Simultaneous Geography, Divided Communities: Paving the Way to Silencing the Ethno-Religious Insurgencies in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article situates the notion of ethnicity as one key defining component upon which communities within Nigeria appear to divide and sustain themselves, particularly in light of the current fear of insurgency. In doing so, reference is made to the concept of the 'other': being ethnically, culturally and religiously distinct from the major ethnic groups within the country. Some key implications of this trend in terms of fear and societal exclusion are explained. The discussion is situated within the broader context of community, ethnicity and insurgency within Nigeria. The following is not a discussion of insurgency; rather, it is an exploration of issues that galvanize some communities whilst provoking an attitude of suspicion toward others. It is argued that attempts to deconstruct diversity in favor of enforcing a singular cultural identity inherently links difference to fear and, by doing so, risks further polarizing communities within Nigeria.

Keywords: Community, Christian, Ethnicity, Muslim, Insurgency, Nigeria

Introduction

No state is mono-ethnic. The majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are essentially multinational, meaning that a large number of countries in sub-Saharan African region are made up of different ethnic groups. This issue always arises when groups of marginalized sects of ethnic or religious groups become concerned with regard to who they are and what others are up to. This calls to mind the question of identity and supremacy with the attendant tensions in relation to other groups. As is widely known, Nigeria

is a country characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, with many inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts.

At the state level, given Nigeria's ethnically diverse population, ethnic contests are easily conceived as inter-communal competition, where losing could prove economically disastrous—as winners often limit the distribution of state resources within their immediate communities or coteries. It is this zero-sum nature of ethnic contest that polarises communities and turns peaceful living to warfare. However, it must be noted that the current spate of inter-ethnic and religious group tensions in Nigeria is essentially a case of transformation from what it used to be. Nigeria has a fair history of successful communitarian traditions whereby different communities have historically co-existed, largely with mutual respect for each other's differences.[1] In recent times, however, a shifting from the original and successful communitarian system among the religious and ethnic groups toward living system that operates by means of deconstructing diversity has been observed within communities in every state, especially in the northern region of Nigeria. In essence, such differences, once celebrated, have, particularly in the current context of insurgency, morphed into a focal point of community fear among ethnic and religious groups and has been amplified as an excuse for the exclusion or marginalization of ethnic and religious groups considered as 'other'. This is a fundamentally emotional reaction to a fear of the 'other', symbolically linked to ethnicity, religion and culture.

This article examines communal responses to ethnic and religious insurgency by critically outlining key issues central to the ways in which ethnic and religious groups in Nigerian communities allied together in order exclude others. First, the meaning of community is explored and then the ethnic diversity of Nigeria is highlighted. Secondly, the word 'community' is critically analyzed. Through an examination of the Boko Haram insurgency group, the Fulani Hermen insurgency group, and the Niger-Delta Avengers insurgency group, this work analyzes the formation of insurgency organizations by trying to make sense of the ethnic, religious and socio-political climate in Nigeria in the face of fear of other groups. Further, an example is given of a ground-level community-based initiative aimed at deconstructing difference among the ethnic and religious groups in the country. This study argues that, while shared ethnic and religious values may define

communities, fear of difference among the majority and minority groups is what solidifies communities and acts to exclude those considered as 'other'.

Conceptualization of Community

In describing or rationalizing the decadent nature of Nigerian societies, the roots of Nigeria's ethnic and religious insurgency and community have been one of the most commonly analyzed concepts. This concept provides a veritable framework of analysis given the perverse nature of Nigeria's society and the ethno-religious fault lines that have continued to pervade it. There is need, however, to revisit and unpack the concept in order to identify its usefulness in explaining the prevailing insurgency problems in the Nigerian state—and to what extent they can be considered responsible for Nigeria's violent culture of fear of other groups. The word 'community' can be defined in different ways and can range from the national level to the global level. A quick intervention is required at any of those levels in order effectively enhance security. 'Community' at the global level has to do with shared interests, values and basic needs of the people (e.g., youth, women, the working class, the disabled community, or a religious community), which can extend across borders.[2] The concept of community does not just refer to individual community members, but to all the various actors, groups and institutions within the specific geographic space. It therefore also includes civil society organizations, the police and the local authorities that are responsible for delivering security and other services in that area.[3] Alperson offers a succinct description of the concept of community, noting that groups within particular geographical areas are drawn together on the natural basis of cultural ties, such as family connectivity, religion, ethnic and common interests.[4] Not surprisingly, shared language, birthplace, ethnicity and religion also bond people together.[5] Family connections and shared social, political and economic values, including ethnic and religion, seem to be critical components in solidifying a community. Although such natural ties are obviously strong and binding, there is no persuasive evidence to suggest that communities are formed along other shared ethnic and religious values.

