

THE PLACE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ETHNO-SECURITY
ISSUES OF NIGERIAN POLITY

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ABSTRACT

Most developing countries are ethnically diverse and Nigeria as an entity and political polity is not an exception. Nigeria is one of the African countries that has ethnic diversity which has led to increased civil and national strife. Potentially, the detrimental economic/social effect of diversity and ethnic conflict and consequent national security problems are increasing at an alarming rate. Ethnic conflicts have become the serious challenges of our times, which perhaps explain why ethnicity and security problems are seen as the reigning concepts in African studies at present. Nigeria is widely known as a country with extreme linguistic fragmentation. Nigeria is made up of diverse ethnic groups, the majority of which have minority status. Based on the size of the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country, three distinct groups have been recognized: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. In addition, Kin-selective altruism has made its way into Nigerian politics and has spurred various attempts by tribalists to concentrate Federal power to a particular region of their interests. Consequently, such factors have led to national security issues in the Nigerian polity. The communicative roles of the English language and literature in solving security problems that emanate from ethnicity and national security problems cannot be undervalued especially in our contemporary Nigeria where English serves as a second language cum first language to a great number of the people. This paper therefore explores extensively the communicative roles of English and literature in solving national security problems of the Nigerian polity. The writer reiterated that Ethnocentrism, tribalism, religious persecution, and ethnicity have played a visible role in Nigerian politics. The writer highlights linguistic strategies and techniques that could be tantamount to tackling security problems and she concludes by reiterating the fact that concerted efforts should be made by the government, individuals, teachers, students and corporate bodies in order to utilize fully the tremendous impacts of the integration of the English Language and African Literature in solving national security issues.

Key Words: *National Integration, Ethnicity, Ethnocentrism, Technological advancement*

INTRODUCTION

In modern times, different countries of the world have experienced crises at different times and efforts have been made to combat such crises. Despite such efforts, it has been observed that there are severe shortcomings in the conflict management processes. Bemoaning this situation, Zartman (2000: 3) wrote: Yet African countries remain impervious to these attentions; though they involve the activities of seasoned peace makers using the best of personal skills and recently developed knowledge about ways of managing and resolving conflicts, international efforts at conflict management have not been particularly effective or efficient in overcoming the disasters that have brought them to the continent. It is this futility of efforts to resolve conflicts in African countries that has partly provoked "the search for more creative and contextual approaches to conflict resolution in Africa" (Osaghae, 2000: 201). In fact, Zartman (2000) held the view that before conflicts in Africa rose to an intensity that justified international attention,

domestic measures would be expected to come into play. This is the current thinking among scholars who strongly argue for great emphasis to be placed on the wisdom of African traditional conflict management practices. In fact, there are myriads of problems that mitigate against Nigeria's politico-economic development. Such problems have persisted and continued to defy solutions because no coordinated policies and programmes have been formulated, designed and implemented to ameliorate the problems. This paper employs a lingual and literary approach to solving problems that arise as a result of ethnic diversities. We must assert that the English language in its various forms of usage and uses is recognized as a complementary language to the indigenous languages and must be learnt and utilized effectively to also perform relevant social and national functions. In view of the role of language, Adebite1999 asserts that:

there should be a recognition that language (lingual) and cultural (any aspect or area of experience of members of a society or nation) are interconnected and has to be integrated in the formulation of policies on any area of experience (375).

In Nigeria, there are ethno-religious conflicts that have interplay of politics, ethnicism and religions, which have consequently led to the rising nationalism and militancy of various ethnic and religious movements. It is interesting to note that the overall consequence of this is the escalation of various ethno-security problems that are witnessed all over the country today. It is important to note here too that the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governments, forge national integration and promote what can be called real economic progress, through deliberate and articulated policies, has led to mass poverty and unemployment. This has resulted into communal, ethnic, religious and class conflicts that have now characterized the Nigerian nation. These have resulted into insecurity witnessed in the Nigerian polity. Poverty and unemployment have therefore served as nursery bed for many ethnic related conflicts in Nigeria because the country now has a reservoir of poor people who warmongers as mercenary fighters. Amidst all odds, there is need to curb the extent to which lives and property are lost and it is believed that the English language and literature have a great role to play.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is a multilingual nation where English has acquired the status of a second language to many, while to others it is a third language. In Nigeria, English was given an important place before independence. In most of the institutions, English had been the medium of instruction. The study of English was considered to be a superior quality not only status wise but also for career. The child is expected to interact through English with its family members and neighbours in various types of interaction.

