

THE BURDEN OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE ON NIGERIAN ARMY SINCE 1980

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Abstract

Religious violence has been an additional security burden to the Nigerian Army (NA) since 1980, with the Marwa Maitatsine religious uprising. This study aims at showing that since then, the NA has been consistently faced with different cases of religious violence, which it fights with the joint efforts of other Armed Forces of Nigeria. The study leans on structural functionalist theory, which explains how Religion and the Nigerian Military have functional correlation as institutions of society. Thus, the negative activities of religion affect the ideal positive functions and activities of the NA. Using an analytic method and qualitative approach, the study demonstrates in its analysis and synthesis of literature that religious violence has often been masterminded by some political and religious elites. The prevailing hard conditions of the citizenry make them susceptible to elitist religious manipulations and incitement of the masses. The apex of the religious violence suffered and combated by the NA is from the Boko Haram Islamic sect in the northeastern Nigeria. The study concludes that religious violence causes social violence and disorder; claims many lives and property; and compounds NA's shouldered security burdens, as it poses severe threat to internal security, intergroup/interpersonal relations and the overall well-being of Nigeria. It recommends positive reorientation, wide sensitisation, true moral education and operational legislations against those guilty of incitement and perpetration of religious violence.

Keywords: Burden, Religious violence, Nigerian Army, Security threats, Elites, Manipulations

Introduction

For several decades now, religious violence has remained one of the most endemic threats to the Nigerian Army in particular, and to Nigeria as a whole in terms of internal security. It has compounded the contemporary security challenges confronting the Nigerian Army (NA) before and after the Nigeria Civil War. Despite being a secular state, the religious plurality characterising Nigeria had been made a

tool for political manipulation of the masses by the elites (Osakwe, 2017; Galadima, 2016). The use of religion and ethnicity to manipulate the masses is a common practice introduced and sustained by politicians. They have religious elites as their accomplices and collaborators. Okpale (2019, p. 686) lends credence to the foregoing position of this paper, as he argues that Nigerian politicians are those who set the NA up with insurgency and other internal security threats, so as to have them distracted from politics to combating internal security challenges. Instead of providing security for the citizenry as stipulated in the Constitution of Nigeria, the political office holders making up the government of the Nigerian state rather play the role of causing as well as fueling insecurity.

The 1999 Constitution clearly states viz: 14 (1) 'Security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government' (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, S. 14(1)). Rather than providing security, these elites resort to causing and fueling insecurity. By compounding security challenges for the NA, its constitutional functions are affected. This is because the NA now has divided attention and compounded responsibilities. Meanwhile, other challenges to internal security are on the increase in the 21st century Nigeria. Other challenges to internal security in Nigeria include Boko Haram terrorism, Niger Delta militancy, banditry, kidnapping and other high profile crimes. For these, the Nigerian Armed Forces have been involved in joint operations across Nigeria, with a central focus on the North-East (Gowon, 2015, p. 3). In view of the foregoing, this study rises to appraise the contribution of the NA in combating religious violence in Nigeria since the early 1980s. The essence is to show how religious violence has constituted a setback to the NA, particularly to the extent of its functionality.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of structural functionalism, as championed by Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton, the earliest pioneers of the functionalist theory. The functionalist theory is also known as structural functionalism. Brown (1952) has defined functionalism as a condition in which all parts of the social system work together in a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency, devoid of persistent conflicts that can neither be resolved or regulated. For Cancian (1960), functionalism is a system that can be analysed into a set of interdependent parts, the value of some of which determine whether or not a certain property will occur in the system, and there are certain limits on the variations of the values of the variables and the system would thereby disappear. The choice of this theory lies in the suitability of its theoretical postulations in our study. Basically, functionalist theorists hold that society is an integral collection of the parts of a whole, which must co-exist, co-relate, be interdependent and be functional in their dealings, in order to pursue and

realise substantial set goals/objectives, which are of the good of all. For the functionalists, elements of society are functional. They relate the tenets of functionalism to various practical and theoretical contexts.