Consequently, communities divide and sustain themselves according to certain shared principles but, for the most part, have a reasonable capacity to be fluid. The establishment of communities and, more significantly, the impact of exclusion and marginalization is discussed in a range of research. Within Nigeria's socio-cultural, religious and political landscape, community can be better understood in the scenario below, succinctly captured by the definition of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report contending that critical to the composition of community is the notion of 'fear'.[6] The report argues that because communities form through fear, they exclude those they consider as culturally distinct, as 'other'. In the case of the Nigerian state, those deemed as 'other' are viewed with increasing suspicion by the majority (that is, the southwestern and southeastern majority).

Following the emergence of the Boko Haram group, the Fulani herdsmen and the Niger-Delta Avengers insurgency in Nigeria, this fear of the 'other' has clearly permeated Nigerian society. The bulk of the literature has highlighted that Nigeria, although geographically sequestrated, is part of a global community and hence not exempted from the insurgency issue. It has seen attacks both from rival ethnic and religious groups and external groups. Media images depicting the horrific carnage from insurgent attacks certainly add credibility to this fear of others. According to Nossier, while it is legitimate to fear acts of insurgency, the religious, ethnic and political leaders manipulate and distort community fear to an irrational degree in pursuit of greater societal compliance.[7] Gbadegesin rightly pointed out parallels with the notion of a 'crime wave', which he argues has also been distorted by ethnic, religious and political leaders, resulting in a societal panic around criminal acts that may occur if pre-emptive measures are not taken.[8] One consequence of this is the legitimized increase of government spending on bolstering police forces as well as eliciting greater societal compliance. Similarly, this fear of the 'other' is coercive in its ability to segment society along the lines of fear. As a result, presumptions regarding particular ethnic and religious groups of ethnic and religious minorities are often made based solely on appearance, resulting in a prevailing 'us' versus 'them' mindset. For example, advocates for the Islamization of the geographical space they occupy, with the attendant delusion

of turning the entire region into an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria, is an issue demanding more cautious and nuanced analysis. Such advocates have increasingly been criticized by other groups in the country for choosing not to embrace Nigeria secular state. It is this mistrust and misperception that has created the ethno-religious insurgency situations that exploded into Boko Haram insurgency. Some of the notable religious ethno-religious insurgencies in the post-independence era in the Northern region of Nigeria include: Maitatsine riots in Bulumkutu (1982), Jimeta (1984), Kano (1980, 1982, 1987, 1990, 1995), Gombe (1985,1991), Jalingo (1992, 2009), Shagamu (1999); Kafanchan (1987), Tafawa Balewa (1991, 1995, 2001), Zangon-Kataf (1992) Potiskum (1994, 2009), and Kaduna (Rigasa, 1982, 1992, 2000); Moon-Eclipse crisis in Borno (1996); Tiv and others in Nassarawa (2001); Jos (1994, 2000, 2001-2003, 2008, 2009, 2010); Ikulu-Bajju (2001); Yelwa-Shandam (2002, 2004); Mangu-Bokkos (1992-1995); Bukuru-Gyero (1997); Maiduguri (2006, 2009), Iggah-Oyikwa (2002); Kano (2004); Numan (2004); Azare (2001); Bauchi (2010); and Wukari (2010).