Language could be used as a unifying tool, especially for people who speak the same tongue. For such people, language acts as a national flag, giving the speakers a common identity and a sense of belonging. It is also used for controlling people's behaviour since it is rule-governed, and a breach of its rules attracts sanctions. Speakers of the same tongue are bound together culturally and linguistically. This is the socio-linguistic integrative role of languages. Speech norms are to be observed in speech acts to avoid communication breakdown. Through language the United Nation's 1946 declaration on Universal Human rights become a handy document in the hands of all and sundry. Through language, the ingredients of global citizenship and integration-such as peace, cooperation, interdependence, mutual trust, respect for human rights, patience, altruism, etc are taught in schools.

These values too are also ingredients for sustainable democracy. Anikweze, et al 2005) christen these socio-cultural values as "Petadi" and which stands for the issues and values of patience, education, talent, altruism, discipline and internationalism. These are now global ideas often discussed at national and international fora.

English plays a significant role in almost all spheres of human endeavour, be it in education politics, the judiciary, administration, economics, religion, government, business and legislation. English today is the lamp which the youths need in order to travel through the educational tunnel. Government reaches out to its teeming multi-ethnic and multi-lingual population through the English medium. It is the language of crisis management, be it political, religious or ethnic crisis. At the Independence Day, Democracy day, Nigerian workers' day, etc, English is the language used to address Nigerians. Ogundare (2004) she asserts that English is so fundamental to the functioning of the nations that she refers to it as "one of the major Nigerian languages". According to her, because ethnic and linguistic plurality is a fact of Nigerian life, the role of English as a unifying and integrating language is obvious. Nigeria as a developing democracy operates a multi-party system where political parties meet frequently, hold rallies and meetings, and carryout electioneering campaigns. Members of these different political parties come from diverse ethnic, religious and socio-linguistic backgrounds. In this situation, English becomes the only viable, integrating language, because English is a neutral language. As a multilingual nation, Nigeria requires a common medium for inter-ethnic Communication, English has remained the compromise choice as the medium of interaction in this situation, since political resistance has forced three major Nigerian autonomous languages out of the status of Lingua Franca.

CAUSES CUM ANALYSIS OF CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Conflict is an aspect of life that is very often avoided for the fear of loss. However, conflict is a part of our human existence. It has been known to bring about all manner of outcomes from food shortages to prosperity; economic recessions to gender inequality. Civil conflict has been known to leave people with little or no time to practice farming hence causing food shortages. Countries with large defense industries have been known to make tidy profits from armed conflicts across the world. Nigeria has not been without its fair share of conflict. In fact, no decade of post-Independent Nigeria has been conflict free. With several coups, general strikes and a civil war, Nigerians have had to experience some of the most sordid tragedies arising from difference of opinions and distrust. Several factors are responsible for the ethno-security conflicts in Nigeria. There is the breakdown of such vehicles of social control that characterized the traditional African societies such as, the family, education, law, religion and political system that cared for the well-being of ail citizens. Indeed, the malfunctioning of all these important institutions has actually increased ethnic and communal conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, the inability of many homes to make the ends meet with the family income tends to increase immorality, broken fatherless/motherless homes, divorces and drunkenness, leading again to a large reserve of youths who could be employed for execution of ethno-religious conflicts. It is also important to note that the school system in Nigeria today is in shambles and cannot impact even sound knowledge, let alone instill discipline and desired type of morality. The religious institution is also not playing its expected roles, while the law enforcement agents indulge in crimes, demand bribes and collect illegal levies from motorists openly and, shamelessly. All the above constitute a wrong signal to the social and encourage social vices in the society thereby laying the foundation for conflicts in general. It must be stated that the first five years after the civil war were declared the period of reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Despite the attempted reconciliation, the religious face of the civil war persisted even after the war had ended. It continued in the form of a religious cold war and this has drastically affected the security of Nigerians. Some of the crises are: The Sharia Crisis (1976-1979) which remains the major source of conflict in the Nigerian polity, The Shagari Regime Religious Crises (1979-1983), Kano Riot (18-29 December 1980) which involved burning of Churches in Kano (October 1982). It was the first open and violent religious conflict between Christians and Muslims. The Buhari Regime Religious Crises (1983-1985) in which Christians feared that the federal government was systemically engaging in the process of Islamizing the country. The Ahmadu Bello University Religious Crisis (June 1988) which occurred because a Christian candidate was about winning the Student's Union elections. The Kano religious riot of 1991, and there was several riots and destruction of lives and property both in the North and in other parts of the country during Obasanjo Regime of 1999-2004. These crises disrupted activities in the cities concerned in Nigeria. The recent bombing attacks on Nigeria by members of Boko Haram

