RELIGIOUS FANATICISM AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Nigeria has witnessed different kinds of security challenges at different periods in her existence as a nation. However, the nature and trends of insecurity in the country have been worrisome in recent times. This paper examines the link between religious fanaticism and security challenges in Nigeria. Currently, the country grapples with a lot of security challenges such as assassination, ritual killings, armed robbery, kidnapping, ethno-religious violence, banditry and insurgency. The central thesis of the paper is that religious fanaticism coupled with other factors has increased the level of insecurity in the country. This has given rise to loss of lives and property, proliferation of arms, fear and instability in the country and proliferation of security guards. The paper recommends proper religious education and de-radicalization of religious fanatics; as well as the electronic surveillance of the nation's borders to check smuggling of illegal weapons into the country among others. It is believed that such measures will help in stemming the ugly tide of insecurity in the country.

Keywords: Religion, Fanaticism, Insurgency, Security.

Introduction

The present state of security crisis in Nigeria is very worrisome. As a multi-religious nation, Nigeria is faced with the challenge of utilizing her religious diversity in achieving a secure and prosperous nation. It is expected that religion should be a factor that promotes security in the society since it is known to help in fostering national peace, unity and progress. However, when religion is abused by the adherents, it leads to insecurity. Nigeria today is faced with the problem of religious fanaticism. This has given rise to different security challenges in the country such as religious violence and insurgency in recent time. In this line of thought, Ottuh (2013) asserted that religious fanaticism breeds religious conflicts.

Though insecurity is not a new thing in Nigeria, the number of security challenges in the country in recent time is alarming. Imhonopi and Urim (2012) noted that the number of violent crimes such as kidnappings, ritual killings, carjackings, suicide bombings, religious killings, politically-motivated killing and violence, ethnic clashes, armed banditry and others has increasingly become the regular signature that characterizes life in Nigeria. According to Onifade, Imhonopi, & Urim (2013), the rising number of security challenges in the country may not be unconnected with "the increasing ethnic hate, religious bigotry, political rivalry

and a growing population of disgruntled citizens in the country who feel that they have been short-changed and given very limited or no access to the common patrimony" (p. 53). In the same vein, Egwu (2001) argued that the primordial tendencies of various ethnic groups towards violence, the perennial eruption of various ethnic militias and the preponderant religious fundamentalism in place, given expression to by some sections of the dominant religious establishments in Nigeria, have inevitably aggravated the scale and propensity of insecurity and widened its scope in various ramifications.

Nigeria's religious space is dominated by two major religions: Christianity and Islam. There are also some adherents of the African Traditional Religion. Out of these three religions, religious fanatics that have posed serious security challenges to the nation have mostly risen from Islam. Though, religious fanaticism in Nigeria is not exclusive to Islam, it is more pronounced among Muslims in Northern Nigeria. This paper will therefore concentrate on religious fanaticism among Muslims in Northern Nigeria and its effect on the security of the country.

Conceptual Clarification

Religion

Religion as a concept has no generally accepted definition. It has been defined in many ways by different people depending on their orientation and perception. According to Agha (2012), "religion is the conscious or unconscious belief in spiritual being and elements (forces of nature) with powers" (p. 21). For Hick (1994), religion is human recognition of super human controlling power and especially of a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship. Also, religion according to Bouquet (1941) is a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute or simply God. Durkheim (1915)'s definition is one of the most popular definitions of religion. He defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community and all those who adhere to them. All these definitions point to the issue of beliefs. Religion can therefore be defined as a system of beliefs and practices relative to a supernatural being which unite the adherents into one moral community.