Furthermore, little distinction is drawn in the literature between the beliefs and practices of extremist and moderate Islamic believers. As a result, Nigeria, once applauded for its willingness to embrace ethno-religious difference and variation, now seems to demonstrate suspicion of those considered most different. Not surprisingly then, communities throughout Nigeria have become increasingly polarized and insulated along lines such as ethnic and religious belonging. Ethno-religious variation or differences, Fisher argues, fuels the sectionalization of the Nigerian state and, ultimately, communities form on the basis of fear of the 'other'.[9]

Nigeria and Ethno-Religious Diversity

Ethnicity and religion are two of several complex and interlocking factors of insurgency in Nigeria. The polarization of the territories that became Nigeria actually began with the country's creation and administration as two separate colonies, namely Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. A somewhat romantic interest in the North, especially the Sokoto Caliphate and its institutions, seems to have induced the colonial administrators in the North to treat that colony as if it were special. Thus, every effort

was made to advance its territorial and ethno-religious interests vis-a-vis those of the South. The immediate implication of the ordinance, backed by the Muslims' desire to confine themselves to an environment where their ethno-religious practices and obligations would not be influenced by the Christian culture, gave birth to the rise of Sabon Gari patterns of settlement in Nigeria. The North was also to become a proto-type 'native' state operating its own indigenous institutions, while being protected from all external influences, especially Christian proselytizing and educational enterprises.

Even resident immigrants from Southern Nigeria were to be restricted to the Sabon Gari or foreign quarters. Sabon Gari was created in the Northern part of Nigeria in 1911, which made it imperative that those coming from the Southern part of Nigeria would settle in that separated part of the city, different from where the indigenous inhabitants were settling. Gradually, the need to establish a Sabon Gari residence area for those coming from Southern Nigeria spread throughout Nigeria. It has been asserted that whatever the case may be, the residential segregation of the Kanawa engendered hostility between migrants and longtime residents. This hostility was intensified by two main factors, the first of which is the wide gap between the speed of development in most of the Sabon Gari areas when compared to the areas settled by the Kanawa. Secondly, the form of divide-and-rule administration that was instituted by the British contributed to not only the maximum exploitation of the Nigerian state but also the promotion of ethno-religious and cultural differences. The British colonial policy fueled and poisoned inter-ethno-religious relations among communities in the country. Thus, before the debut of independence, the colonial government had not only laid the foundation of ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria, but it had also created permanent mistrust and suspicion among the different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria.

Diversity is also mirrored to some extent in the ethnic and religious affiliations of the Nigeria's population. Religion is a critical component in any discussion of ethnic diversity. In order to situate religion within the context of difference and how difference is constructed, it must be acknowledged that a range of religions are represented in Nigeria.[10] Statistics from the 2015 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey, which interviewed a nationally

representative sample of 7,620 women (aged between 15 and 59) and 2,346 men (aged between 15 and 49), showed that 50.4% of Nigeria's population are Muslims, 48.2% are Christians, and 1.4% adhere to other religions.[11] A few years later, these figures seem not to have changed much, as a 2009 National Religious Survey on Nigerian Christians reported 15% Protestants, 13.7% Catholics, and 19.6% other Christian denominations. Similarly, a 2009 survey by Pew reported that the Nigerian Muslim population was 50.4%. By 2010, however, figures seemed to favor the Christian population, as a 2011 study conducted by Pew saw the Christian population increase to 50.8% (80,510,000).[12] The total number of Muslims was reported at 75,728,000 against its 2003 population of 78,056,000.[13] The majority of Nigerian Muslims are Sunni, though a significant Shia minority, primarily located in the north-western state of Sokoto, as well as a Sufi minority exist, alongside a small minority of Ahmadiyya.[14] It should be added that other minority religious and spiritual groups in Nigeria include Judaism, Hinduism, the Rosicrucian Order, Freemasonry, Grail Movement, Hare Krishnas, Eckankar, and the Bahá'í faith which is a syncretic faith melding elements of Christianity and Islam aimed at controlling feuds among Nigerians.[15]

In terms of religious affiliations, Nigeria is also divided along the line of region and ethnicity. For instance, while the Hausa ethnic group in the North is 95% Muslim and 5% Christian, the West (which is the Yoruba tribe) is almost 50/50 in terms of Islam and Christianity adherences, with an insignificant number of traditional religionists. The Igbos in the Southeast and the Ijaws in the South are 98% Christian (mostly Catholic) and 2% African traditional religions. The middle belt region, sometimes referred to as the North-Central Zone and home of the minority Christian community, are mostly Christians and traditionalists with few Muslim coverts.[16] It was perhaps because of this unique and conspicuous religious divide that Archbishop Onaiyekan described Nigeria as "the greatest Islam-Christian nation in the world," by which he meant that Nigeria is the largest country in the world with an evenly split population of Christians and Muslims, and thus "really the test case of the 'clash of civilizations'".[17] Christianity and Islam, the most popular religions in Nigeria, are not native to the country, but have been playing an important part in Nigeria and her politics, influencing core aspects of policy, from

