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Ethnicisation of Violent Conflicts in Jos?

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Ethnicisation of Violent Conflicts in Jos?

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Abstract- For over a decade now, violent conflict has been a recurring decimal in Plateau State, most especially in Jos the state capital. However, some commentators have examined the simmering conflicts in Jos by adopting mono-causal perspective. Anchored on eclectic model of conflict analysis and with heavy reliance on secondary data, this study examined violent conflict in Jos. The study found that conflicts in Jos and elsewhere are caused by confluence of factors and as such solutions to conflict should embrace the various manifestations of conflict so as to proffer workable solutions.

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I. Introduction

For some years now Plateau State has been a theatre of violent conflict. Over the past decade, at least 4,000 people have been killed in Jos and smaller cities and villages in Plateau State (Krause, 2011). There has been extensive damage of property, and violent conflicts in the state have taken toll on its developmental prospects. But Jos, the state capital appears to be the epicenter of much of insecurity and the worst site of violence in the state (Higazi, 2011). Episode of mass killing and destruction of lives and property seems to have started from 2001 and continued to 2010 according to (Higazi, 2011) but after 2010 there have been quite a number of episodic violence till date.

In the literature, ethnicity and indigene/settler phenomenon (see Best, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2006) are often seen as central to violence in the state once known as home of "peace and tourism" that has now become the centre of violent conflict. Still few others like the former Governor of Plateau State, late Solomon Lar (cited in Suleiman, 2011) disagreed with the above assertion by saying politics is the cause of conflict in the region. Some commentators like Philip Dafe Chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) (cited in Adi (2011) see religion as the driver of conflict in the region as people that are often victims of violent conflict in Jos and other parts of the state are people that have nothing to do with the politics of Jos but Christians. The position of this paper is that, instead of viewing the aforementioned factors singly as cause of conflict, it is better to treat them holistically as one factor reinforces the other and the fact that mono-causal approach to conflict analysis is inadequate.

For analytical purposes, this study is divided into the following segments: section one introduces the study; section two focuses on conceptualization of the key concepts and theoretical framework; the next section is on the geography of the study area and also an overview of conflict in the region; the next section immediately after this discusses etiology of violent conflicts in Jos, and its implications. The last section is on conclusion and recommendations.

II. Conceptual Premise

a) On Ethnicity

Ethnicity according to Nnoli (1978:5) simply means a social phenomenon associated with interacttions among members of different ethnic groups. He further held that ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by communal character (i.e. language and culture) of their boundaries. In the same vein, Otite (1989:2 cited in Egwu, 1998:56) defined the concept as the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols. According to Nnoli (1989) there are four major attributes of ethnicity: first, it exists in a polity in which there is a variety of ethnic groups; second, it is characterized by exclusiveness which is manifested in inter-ethnic discrimination; third, conflict is inherent particularly in situations of strong competition over limited resources; finally ethnicity involves consciousness of being one in relation to other ethnic groups.

b) On Violence

The concept of violence serves as a catch all for every variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscle flexing which a given observer happens to fear or condemn (Tilly, 1974 cited in Joshua and Oni, 2010). To Anifowose (2011) in order to properly conceptualize violence, it is necessary to distinguish it from force. Force means legal and legitimate use of violence by a government so as to protect the state, while violence carries an overtone of "violating" that is illegitimate use of force by non-governmental individuals and groups. However, in the context of this study, extrapolating from Anifowose (2011) violence is defined as the use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual(s) or a group of people within a geographical enclave against another individual(s) or a group of people and or property, with the intent to cause injury or

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death to person(s) and/ or damage or destruction to property.

c) On Conflict

The word conflict is taken from the Latin word "conflictus" meaning "struck together". Conflict means clash, contention, confrontation, a battle or struggle, controversy or quarrel (Nwolise, 1997:28 cited in Joshua, 2013:33). To " Coser (1956 cited in Joshua, 2013:33)" conflict is a struggle over values and claims over status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.