From Merton's (1938, pp. 673-4) explanation of functionality, it is understood that the NA fails or underperforms because of the absence or unavailability of the means for the realisation of the roles Nigerian society prescribes for it. This is because despite prescribing roles for institutions and agents, the society still leaves some institutions and individuals to be at the disadvantaged side and thereby lack the means to realise the roles assigned to them by the same society (Merton, 1938, pp. 673-4). Similarly, for Chinoy (1967, p. 454), differential opportunities further worsens the chances of the less privileged, because the society places undue emphasis on its goals without corresponding strong emphasis on the means of attaining such goals. Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society. Society is more than the sum of its parts. Each part of the society is functional for the stability of the whole (Ashley, 2009, pp. 1-2). The functionalists use the terms 'functional' and 'dysfunctional' to describe the effects of social elements on society. Elements of society are functional if they contribute to social stability and dysfunctional if they disrupt social stability. Some aspects of society can be both functional and dysfunctional. There are manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are consequences that are intended and commonly recognised; while latent functions are consequences that are unintended and often hidden.

Religion, family, education, polity, economy, the media and the likes play distinct and shared roles for the well-being of the society (Ashley, 2019, p. 1). Each of them complements the others in their functionality. It follows that the functionality of the army of every society is not only intertwined with that of armed forces but also with the strategic functionality of the whole society. In other words, the existential and socially, politically and systematically conditioned roles of the various societal systems and institutions manifest in the functionality of the army of a nation.

Meanwhile, the army and the other armed forces cannot exist, operate, function and survive exclusively or independently on their own. They also rely on the society. As such, their functionality is connected to that of the society. The implication of the above is that the Nigerian society has been thwarting the enormous security efforts of the NA toward pursuing and realising its constitutional functions. Religious violence is one of the threats from the Nigerian civilian society to the NA and other Armed Forces of Nigeria. The NA takes the lead in combating all major (deadly) security threats to Nigeria. The cases of Maitasine and Boko Haram are ample examples of such threats to the NA from the Nigerian civilian society.

Structural functionalism aptly explains the inter-connectivity between the military and the society, military and civil government, military and paramilitary, and NA and other two wings of the Nigerian military. There is undoubtedly a systemic, structural and functional correlation between and among them. The connectivity is such that when one fails, the others in the chain or hierarchy get affected and thereby fail too. The constituents of the chain of structural functionality are more like the parts of the body. If one part is disfigured, the other parts are also affected (Ashley, 2019, p. 1), despite still functioning without the disfigured one(s). In this case, the society is partly responsible for the failure of the NA in carrying out its functions in both internal and external security operations. Thus, the NA's failure is partly a result of the structural failure of the society in which it operates and the failure of other institutions on the chain of the structural functionality. Given the foregoing, it is quite clear that the chosen theory aptly suits the study and rightly explains the functionality of the NA and the drift from its functions as a result of the persistent challenges it battles with, one of which is religious violence.

A Brief History of the Nigerian Army (NA)

The Nigerian military is a creation of the colonialists (Abdulrahman & Mang, 2017; Gowon, 2015). The Nigerian Army was created in 1863; the Nigerian Navy was created in 1964; the Nigerian Air Force was created in 1964 (Gowon, 2015, pp. 2-3). The NA, as an arm of the Nigerian military, pursues the attainment and sustenance of the strategic national interests of Nigeria and upholds Nigeria's integrity and its own professionalism in totality. Accordingly, the history of the Nigerian Army (NA) is traced to 1863, when Lt John Glover, a British colonialist of the Royal Navy, secured the freedom of some slaves besides some who had already fled their masters' homes and had contact with him at Jebba (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 1). Their ship was wrecked and he and Dr Baike could no longer journey straight to Lagos on sea (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 1). Most of the slaves were Hausas. Upon reaching Lagos, he organised the slaves who went with him into a local force, known as Glover's Hausas, Glover's Constabulary or Hausa Militia in 1863 (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 1). This local force is what later turned out to be the Nigerian Army. Glover was satisfied with the security services of these men and their enthusiasm in doing the work. He pushed on for the force to be approved and formalised.

So, that is how the present Nigerian Army rose. As at that time, the West India Regiment was responsible for garrison activities in Lagos (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 1). The Royal West African Frontier Force, metamorphosed into the Nigerian Army (Ubah, 2007; The Library of Congress, 2001). From the defunct Nigerian Marine Department of 1914, the Nigerian Navy was created in 1958. And, against the difficulties encountered in the airlift of

Nigerian contingents to UN missions in the Congo, the Nigerian Air Force was formed in 1964 by an Act of Parliament (Gowon, 2015, pp. 29-32). So, the local force, the constabulary, which started with 40 men increased soonest to 100 in June, 1863. In October, 1863, Glover got an approval and was asked to increase the force strength to 600. A two-month training was organised for them, with 100 men in batch passing out. In 1865, the British Government recognised Glover's Force as a regular force and named it 'Lagos Constabulary', charged with both military and police duties (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 2). By 1901, when it was incorporated into the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), the Lagos Constabulary became known as Lagos Battalion of the West African Frontier Force (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 2). It was in July, 1897, Chamberlain asked Lugard to take command of WAFF. He did and became the first Commandant of WAFF (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, pp. 20-27).