economic development to health.[18] The intensity of religious identity in Nigeria is regarded as one of the highest in the world, according to Paden.[19] This argument is hinged on the fact that Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of religion than any other identity. According to a 2015 survey on "Religion and Public Life" conducted by Pew, 76% of Christians say that religion is more important to them than their Nigerian or African identities, or even their membership in a particular ethnic group.[20] Among Muslims, the number naming religion as the most important identity factor is even higher (91%). In effect, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and conflict, with Muslims in Nigeria more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians.[21] Spotting such religious identity plays out in the deep distrust between the Muslims and Christians. Ojo notes that most of the country's Christians (62%) trust people from other religions only a little or not at all.[22] Similarly, Nigeria's Muslims (61%) say they trust people of other religions little or not at all.[23]

Religion is also reflected in the Nigerian legal and judicial system, which contains three codes of law: customary law, Nigerian statute law (following English law), and Sharīʿah (Islamic law). Customary laws are most times administered in native or customary courts. These cases, often centered on family problems, are usually presided over by traditional rulers. Kadis (judges) apply Sharīʿah based on the Maliki Islamic code.

Any debate or discourse on community, ethnic diversity, and insurgency needs also to acknowledge the place of religion. This is not to say that it is appropriate to draw parallels between ethnic diversity, religious diversity and insurgency, but it needs to be acknowledged that fanaticism is credited with the most extreme acts of insurgency in Nigeria. The most notable events are the Fulani herdsmen attacks in various states, the Boko Haram insurgencies in the northeastern states and, more recently, the Niger-Delta Avengers (NDA), which can be called an ethnic insurgency operation, in the south-south states. There are clear and undisputed links between ethnicity, religion, and insurgency. However, when moderate Muslims and Christians are generically tarred with the extremist label, the implications of this, at least at a grassroots level, are problematic in terms of denial of access to various communities and ultimately social exclusion. McCready

suggests that rejection could lead people to embrace a 'singular identity'.[24] Perhaps, as Niezen argues, insurgency is a process whereby individuals subjected to labeling ultimately assume their aberrant identities.[25]

Diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion has long characterized communities across Nigeria. Yet it is important to also acknowledge that the very concept of diversity is laden with meaning. Religion seems to be one key way by which ethnic minorities and majorities, both individuals and communities, are defined. Ethnicity viewed singularly does not clearly define actual difference. Rather, it suggests a type of 'ethnic essentialism' similar to that discussed by Connor in her work during the early 1990s regarding 'gender essentialism' and young female offenders in Nigerian communities.[26] 'Essentialism' in this context assumes that issues of variation or diversity and gender are subordinate to the individual's ethnic status or, more importantly, to their status as 'other'.[27]

Similarly, in their debate on ethno-religious diversity in Nigeria, Anderson and Taylor critique the use of diversity as a concept.[28] They contend that it denies the legitimacy of individualism. Therefore, ethnic and religious groups are defined according to the dominant criteria—in this case, country of origin—not accounting for any differences between them. Nevertheless, while it is acknowledged that there are clear difficulties in terms of defining people according to their ethnic and religious background, such a classification does prove useful for this article, as it enables some accounting for ethnic and religious differences on a broad rather than individual basis.

Causes of Communal Ethno-Religious Insurgency in Nigeria

The roots of communal ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria are much deeper and complex, compared to civil war and are embedded in the interplay of historical factors, socio-economic crises, legacies of authoritarianism and the politics of exclusion, international forces, and local struggles.[29] Admittedly, while the aforementioned constitute the broader causal factors, embedded within and related to them are bad governance and corruption, human rights violations, poverty, ethnic marginalization and small

arms and light weapons proliferation, which continue to serve as drivers of communal ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria. Even though there are several other specific causes of communal ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria, the section will focus on discussing the aforementioned.