Religious fanaticism

Omomia (2015) described a fanatic as an over-enthusiastic person. According to Asghar (1997) fanaticism can be defined as over-enthusiasm and zealousness which may cross all bounds of reason and may tend to become wild and dangerous. Fanaticism therefore can be referred to as over enthusiasm. Those who are over-enthusiastic about their religious beliefs and practices to the detriment of others are therefore religious fanatics. Hence, Balogun (1988) cited by Oduwole and Fadeyi (2013) defined religious fanaticism as a violent and unreasoning religious enthusiasm. Onimhawo and Ottuh (2007) stated that to become a religious fanatic is to be wild and excessive about matters that relate to one's belief. According to Iwe (1987) religious fanaticism is an "irrational attitude to religion which leads the religionist to practice religion beyond the bounds of reason and, therefore, without moderation" (*p.* 44). Religious fanaticism is the manipulation of religion and religious beliefs by religious adherents to satisfy their selfish interest. It is a negative attitude to religion which often involves the use of violence. Iwe (2000) asserted that "it is obvious that religious

fanaticism is essentially a negative and vicious attitude to religion, characterized by exaggeration, excesses and violence" (*p.* 11). Religious fanaticism is therefore an irrational practice of religion in which adherents make use of violence to promote their religious faith and teachings.

Security

The term security has been variously described by scholars. Akin (2008) cited by Ozoigbo (2019) described security as any laid down procedures toward the protection of persons and property against hostile persons. It is a situation where by a conducive atmosphere is created within which people in the state can go about their normal daily activities without threat to either their lives or property. According to Adeleke (2013) "security is a situation in which citizens are free from any threats to their life and means of livelihood, safe from bodily harm, diseases, unemployment, and human rights violations wherever they may find themselves within a sovereign nation" (p. 8). Palme (1992) argued that there is a connection between security and survival. For him, security is a basic condition for the survival of human beings. Thus, security is synonymous to freedom from danger, fear and doubt among others. Otto and Ukpere (2012) noted that security relates to the presence of peace, safety, happiness and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis. Security can therefore be described as freedom from threat or violence which could lead to the loss of lives and property.

Religious Fanaticism and Nigeria's Security Problems

The importance of religion to mankind cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria, no account of the state will be complete without reference to religion. This is because, the Nigerian state is one that embodies an extremely complex web of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. A geographic and religious line divides the country into a Christian-dominated south and a Muslim-dominated north (Ezeani & Chilaka, 2013). However, Religion that supposed to be a unifying factor among several ethnic groups in Nigeria has turned out to be one of the catalysts that are causing destruction of lives and property due to narrow-mindedness, misunderstanding, fundamentalism and fanaticism of religious adherents (Afolabi, 2016). There is no doubt that religious crisis has been as old as religion itself, but the tendency to promote militancy and intolerance from within extremist religions appears to be much more common in recent time.

One of the dangerous attitudes of adherents of various religions in Nigeria is the claim of supremacy of their religions over others. Most religious practitioners, especially Christians and Muslims see their religions as the only authentic religion. With this state of mind, they adopt every possible means to ensure that others are converted to their faith. This leads to intolerance and crises which in most cases degenerate to violent security challenges. From the foregoing, it is clear that it is not religion per se that brings about crises in the country but adherents of different religions who engage in irrational practice of religion.

The insecurity in Nigeria is a serious concern to every right thinking citizen of the country. The security of the nation is at stake with series of incidences of assassination, ritual killings, armed robbery, kidnapping, ethno-religious violence, banditry and insurgency prevailing in many parts of the country. These challenges are eating up the nation's sense of 'identity and security' as it affects virtually everybody in the country. Out of all the security challenges in

Nigeria, religious crises and insurgency are orchestrated by religious fanaticism. Religious fanaticism brings about religious conflict through religious intolerance which leads to security problems in the country. This section addresses security problems in Nigeria orchestrated by religious fanaticism. Focus is on the security challenges in Northern Nigeria championed by Islamic fanatics.