WAFF began with five British, two native officers and 404 men. Some of the men were recruited from Gold Coast (present-day Ghana). Among them, the about 100 Hausa men were known to be the best fighters. Two Muslim Mallams were therein serving as Imams to these Hausa officers. The African officers were grossly underpaid, unlike the five European officers, whose pay per annum totalled 10,000 Pounds, while 7,700 Pounds made up the total annual pay for all the African officers (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 7). The Nigerian Regiment was created out of the desire to resist French incursion into Yorubaland and Borgu. Ahead of French incursion attempts, Joseph Chamberlain, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, created the West African Frontier Force in 1897, referred vaguely as 'West African Force' until it later gained 'Royal' in 1928 by King George V (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 19). The Nigerian Regiment wore the same uniform with the Royal Niger Constabulary (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, pp. 5-8). Having become the Col.-in-Chief of the RWAFF in June, 1953, Queen visited Nigeria. During her visit, she conferred the Nigeria Regiment of WAFF with the title 'Queen's Own' (i.e. Queen's Own Nigeria Regiment – QONR) (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 110).

Upon independence on 1st October, 1960, the NA became known as the Royal Nigerian Army (RNA) (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 118). By 1st January, 1960, there were 228 British officers, 48 Nigerian officers with Combatant Commission and 2 non-Combatant officers. At independence, Royal Nigerian Army (RNA) had only 7,600 men with 50 Nigerian officers. Most of these Nigerian officers held ranks from Major and below. With independence, a lot of things changed. These included where training of officer cadets was to be taking place; equipment purchase; increased NMTC; the dropping of 'Royal' from the name on 1st October, 1963; provision of better facilities and equipment; changed uniform

and insignia; increase in the Force manpower strength; the indigenisation of the Officer Corps; and changed NA structure (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, p. 123).

The NA in Combating Religious Violence

Here, the focus is solely on NA's involvement in quelling religious violence. Studies confirm that Nigeria has witnessed different religious related crises since 1980 till date (Aleyomi, 2012; Bagaji, 2012). Osakwe's (2017, p. 37) study 'unfolds the continuation of religious crises in Northern Nigeria for over thirty years now.' Religious violence is of both intra- and inter- conflict phases (Ojo, 2010). Ojo (2010) holds that Nigeria inter-religious unrest often leads into inter-ethnic clashes, despite being a case of clear religious conflict. Canci and Odukoya (2016) say religious conflicts account for social clashes and violence among people of different ethnic, social and religious groups. This is because every religious faithful belongs to a tribe and a social group. Afolabi (2016, p. 26) points out that most of the religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims are cases in which 'members of the same sect engaged in violent conflicts because of different interpretations of the holy books.' As Odoh (2012, p. 15) notes, the harsh political condition occasioned by the Babangida extravagant leadership grounded series of religious conflicts in Nigeria. Although Odoh (2012, p. 15) points out that the conflict between Muslims and Christians started with the 1989 DIC problems, this paper observes that the Maitatsine religious uprising with its attendant violence and damages was on board before the 1989 DIC. So, the 1989 DIC was rather the institutional beginning of the violent conflicts between Muslims and Christians.

The first organised religious violence or terrorism in Nigeria was recorded in December, 1980, when 'the Maitatsine riot broke out in Kano, claiming many lives' (Omotosho, 2003, p. 15). It was incited by the Maitatsine sect, led by late Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa, (alias Allah Ta-Tsine or Maitatsine). He was an Islamic immigrant scholar from Marwa town in Northern Cameroon. Between 1980 and 1985, the uprising spread from Kano to Yola, Maiduguri, Bauchi and Gombe, overwhelming the police and leading to the death of over 5,000 people (Imo, 1995, pp. 21-2). By 24th December, 1984, 1,000 people were reported dead, including Police, Army and other members of the public. On 28th December, 1984, the NA sent in soldiers from 146 Infantry of 3 Infantry Brigade, aided by armoured vehicles from 202 Armoured Battalion, Kaduna to go and bring the situation to order. Maitatsine was badly wounded on the leg. He escaped from his Yan Awaki Quarters and took refuge at RijiyarZaki village, where he later died of the serious wounds. On 29th December, 1984, the operation was announced ended (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, pp. 237-8). Nigerian Army Education Corps and School (1994, pp. 139-150) notes that inter- and intra- ethnic and religious conflicts are

chronic sources of nationhood issues. These issues caused loss of lives, property, different resources, coups, regional politics and soldiering, among others (Nigerian Army Education Corps & School, 1994, pp. 149-150).

