

Religious fanaticism and thugocracy: Catalysts to the brain drain in Nigeria



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Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multicultural society, and therefore, Nigeria's religious inclinations differ broadly. There are currently three religions dominant in Nigeria, namely Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). These three religions, especially the first two, have demonstrated varying levels of fanaticism in the past leading to many recounted crises and jungle justice incidents in Nigeria. Because of Nigerian politics, we have witnessed the use of armed thugs by politicians to harass and even kill party opponents and displace their families. These two factors have caused many young, highly skilled persons to flee Nigeria for a safer haven. This study therefore tries to review current religious fanaticism and electioneering thuggery leading to loss of lives and property, which consequently sees to the fall of the Nigerian economy and the subsequent entronement of insecurity in the country. It suggests that these factors are foundational problems consequent to the amalgamation of 1914 and are leading causes for the rapid rate of migration of Nigerian experts out of the country.

Contribution: At a time when Nigeria is in dire need of great brains to help in its developmental struggle, politicians and religious bigots have constituted a serious blockade to this ambition. This article is a review of recent political and religious turmoil in Nigeria with a view to call the attention of all warring religious and political stakeholders to the damage their extremism has already caused and to also bring the attention of Nigerians to the foundation of these problems, namely the amalgamation and the need to address it.

Keywords: religious fanaticism; thuggery; brain drain; amalgamation; Nigeria.

Introduction

It is historically clear that the present inhabitants of Nigeria do not share common ancestry. Among the approximately¹ 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Akwanya 2014:10; Gandonu 2011; Tangban 2014:378), none has a historically known common descent with the others from times of antiquity. The cultural diversities encased in nonhomogeneous ideologies are therefore not surprising. The history of the forceful bringing together of these once independent ethnic groups started with the arrival of the British, who later made themselves colonial masters and lorded it over these native groups as they did in other places in Africa. It is believed that this union (the British efforts to create a Nigeria out of many ethnic groups) 'was contracted, not willingly altogether but because a forceful reprisal awaited any defiant' (Egbe & Okoi 2017:105). At such a time, to have a geographical area they could effectively manage, they considered putting the North and the South under different protectorates. But on economic and administrative grounds, they later brought these two different protectorates together as one, thereby naming it Niger-area (Nigeria). The British were clearly moved by greed and a lack of consideration in this process. This development has severally been condemned with various descriptions. The Nigerian newspaper Vanguard News (2020) puts it this way:

Given that the British colonial government was motivated by the very self-serving and ignoble obsessive quest for maximum economic exploitation of 'Niger area' and administrative convenience, the amalgamation was built on a moral and ideological quicksand. Let us be clear on this point: Britain never intended to create a great Nigerian nation that would be the pride of its citizens and the black race in general.

There is no gainsaying that the emergence of the Nigerian state is the brain behind developmental retrogression in Nigeria (Adeyemi 2018:35). This is majorly because of the inability of the various ethnic components of Nigeria to drop ethnic sentiments and see Nigeria as a common heritage.

¹Aside from the popular opinion of 250 distinct ethnic groups making up the pre-Nigerian society, Chimee and Ojiakor (2021:175) believed that pre-Nigeria 'had more than 300 ethnic groups'

