Religious Dogmatism, Prejudice and Conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract
Nigeria has over the years witnessed religious conflicts that have threatened the unity of Nigeria. From the point of view of Intergroup Threat Theory, this paper argues that religious conflicts that Nigeria has witnessed over the years is traceable to prejudice resulting from religious dogmatism which has been expressed through intolerance, clashes, riots, and discrimination. Through religious teachings, religious leaders have instilled dogmatic prejudice in their followers which has culminated in religious intolerance, violence, discrimination, and resentment perpetrated by religious groups against other religious groups which they have defined as out-group. To preclude religious conflict in Nigeria therefore, religious leaders and teachers should be sensitized to indoctrinate their members in a way that would promote love, peace, and tolerance, and abstain from any form of teaching and utterances that could cause their members to be prejudiced against other religious groups.
Keywords: Dogmatism, Prejudice, Conflict, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a country with over 180 million people affiliated to different religious and ethnic groups (Canci & Odukoya, 2016). In other words, Nigeria is a populous country divided along ethnic and religious lines. With 95% adherents, Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions in Nigeria while adherents of Traditional African Religion constitute 5% (Ekundayo, 2013). It is however worthy of mention that these two dominant religions were preceded by African Traditional Religion which Nigerians practiced prior to their advent (Rimansikwe & Achunike, 2013). Nigerians were therefore worshippers of God who was known as the Supreme Being prior to the arrival of the missionaries (Olawola, 1993).

By preaching and teaching morals, love, forgiveness, tolerance, religion advocates harmonious coexistence in societies (Ngbea & Achunike, 2014). It builds morals standard of the people and brings about peaceful coexistence which results in the progress of a nation (Paul, Audu, Olatunmibi, & Wada, 2014). However, it seems paradoxical that religion which is a source of peace is also a source of conflict and hostility, as adherents of religious groups engage in conflict with each other in the name of religion. Owing to the division of societies along religious lines, violent conflicts have erupted across the globe on account of religion (Maregere, 2011). Albeit there are other areas of divisions in the society such as politics, ethnic affiliation etc., societies characterized by religious division tend to be more susceptible to conflict (Reynal-Querol, 2012). This applies to Nigeria where religious conflicts have over the years, culminated in loss of lives, destruction of properties and insecurity. According to Center on Religion and Geopolitics' Nigeria Security Tracker (2014), Nigeria is a culture replete with religious grievance. From 1987 to 2011, Nigeria experienced copious religious conflicts that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and resulted in the destruction of worship centers and properties worth billions of Nigeria (Gofwen, 2004 in Nwaomah, 2011).

From the point of view of Intergroup Threat Theory, this paper analyzes religious conflict in Nigeria as documented in literature. Literature shows that religious conflicts in Nigeria has been attributed to various causes. This paper takes a cursory look at the extant popular themes regarding the causes of religious conflict as documented in the literature, and beyond this, with Intergroup Threat Theory as a theoretical guide, refocuses on the role of dogmatism in formation of prejudice which results in intolerance and conflict in Nigeria. The paper does not however discard extant narratives regarding the sources of religious conflict in Nigeria

2. Some cases of religious conflicts in Nigeria

Adamolekun (2012) documents that religious hostility started in Nigeria in the 1980s. He submits that owing to misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims in 1982, 1991, 1994 and 1995, there were inter-religious conflicts in Kano State while same occurred in Kaduna State in 1987. Below are some (not all) cases of religious conflicts in Nigeria documented in literature. Literature shows that all the conflicts resulted in destruction of lives and property (Sampson 2012)

1.   Clash between Muslims Traditional Worshipers at Sagamu, Ogun State over religious misunderstanding: 1st Jul 1999
2.   Reprisal to Sagamu incident occurred at Kano: 22nd Jul 1999
3.   Clash between Christians and Muslims at Kwara State leading to destruction of lives and property: 20th December, 1999