Historically, Boko Haram terrorism is a continuation of the Jihad Islamic radicalism war and the MarwaMaitatsine uprising of 1980 in Kano, 1982 in Kaduna, 1984 in Yola and 1985 in Bauchi (Ibrahim, 1998; Abimbola, 2011; Bare, 2013; Muktar, 2015; Kanu, 2016). The Boko Haram terrorism is the deadliest and most pervasive religious security challenge in Nigeria, with unquantifiable effects on all and sundry. Some people (e.g. Abimbola, 2011; Bare, 2013; Muktar, 2015) are of the opinion that Boko Haram had been in existence and operation long before 2002, when Mohammed Yusuf, a secondary school dropout from Yobe, took over the leadership of the sect. Upon taking over the leadership, he introduced his radical Islamic ideologies that he learnt from Chad and Niger Republic, where he later went and studied Quran. He secured funding and sponsorship from some elites and forcefully recruited young children, both of age and underage. Abimbola (2011), Mukhtar (2015) and several others trace Boko Haram to 1995, as a reborn of MarwaMaitatsine, which was called Sahaba and led by Abubakar Lawan, who later left for studies at the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. Yusuf is said to have been appointed by the then leading clerics to take over the mantle of leadership.

From the Maiduguri complex, Mohammed Yusuf relocated the school, disguised to be a normal Islamic school, to his village, Kanamma in Yobe, close to the Niger Republic border (Kanu, 2016). Yusuf took advantage of the frustrating situations of the poor Nigerian masses and preached to and converted many young youths, making various empty promises of being out to deliver them from poverty, hunger starvation, ignorance, illiteracy and outright lack. He made them take oaths and got them trained for suicide bombing and terrorism. He went on and linked up with many other international terrorist groups. These include Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of Islamic Maghreb (AQLIM), Ansar Al-Dine of Mali, the Movement for Oneness Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Azawald National Liberation Movement (MNLA), among others (Mukhtar, 2015; Kanu, 2016). On 12 November, 2016, Saturday Punch Newspaper reported that Boko Haram caused 17,000 deaths, destroyed more than 1,000 schools, and displaced about two million people. These are in addition to the adopted 270 Chibok school girls in 2014 and the 104 Dapchi School girls in March, 2018 (Yagboyaju 2019, 45).

According to Hoogvelt (2001), the current Islamic resurgence across the globe points to how identity, hegemony, exclusionary politics of marginalisation and religious fundamentalism can together or singly culminate or degenerate to violence, such as the violent religious insurgency from the North-East. In her words, 'Islamic

resurgence is best understood as the politics of identity in response to exclusion' (Hoogvelt, 2001, p. 199). Similarly, Alozieuwa (2010) observes that different social groups, especially those in multi-ethnic societies, often tend to use violence in different historical circumstances for political ascendancy. As Alozieuwa (2016) observes, political and economic factors are behind the violent religious and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. The NA had always been involved in quelling each of the recurrent violent religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Jos (Kukah 1993; Imo, 2001; Alubo, 2006; Gofwen, 2004) and in other parts of the country, especially in (other parts of) Northern Nigeria, where violent religious conflicts are prevalent and on the increase. Examples of such states include Kano, Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Taraba, Adamawa, Yobe, and Borno, among others. The Jos crisis of April 1994 is one of the most noted of the violent religious conflicts in Jos.

Stating categorically, apart from Maitatsine religious violence, the NA had involved in quelling the violent religious conflicts in Kaduna and Bulunkutu (Maiduguri) in 1982; the Ilorin Muslim-Christian riot during Christian Easter procession of March, 1986; Zaria and Funtua religious riots of March, 1987; the October, 1990 religious clash between Christians and Muslim in Kano over the invitation of Reinhard Bonnke to Kano, as against the rejection of Ahmed Deedat in South Africa for a similar religious exercise; another Kano civil disturbance of December, 1991; etc. (Alubo, 2006; Adebayo, 2010; Adesoji, 2010; Bagaji et al., 2012; Aleyomi, 2012). As Adebayo (2010) notes, the religious violence over the invitation of Reinhard Bonnke to Kano claimed over 500 lives and property worth millions of Naira, while many were left injured and maimed. Again, in Kafanchan, Kaduna, a serious major religious violence broke out and claimed many lives and property on 6th March, 1987. It later spread to Zaria and Funtua. This riot rose from the misrepresentation of Islam by one Rev. Abubakar Bako, who distorted some facts in the Qur'an and made derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad (Isyaku, 1991, p. 25).