An average Nigerian considers his or her position as a Nigerian a violation of the right to exist as a tribal person. He or she therefore embezzles national funds when possible in order to use them to promote an ethnic and religious agenda.² Even in politics, Nigerians contest for federal positions to possess political authority over other ethnic groups. Of course, the move to bring together by force people whose cultures have no resemblance is clearly a violation of the rights of these ethnic groups perpetrated by Britain; this is therefore the root cause of all the conflicts and wars Nigeria has had.³ These wars have manifested themselves through two major institutions in Nigeria, the religious and the political institutions, and have led to untold loss of human and material resources. Besides the people who have died in these crises, these religious and political wars (mainly with the use of thugs) have also led to the downward movement of the Nigerian economy, leading to the fleeing of young intellectuals and experts from Nigeria. This brain drain and its cause are the focus of this article, which calls for a strong re-evaluation of the events surrounding the 1914 amalgamation, which would lead to an effective checking of religious and political crises in Nigeria. This will then lead to an equally effective curbing of the loss of great brains from Nigeria to other countries of the world. This study uses secondary data which are gathered from books, published academic articles and online national dailies. These data are then subjected to analyses through a narrative analytical method. Narrative analysis will help the study to make recommendations based on Nigeria's past experiences, in line with the two variables of study.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical base of this study follows 'Galtung's (2014) theory of the peace potential of religions' (Silvestri & Mayall 2015:19). This theory expresses the belief that religion has a potential tendency to produce peace only when factors that bring inequality are addressed. In his words, Galtung (2015:25) stated that 'unresolved conflicts underpin ongoing violence'. This summarises Nigeria's challenges right from the days of its amalgamation. For Galtung, 'relations with incompatible goals are fraught with the danger of violence and also with the opportunity to transcend such conflict'. Indeed, Galtung's theory best explains why northern and southern Nigeria have remained at loggerheads and need to redress the issues surrounding amalgamation and political inequality.

2. Recently, President Muhammadu Buhari approved the sum of 1.145 billion naira for the purchase of vehicles for the government of Niger Republic. Even though the Minister of Finance has defended the action by stating that it is in line with Nigeria's 'policy of assisting its neighbours to strengthen capacity to deal with insecurity' (Agbakwuru 2022), it has, however, aroused serious agitations on social media, with many people accusing the president of shifting Nigeria's wealth to the people of Niger Republic with whom he share kin amid the Academic Staff Union of Universities strike. A comment on Twitter from Shehu Gazali Sadiq reads, 'We've been saying that Buhari is not a Nigerian. He's a Nigerien. Buhari has been spending our commonwealth on Niger Republic as exposed by David Hundeyin. We equally know that he got votes from Niger Republic in 2015 and 2019...' See <https://www.ripplesnigeria.com/socialmediatrends-nigerians-question-fgs-purchase-of-cars-worth-n1-4bn-for-niger-republic-amid-asuu-strike/>

3. Nigeria is enmeshed in many ethnic wars under the guise of various kinds of conflicts, related to religion, politics and the border. As it is true that the ethnic groups in precolonial Nigeria 'were not even aware of the existence of some ethnics let alone to express ethnic sentiment against any' (Ayatse & Iorhen 2013:181), it means that the British antics are solely responsible for all the ills that have befallen Nigeria.

The amalgamation of 1914 and its consequence on the peaceful cohabitation of Nigerians

Colonialism began in Nigeria when the British government, alongside other European powers of those days, made their way into the sub-Saharan Africa in the late 19th century. Undoubtedly, 'prior to the advent of colonialism, the area known today as Nigeria was peopled by different ethnic nationalities' (Tangban 2014:378). These different ethnic nationalities lived in almost distinct geographical locations and held distinct cultural heritages. As one might expect, there was no recorded history of ethnic wars before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, especially because these ethnic groups barely knew of each other's existence. Colonialism arrived, giving cause for disunity rather than uniting these independent city-states in an effort to achieve its premeditated agenda (Tangban 2014:378):

To consolidate its policy of exploitation, the colonial regime felt the need to weld together the two separate administrations it had created in the southern part that is the Colony of Lagos and Protectorate was amalgamated with the protectorate of Southern Nigeria, to form a new Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. This was done without recourse to the wishes of the indigenous peoples, but as a way to maximize the economic resources available in the area. Amalgamation, a second one was carried out clearly to create a centralized political entity for economic and not really administrative reasons and for firmer exploitation of resources. (Chimee & Ojiakor 2021:175–176)

It could boldly be reiterated that colonialism introduced wars and disunity in Nigeria. This is because:

[T]he British colonial rulers, after forcefully amalgamating the disparate groups to create what became Nigeria, did not teach Nigerians the powers inherent in unity in diversity, but rather thought [*sic*] them disunity in diversity based on the policies they enunciated up to independence. (Chimee & Ojiakor 2021:175)

Thus:

[I]t is always convenient to continue to hold colonial legacies accountable for the deepening crisis of sustainable governance, democracy and development, and above all lack of unity in the country. (Tangban 2014:378)

This situation has led to the realisation that the current political leaders in Nigeria, having emerged 'from the disarticulated colonial order, continued to fan the embers of ethnicity, which ultimately bedeviled the possibility of nation-building, unity and progress of Nigeria' (Chimee & Ojiakor 2021:175). Rather than seeking to find out the root causes of Nigerian problems, the leaders in the country are determined to enforce 'the magical theory and wand waving method of making nationhood' (Akubor 2016:53), which is clearly taking the country nowhere. These leaders have completely neglected the real reasons why the British government amalgamated the various parts of what is today Nigeria, which include security of their trade regions (Mohammed 2013:434) and displacing other rival European groups interested in the region (Dioka 1987:350). To maximise

what has long been regarded as exploitative economic motives through the emptying of human and material resources found in Northern and Southern Nigeria:

Forced labour, taxes and punitive laws or ordinances were employed to achieve these exploitative economic motives. The construction of roads, rails and ports was to facilitate easier evacuation of goods and other resources from the hinterland to the coast. (Adeyemi 2018:36)

These are self-serving reasons for Britain (Peters & Nkemakolam 2019:188). In fact, Britain had no reason to create a Nigeria which is beneficial for Nigerians, except for these selfish reasons. Southern Nigeria was worst hit by this selfishness exhibited by the British government. That the British colonialists saw Southern Nigeria as the means to augment the insufficiency in the North cannot be overemphasised. Asemota (2008:1) explained that 'amalgamation came about because the British Government was subsidising Northern Nigeria while Southern Nigeria had a surplus, and as Lord Harcourt (then colonial secretary) said, "it was a marriage" between the "well-conducted youth" of the North and the "Southern lady of means".' Lord Lugard's amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria was carried out strictly on the instruction of the British government, as is clearly stated in a British document to that effect:

[T]he practical result of the amalgamation was to enable the large revenue of Southern Nigeria to be spread out for the development of the whole of Nigeria [and] to put an end to the financial difficulties of the North ...⁴

Thus, Teniola has argued in a Nigerian national daily that 'Nigeria's existence is little more than the outcome of balancing the colonial accounting books' (Teniola 2021). So the amalgamation was all about business for Britain, and the results of that amalgamation, ranging from ethnoreligious wars to failed government, led to untold poverty in the country. This resulted from the aftermath of the failed British business idea. Teniola further refers to Sir George Goldie, who 'admitted that the two countries [*Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria*] were "as widely separated government, customs and general ideas about life, both world and the next, as England is from China"' (Teniola 2021). Teniola then asks a very logical question as a sequel to Goldie's statement, thus: 'Since Britain was aware of the sharp differences between the two Nigerias, why [did] it decide to amalgamate them anyway?' (Teniola 2021) This question still poses itself to the present leaders of Nigeria in another form; as the leaders of Nigeria are aware of the sharp differences between the ethnic groups in Nigeria, why have they decided not to revisit the amalgamation by Britain?⁵ It is argued here that until this question is seriously

4. *Lugard and the amalgamation of Nigeria: A documentary record*, page 29 in Asemota (2008:3).