4. Religious riots at Kaduna over introduction of sharia resulting in destruction of lives and property: 21st-22nd February, 2000.
5. Riots between Christians and Muslims at Aba, Abia State, resulting in loss of lives and
6. Kaltungo crisis in Gombe State over implementation of sharia: 8th Sep. 2000.
7. Interreligious crisis in Kano: 12th Oct 2001
8. Religious misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims in in Jos: 7-17 2001
9. Religious crisis at Kaduna resulting from "Miss World pageant":16th Nov 2002 Conflict between Christians and Muslims in Numan town, Adamawa State over location of Mosque: 8th Jun 2004.
10. Religious conflict between Muslims and Christians in Maiduguri, Borno State: 18th Feb 2006.
11. Clash between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State over election in Plateau: 28th Nov, 2008.
12. Ethno-religious conflict at the Makama New Extension, Bauchi State: 21st Feb 2009
13. Violence in Bauchi State resulting from activities of Boko Haram: 26-30 Jul 2009.
14. Religious conflict in Bauchi State: 29th Dec 2009.
15. Resurgence of religious crisis in Jos, Plateau State: 17-20 Jan 2010.
16. Ethno-religious crisis at Dogo Nahawa, Shen and Fan villages, Plateau State: 7th Mar 2010.
17. Ethno-religious crisis in Plateau: 17th Mar 2010.
18. Ethno-religious conflict at Berom, Plateau State: Apr 2010.
19. Plateau 22nd Mar 2010 Ethno-religious conflict
20. Ethno-religious conflict at Tusung Village in Barkin Ladi LGA, Plateau State: 22nd May 2010.
21. Ethno-religious conflict at Mazah, Jos, Plateau State: 17th Jul 2010.
22. Clash between Muslim and Christians in Jos, Plateau State: 29th Aug 2011.
23. Interreligious attack in Niger State: 25th Dec 2011 Inter-religious attack

Source: Sampson, I.T (2012). Religious violence in Nigeria: Causal Diagnosis and strategic recommendations to the state religious communities.

3. Sources of Religious conflict in Nigeria: Extant Themes

A number of factors exist in literature as the causes of religious conflict in Nigeria. These factors view it as resulting from forces external to the individual that predispose them to act violently towards members of other religious groups. According to Otite (1990), in Idike & Okechukwu, (2015), selfish individuals who are keen to achieve egoistic interests instigate their in-group members against the out-group (religious or ethnic) via manipulation of ethno-religious and communal differences. By resorting to accentuation of religious differences that exist between them and the out-group, such selfish individuals mobilize members of their religious in-group who sentimentally support them to achieve their egoistic interest even if it warrants unleashing violence. Jega (20020 in Idike et al (2015) underscores that youths who are poor by virtue of joblessness can easily be mobilized to partake in riot and reprisal attacks if they are offered inducement or presented with opportunity to loot. Similarly, Kwaja (2009) submits that the failure of institutions, corruption etc. which impact negatively on the people predispose people to engage in religious violence. In the same vein, Salawu (2010) stressed the importance of social institutions such as the family, education, religion, etc. in ensuring that members of society behave in a decorous manner. He maintained that youths are easily employed to perpetrate ethno-religious violence by virtue of the failure of these institutions to instill discipline and moral standards. In his contribution, Omotosho (2003) avers that scornful publications by the elites from religious groups incites adherents to unleash violence on one another. On their part, Idike et al (2015) states that conflict is a product of parochialism and irresponsible utterances and conduct of the leaders who in pursuit of self-serving objectives merge and present such objectives as the objectives of their entire group thereby winning the sentiment and support of their unsuspecting in-group members who engage in antagonistic approach in the course of pursuing such objectives (individual's selfish objective presented to them as group objective(s)). To Muhammad, Hassan & Umar (2010) religious conflict occur as a consequence of the manner in which religions are propagated and mistrust and suspicion between members of religious groups.

4. Theoretical Framework: Intergroup Threat Theory

The Intergroup Threat Theory posits that the society is polarized by religion, political party, ethnicity, sex, ideology, social class etc. which influence our lives and identities. These groups create in-group and out-group categorizations. Albeit this categorization does not inherently connote hostile relationship between groups, yet, groups usually engage in antagonistic relationship with each other more than they relate cordially (Stephan & Ybarra, undated). Intergroup Threat is a product of one group or both group's perception that the other group constitutes threat to them, which could be realistic or symbolic threat (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). Realistic threat refers to threat to a group's power, resources, wealth etc. while symbolic threat on the other hand refers to threat to a group's religion, values, morality, belief system or ideology etc. The possession of unequal power; equality of power between the two groups; history of conflict; and group size are factors that lead to perception of

realistic threat because they are associated with the tendency for one group to assert control over valued resources or to harm another while differences in ideologies, values, morality, worldview, religion etc. produce symbolic threat.

Perception of threat has cognitive, emotional and behavioral consequences. Cognitive consequences are intolerance, hatred, dehumanization, and ethnocentrism. Emotionally, the group that feels threatened tends to develop fear, anger, anxiety, and resentment. The cognitive and emotional reactions to perception of threat is followed by behavioral reaction in the form of aggression, retaliation, sabotage, protests, discrimination, lying, cheating, harassment, warfare etc. Behavioral response could also take the form of withdrawal, submission and negotiation in the case of which, violence may not occur.

