

**HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND ITS IMPLICATION ON THE LIVELIHOOD OF THE PEASANTS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*Ethno religious conflicts started in Northern Nigeria in the pre-colonial era, it got rooted in the colonial era but got to its climax in the post-colonial era. Karl Marx theory of conflict was used to provide an academic foundation for this study. The study reveals that so many peasants in Northern Nigeria lost their sources of livelihood as a result of constant attacks from the Boko-Haram, bandits and Fulani-herdsmen. They also suffered greatly as a result of several ethno-religious crises that have occurred before the advent of Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen and Banditry. Ethno-religious conflict only intensified as a result of the emergence of bandits, book-haram and Fulani herdsmen. Most of their valuable properties, crops, cattles and land have been destroyed and taken over by the Fulani herdsmen. The rate of insecurity in Northern part of Nigeria is alarming as the death toll is increasing every month, and even the internally displaced people's camps are not save for human habitation in terms of security, good sanitary condition, adequate food, nets, drugs, etc. it was therefore recommended that the Federal Government should equip the police and away with sophisticated security devices and weapons that will enable them to combat ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Livelihood, Peasants, Ethno-Religious Conflicts, Insecurity.*

**1. Introduction**

**Historical Antecedents of Ethno-Religious Conflicts and its Implication on the Livelihood of the Peasants in Northern Nigeria**

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria started in the pre-colonial era, but increased in the colonial era and have got to its climax in the post-colonial period. Ethno-religious conflicts got rooted when communities in the northern part of Nigeria were Islamized by the Arab traders, and became instituted when Uthman Dan folid launched his Jihad that claimed the lives of so many peasants, their houses, and crops were destroyed while some of their land were forcefully taken by the Jihadists, Deedam (2023) posits that several scholars have argued at different fora that the Sokoto Jihad was not a truly religious war, rather it had political

economic and tribal undertones. Barkindo, Omolewa and Maduakor (1989) succinctly put that the continuing warfare in Hausa land greatly affected the people, as lives and properties were destroyed.

To really substantiate that the war was not a truly religious war, Northern Nigeria was divided into the Sokoto caliphate, under the rulership of his son, Bello while Gwandu was placed under the rulership of his younger brother called Abdullahi. To further substantiate that the Jihad was fought for tribal or ethnic reasons, 12 out of the 14 flag bearers that led the Jihad were made emirs and they were all from the Fulani ethnic nationality.

During colonialism, ethno-religious conflicts increased due to the administrative policies and leadership styles of the colonial masters. Infact, people from the Northern region was not allowed by the colonialists to participate in the preparation of the annual budget during the 1922 Clifford constitution. This generated so much tension and feeling of discrimination among the Hausa/Fulani and other minority ethnic groups in the North.

Mezieobi (2004) asserts that the Clifford's elective principle restricted franchise to educated citizens. This elective arrangement did, however, not accommodate the other segments of the diverse ethnic groups in the nation, not even one ethnic minority in the North. This arrangement commonsensically would have fanned ethnic parochialism and sectional or ethnic prejudice.

This explanation shows that election was only held in Lagos and Calabar that were from the Southern protectorate and no election was held in the Northern protectorate.

Ethno-religious conflicts arising from fear of marginalization was intensified as Authur Richard divided Nigeria into three, along ethnic lines. All political leaders and their ethnic groups became so fascinated and interested in their own affairs and solidly planted the seed of National disintegration in a clandestine way. On the other hand, ethno-religious conflicts increased tremendously as a result of the establishment of sabon quatre in 1913 in Kano. This settlement was inhabited by non-northerners and non-Muslims.

The inhabitants of Sabon-Gari find it difficult to fully integrate into the culture and religion of the northerners; hence it became flash points for conflicts. The Igbo people were attacked in 1953 in Sabon Gari area 1, Kano over the disagreement that emanated from the self-government motion moved by Chief Anthony Enahoro in the federal house of representative. Members of the Northern Peoples Party (NPC) vehemently opposed the motion that Nigeria should be granted independence by 1956, and emphasized that independence will be achieved as soon as practicable.

Albert (1999) posits that this disagreement however, resulted to a mass protest in Kano against the tour of Action Group (AG) leaders to Northern Nigeria, Kano in particular. The protest led to the killing of 21 Southerners, most of whom were Igbos, also leaving 163 injured.

These group of settlers suffered untold hardship emanating from incessant attacks from the Hausa/Fulani Muslims who always take advantage of any slightest provocation to attack and unleash mayhem on the non-Moslems.