Bad governance and corruption

Post-colonial rule in different in Nigeria has been fraught with several challenges. Elemental among them are the issues of bad governance and corruption. Following independence, several regimes have mismanaged state resources and weakened governance institutions, which has resulted in an economic stalemate, political apprehensions and the breakdown of social peace and stability. Today, these twin factors constitute a major cause of communal ethno-religious insurgency in the country. Several scholarly works on communal ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria have identified bad governance and corruption as the underpinning factors fueling violence in Nigeria. Communal ethno-religious insurgency, in particular, hinges upon bad governance and corruption. For instance, it was determined that bad governance, corruption and poverty were the root causes of the recent Boko Haram and Niger-Delta Avengers insurgencies.[30]

Corruption in Nigeria, West Africa's most populous nation, has been highlighted as one of the underlying factors in communal ethno-religious insurgencies and the more recent, yet very pronounced, Boko Haram insurgency.[31] In 2003, for example, the Nigerian anti-corruption agency—the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC)—reportedly estimated that 70 percent of the oil earnings, constituting over $14 billion (US), was stolen and wasted.[32] Reportedly, the majority of the perpetrators of corruption in Nigeria include senators, ministers, commissioners, and individuals with higher connections in the political playground.[33] In affirming the link between corruption and communal ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria, Ibrahim argues that "seeing money coming from the federal government, on earnings on crude oil sales, with essentially none of it reaching the ordinary people, has created condition for insurrection".[34] In Nigeria, bad governance and corruption are deeply entrenched in social, political, judicial and economic systems, leading to bitter, pent-up

feelings that are sometimes expressed through communal ethno-religious insurgency. Clearly, if these problems remain unresolved, they could increase the likelihood of more violent communal ethno-religious insurgency.

Human rights violations

Incidences of human rights abuses and violations are numerous in Nigeria, forming the basis for the eruption and renewal of communal ethno-religious insurgency. Across Nigeria, there are reported incidences of sexual and gender-based violence, reprisal killings, beatings, impunity for state officials and institutions, high social injustice, repressive and brutal leadership, and unequal distribution of state resources, among others.[35] All these serve as both triggers and consequences of war. For instance, violations of the human rights of local citizens in Nigeria are one of the factors causing insurgency in the country. In Nigeria, the impunity for human rights abuse by state officials led in part to the communal ethno-religious insurgency that has destabilized the country since 1960. Local authorities are often accused of engaging in beatings and oppression of local citizens, creating a culture of 'Matchundade' (aggressive behaviors), which has bred major communal ethno-religious insurgencies with brutal consequences. Due to the continuation of these repressive acts against citizens and among ethno-religious groups—even after the 1967 civil war—Nigeria seems to be sitting on a boiling pot of tensions. These tensions, unresolved, could explode into another communal ethno-religious conflict, as was witnessed in the 1980s mutiny and the recent Boko Haram and Niger-Delta insurgencies.

Poverty

Poverty is another major setback in Nigeria. Various reports indicate that nearly half of Nigerians live in poverty.[36] Consequently, the poverty that many across the country endure can be seen to be one of the major factors contributing to the occurrence of communal ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria. Like other African countries, Nigeria is neither immune to the poverty canker nor ignorant of its impact on the country's fragile peace and stability. With over 60 per cent of its population living below the poverty line of US$1 a day, civil unrest and grievances—both recipes for

communal ethno-religious insurgency—become widespread. These agitations sometimes take violent forms and are seen as channels for punishing governments for their failure to alleviate poverty.[37] For instance, in a report written by Olatunji, 30 per cent of the Nigerian population indicated that poverty was one of the root causes of most Nigerian ethno-religious insurgencies.[38] Similar assertions have also been made with regards to the communal ethno-religious insurgency in Nigeria.[39] In Olatunji's report, poverty was stated as one of the major causes of the Nigerian ethno-religious insurgency. The report cited food insecurity, lack of infrastructure and access to basic social needs as some of the poverty indicators in the country.[40] Emphasizing the connection between poverty and communal ethno-religious insurgency, the country has the following adage: "In homes where there is no bread, everyone fights and no one is right".[41] Indeed, hunger, starvation, and lack of economic growth and development create a high likelihood of insurgency.