From the foregoing, Intergroup Threat Theory focuses on the conditions that lead to perception of threat which in turn have cognitive, emotional and behavioral consequences as mentioned above. On the basis of the degree to which one group perceive realistic or symbolic threat, prejudice is developed towards the source of the perceived threat, hence unpleasant reaction towards them. This paper focuses on symbolic threat which is the perception that a group's ideology, values, doctrine worldview, etc. have been threatened by another group, as a source of religious conflict in Nigeria.

5. Theoretical Discussion of Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Refocussing the Theme

Nigeria is a country with over 180 million people divided along religious lines with each religious group perceiving its religious ideologies as true and ideologies of other religions as false. Intergroup Threat Theory posits that ideological differences and its associated disagreement evokes cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses. The cognitive response involves categorization of people on the basis of religious affiliation and their ideology as antagonistic which is followed by emotional response in the form of prejudice. Conflict emanating from ideological differences is evident in Nigeria where ideological based intolerance has resulted in religious conflicts that claimed lives and property. Nigerians have been described as one of the most religious people in the world (Zalanga, 2017, Ekundayo, 2013). One would expect that such a high level of religiosity would translate to high moral standard, peaceful coexistence, tolerance, love etc. but this is regrettably not the case as the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria has been characterized by rivalry (Omotosho 2003). Zalanga (2017) states that despite the expansion of religion in Nigeria, morality has waned. Rupert (1995) defines prejudice as a "*prior negative judgment of the members of a race or religion or occupant of any significant social role, held in disregard of the facts that contradicts it*". It is an unwarranted negative attitude towards people on the basis of their membership of a particular group. Being a people who believe that their religious ideology determines to a greater extent, if not in totality, what happens to them, Nigerians embrace religious teachings wholly and hold their religious teachers and leaders in high esteem. In response, what they do and what they abstain from are determined by the teachings of their religious leaders which they have internalized while those who profess a different or contrary faith are viewed negatively by adherents of each religious group, though in varying degrees.

Considering the degree of religious intolerance in Nigeria, it seems that the total acceptance of their religious ideology as indisputable by adherents of each religious group is tantamount to total rejection and loathe of the ideology of other religious groups. As Nigerians identify with their religious doctrines, a sense of religious in-group-out-group dichotomy is created which leads to negative view of the out-group. In a study conducted by Lewis & Bratton (2000), 99.5% of the respondents preferred to identify with members of their religious group. Using their religious ideology and tenets as a touchstone, Nigerians view the teachings and dogma of other religious groups as misleading and the adherents of such religious groups as people going astray and therefore need to be proselytized, if need be. This ideological differences and its attendant misconstruction which culminates in labeling of the out-group as possessors of erroneous or even iniquitous belief is demonstrated by Nigerians (members of each religious group) referring to the out-group as "unbelievers". It is however worthy to note that the people being referred to as unbelievers actually believe in one thing or the other which is different from what the one applying the "unbeliever label" believes in. In other words, everybody is a believer but there are differences in what people believe in. The unbeliever label has its attendant stereotype and prejudice. From the point of view of Intergroup Threat Theory, conflict is a product of perception. Members of a group tend to perceive the ideology of another group as a threat to the propagation of their own ideology if these ideologies are incompatible.

The consequence of having negative view of other religious ideologies is that those who subscribe to such ideologies may be viewed likewise but rejoiced over in event of renunciation of such faith. Owing to prejudicial feeling, behavioral reaction in the form of aggression, discrimination, violent conflict etc. are perpetrated. For instance, over the years, as a result of misunderstanding between adherents of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, attacks in one part of Nigeria have triggered reprisal attacks in other parts of the country, with guiltless people falling victims of offence they did not commit. Such attacks on innocent people which are not based on the offence they have committed but based on their religious affiliation could obviously be described as a vent of

prejudicial anger on people solely on the basis of their membership of a particular religious group. It is an indication that once religious in-group and out-group dichotomy is created, those who are prejudiced towards the out- group tend to view and treat all the members of the out-group the same way, having categorized them as people with false ideologies.