More ethnic conflicts and consciousness were experienced in the 1950s, because all the regions were concerned about the progress and development of their regions, and were not interested in the general development of the Nation. Nwiyor (2004) posits that the ethnic minorities began to demand for a separate state in Nigeria. In reaction to their request, the colonial government formed the Henry Willink commission of 1957/58 to address the fear of the ethnic minorities. According to Ekekwe (1986), the Henry Willink commission's proposal fell short of the demands of the minorities, hence its recommendation were widely denounced

for its failure to provide adequate and timely solutions for accommodating and resolving ethnic agitations.

Few elites among the minorities were favoured in terms of employment but the peasants all over the nation suffered greatly as a result of ethnic discrimination and religious bigotry among the Moslems and Christians. The peasants suffered greatly because they are more fanatical about religion and also have the unquenchable desire to protect their ethnic groups from oppression, discrimination, insult, exploitation and harassment from other ethnic groups. They are always ready to defend their territories, religion, God-given resources and ethnic groups with their blood.

### **Operationalization of Concepts**

*Ethnic group: An ethnic group can be defined as a group of people who share common features such as language, culture, territory, ancestor, region etc and a sense of peoplehood even in a distant land.*

*Ethnicity can be defined as an expression of ethnic consciousness either against a set of people that are distinct in terms of language, culture, religion, ancestor etc, or for the promotion and sustenance of their own ethnic group. It involves the expression of discriminatory behavior towards a different set of people that are considered as out-group and demonstration of love, concern, support towards the people that share the same ancestor with them.*

*Ethno-religious conflict refers to conflict that are caused by ethnicity and religious bigotry. The protection of one ethnic group and the belief system always made them to engage in conflict with other groups who undermined their ethnic group and religion.*

*Peasants: This has to do with a group of rural dwellers who engaged or chose subsistence agriculture as their fundamental source of revenue. They can also be seen as group of rural dwellers who have limited plots of land to carry out their agricultural activities. They are poor farmers who relied on the products of their farms for survival.*

*Livelihood; In this context, the main source of livelihood of the peasants is subsistence agriculture. This implies that they earn their living from the products of their farms and their entire family depended on it.*

### **Some Major Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria**

Nigeria has experienced several ethno-religious conflicts since independent status was attained in 1960. It has occurred in different dimension and magnitude, such as inter-religious conflict, inter-ethnic conflict, intra-religious and ethnic conflicts.

The following ethno-religious conflicts will be examined and x-rayed as follows;

#### **Maitatsine Crisis**

The maitatsine crisis emerged in the 1960s to correct some of the doctrines of the Islamic sect. They used violent approach which resulted to the death of so many people in Northern Nigeria. However, they were confronted by the police, and they exchanged guns. According to Yau (2000) the maitatsine group was an orthodox sect of Islam that reflects acquisition of worldly materialism.

The followers of maitatsine believed that they were the only true and righteous worshippers of Allah and claimed that other Muslims have abandoned the main doctrine of the Koran. They were so interested in the teaching of the Koran but not interested in other universally agreed secondary sources of Islamic law, which include the Sunnah, Hadith etc. According to (Abdul, 2011) Maitatsine was accused of condemning the principles and ethnics of Islam as laid down by the Koran and Sunnah as well denouncing the Prophethood of Prophet Mohammed.

His gang members arrested and detained so many people, especially peasants whom he forced to join his crusade. So many innocent people were killed, and few public primary schools in Kano were under siege. This was a very good example of intra-religious crisis that caused death, Mayhem and public disturbance. Many

peasants were arrested, killed, displaced and their main source of livelihood which is farming and keeping livestock's was truncated.

### **The Fagge Crisis of 1982**

The crisis occurred between the Anglican Church in Fagge and the Moslem. The church members planned to build their church, and the Moslems stopped them, claiming that it was too close to their Mosque. However, the state government supported the Moslems but the Christian went ahead to build their church. This disagreement resulted to conflict between these two religious groups. Few persons were killed and three churches were burnt down in Sabon-Gari while several other churches were vandalized.

It's important to note that the peasants who are so fanatical to protect their faith died and lost their properties while the affluent that sponsored the crisis loose nothing.

### **The Zangon-Katab Riots of February 1992**

Sabenu (1996) succinctly put that an outbreak of ethno-religious rioting that was far more serious than the Kafanchan crisis took place during February 1992 in Zango, a town in the Zangon-Katab Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The crisis reared its ugly head as a result of the pronouncement of the relocation of the Zangon weekly market from the Hausa dominated area to the outskirts of Zangon. The reasons behind the relocation were the unsanitary condition of the market and to accommodate more traders. The Hausa people opposed the relocation of the market that it was a vindictive mission aimed at reducing the economic relevance of the Hausas. This misunderstanding escalated into violent confrontation between the two groups of people.