Conflict is coterminous with violence but may not necessarily mean the same. Conflict may or may not be occasioned with destruction of lives and properties. Conflict that is destructive is termed violent conflict. However, if dispute, quarrel or misunderstanding between people or group is not occasioned with threat or actual destruction of lives and properties it is non-violent conflict.

Studies have revealed that proximate groups are often prone to conflict. Little wonder that Hewstone, et. al (2008) posited that groups in proximity are groups in conflict. This is because neighbouring groups are likely to be competitors for scarce resources such as; land, or may be victimized because they posses wealth that can be conveniently confiscated (Glick, 2008). The nexus of the tripartite concepts (ethnicity, violence and conflict) can be seen in the sense that, differences in ethnic groupings may not necessarily results in violent conflict if there is no competition for scarce resources and values which could be material, political or socio-cultural in nature among the proximate groups. In other words, conflict between or among groups may be triggered by confluence of factors. It is therefore not a surprise that Osita (2007) asserted that any engagement with conflict phenomenon in the present day Nigeria must as a matter of necessity grapple with the multiple impacts of the complex nexus among which are: history, economic, political, cultural, religion and psycho-social dimensions of conflict.

III. Theoretical Exposition

Oberschall (2010 cited in Joshua, 2013) argued that no single theoretical framework can be expected to encompass conflict. In the same vein, Akanji (2005) postulated that it is now generally accepted in the conflict literature that conflict is illusive. Consequently, the position taken in this paper study is that a mono-factor based explanation of conflict is inadequate for understanding conflict in Jos, Plateau State and as such eclectic model of conflict analysis is adopted in analyzing conflict in the region.

The central argument of eclectic model is that civil conflicts are precipitated and sustained by confluence of factors which include: cultural, economic, historical, political and social among others which requires a combination of multiple theoretical approaches so as to arrive at acceptable explanations (Sanderson, 1987). Eclecticism holds that any particular problem must be explained from different angles so as to bring to bear diversity of approaches. The importance of this approach is premised on the fact that each approach only provides partial insight into the nature of problem, whereas the combination of approaches gives complete picture of the problem (Sanderson, 1087). By application to Jos case, eclecticism will bring to the fore the multiplicity of factors responsible for conflicts in the region. The strength of this model is seen in its comprehensiveness and inclusiveness in providing the basis for the analysis of multifactor etiology of conflict.

IV. Geography of the Study Area

Plateau State is located in the North-Central zone of Nigeria and forms part of the middle-belt (Higazi, 2011). Jos is the administrative capital of Plateau State and is located in the North-East zone of the country (Onuoha, et. al, 2010). Scholars like Best (2007:4) noted that Plateau State is one of the most diverse states in the Nigerian federation. The region hosts a high concentration of relatively small ethnic communities with over 40 languages (Blench, 2009:2). The major ethnic groups in Jos are the: Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere regarded as indigene groups in Jos and are predominantly Christians; other groups which are often referred to as settlers are the Yoruba, Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani. The Hausa/Fulani group referrers to themselves as Jasawa (people of Jos) to distinguish them from the Hausa/Fulani in other states of the Nigerian federation (Krause, 2011).

Going by the Nigerian census of 2006, Plateau State had as at then a total population of 3, 178, 712 (Nigerian Census, 2006). The state has 17 Local Government Areas. Jos, the state capital is divided into three Local Government Areas; Jos North, Jos South and Jos East. Krause (2011) noted that according to 2006 Nigerian Population Census, Jos North had as at then, a population of 429,300 people; Jos South 306,716 and Jos East 85, 603.

Having taken a purview of the study area, it is important to note that violent conflicts in the region is mostly limited to the indigenes and the Hausa/Fulani population with other ethnic groups in the region being victims most especially when crisis turns religious. What account for this development is not far-fetched from the fact that, while other ethnic groups in the region apart from the Hausa/Fulani see the mselves as settlers and they never contested for ownership of Jos, the Hausa/Fulani claim that they are indigenes and should be treated as such as a result of their long stay in the Jos.

The next section focuses on an overview of conflicts in Jos.