depict the height of degeneration of moral rectitude in Nigeria. To this end, peace loving citizens of Nigeria are therefore beckoned to join the campaign against terrorism irrespective of tribe, religion or political affiliation. There is need to use dialogue which is a language medium to tackle the problem. The security of lives and property were at stake. Here are five causes of conflict in Nigeria:

1. Tribalism

One of the causes of conflicts in Nigeria is tribalism. Tribalism arises from the avid desire to favour members of one's tribe surfaced among the ruling class of Nigeria. With the autonomy of each region, politicians and top civil servants favoured their kith and kin when it came to appointments, contract awards and national politicking. Merit seemed to lose appeal in the face of ethnocentrism when decisions bordered on overall national interest. Ethnocentrism usually triggers off conflict and strife. For instance, the riots in the Western Region and the events of 29 May 1962 in which the House of Representatives deliberated and approved a State of Emergency in the Western Region were the first symptoms of ethnocentrism. The Region's Premier, Obafemi Awolowo cited that the government of the day had been discriminatory towards the Yorubas in declaring a State of Emergency when it did nothing of such in the Northern and Eastern Regions when similar riots occurred in Tiv and Okrika Divisions previously. The saga deepened and led to the eventual arrest of Chief Awolowo and Chief Enahoro. Having become displeased with the political class and the growing dysfunctionality of tribal politics, a group of five military officers (mostly Easterners) struck on 15 January 1966. It was a very bloody insurrection in which no principal officer of government from Igbo extraction was killed. The coup was dubbed an "Igbo Coup". The Northerners retaliated with a bloodier reprisal coup in July 1966 which flagged off what many historians would call, short of genocide. Igbos living in Northern Nigeria were very many times singled out and butchered from that time, warranting Governor Odimegwu Ojukwu's request that they return home to safety. Decrying the treatment meted the Igbo people, Ojukwu announced secession from Nigeria in May 1967 and on 6 July 1967, a civil war broke out. Many claim that tribal interests played a major role in the defeat of the Igbos as the Igbos had previously failed to rally behind Awolowo in his quest to be Nigerias' first Prime Minister. The civil war was payback time. The Yorubas, especially Awolowo were deemed to have helped foiled the Igbo attempt at self-determination. Even in today's Nigeria, so many ethnocentric sentiments are whipped up by politicians and divisive elements to sway electoral votes particularly at national executive level.

2. Resource Control

The yearning to control resources locally as against the current federal manner in which the resources are administered has been another source of conflict in Nigeria. For instance, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force which picked up the 'militia baton' from where Boro left off, and eventually started an evolution of several splinter groups in the region, all fighting for resource control. The chaos lasted till 26 June 2009 when President Umaru Yar'Adua announced the granting of an unconditional 60-day amnesty from 6 August 2009 to 4 October 2009. The 60-day period package offered the unconditional surrender of arms and ammunition in exchange for training and rehabilitation by government. Resource control remains a highly controversial issue in the Nigerian polity, especially in answering the constitutional questions of what true federalism means in the Nigerian context.

3. Religion

Religious intolerance has been a source of prolonged and conflagrated conflict particularly between Christians and Muslims. The Kano Riot of 1 May 1953 was the beginning of a series of violence against non-muslims inspired by bigotry. For instance, the instituting of Sharia as a main body of civil and criminal law in Twelve Northern Nigerian States, is a clear pointer to an aspiration for a purely Islamic society among some of the political class in northern Nigeria. Christians have also been known to instigate attacks particularly in Jos, which has won the reputation for bloody conflict between both religions since the early 1990s. The country has also witnessed the rise of radical group like Boko Haram movements over the last four decades.

4. Land Disputes

Land disputes have generated a lot of conflicts across the country. A typical example was the issue of Aguleri/Umuleri conflict in Anambra State.

