate existence, the scepter of disintegration is still hunting the nation.

Also ethno-religious conflicts have caused a great divide between the rich and the poor in the country today. The political character of these crises has further improvised the masses as a result of wanton destruction of lives and property. In spite of the fact that the country is once again foot-loosed in search of democracy, it has turned out to be an arrangement of survival of the fittest. Because of ethno-religious intolerance, Nigerians do not think in terms of one nation, one destiny, but as one nation many destinies, which makes it impossible for social democracy to thrive. New political techniques and strategies are urgently needed if Nigeria is to avoid going the way of Yugoslavia. This situation according to Nnoli (1978) is why we have "ethnic and religious watchers" in the country who watched constantly and carefully the pattern of distribution of resources in society, emphasizing the neglect of their groups, thereby fanning the embers of inter-tribal and religious prejudice and hostility.

Our tendency over the years, writes Ake (1981:2) to gloss over economic factors as relevant in undertaking the problem of ethnicity is responsible for our failure to addressing ethnic violence in Nigeria. The traditional method of regarding ethnicity as merely a consciousness without situating it in material condition should be discarded.

Thus ethnic jingoism flourishes because it provides access to 'important' people, for villagers and the unemployed seeking jobs in the cities, it fills to a considerable extent the gap left by the lack of social security, and it serves the economic and political interest of the Nigerian petit-bourgeoisie by promoting solidarity ties across class lines.

Findings

The major implication of ethno-religious violence on Nigeria is the general sense of insecurity and disorder of the society today. Development cannot be enclosed on disunity and religious bigotry that is the fate of Nigeria today. Tied to this is the primordialism of tribe and religion, which has de-emphasized the spirit of nationalism and patriotism in the country. Thus, after about 60 years of Nigeria's corporate existence, the scepter of disintegration is still hunting the nation. Also ethno-religious conflicts have caused a great divide between the rich and the poor in the country today.

The political character of these crises has further improvised the masses as a result of wanton destruction of lives and property. In spite of the fact that, the country is once again foot-loosed in search of democracy, it has turned out to be an arrangement of survival of the fittest. Again, because of ethno-religious intolerance, Nigerians do not think in terms of one nation, one destiny, but as one nation, many destinies; which makes it impossible for social democracy to thrive. New political techniques and strategies are urgently needed if Nigeria is to avoid going the way of Yugoslavia.

Recommendations

There has been a plethora of constitutional provisions, government policies, and programmes aimed at lessening ethnic and religious cleavages and forging national cohesion. These range from creation of states, the application of the principle of federal character, the requirement for all political parties to be national in their membership, the introduction of uniform local government systems, to the introduction of compulsory one-year national service in states other than those of their origin by Nigerian graduates. The building of colleges of national unity and introduction of national orientation programme into the curricula of all institutions of learning below the tertiary level, are pertinent in Nigeria's palliative and unsuccessful search for a political order that transcends ethnic and religious divide.

That notwithstanding, one way of enhancing peaceful co-existence in Nigeria irrespective of tribe and religious affiliation is the need to emphasize good governance. As could be seen in retrospect, the provision of public need to Nigerians – a hallmark of good governance has been neglected, leaving utility services in a very sordid state. Production in all sectors of the economy is seriously crippled. Governance and indeed, economic dispensation is based on intense pressure, lobby, blackmail and tussles, culminating in the perpetuation of the greedy culture of opportunism in the form of scrambling for resources and sharing, rather than banking the national cake. A frustrated and hungry society, created by several years of mis-governance is further pushed to the dungeon of desperation, banditry and crises. We submit here that, it is the prolonged absence of the condition for good governance in our political process that has generated tension and instability in the country today. For so long as the majority poor cannot sleep due to hunger, the rich cannot sleep because the poor are awake. It is this objective reality that makes force an important variable in the perpetuation of the contradictions prevalent in our social system today. The manifestations of good governance point to the provision of basic needs, the enhancement of a sense of worth and self-respect into the individual, the guaranteeing of fundamental freedom of emancipation from the social servitude of men to nature and other men. The elements of good governance identified, which are not exhaustive are inter-related and are ideally encapsulated in the conception of modern democracy. Thus, it may be assumed that, democratic government as a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm would promote the best wishes of the majority, recognize and accommodate the yearnings of the minorities, rely heavily on consultation in order to obtain consensus on policy, adhere strictly to the principles of the rule of law as well as the practice of honesty, transparency and accountability in the conduct of government business. This will go a long way in taming communal and religious violence in Nigeria.