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V. Violent Conflicts in JOS : An Overview

Jos the state capital of Plateau State has witnessed violent conflicts of differing dimensions in 1994, 2001, 2004, 2008 and the last major crisis being that of January 17 and March 7, 2010 (Onuoha, et al, 2010). But since then (2010) there have been cases of secret killings and night ambushes in different in parts of the state and casualties have been on both sides (the indigenes and Hausa/Fulani). Countless churches and Mosques have been razed, and hundreds of lives lost to the crisis (Suleiman, 2011).

Few cases of violent conflicts in Jos are examined below. The first major conflicts in Jos was in 1994 when the indigenes and Hausa/Fulani group engaged in violent confrontation over the appointment of a Hausa candidate to chair the Jos North Local Government Council which was created in 1991 by the military government of Babangida. It is believed that the military regime created the Jos Local Government to satisfy the interest of the Hausa/Fulani population in Jos North. The violence immediately took on ethnic and religious colouration (Sulieman, 2011). In 1998, a small incident between a Berom and Hausa man degenerated into what became known as the Bukuru Gyero road fracas, leading to violence, destruction of property and loss of lives (Egwu, 2004). In fact, Onuoha, et al (2010) noted that between 2001 and 2004 there were about 63 conflicts with ethno-religious undertones around Jos and other parts of Plateau State. In September 10, 2001, it was alleged that some Huasas/Fulanis attacked Barakin Ladi Local Government Area and killed 12 people. On February 24, 2004 another violent conflict engulfed the area in which about 150 houses were burnt and over 265 people killed. The next one was in Yelwa on May 3rd, 2004 which culminated in the declaration of a state of emergency in the state. It is chagrin that despite the declaration of a state of emergency on the May 18th, 2004, violence was still being perpetrated.

In November 2008, local government elections were conducted across Plateau State. However, the conduct of the election in Jos North and the dispute over the results gave vigor to a renewed mass violence in Jos, leading to the death of over 700 people within two days (Higazi, 2011). Before the army and mobile police quelled the violence, houses and other properties were destroyed in the affected areas and churches and mosques were torched (Higazi, 2011).

On Sunday 17, January 2010, another round of bloody violence broke out in Jos. The remote cause was attributed to the desire to retaliate based on what some parties had suffered during the November 2008 bloodbath. It was indeed, a reprisal attack. The immediate cause was connected to a man who had returned to rebuild his home and was prevented and subsequently attacked (Onuoha et al, 2010). The crisis started at Jos Jarawa area of Fraka district, near Dutse Uku and later spread to Angwan Rogo, Bauchi road, Angwan Rukwuba and later to Jos South. At least 300 lives were lost and thousand wounded (Thisday, 2010; Gofwen, 2011).

On March 7, 2010, Jos was rocked again by violent conflict in which hundreds of Fulani herdsmen were said to have invaded three Christian villages of Dogo Nahawa, Ratsat and Zot at midnight. Not less than 500 people were killed in the attack who were mostly women, children and elderly. The attack was interpreted as a reprisal by Hausa/Fulani ethnic group over the January 2010 incident which was claimed to have led to the massacre of many Hausa/Fulani Moslems (Onuoha et al, 2010).

2011 was a particular bloody year. The people that were killed in the first six months runs into hundreds. In fact, between 15 August and 12 September, more than 150 peoples lost their lives, with about 50 records in a week. Victims of the gruesome killings included pregnant women, children and an entire family. The sudden upsurge of violence in this particular period was also accompanied with regular "silent killing" (ICG, 2012).

The city of Jos was rocked with three suicide bombings between December 2011 and March 2012 which Boko Haram was suspected to have orchestrated. The first on Christmas Day 2011, claimed about fifty lives mostly in churches as churches were targeted in the attack (ICG, 2012).

Having given a purview of cases of violent conflicts in Jos, the next section discussed causes of violence in the region.

VI. Etiology of Violent Conflicts in JOS

Some of the factors identified as causes of conflicts in the region are remote and proximate. However, most of the causes identified reinforce one another. As noted by Best (2007) the Fulani attribute causes of conflict in the area to ethnicity, religion and their economic prosperity reflecting in the large herd of cattle they have which made them object of envy to the indigenes. The indigenes argued that they do not envy the Fulanis and that conflict between them often cropped up when their cows (the Fulani cows) destroyed their (indigenes) crops. But the Yorubas in the area view the conflicts as been politically motivated by the politicians in the area. Some of these factors are discussed below.