5. Trade Related Disputes

Trade related issues can trigger off disputes and national strife. For instance the Aba Women's' Riot broke out in 1929 was as a result of a dispute that emanated from taxation by the colonial authorities of that time. There equally general strikes that shroud the 60s, 70s and 80s. Again, the President Obasanjo regime also had its fair share of industrial actions due to fallouts of hikes in the price of petrol. The removal of fuel subsidy by the government equally led to disputes. The movement witnessed demonstrations at home and abroad that raised so many unanswered questions that linger till today.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AND THEIR ROLES IN ETHNO-SECURITY ISSUES OF NIGERIA

There is dire need to adopt stringent and pro-active measures to tackle the problems emanating from ethno-related matters in Nigeria. English can play a vital role since it renders a significant role in multilingual/multicultural settings; it can be an extremely useful tool for enhancing the re-orientation and re-construction efforts of the country. Current national problems like poverty, identity, scientific and technological backwardness, revenue derivation and sharing, corruption, drug abuse, religious intolerance, pollution, and illiteracy can be tackled through reading and writing-related classroom activities in English, particularly at the advanced level of learning. The activities might influence the learners' views on such problems and mobilize them for appropriate action. It should be noted that one's command of language reflects the quality of one's thought and action. There are research evidences that language is genetically related to thinking. In modern times, where the issue of GlobalVillage and Information technology has been raised, it would be detrimental to easily dismiss the role of the English language as it is used in international communication. This is particularly true of a country like Nigeria. Generally speaking, English should still be taught according to the social and development needs of each African country. Linguists are of the opinion that languages are closely associated with scientific and technological advancement. Sociolinguists maintain that such development is only possible under the appropriate political, economic, cultural and ecolinguistic conditions. That is probably what the African continent should strive to achieve (as one of the basic steps towards conflict resolution through communication). However, in using the English language to solve problems, there should be total avoidance of Inflammatory Statement against any Religion. It is well known that some utterances are capable of inflaming passions which, of course, can develop into intolerance and eventually end up in riots. If the leaders will avoid foul language, it will encourage other members of their religion to follow suit. This will in turn promote good neighbourliness and strengthen the unity of Nigeria.

On the hand, the role of literature cannot be undervalued. Literature is language in action. Literature communicates through language. It enlarges our knowledge and understanding of human behaviors. Through literature we know what goes on in other nations of world. Literature illuminates man's mind and liberates man from prejudices. Through it the ills of the society are mirrored and criticized. Democratic and antidemocratic practices of different nations are highlighted, as literature relates to life and deals with man in his social political, economic, emotional, religious and cultural realities. The younger generation, though voracious reading comes face-to-face with global malaise, such as armed robbery, assassination of citizens, political thuggery, arson, sectarian crisis, lawlessness, dictatorship, extra-judicial killings, ethnic clashes, military coups, ritual killings, rape and a host of other social vices. Literature can thus be viewed as veritable tool for globalization.

Literature mirrors the society. It is indeed a veritable tool for solving/exposing the problems of any given society. Serious issues bothering any society can be dramatized thereby alleviating the problem, and consequently, create awareness. It must be pointed out that many authors/literary artists have portrayed national and international issues through their didactic literary texts. Notable scholars like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka etc have written extensively on texts that center on African society and their countless social problems. Literature according to Asade (2000) can be regarded as the matrix of socio-cultural ethos of a people, the weapon of sustenance, the means of exchanging opinions, feelings,

apprehension and aspirations. It is the greatest machinery for the mobilization and coordination of political activities into a cohesive and unified whole. It is even suggested that intra-national and international translation of literary works can enhance further mutual understanding, tolerance and cultural integration among the various socio-linguistic and cultural groups of the world. Indeed, literature, as a source of information, is one of the most potent instruments for societal enlightenment and integration. It must be stressed that literary artists are regarded as the conscience of the society. Literature brings about awareness of global trends, and it spurs people of diverse races into action, and binds them together as a people facing a common enemy. It thus welds together, in an integrative manner people of the same ideological beliefs, their colour/tribe/ethnicity notwithstanding.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the problem of ethno-security issues in Nigeria with emphasis on its causes and management. The article points out that the causes of these ethno-security conflicts, are multi-dimensional. Some of the causes mentioned may be attributed to accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry; the inability of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governments; breakdown of traditional vehicles of social control; the long history of military intervention in politics, which legitimizes the use of force and violence as instruments of social change and attainment of set goals and demand; and historical antecedent. In spite of the widespread of ethnic related conflicts in Nigeria and their long history, the paper has shown that the English language and literature are vehicles through which the Government, spirited individuals can articulate such problems in their bid to solve them and by implementing well organized policy actions.

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