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Chapter Thirteen

Violence in Nigeria - An Overview

The word violence by dictionary definition is the illegal exercise of physical force, an act of intimidation by the show of threat of force, whose import is of very dire consequence and inflicts pain or extreme abuse to the rights and privilege of the recipient.

The un-mitigating spate of Violence that has characterized the sovereign state of the Federal Republic of Nigeria today is traceable to the Violation of acceptable ancestral customs, rules and traditional norms that was forcibly meted out on the various nationalities that made-up today's Nigeria through the forceful amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by the colonial masters in 1914.

Before the intrusion of external forces inside today's Nigeria, the various nationalities or tribes in her, had traditional and customary norms that predetermined their inter—personal relationships, as well as guide collective behavioural patterns. The departure from these rules and norms came through the introduction of elitism and sophistication of both thought and action by those colonialists, who used same to gain favours and protection among the local natives. Because this paper is non-historical on our colonial past, room must be reserved for the errors of the colonial masters, so that mention will be made of the genesis of what precipitates the present anti—social malaise Nigerian Nation is passing through, especially in the multiplicity of violence on the polity and people of this Nation.

Factors of Violence in Nigeria

There are many factors that have influenced the growth and development of violence in Nigeria. Mention however has to be limited to these four Basic Issues (BI) in today's Nigeria. They are: — (1) Religion (2) Ethnicity (3) Illiteracy and (4) Poverty. Each of the above four elements are inter—related and chain—linked in the following sequence.

1. Religion

Religion they say is the opium of the soul. Religions and their belief systems, are innate consummation of an individual self, and have to be the entire

essence for which the individual self-accepts for eternal emancipation. A bond for which the individual intrinsically holds higher than any other affairs of the world, for realizing God his creator.

When Religion, therefore, becomes an imposition and condition for patronage and favours, it loses its meaning to the individual self, and only presents a compulsory social forum for the societal acceptability of the individual. For Nigeria, the issues bordering on religion have been much knottier than everything else.

Before the advent of both Islam and Christianity, like is earlier observed, the people of Africa, Nigerians inclusive, had their Basic Belief System (BBS) which from every available record, guaranteed them sound morals and good personal conduct within their *Nativities*. Till the present age, the average African, nay Nigerian, still harbours awe and great respect for the belief and taboos of their ancestral past despite their *neck deep* into either Islam or Christianity. Imams and Bishops have been known to die or have serious unexplainable physical ailments, for venturing to desecrate the holy worshipping grounds of their fore fathers. That to me shows that despite the few and far-fetched barbarism, of the Traditional Belief System (TBS) of Nigerians, that their Ancestral Religion (AR) still holds deep and could be the missing link, after all, the Saxons were once known as a Barbaric tribe, whereas the world—over today, cannot but agree that the present civilization of the world as we know it today, had its root in Africa, Nigeria inclusive.

So the introduction of Islam and Christianity, two of them forcibly to Nigerians, has been used to a very great extent to ferment violence and anarchy in the country. In fact, the Moslem Youths of Nigeria, are the main culprits of this Religion induced violence in Nigeria, as their Imams and Emirs readily find them handy, whenever they want to score a Political or ethnic point. Merciless killings, mayhem and arson have been perpetrated by these Moslem Youths without much retributive justice by any Government, so much that other Youths of other colouration and belief, joined their league, saying, if nothing was done to Moslem Youths in Kano & Kaduna, who had killed and looted people's properties, what audacity has anybody to Visit justice or the arm of the law on them. That is the scenario as of today where up Northern Nigeria (where Islam is the main religion), the elites organize the youths for social upheaval to score ethnic or political points. While down South where Christianity is dominant, elders also deploy youths to press

home for social or economic reasons, to maim and loot; inflicting Violence on fellow citizens.

2. Ethnicity

Lip-service is paid to the adage “unity in diversity” in Nigeria. For us in Nigeria, the more diverse we are, the more disunited we become. The introduction of violence on a large scale was at the point of Nigeria's Civil War. The main bone of contention then that sparked off the pogrom of the North was ethnicity. Because a military constituency wanted a change of government based on their perception of that Government as un-fit for peace and progress of Nigeria, they staged a coup. But incidentally, a particular ethnic group were leaders of the coup which was planned and executed by the military constituency. For this reason, innocent civilians and citizens of this country, who were not privy to the coup, were brutally murdered in their thousands simply because they belonged to the ethnic grouping of the master minders of the coup.