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VII. Dispute over Ownership of JO S

The Hausa argued that they established Jos, and that it was nurtured by them till it become a modern city without any help from any of the indigenous ethnic groups in Jos. A leader of the Hausa/Fulani community in Jos was quoted to have said:

Historically, Jos is a Hausa settlement and this had been confirmed by Mr. Ames, a colonial Administrator who gave the population of Jos town in 1950 as 10,207, out of which 10,000 people were of Hausa/Fulani origin. Before the arrival of the British, the present location of Jos was a virgin land and the situation as could be seen today shows no concentration of Berom or any of the tribes in the neighbourhood as being seen in the heartland of Jos town (Best, 2007:24).

The Hausa also claimed that the naming of major streets and areas in Jos (Abba Na Shebu, Garba Daho, Sarkin Arab and so on) with Hausa names and the fact that they had produced a total of eleven Hausa Chiefs who ruled Jos up to 1947 authenticate their claims. Thus, having founded and ruled Jos, they cannot be considered as aliens and settlers (Best, 2007).

The indigenes debunked these claims by saying that they were never conquered by the Fulani Jihadists following the Usman Dan Fodio Jihad policy; and that the Hausa settlers came to Jos after the British conquest of the area to work in tin mining industry and were never indigenes. It was after they had settled they re-named those streets in Hausa name (Best, 2007).

VIII. Ethnicity

The heterogeneous nature of Jos and Plateau State in general has been identified as a key factor to the conflicts in the area. Aside this, lines of ethnic identity quite frequently do coincide with religious affiliation. While the indigenes are mostly Christians, the Hausa/Fulani are predominantly Moslems. Which is why conflict between the two groups is often seen as religious (Onuoha et al, 2010).

IX. Political Factors

The balkanization of Jos Local Government Area in 1991 into Jos North and South (while Krause, 2011 said it was divided into Jos North, South and East) by the Babangida's military regime has often been used as a sad commentary in respect of Jos crisis. This is because the exercise gave the Hausa/Fulani group numerical domination in Jos North. Throughout the period of military regime Huasa/Fulani extraction was always appointed to chair the Local Government, a development that pitched the Hausa/Fulani population against the indigenes. A more direct link to this was when local government election in November 2008 sparked violence in Jos North Local Government on the claim by the Hausa/Fulani that Jang's administration planned to rig the election in favour of his cousin, a Berom who contested on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Suleiman, 2011). Added to this is the fact that, the Hausa/Fulani group does not feel represented in the government of Jang's, the present governor of Plateau State (ICG, 2012).

X. Religion

Philip Dafes (the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria Plateau State Chapter cited in Adi, 2011 before and Suleiman, 2011) is of the opinion that that violence in Jos is more of religion in the sense that there has been no political party office burnt or destroyed in the crisis but several religious worship centers have been razed. Best (2007) also noted that for the Christian leaders in Plateau state, the Jos conflict is seen as primarily religious. They view the conflict as a campaign to forcefully bring down Christianity in other to impose Islam on the people of Plateau State. In the same vein, HRW (2009) noted that in November 2008 crisis; forty-six churches were vandalized and set ablaze with a number of clergies killed. This is in line with the trend of thought of Suleiman (2011) that blockage of roads during worship and indiscriminate use of speakers among others accentuates violent conflicts in the area.

XI. Youth Unemployment

ICG (2012) noted that lack of opportunities and growing rate of unemployment among youth, especially from the late 1980s, have aggravated tensions in Jos and the rest of the country. Onuoha et al, (2010) equally aligned with this argument that high level of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, especially among youth is a contributory factor to the outbreak of violent conflicts not only in Jos, but Nigeria in general even though the figure of unemployment in Jos is not available.