Subaru (1996) asserts that according to official estimates, left 95 persons (mostly Hausa) dead, 252 others injured and 133 houses and 26 farmlands destroyed. It was observed and confirmed that the peasants in the both sides suffered greatly and lost their crops and cattles which were their only sources of livelihood, while the rich people who funded the crisis were not hurt.

### **Proposed Visit of Rev, Reinhardt Bonnke in 1991 to Kano**

A serious religious crisis broke out in Kano on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1991 between the Christians and the Muslims over the visit of a renowned Christian preacher Reinhardt Bonnke. He was given permission by the Kano state government to organize campaign but the Muslim faithful were not comfortable with the theme of the programme, "Jesus for all by the year 2000". The Muslims protested to the palace of the Emir and later had emergency prayer at Kofar Mata Eid praying ground. Suddenly, the peaceful prayer turned to a violent conflict between the Muslims and Christians. The Christians were killed; their shops looted while the Igbos and other Christians in Sabon-Gari killed the Hausas that were found there. Although, the non-Muslims fled from the town while some took refuge at the police stations and military barracks.

### **Kafanchan Crisis of 1987**

Kafanchan riot took place in March 1987 between the Christians and Muslims students of Kafanchan Teachers College of Education in Southern Kaduna. The crisis took place as a result of disagreement and quarrel between the Muslims Students Society (MSS) and the fellowship of Christian students (FCS) over an evangelical campaign organized by the Fellowship of Christian students on campus. Muslim students vehemently opposed this campaign and protested against it and requested that the banner of the programme be removed. The protest embarked upon by the Christians. Subsequently, the violence extended or spread like wild fire and engulfed Zaria, Funtua, Daura and other settlements around

Kaduna.

According to Ewerem (1995) the conflict claimed over 19 lives and 61 injured. Also 152 churches, 5 mosques were destroyed and 169 hotels and beer parlours were burn to ashes. A total of 95 vehicles and 152 private buildings were severely damaged. The aftermath of this conflict is still fresh in the minds of people till date. Infact, this manifested throughout the reign of Governor El-Rufai, where the Christians in southern Kaduna were killed by the Muslims of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic Nationality. The properties including crops and livestocks of the people were destroyed and some of them became homeless.

### **Boko-Haram**

Between 2002 and 2009, a group of Islamic fanatics sprang up to unleash mayhem on the people of Northern Nigeria. Its official name is Fama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda await Wal-jihad, an Arabic phrase which simply means "people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teaching". It was headed by Mohammed Yusuf. Boko-Haram members have embarked on several suicide missions which claimed the lives of so many people and their properties in North-eastern part of Nigeria. The Boko-Haram group is totally fighting against Western culture and education that they thought that are incompatible to Islamic doctrine and ideology. However, in the course of carrying out their nefarious and barbaric actions both the Muslims and non-Muslims have been killed.

In fact, their actions can be best described as inter-ethnic, inter-religious, intra-religious and intra-ethnic warfare. The entire Northern Nigeria is insecure as a result of the activities of the Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen and bandits, so many school pupils and students have been kidnapped since 2014 when the Chibok girls, Damasak students and others were kidnapped.

### **Fulani Herdsmen**

The scramble for available arable land among the agrarian communities and the invasion of herdsmen is generating crisis. However, the emerging trend in the sophistication of the crisis resulting to colossal loss of lives and properties have generated insecurity and threatening the corporate existence of the nation-state (Poroma, Deedam and Igwe (2019). In similar vein, David (2016) posits that so far, thousands have been killed and many more have been expelled from homes, and the Nigerian government does not appear willing to initiate any forceful action against them. Due to the peculiarities of the activities of the herdsmen, they moved from one place to another in search of pasture.

As the Fulani herdsmen moved with their cattles, crops were destroyed and several attempts to prevent them met with opposition, and the farmers are always overpowered because the herdsmen have sophisticated guns such as AK 45, Mark 4 etc. According to the statistics provided by the institute of Economics and Peace, 1,229 people were killed in 2014, up to 63 in 2013. Benue state seems to be the hardest hit in recent times. Five days to the end of Governor Suswan Gabriel administration in May 2015, over 100 farmers and their families were reportedly massacred in a village and refugee camps located in the Ukwa, per-Gasa and Ise-Gusa Local Government Areas of the state.