Religious crisis

Religious crisis has become the bedrock of Nigerian's security problem since her Independence in 1960. Today in Nigeria, there are abundant cases of religious clashes which have led to loss of lives and property. According to Okafor (2017) "over the years, religious clashes have occurred among Nigerians who began to see themselves as Muslims, Traditionalists, and Christians, and no longer in their ethnic or tribal identity" (p. 1). However, all the major religions in the country had been managing the disaffection until Maitatsine riot in Kano in December 1980. The riot was an intra Muslim crisis championed by the Maitatsine fundamentalists to purify Islam from idolatry and syncretism (Ekundayo, 2017).

The *Maitatsine* uprisings started in Kano in 1980 and spread to other neighbouring states in the North. According to Anugwom (2018) *Maitatsine* uprisings remain perhaps the longest and most widespread Islamic fundamentalist strife in the history of modern Nigeria. Mohammed Marwa, the leader of the *Maitatsine* movement, adopted "Maitatsine" as a nickname which means "the one who damns" in Hausa language. Anugwom (2018) noted that Marwa manifested this in his public speeches which were composed of curses and incendiary outbursts against the Nigerian state and non-Muslims. The group engaged in terror and religious killings between 1980 and 1992 in the northern states of Kano, Borno, Kaduna, Adamawa, Katsina, Gombe and Bauchi and hundreds of thousands of lives were lost before the uprisings ended in 1992 (Udoidem, 1997). Within two weeks, the Maitatsine had killed about 5,000 people. Though, a large number of the casualties were Muslims, scores of Christians were also killed. Many Churches, Christian Schools and businesses were destroyed. The Maitatsine riot had no sooner subsided than the riot of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria began in 1985, also in Kano. The riot was a Muslims' protest against the building of a new St. George's Anglican Church which was said to be too close to a Mosque in Fagge district of Kano. Despite the fact that the old Church building had been there since 1930 before the Mosque in question was built in 1970. The fundamentalist Muslim youth put the Church to sword and 564 Christians lost their lives (Boer, 2003).

Since the re-emergence of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999 there has been a continued rise in religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Prominent among the religious crises that took place within this period was the *Sharia* crisis.

On February 11, 2000 the Islamic *Sharia* legal system was introduced in Zamfara state. Afterwards there was its subsequent introduction in eleven other States of Northern Nigeria, including Katsina, Kano, Sokoto, Bauchi, Niger, Gombe, Jigawa, Borno, Kebbi, Yobe and Kaduna States. In each case, the introduction of the *Sharia* law was accompanied by controversies which led to series of crises that claimed so many lives and displacement of people. In the case of Kaduna which is populated perhaps equally by Christians and Muslims, the tension degenerated to very violent conflicts in February and May 2000, that saw to the death of thousands of Muslims and Christians, including a Catholic priest and a legislator (Ehusani, 2002). The riots left at least 3,000 persons dead and led to the displacement of over

63,000 people within Kaduna and its surroundings (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2007). These displaced persons sought refuge in the police and army barracks, considered to be the safest places in the heat of the conflicts. Although *Sharia* legal system is an age-long practice among the Muslim population in the state, what triggered the *Sharia* conflicts of 2000 was the impression of the Christian citizens that the action will turn Kaduna State into a Muslim state (Alao & Mavalla, 2016). Between February 2000 and March 2002, similar *Sharia*-related riots erupted in parts of Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau, Niger and Nasarawa States. The tension generated by the *Sharia* all over the country was such that a quarrel between two people of different faiths (Muslim and Christian) often degenerated to inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict in which hundreds of lives were lost and property worth millions of Naira were destroyed, while survivors relocated to safer places (Ede, 2017).

Insurgency

The emergence and activities of the dreaded Islamic sect popularly known as *Boko Haram* in Northern Nigeria have been issues of concern to the security of the country (Ede, 2017). This sect, made up of Islamic fanatics, has introduced insurgency in their bid to achieve their religious goal. Boko Haram's ideological mission is primarily to overthrow the Nigerian state with its Western values and then impose strict Islamic Sharia law in the entire country. Anugwom and Oji (2004) had drawn a connection between Boko Haram and other past Islamic fundamentalist episodes in the history of Nigeria such as the Jihad by Usman dan Fodio and the Maitatsine riots.