XII. Efforts at Resolution

Since April 1994, quite a number of commissions of inquiry have been set up to investigate the remote and immediate causes of violent conflict in Jos. They are: Justice Aribiton Fiberesima Judicial Commission of inquiry into the April 1994 crisis; Justice Niki Tobi Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the September 2010 crisis; Presidential Peace Initiative Committee on Plateau State, headed by Shehu Idris of Zazzau, May 2004; Plateau Peace Conference ("Plateau Resolves") 18 August-21 September, 2004; and Presidential Advisory Committee on the Jos crisis, March-April 2010 (ICG, 2012).

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Apart from the peace initiative mentioned above, government has also deployed the Joint Task Force (JTF), and the police to stem the tide of killings in the region. The efforts of the military Task Force has however been undermined by deep-rooted mutual ethnic and religious suspicion between the combatants as the members of the JTF on assignment in the region that are Hausas/Fulani are seen as taken side with the suspected Fulani herdsmen attacking the indigenous tribe. This is because Fulani herdsmen attacks on the indigenous tribes were said to have taken place close to the position of the JTF without such attacks been prevented (Suleiman, 2011).

In addition, ICG (2012) observed that the inability of government to stop the spiral of violence is predicated on the fact that, whenever violence broke out, government always made tough speeches which are not followed with corresponding political action against the perpetrators of inter-communal violence, even after they have been identified by security, intelligence agencies and the local communities. It was observed that some of the people alleged as perpetrators of 2008 crisis were released shortly after arrest. The security agencies hardly inquire about persons alleged of making inflammatory, inciting and provocative speeches. In other words, there seems to be little or no deterrence and disincentive to check the recklessness and impunity of perpetrators of violence.

XIII. Implications of Violent Conflicts in Jos

Violent conflicts in Jos have wide range implications. It has led to destruction of lives, properties and social life. For instance, former President Olusegun Obasanjo in justifying the declaration of the state of emergency in Plateau State stated among others that:
Violence has reached unprecedented levels and hundreds have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes on account of their ethnic religious identification. School for children has been disrupted and interrupted; businesses have lost billions of naira and property worth much more destroyed (Obasanjo, 2004 cited in Mohammed, 2005:4).

Obasanjo (2004 cited in Mohammed, 2005:4) equally observed that visitors and investors have fled or are fleeing Plateau State leading to influx of internally displace persons into neighbouring states with implication for disruption and dislocation of their economies. This development has made the Federal Government and the neighbouring states incurred huge expenses in the management of the socio-political and economic consequences brought about by the near collapse of the state authority and the breakdown of law and order in Jos and some parts of Plateau State.

Similarly, Mohammed (2005) also submitted that, crisis in Jos and other parts of the state has led to the killing and burning of a large number of livestock, residential building and places of worship. He equally added that Jos market that was built with about two million naira in the late 70s was razed down in one of the crises.

XIV. Conclusion and Recommendations

It appears from the analysis above that mono-causal approach to conflict analysis using Jos as a focal point of study is inadequate. This is because conflicts in the region and elsewhere are often caused by confluence of factors. In view of this submission, solutions to violent conflict in Jos and elsewhere should equally encapsulate the various manifestations of conflict. Based on this informed position, some suggestions are made. The rationale for the suggestions is predicated on the fact that "… it is an intellectual obligation not only to analyze the problems of society but also to proffer solutions" (Gboyega, 2003 cited in Joshua, 2013:276). The suggestion made in this regards are as follows: There is need for the government to revisit the issue of citizenship and come up with a position that will bring about better integration of the various ethnic groups in the polity.

The government and the two religions (Christianity and Islam) often in conflict should create a forum that will promote inter-faith tolerance in Nigeria and Plateau State in particular.

Politicians should be re-orientated towards shunning divisive politics and also see the various ethnic groups in the various areas of their jurisdictions as one so as to foster peace.

The Hausa/Fulani should be educated on the simple logic that what they would not permit in their home state(s) they should not canvass for in their host state(s). In other words, if they (Hausa/Fulani) will not allow any non-indigenes to claim ownership in their home states they should not ask for the same privilege in their host states.

Government should embark on mass employment of youth so that they will no longer be ready tools in the hands of desperate politicians or religious zealots.

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