There is also, the need for the administration of justice if we must tame communal and religious bellicose in Nigeria today. The democratic creed of separation of powers should actually be to make the judiciary independent of executive or state control, so that judges/magistrates would not just be immune from the risk of losing their jobs if they fail to comply with the government directives on certain cases, but, also be entitled to their pay when due. This will enhance justice. Actually, if the judiciary in Nigeria today is made to be independent and the custodian of the common man, prosecution and punishment of erring Nigerians, no matter how highly placed would curtail so many crimes that are perpetrated in the society today. This will go a long way in curbing the manipulation of communal and religious sensibilities by men in position of power and authority for their selfish motives.

Another major factor that can curb the menace of ethnic and religious bellicosity in Nigeria is agreed on the focus of governance. In this case, we emphasize true federalism. In a situation where our political system is unitary in a federal disguise cannot but, lead to one thing; the increase role of the state in subverting the wishes and aspirations of sundry Nigerians and the increase manipulation of ethnic and religious sentiments by politicians to corner the national resources. This unitary framework of governance has hold-sway due to the long authoritarian leadership of the military occasioned by centrifugal forces that were tending to reinforce the disintegration of the country. But as it seems in modern times the centralization of resources at center has more often than not denied the Nigerian masses quality life at t expense of the of the minority ruling class who are in control of the administrative process of the country. True federalism will bring the government closer to the masses and an increased sense of belonging, relative peace and security in the country.

If meaningful solution is to emerge in addressing the spate of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, our welfare system needs redirection and refocusing. As Na'Abba (2002) rightly observes, “our welfare system is very archaic and it betrays a lack of compassion”. The pursuit of moral balance could be erected solidly on economic empowerment and people-friendly nature of the polity. True human freedom is freedom from want. Although it may not entirely guarantee the absence of conflicts, it however minimizes them to manageable levels. A great number of conflicts are linked to the mode of economic production and distribution as earlier alluded in this exposition, and so it behaves the state programmes on economic problems must take cognizance of enhancing production techniques and adequate provision of infrastructure in the rural communities.

All the points emphasized here can only be sustained if they are anchored on a sound economic and good character of the political leadership. In the course of this exposition, we emphasized the centrality of the economic system in bringing about quality in the social relations of production. We also emphasized how the social relations of production (especially the state) are important in shaping the development of the economy. It is therefore the position of this paper that, good governance, administration of justice, true federalism, improvement in our welfare system in a bid to enhance a stable polity devoid of cankerous ethnic and religious violence can only be established and sustained by a developed economic system and the character of the political leadership arising there from. It therefore means that, the political leadership of this country must imbibe values that are promotional of development such as discipline, self-control, honesty, commitment to duty, accountability and transparency among many others. Only then can it be possible to chum out policies of improving production, reducing unemployment and even curtailing excesses of the followership.

Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, it is correct to state that, if communal and religious cleavages are to be successfully managed and resolve, the role of the state, especially the political leadership must have the political will to initiate and actually follow conflict management and resolution mechanisms by rising above them and assuming an unbiased position. That is why “ethics and accountability” on the part of the political leadership in governance is upheld by Sorkaa (2003), in a trail-blazing inaugurallecture, “Development as Ethics and Accountability in Governance”: The way forward for Nigeria, is quite crucial if they are to rise above these cleavages and mediate in the management and resolution process. To this it must be stated that, what the nation needs according to Utov (2001) “is a basic reversal of attitude from mere quantity to universal quantity, from over-vaulting ambition for power and greed for soul-stifling abundance to totally dedicated openness to Nigeria's transforming politic-economic trends”.

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