Ethnic marginalization

Ethnicity by itself is not violent; however, the concept has been manipulated in "societies polarized into two imbalanced divides with one faction feeling marginalized".[42]Correspondingly, Collier and Hoeffler also believe that "a greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity . . . by itself" is not "a major and direct cause of communal ethno-insurgency".[43] Nevertheless, to a larger extent, for a heterogeneous community like Nigeria, ethnicity has become a dividing factor that continues to drive communal ethno-domestic insurgency within and among communities, destabilizing the country.[44] It is not trite to say that ethnicity and religious fragmentation is one of the root causes of communal ethno-religious insurgency. In Nigeria, which was once noted for stability and peace, ethnic division has led to communal ethno-religious insurgency that threatens peace in the entire country.

Small arms and light weapons proliferation

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation is one of the major challenges in Nigeria. The country remains an area of considerable SALW proliferation because of their affordability, accessibility and availability; the porosity of Nigeria's borders; and legal frameworks legitimizing their use.[45] As reported by

Chuma-Okoro, Nigeria hosts about 7 to 10 million of the world's illegal SALW as well as 8 million out of the 100 million circulating in Africa.[46] Additionally, 77,000 of the small arms are allegedly within the control of Nigerian insurgent groups.[47] The circulation of illegal arms within and across states has increased the proclivity of communal ethno-religious insurgency within the country. Small arms proliferation has contributed to the mobilization for coups d'état—undemocratic overthrow of governments—increasing casualties and violent inter-communal and intra-state insurgencies in Nigeria.[48] Since 1960s, the successful ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria often resulted in communal ethno-religious insurgency, killing millions and displacing many.[49]

Deconstruction of Divergence at a Community Level

A recent spate of insurgency in Nigerian communities has highlighted tensions based 'ethno-religious difference'. Nigerian scholars have focused on 'difference' as responsible for the insurgency, which reportedly occurred in response to the religious, economic and political discrepancies in Nigeria. Ethnicity and religion 'difference' in particular became the single biggest focal issue. A pertinent issue for this current discussion is how this concept of 'difference' was interpreted by the wider Nigerian community. Certainly, the image of the country in the international arena was disturbing. Nigeria was unsafe, and the cause was ethno-religious tensions—at least partially.

Hostilities were heightened in the early 1980s at a broader societal level by Islamic insurgency groups' portrayals of predominantly Muslim young people ostensibly congregating to protect their religious beliefs and practices. Their aim, it seems, was to put an end to what was perceived as a Muslim invasion of Nigeria. A largely polarized debate ensued. Compounding this were images and stories of Muslim extremist young people mounting support to combat the Christian majority. These disturbing images were discussed at length in the local media, and the overwhelming commonality of all discussions was fear of the 'other'. Young people thought to be of Islamic background were defined entirely by their perceived ethnicity. This was regardless of their place of birth or even nationality. Nigeria, once a country that embraced diversity and encouraged acceptance of what Epstein terms

'cultural pluralism', was reduced in this instance to racist behavior by a symbolic show of power clearly aimed to cause fear.[50] While acknowledging the severity of the Northern communities' situation and its wider implications, it should also be noted that such behavior was reportedly fuelled by ethno-religion differences. In other words, a 'thug' mindset presided.

The situation described above indicates that followers of Islam are increasingly viewed with suspicion in Nigeria. There are several reasons for this, with fear being chief among them. Smock attempts to deconstruct the basis of this fear of Islam in Nigeria by discussing the link between Islam and insurgency in the Nigerian psyche.[51] He argues that a range of national issues have linked Islam to insurgency and violence in the Nigerian psyche, citing a number of prominent examples including the Maitatsine uprisings of the early 1980s and the Sharia issued in 12 northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara by Senator Sanni Yerima in Zamfara in 1999.[52] Compounding this are the attacks on many communities in Berom, Anaguta and Afisare, and the Boko Haram/Ansaru insurgency. Whether legitimate or not, the fear of the 'other' as the key perpetrator of insurgency action seems to bring Muslims under intense public scrutiny.