Debie (2018) avers that at least a dozen of people were killed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, 2018 in apparent clashes between farmers and cattle headers in Yola, Adamawa. Recently, some communities in Benue Plateau and Adamawa states have been ravaged by incessant crisis to the invasion of militia groups suspected to be herdsmen. The response to the crisis at both the federal and state levels has not addressed the issue. Farmers have accused the apex organization of the Fulani herdsmen, the Meyitti Allah of instigating herdsmen invasion of communities in the north-central and other regions in Nigeria.

### **Factors Influencing Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria**

The following factors have been identified as responsible for ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.

**Religious intolerance:** the Muslim-Christian dichotomy has been in existence from time immemorial. The Muslim believed that non-Muslims are evil doers or animists and therefore have no legal justification to live and enjoy equal rights with them. The Muslims do not also believe that the Christians are worshipping the true God and the Christians also have the same belief. This beliefs and ideologies made it difficult for each of them to tolerate each other.

Competition over scarce valuable resources between the Muslims and the Christians increased ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. The both groups of people live together and compete for job opportunities, political appointments, and admission into tertiary institutions, social amenities, land and political dominance. The both groups are always fighting and struggling to be in charge and dominate the other groups, this usually culminated to violent conflict.

**The influence of globalization:** The world is now a global village, so the Islamic conflicts in the Middle East influenced the behaviour of the Muslims in Nigeria against their Christians counterparts whom they perceived as opponents and enemies. Countries in the Middle East were curious to detach themselves from socio-economic inequality and psychological alienation of the modernization introduced by the western world. This perception and ideology influence the activities of the Boko-Haram to Fight against western education.

Increase rate of desertification have adverse effects on the Fulani herdsmen. Desert encouragement affected grazing land and destroy pastoral livelihood. Greater number of herders and people that were affected by desertification migrated to states in the middle belt and took over their land in an attempt to graze their cattles.

The crops of the people of middle belt were terribly destroyed and any attempt to caution them resulted to conflict, because the Fulani herdsmen are well armed with modern and sophisticated weapons. Infact, currently, some of the indigenes of plateau and Benue state respectively have been displaced as a result of the incessant attacks in their communities which claimed the lives of so many people. **Supremacy rivalry:** the both religions are claiming to be superior to each other. The Christians claimed that they are worshipping the true God, while the Muslims are also claiming that they are worshipping the true God. This particular perception has increased ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Some ethnic conflicts occurred as a result of fight and disagreement over territorial boundaries or land.

### **The Consequences of Ethno-Religious Conflicts on the Livelihood of the Peasants**

The various ethno-religious conflicts that occurred in Nigeria have impacted negatively on the lives of the peasants and the generality of the people in the following ways;

Ethno-religious conflict serves as a vehicle of disunity in the country and enhances disintegration of the various ethnic groups that made up the country. All efforts and measures adopted to enhance integration have failed because we are divided along religious line and ethnic lives.

Ethno-religious conflict enhances the high rate of insecurity in Nigeria today. Currently, Nigeria is battling with the Fulani herdsmen, Bandits and Boko-Haram that have ravaged and killed so many people in Northern Nigeria. In Nigeria, no particular geo-political zone is safe from the activities of the Fulani-herdsmen.

So many people, especially the peasants of Northern Nigeria have completely lost their main source of livelihood, as a result of the destruction of their crops, houses, cattles and other valuables by the Fulani herdsmen.

A good number of people, mostly peasants have been displaced from their communities in Plateau, Benue state, Yobe state, Borno state, Taraba state, Adamawa state, Niger State and Bauchi state at one time or the other – as a result of deadly attacks by Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen and Bandits. These people suffered greatly in these internally displaced people's home as a result of insufficient food, poor sanitary condition, congestion etc.

The government paid lip-service to provide adequate health facilities, mattresses to sleep on, and food to eat, for these displaced peasants in internally displaced people's home. Funds are usually released for their welfare, but parts of the funds are embezzled by those in charge.

The rate of food production in Northern Nigeria has greatly reduce - as a result of insecurity. This resulted to food crisis and high cost of food in the country. The Fulani herdsmen, Bandits and Boko-Haram members are not always arrested by the police and prosecuted accordingly. They walked freely with their weapons in these communities and are not arrested while the real owners of these communities are in internally displaced people's home.

The peasants who suffered greatly as a result of displacement, destruction of properties as well as the death of their loved ones are not compensated by the government. Their houses are not built by government; this increased their rate of suffering and hardship in their respective homes.

Most of their children are no longer going to school because of fear of the bandits and Boko-Haram that have taken over Northern Nigeria. So many school students have been kidnapped in great numbers and some of them have not been rescued till this day. This is affecting the peasants greatly as their children are no longer going to school because of fear of being kidnapped or killed. Again, those of them in internally displaced people's camp are not also going to school. This will definitely increase the rate of misery and poverty among the peasants.