Ideally, political offices should be occupied by competent and credible people, irrespective of their religious affiliation, who would improve the lives of the people by delivering the dividends of democracy. In the case of Nigerian politics however, political support is not based on the candidates' credibility and competence but on their group affiliation, of which religious affiliation tend to be more pronounced. Albeit, religious prejudice was not expressed during the annulled 1993 Presidential election in which Nigerians supported a Muslim-Muslim ticket of Late M.K.O. Abiola and Babagana Kingibe, religion became a central factor in Nigerian politics thereafter (Aziken, Vangaurd News, June 12, 2015). As the 2015 general election was approaching for instance, Nigerians (including the former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo) cautioned political parties over fielding "same religion" (Muslim-Muslim or Christian-Christian) ticket (Adedeji, Premium Times News, 26th October, 2014). This is in response to a situation in Nigeria whereby candidates who belong to other religious groups are abhorred and rejected solely on the basis of professing a different or contrary religious dogma or ideology perceived as untrue and misleading. In the same vein, According to Adeniyi (2017), the All Progressive Congress (APC) in its bid to win the 2015 Presidential election had to heed the warnings of top politicians against fielding a Muslim-Muslim ticket, which culminated in choosing Professor Yemi Osinbajo (a Christian) as the running mate of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (a Muslim). He added that as a result of this, the APC leader, Bola Ahmed Tinubu who would have been chosen as the running mate but was not chosen on religious ground expressed his dissatisfaction saying "*...There has been one form of attack that has troubled me. That is the attack based on religion. Those who exploit religion should be wary. For there really is a God and He does not like it when you play with His people or use His name to do the opposite of what He intends*" (Adeniyi, 2017). This is an indication that religion has become a focal factor in Nigerian politics characterized by expression of religious-based prejudiced opposition of presidential candidates, with each religious group campaigning against candidates belonging to other religious groups. Religious adherents not only feel threatened that their interest would not be protected if a member of the other religion is in power, which Stephan & Renfro (2002) refers to as realistic threat, they also tend to have egoistic desire that their "brother" (religious in-group member) should be the one in power and not someone who professes unacceptable faith. As a result of this, conflict erupt even at pooling units over who wins election as the candidates' supporters, who may have been mobilized, tenaciously engage in activities (including violent ones) that would ensure their ideal candidates win the election at all cost. On the basis of prejudice emanating from ideological difference, therefore, religious conflict erupts. Prejudice may not be translated to violent conflict until there is an immediate cause. In other words, dogmatic prejudice may remain dormant until ignited by immediate perceived provocation, competition for power and control and other forms of misunderstanding.

Prejudice is learned through socialization (Barb & Hopkins, 2013). Among the agencies of socialization is religion. Onwuka (2010) states that religious organizations specialize in the indoctrination of their members on the beliefs and practices prescribed by the religion. He added that via the activities of religious functionaries such as the Priests, Imams, Pastors, Shrine Heads etc., members of religious organizations internalize religious norms that inform what they do and what they refrain from. As mentioned above, by virtue of high religiosity of Nigerians, religious leaders tend to be defined as bearers of divine message that should be respected and obeyed. As a corollary therefore, the disposition of members of a religious group towards other religious groups is traceable to the manner in which the leaders and teachers indoctrinate them. In a situation whereby the messages and comments of revered leaders of a particular religious group depict abhorrence of the dogma and practices of other religious groups, prejudice is ingrained in the minds of those under their tutelage. Preaching of such messages and making of such comments might not be unconnected with misinterpretation of the ideologies of other religious groups by virtue of having superficial knowledge of such ideologies. It is worthwhile to mention that not all religious leaders make comments and preach sermons that instigate prejudice; and that not all religious adherents hold prejudiced view against other religious groups. Holding prejudiced view is therefore traceable to the nature of religious teachings and sermons one has been exposed to.

6. Conclusion

Religious conflict has been a recurrent incident that has had dire consequences on Nigeria. While not discarding common themes regarding its sources, this paper argues that religious conflict in Nigeria is a product of prejudice resulting from ideological differences and expressed when ignited by perceived symbolic and realistic threat. Prejudice in this case develops through religious teachings and messages probably resulting from misconstruction of the ideologies of other religious groups, which results in perception of their members as adherents to misleading ideology.

7. Recommendations

Religious leaders have a lot of influence on the people they lead. To nip religious conflict in the bud therefore, religious leaders should endeavor to indoctrinate their members in a way that would promote love, peace, and tolerance, and abstain from any form of teaching and utterances that could cause their members to be prejudiced against other religious groups. There is need to organize a national sensitization program by the National Orientation Agency to persuade the religious leaders to socialize people under their tutelage in a manner that promotes interreligious tolerance, harmony and peaceful coexistence.

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