Yet fear is also a pivotal building block upon which society forms. Through fear, individuals seek solace with others whom they consider to be like themselves, and entire communities may be constructed to reflect similarities.[53] Within Nigeria, a number of the newer housing developments are built in such a way as to imply residing there gives access to a community—a neighborhood of similar people with perceived shared values in much the same way that gated communities promise a dream of safe and exclusive living for the wealthy. Some of the new growth corridors of the outer suburbs in Nigeria, for example, market themselves through advertising as a community inhabited by similar people: a place of comfort and belonging. Conversely, the recent insurgence in Nigeria implies the opposite of inclusion within community, instead demonstrating exclusion of those considered most different.

In a multiethnic, multireligious and multilinguistic society like Nigeria, this fear of 'other' has caused some difficulties for how Nigeria as a nation accepts those deemed as 'other', or ethno-religious different, from the predominantly Christian majority in

Nigeria. Deconstruction of diversity at its most basic level, that being cultural values, allegiance and language, seems to be at the forefront of government response. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) has recently outlined proposed reforms that could subject the upcoming generations in Nigeria to increased language and ethno-religious history tests as well as a requirement that they demonstrate knowledge and an undertaking of allegiance to core Nigerian values. Moreover, former Nigerian Information Minister Labran Maku suggests that citizenship should be sought by the young generation sooner rather than later, in an attempt to further cement a commitment to Nigeria. Essentially, the Nigerian Minister of Interior and the Minister of Culture and Tourism are proposing a system that aims at breaking down fragmented allegiances in favor of a preferred overriding singular culture, at least in terms of placing the stated values of Nigeria first. If such initiatives are implemented correctly and not forced, they might serve useful in paving a positive step toward creating a country of shared values.

When we talk about difference, what we are most interested in is the relevance that difference has for ourselves. Gbadegesin, suggests that we are most comfortable within a group of similar people, and hence most uncomfortable when we are with others we consider most unlike us.[54] Within the context of Nigeria, this raises questions regarding the vast population who originate from various ethno-religious groups who appear unlike the Nigerian majority. Indeed, during this insurgency, local media reports confirmed that derogatory 'drumbeaters' comments were made against those classified as 'non-Muslims'.

Within Nigerian society, there is an overriding acceptance and integration of people from different backgrounds. A variety of reasons helps account for this, the key reason being a solid history that goes back to Sir Lord Lugard of the pre-colonial era in 1914. The British Administration began with Frederick Lugard as the first High Commissioner. In 1907, Lugard left Nigeria for Hong Kong. As a result, there are now second and third generations firmly entrenched in Nigeria. Similarly, during the pre-colonial era, people from a variety of sub-Saharan African countries, including Niger and Chad, made Nigeria their home. They were eventually accepted into the Economic Community of West African States society.

However the amalgamation of Nigeria has caused Nigerian society to be grossly engaged in challenges of differences and fear.

Again, 'difference' seems to be the biggest factor driving discriminatory actions. A number of studies within the field of insurgency, for example, have focused on the experiences of young men in the juvenile justice system. One key study conducted by Akuar states that between 2000 and 2015, young offenders (Al-majaris) from the northern region stayed three times longer than the average in the juvenile detention system.[55]

Ethnicity and religion seem to be the crucial factors affecting acceptance by those from the South and West regions of Nigeria, who for the most part adhere to Christian beliefs and practices which are viewed there as peaceful and non-confrontational. Islam, on the other hand, represents a clear threat to Christian ideals, as Smock has illustrated. In this sense, the perceived threat of insurgency associated with ethno-religious differences and diversity—and in particular, Islam—serves only to hinder the inclusion of Muslims in broader Nigerian society.[56] Furthermore, there has also been a societal condemnation of Muslims as the Muslim community has failed to collectively rebuke recent Islam-related insurgency. This contentious issue has been amplified through public debate, which has only exacerbated problems at the community level and increased the fear of the 'other' by linking insurgency to all Muslims. At the community level, the ethnic and religious foundations of Nigerian society have shifted in recent times, giving way to an overwhelming suspicion of difference. The elimination of threats both real and perceived is more complex than deconstructing difference in favor of creating a singular ethno-religious identity. Indeed, the very issue of fear and the construction of Muslims in particular as the 'other' requires further consideration, at the very least in terms of the outcomes of their exclusion. Any discussion of insurgency should also consider broader societal implications, such as exclusion or integration.