The federal government has failed to secure both lives and properties of the citizens, this has really affected its capacity to deal decisively with ethno-religious conflicts. The inability of the federal government to curtail the nefarious activities of the insurgents threatening the peaceful co-existence of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria as well as the foundation and oneness of the country.

The alarming and destructive nature of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has motivated so many minority ethnic groups and even the Igbos to demand and agitate for political autonomy and outright independence. Ethnic minorities such as the Ijaws, Ogonis, Orobosm, Ibibio etc of the Niger Delta region have advocated for political autonomies since the 1990s while the Igbos of South-Eastern region is presently demanding for the independent state of Biafra as a result of marginalization and attacks of the Igbos in the Northern part of Nigeria.

### **The Peasants and their Livelihood**

The main source of livelihood of the peasants in Northern Nigeria is subsistent farming, and it has been ravaged by ethno-religious conflicts. Most of the major characteristics of the peasants were destroyed as a result of these constant conflicts. This study reveals that their communal living have been destroyed as they are scattered in different internally displaced people's home. They were also easily attacked by sicknesses while in internally displaced people's home.

On the other hand, they are not properly fed while in the IDP camps and are exposed to emotional trauma as a result of the death of their love ones and destruction of their properties. The peasants' main source of livelihood were

destroyed and could no longer have access to their farmlands, especially some of them from Benue state, Plateau state, Borno state, Yobe state and Taraba state. Deedam (2022) asserts that the peasants became more pauperized as they began to live as slaves on their land, and their farmlands were forcefully taken away from them.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **Karl Marx Theory of Conflict**

The major premise or postulation of Marxism is that class struggle exists in all the epochs of development except the era of primitive communalism and communism. During the era of primitive communalism, the means of production and the products of labour were communally owned Schaefer and Lamni (1995) posit that since each members of society produced both for themselves and for society as a whole, there were no conflicts of interest between the individuals and groups.

The major contradiction emerged as a result of the unquenchable desire to own private property. This gave rise to the ownership of the means of production while the peasants owned nothing apart from their labour power. The privileged few (capitalist) control the means of production and enjoy the fruit of labour of the large number of workers (Lower class) who earned little from their daily production. Giddens (2006) avers that the tension and conflict generated by this contradiction are the major dynamics of social change. Charles (2010) succinctly puts that Marx's dialectical materialism is premised on the notion that the source of change lies in contradictions in the economic system in particular and in society in general.

The manifestation of conflicts between the various ethnic and religious groups in Northern Nigeria is expected because one group gains at the expense of others at every given time. In most cases, the conflicts that occurred between them have economic undertone, hence they rose up as a group to protect their heritage and beliefs.

The protection of their land, heritage and the sustenance of their belief system resulted to conflicts between the various groups in Northern Nigeria.

## **3. Recommendations**

The following recommendations are proffered as solutions to the problems identified.

*The Federal Government should equip the law enforcement agencies with sophisticated security devices that will enable them to curtail ethno-religious conflicts. The police failed to arrest and manage the situation because they do not have sophisticated security devices that can help them tackle the problem.*

*The security agencies should work closely with the indigenes who are willing to provide useful information that will enable them overcome ethno-religious conflict.*

*The federal Government should ensure that the culprits are arrested and prosecuted. This will serve as deterrent to others.*

*The federal Government should take proper care of victims of ethno-religious conflicts by providing sufficient food, mattresses, drugs, nets and other necessary items that will help to improve their living condition.*

*The Federal Government should help to reconstruct the buildings of the victims to ameliorate the suffering of the peasants.*

*The Federal Government should collaborate with foreign security agencies to fight ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria; so as to reduce the emotional trauma suffered by these peasants in the rural areas.*

*The sponsors of the ethno-religious conflicts should be arrested and prosecuted irrespective of their socio-economic class and political affiliation*

## **4. Conclusion**



It has been revealed that the peasants suffered most than any group of people where ever and whenever ethno-religious conflict occurs in the rural areas in Nigeria. In addition to the above finding, we have recorded more ethno-religious conflicts in the rural areas than the cities in Northern Nigeria. So many communities have been ravaged by Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen and Bandits for so many years, and their main source of livelihood had been bastardized. This situation increased their misery and pushed them into deplorable condition, perpetual bondage and abysmal poverty. This situation also widens the gap between the rich and the poor as they did not have access to their farms and their children can no longer go to school. To worsen the situation, the Federal Government has not been able to provide lasting solution to the problems of ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria, and therefore has no plan to cushion the effects of ethno-religious conflict on the peasants.

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