Also, barbeque (suya – roasted meat) caused religious violence between Christians and Muslims of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area (LGA), Bauchi State in April 1991. From that LGA, the crisis spread to other parts of Bauchi, claiming many lives and property, including churches and mosques being burnt and destroyed (The Guardian, 1998, pp. 1-2). Also, The Guardian Newspaper of 28 May, 1998 reported that twelve people were said to have been killed at Abule-Taylor on the outskirts of Lagos (The Guardian, 1998, pp. 1-2). As Omotosho (2003, p. 16) has noted, although the police report had it as a pre-emptive attack on another Maitatsine sect, led by Alhaji Muhammed Adamu, since there were no clashes before the police raid, it becomes cumbersome to ascertain the police's claims as it is also difficult to determine whether it was an inter- or intra-religious clash. More so, Canci and

Odukoya (2016) say religious conflicts account for social clashes and violence among people of different ethnic, social and religious groups. This is because every religious faithful belongs to a tribe and a social group. Afolabi (2016, p. 23) observes that 'Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented number of conflicts arising from mostly religious-based disputes since 1999,' with 'not less than ten thousand lives having been lost to religious-based violence between 1999 and 2016.' It should be noted that this figure is underestimated.

Economic growth and political stability are threatened by religious violence (Sankore 2001). Hardship and miseries become the order of the day (Agi, 1996). Sour interpersonal and intergroup relations arise from religious violence (Alozieuwa, 2010). Lives and property are lost. In terms of violent conflicts in general, studies have shown that conflict has extreme negative and devastating effects on the people and the society. It threatens stability and peace, leading to violence, loss of lives, property and time, displacement of persons, trauma, pains, anger, insecurity, anger, poverty, distrust, negligence, underdevelopment, broken homes/marriages, sour interrelations, arousing enmity, paralysed economic activity, anarchy, starvation, health issues, prejudices, ethnic hate and what have you (Omenukor, 2006; Solomon, 2002; Sankore, 2001; Ibeani&Onu, 2001; Adamu,2001; Alao et al.,2012).

Clearly, religious violence is a threat to the NA. It threatens and takes the lives of its personnel; keeps them distracted from their core constitutional duties; causes them a lot of woes and losses, including huge material and financial expenses and losses; makes them enemies of some religious faithful; retards their efforts at combating internal and external security challenges; destroys infrastructure, logistics and the image of the NA; and a host of others. The NA gets all these basically as a result of state failure (i.e. failed leadership). The failure of political and religious leaders causes the NA the religious-based plagues it has been suffering for over four decades now. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Galadima (2016) regrets that these rulers rather join force with their fellow secular politicians to cause a whole lot of mayhem on the contemporary society. Thus, they have added up the onerous sustained task of combating religious violence along with other forms of internal security to their traditional roles

Conclusion

This study has so far made a concise exposition of how religious violence is a burden to the Nigerian Army, drawing support to its arguments from several literatures. Religious violence is an additional burden to the NA, because it battles with combating this phase of internal security challenge amidst other internal security challenges of the 21st century. On the theoretical lane, the study argues that by virtue

of functionalism, religious violence interferes with the functional efficacy and ideal service delivery of the NA. This has been happening since 1980 to date. The religious violence that got NA involved in quelling religious violence in Nigeria is the Maitatsine religious violence uprising of between 1980 and 1985. These days, its resurfaced version is said to be the Boko Haram, which rose in 2002, got prominence in 2009 and became bloodiest in 2011. Maitatsine religious uprising, other cases of religious violence over the years and the Boko Haram religious-based violence are the extra- security burdens shouldered by the NA from religious violence. These burdens have been adversely affecting the NA since 1980 to date. They hamper its efficiency, services, operations, personnel and entirety. This study recommends positive reorientation, wide sensitisation, true moral education and operational legislations against those guilty of incitement and perpetration of religious violence.

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