Communities form on the basis of shared interests. As we have seen, chief among these interests seem to be ethnicity and religion. Identification with one's ethnic group and devotion to one's religion need not inevitably lead to an avoidance of interactions with people from other communities, however. A number of initiatives have recently been undertaken at the community level in Nigeria, aimed solely at demystifying and understanding difference. One such initiative is the story of Pastor James Wuye and Imam Mohammed Ashafa, which in itself is a narrative of

ethno-religious peacemaking. In 1992, they fought on opposite sides of an ethno-religious insurgency. Wuye lost his right arm, and Ashafa lost his spiritual teacher and two cousins in a Muslim-Christian clash in Nigeria. In 1995, they recognized that their two faiths both contain warrants for peace. They established the Inter Faith Mediation Centre and committed themselves to working collaboratively to promote interfaith reconciliation. In 1999, they co-authored a book titled, *The Pastor and the Imam: Responding to Conflict* (Lagos: Ibrash Publications, 1999), which describes their experiences and sets out the biblical and Quranic mandates for peace.[57] Since then, Wuye and Ashafa have helped bring religious peace to the troubled city of Kaduna. They subsequently turned their peacemaking attention to other cities that have experienced comparable ethno-religious insurgency.[58]

Another good example of interfaith accord took place early 2012 in Kaduna, Kaduna State. It involved women, including Christians and Muslims, meeting on a Sunday afternoon to share a meal and discuss shared attributes of their lives. By discussing their daily routines, it was envisaged that stereotypes about each other would be broken down, and the women would define each other in terms of their shared status of 'female' rather than by their ethnic or religious identities.[59] At a community level, this initiative was somewhat unique. Invitations were extended largely via word of mouth. Those attending the function were encouraged to bring photos of their children, talk about their daily routines and discuss their feelings regarding insurgency—specifically their reaction to the recent Boko Haram insurgency and subsequent atrocities, such as the kidnapping of over 200 Chibok girls. The Islamic Council of Nigeria supported the women's event.[60] While such initiatives are attractive in terms of gaining positive local media coverage and possibly diminishing participation in insurgents' activities, stereotypes are solidly entrenched. Regardless of their limitations, however, it should be acknowledged that such initiatives are useful in fostering an environment of understanding across difference by highlighting similarities. When discussing difference within the context of Nigeria, it becomes apparent that Muslims, as the group perceived to differ the most from the ethno-religious majority, are those who are most likely to be focused on. There are, of course, a number of explanations for this, the most obvious being the fear of insurgency, which has drawn Muslims in general under greater scrutiny

in terms of their difference, imagined and real, from the ethno-religious majority within Nigeria. But it is the underlying premise of fear upon which this notion is built that is of concern. Community as a concept describes a form of unity, and where there is fear, it is unlikely that unity will flourish.

Conclusion

Since 2009, references to insurgency in Nigeria were apparent in the literature, and the elements that constituted a community seemed more fluid with an overriding communitarian tradition of acceptance of difference. Historically, waves of ethno-religious differences demonstrate acceptance of various ethnic communities within Nigeria. Now in 2016, it is clear from media reports that ethno-religious difference has taken on new meaning, and 'difference', whether real or perceived, is increasingly viewed with suspicion. Islam in particular has been the focus of much media attention and is linked to fear. There are many instances cited in Nigerian local media where Muslims have been vilified in Nigeria. There is evidence of an underlying discourse of 'us' and 'them'. Recent insurgencies in Nigeria are proof of tensions among various ethnic and religious communities within the region. This has been mirrored to some extent in other states, evident through public opinion as highlighted in public debate. Yet there are also examples of cross-ethno-religious community initiatives at the ground level that aim to demystify difference and break down barriers, the success of which is largely localized. Such initiatives need a far wider public audience to penetrate broader society.

Insurgency does not fit neatly into any particular causal theory of crime. As such, the terms under which insurgency is examined at an academic level need to remain fluid and consider key concepts of community and the 'other' as central in terms of societal response. This paper has suggested that building a strong sense of Nigeria through the dismantling of fear needs to be a priority for policymakers. Attempts to enforce a singular integrated model whereby diversity is deconstructed and replaced with a forced sharing of community values should be treated with caution. Such attempts inherently link difference to fear and therefore pose a risk for a negative counter-effect.

Notes

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