The most commonly accepted translation of the name *Boko Haram* in Hausa language is "Western education is forbidden". *Boko* originally means *fake* but came to signify Western education, while *haram* means *forbidden*. It has also been translated as "Western influence is a sin" and "Westernization is sacrilege". The group's official name is *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad,* which in Arabic means *"People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (*Banjo, 2016). The group was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. Yusuf had a strict, fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur'an and believed that the creation of Nigeria by British colonialists had imposed a Western and un-Islamic way of life on Muslims. He established a religious complex which included a mosque and an Islamic school which attracted poor Muslim families from across Nigeria and neighbouring countries. The centre had the political goal of creating an Islamic state, and became a recruiting ground for jihadists (Ede, 2017). At the early stage, the group was not violent as Yusuf did not openly preach violence (Kukah, 2015). However, following the attack on the group by the Nigerian security forces in 2009 and the subsequent killing of Mohammed Yusuf, the group turned violent and started unleashing mayhem through bombing of government and religious institutions. *Boko Haram* re-emerged in 2010 with assassinations and a major raid on a prison more than a year going underground. Yusuf's deputy, Abubakar Shekau, who police claimed had been killed in the 2009 uprising, began to appear in videos as the group's new leader. Attacks gradually grew more deadly and sophisticated, particularly with the use of explosives.

The sect has graduated from cruel drive by attacking beer parlours to bombing of security buildings, public buildings and Christian institutions (churches) which happened to be the most affected. Despite the claims by the new administration of Muhamadu Buhari that *Boko Haram* has been "technically" defeated; the insurgents are still carrying out attacks on innocent Nigerians, especially in the North-Eastern part of the country (Dara 2016, Adeniyi,

2016). There are indications that these Islamic fanatics and insurgents have international connections (Uji & Or Tserakaa, 2014). Sources confirmed that while the organization relied on donations by its members in its earlier days, its links with Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) opened it to funding from groups in Saudi Arabia and the UK (Taiwo, 2010).

Implications and Recommendations

It is not easy to measure the cost of the prevalent insecurity in Nigeria in monetary or real terms, however it is clear that it has cost Nigerians enormous human and material resources. Security plays a major role in the existence and sustenance of human being. Hence, Coupland (2007) asserted that insecurity has a far reaching impact on people's lives and well-being and for this singular reason the government has to be alive to its responsibility of guaranteeing security. Some of the implications of the prevalent insecurity in Nigeria are highlighted here.

Loss of lives and property

One of the major negative effects of insecurity in the country is the loss of lives and property of citizens. Nigeria has been going through so many security challenges leading to scores of deaths of innocent civilians, foreigners, some members of the nation's security personnel, elected officials and many government workers. Onifade, etal, (2013) noted that "the insecurity challenge has assumed formidable dimensions forcing the country's political and economic managers and, indeed the entire nation, to rue the loss of their loved ones, investments and absence of safety in most parts of the country" (p. 53).

Oduwole and Fadeyi (2013) observed that:

> The most painful consequence of religious violence is the reckless destruction of lives and property. It is a painful outcome of religious fanaticism and violence because no known scriptural religion tolerate murder, but at the slightest act of provocation, many religious bigots and fanatics deploy the latest and most sophisticated weapons of war available to destroy and maim human beings (pp. 55-56).

Instability

Insecurity resulting from religious fanaticism also leads to instability in the country. The continued state of insecurity threatens the very fabric of national integration in the country and creates the ecology of fear, disquiet and anxiety. It hinders national integration and social harmony. It denies Nigerians their right to peaceful co-existence and breeds mutual suspicion among members of different religions. It has caused Nigeria not to come to a speedy realization of all the positive values that come with modern democracy. It destroys the oneness of the nation and retards the growth and development of the nation.