An ethnic group from the North was officially massacred for daring to defend their right (in ‘Zaki-biam’) because the Minister, who was in charge of defence, happened to come from the opposing ethnic group. When an ethnic Yoruba Youths Organisation called OPC, vents their displeasure through Violence, looting and arson, the head of the government of the Nigerian State who is a Yoruba verbally cautions them, but when a Riverine ethnic group (ODI) attempted to defend their right to self-actualization and respect to life, a detachment of well-armed government troop is dispatched to Odi for annihilation of citizens, by this same Yoruba head of Government of the Nigeria Federation.

Therefore, in a multiplicity of tribes and tongues (Nations) country like Nigeria, what should serve as our strength has become our weakness. Violence is on daily basis being visited on citizens of this country, on a mere accident of birth that such citizen is not of same ethnic nationality like you. There are more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria.

3. Illiteracy

Education is the bed—rock of every human development. For a country like Nigeria where there is abundance of wealth and resources, it is regrettable to observe that her over one hundred million people are still clogged and shackled with the pains of ignorance and illiteracy. The youths of any nation are the beacon of their future hope, but for Nigeria, our youths are a constant reminder of the abject and horror-filled tomorrow. This is so,

because the youths of Nigeria, who should be acquiring education today for our tomorrow leadership, have no access to education, formal or informal.

Youths and adults who desire education are materially denied the opportunity. There is a weak economy, and high inflationary cost. The youths who are desirous of education are in 80 out of 100, soon to realize that their parents or guardians cannot meet—up with the high cost of school fees etc. When these youths no longer could plan for their future through constructive and meaningful engagement like education, they resort to ready tools in the hands of Imam and Bishops, for religious violence, politicians and power mongers, for electoral thuggery, drug barons and smugglers for dirty jobs and even some end up willingly offering themselves for slavery and prostitution in order to make-ends meet and sustain hope for a brighter tomorrow.

The children of the elites, who must attend to school and get educated, are often not available for induced Violence in our society, because their wealthy parents ensure they pay heavily, and discriminatingly any amount to send their wards into school locally or abroad. Therefore, the hands that are available for organised crime and violence in Nigeria are those youths whose parents can ill—afford to economically sustain the high prevailing cost of education in Nigeria.

4. Poverty

As the third largest oil-producing nation with high deposit of rich solid minerals, massive arable land for agricultural development and an enviable population density, Nigeria of today is a pitiable, hungry, dejected crying child, who is an orphan, without a sympathizer. Poverty of the mind and purse has immensely contributed in making violence a 'must do' for Nigerians, especially the youths.

With the Dollar exchanging for ₦140.00 and our economy dependent on imports, the average Nigerian today could be said to live on less than four Dollars per day. This poverty level has turned most Nigerians into scavengers. The high tempo-call for resource control and the restiveness of the youths from where the wealth of Nigerian Nation comes from, is a direct pointer to the collective denial and deprivation of Nigerian citizens of the benefit of their wealth. With the inconsistent government economic policies, with lily-livered programme on anti-corruption, the people of this country are constantly, in economic quagmire.

The high poverty propensity has driven the youths in school, who cannot afford either three square meals a day, or money for their text books to turn to armed and organised crime and robbery. While their female folks engage in sex for a fee or out—right prostitution. But for those youths who cannot go to school due to parental financial indigence, they again find succour to organised violence in our society at large for their survival and this phenomenon has also affected the loyalty and concentration of those whose duty it is to check—mate crime and criminal elements in the society.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there are other factors for violence in Nigeria, but these four points above are the most obvious. The reoccurring decimal in the painted scenario above is that women (girls) or youths (boys) are the mostly affected and endangered group in Nigeria. For a child whose parents have no means of educating him/her, what hope and aspiration does he or she have for a better tomorrow? Those youths, who on daily basis are being shot by some courageous law enforcement agents in Nigeria are only expressing their fears for a better tomorrow today, but regrettably through robbery and violence.

For this country to have hope of secured economic and leadership role in Africa tomorrow, as the most populous and naturally endowed nation, the present crop of Nigerian leaders must address the issues of (a) Education for the youths (b) Religious Intolerance (c) Corrupt and divisive political leadership (d) Reward for excellence without bias (e) Establishment of Youths Leadership Development Programme at a Ministerial level (f) Issues of Poverty and the Nigerian Economy, and finally (g) Ethnicity free society, where Nigeria and Nigerians must aspire equally, on a level playing platform, Without recourse to tribe and tongue.