Proliferation of Arms

Arms proliferation is one serious problem facing the country. The security challenges in the country and the country's porous borders have inadvertently facilitated arms trafficking. Insurgents take advantage of the peculiar difficult terrain in the Nation's border areas and ineffectual security system to smuggle arms. Hence, arms proliferation has grown by heaps and bounds in Nigeria.

Proliferation of Security Guards

The enormity of security challenges in the country, coupled with the failure of public security in Nigeria, has led to the proliferation of security guards by organizations and communities. Communities and organizations now engage the services of different security outfits. Most communities now have vigilante groups for the security of their people.

Implication on social security

Human security entails access to the basic necessities of life such as food, nutrition, clean drinking water, hygiene and sanitation and housing. The provision of social security can only be guaranteed when there is peace in the nation. Insecurity leads to fear, coercion, displacement and deprivation of basic daily needs such as drinking-water, food and health care. According to Meddings, (2001) when people's security is guaranteed, it gives them the freedom, physically and mentally to get on with the business of building their lives without fear of molestation or violent death. Thus, to experience a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being security is essential.

Implication on national economy

Insecurity impacts the national economy negatively. One of the consequence of religious violence is the disruption of socio-economic life of the people. As people escape to safer places and hide for their lives, during crises, the economic life of the society suffers. The productive aspect of most manufacturing businesses depends largely on the availability and regular supply of raw materials for production. Insecurity cuts off the supply of such raw materials hence, jeopardizing production activities. Also, insecurity affects marketing of finished products as there is a continuous exodus from areas of insecurity. There is also an increase in security spending as most business organizations operating in Nigeria spend a lot in maintaining private security outfits. Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) observed that the destruction of business buildings, properties and equipment is tantamount to loss of capital which has ruined not a few businesses in Nigeria. Thus, security is critical for the nation's development and its absence means that economic growth and development cannot be achieved.

Based on the above discussions, the following recommendations are made:

a) There should be proper religious education for the youths. This will help to sharpen and refine their religious understanding.

b) Government should put in place a rehabilitation programme to de-radicalize repentant religious fanatics. This will help reintegrate them back to the norms and values of the society.

c) There should be electronic surveillance of the nation's borders to check smuggling of illegal weapons into the country. This will help reduce the accessibility of weapons by terrorists and other religious bigots who go about killing people at every slightest provocation.

d) There is need to discontinue the almajiri system of education and the reintegration of the almajiris into government schools. This will help to ensure proper education of the children in order to avoid losing them to Islamic fundamentalists.

e) There is need to promote inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria. This will contribute a great deal in averting religious violence.

f) Government, Non-Governmental Organizations and religious bodies should frequently organize religious seminars on peaceful coexistence among religious adherent in Nigeria.

g) There is the need to create employment for the teaming unemployed youths. This will help to reduce their chances of being used by religious fundamentalists and terrorist to cause trouble in the society.

It is believed that if the above measures are taken, security challenges orchestrated by religious fanaticism would be brought to the barest minimum.

Conclusion

Religious fanaticism has orchestrated unbridled conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. There have been several incidents of religious violence in post-colonial Nigeria, especially in the Northern part of the country. Most of the religious violence in Nigeria were caused by religious intolerance and rivalry between the adherents of the two dominant religions, *Islam* and *Christianity*. Religious fanaticism in the Northern part of Nigeria has been hidebound and its spread is unbridled. Insecurity caused by religious fanatics have graduated from the usual religious violence to insurgency in recent time. The Boko Haram insurgency, which seeks to establish in northern Nigeria an Islamic caliphate governed by Sharia laws, has worsened the security situation of the country. Apart from religious fanaticism, other factors affecting the security of Nigeria include porous borders, arms proliferation, governance failure, and corruption. Insecurity in Nigeria has given rise to loss of lives and property, proliferation of arms, fear and instability in the country and proliferation of security guards. The issue of security therefore should be the concern of every citizen of the country.

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