5. In 2014, a national conference was held in Nigeria where the amalgamation was briefly discussed. It was mentioned that representatives from the four British colonies in West Africa held a conference in Accra in 1920 where 'the sub-regional conference urged the British to lay the basis for future self-determination'. Although this agitation did not receive any positive attention from Britain, the agitators through the conference 'argued that the act of amalgamation was not a federal idea but that there were strong integrative factors of intergroup relations that favoured the division of the country into a number of units that could develop into components of a future federation' (see National Conference 2014:5, 6). The conference highlighted the problems caused by the amalgamation and sought ways

considered at the national level, Nigeria may not move beyond being a glorified village. Therefore, 'the southern lady of means must be free for Nigeria to be able to progress' (Asemota 2008:2). To achieve this, 'the South must shake off fifth columnists and uninformed leaders in their midst who ensure on behalf of the North, that the South remains docile and helpless' (Asemota 2008:2).

Current religious and political turbulence in Nigeria: Mirroring Nigeria's ugly past

Under this section, the study shall consider the above-mentioned variables separately and then make comparative statements about the combined effect they have on the country. To start with the subject of religious crises and their effect on Nigeria, the study shall look at this from an ethnic perspective. Nigeria's multireligious disposition is not verifiably Nigeria's problem when the negative impacts religions have made on Nigeria is considered. In fact, many countries of the world have more than one religion as well.⁶ The real problem of Nigeria regarding religion is the impact that religion has on its ethnic groups. Apart from African Traditional Religion (ATR), the other two Western religions are divided on ethnic lines, where one controls the Northern populace and the other controls the Southern populace. Here, it is observed that so far as the teachings of these two religions conflict on certain aspects, those aspects definitely become areas of friction and conflict between Northern and Southern Nigeria. At times, there is a serious twist on this matter when such conflicts exist between members of the two religions only in Northern Nigeria, which unwittingly spills over to people of the South as ready targets and scapegoats. An example is with the recent killing of a young female student in Sokoto Nigeria. A *Nigerian Tribune* editorial (2022) reports that:

[D]eborah Yakubu, a Christian and a 200 level student of Home Economics at the Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Sokoto State, was killed recently by some of her Muslim classmates, allegedly for blasphemy.

While Yakubu was a Northern Christian who was murdered by Northern Muslims for alleged blasphemy, the shops and business areas of Southerners, mainly Igbo people, were either destroyed or vandalised during the protest of the arrest of two suspects involved in Yakubu's killing (Adonu 2022; Akanimo 2022). Meanwhile, there is no reported connection between Igbo traders in the North and the killing of Yakubu (Unini 2022). At face value, one could call the aftermath of Yakubu's assassination a religious crisis, but in reality, such aftermath was a religious crisis born out of ethnic sentiment. From shortly after Nigerian independence until today, the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria have been the worst hit in ethnoreligious crises emanating from the North. At the

to address such problems but failed to find ways to question the need to continue with the amalgamation among the national questions.

6. However, some countries of the world have favoured one religion above others as state religion for many reasons, including economic and political reasons, as well as a conflict-free society (Barro & McCleary 2005:1331-1370).

time of writing this article, people from the North (Fulani herdsmen) have been identified as kidnappers terrorising the South and kidnapping influential and noninfluential people, including clergymen, to raise money for an intended ethnic cleansing. This statement is corroborated by an event that took place on 29 May 2022. The Internet was flooded with the heart-breaking news of the kidnap of the prelate of Methodist Church Nigeria, his Eminence Kanu Uche, during his ecclesiastical tour somewhere near his village in Abia State. To release the prelate from the kidnappers' den, the Methodist Church Nigeria was forced to make a payment of 100 million naira for his ransom. 'He identified the gang that abducted him and his fellow clerics, as "Fulani boys"' (Ugwu-Nwogo 2022). According to an online video credited to Channels Television, the prelate states:

[W]hat pains me most is that these people told us that after buying enough weapons, they will bring all the people put in disarray driven away from Zamfara, Katsina, Sambisa forest ... to [re]locate themselves in Igbo land and there will be no security in Igbo land. They will come there and deal with us ... Do you know Ibadan-Lagos expressway? We are in all the bush[es] there. We are also in the South South. We are waiting for the slightest signal and we will finish you people and take over this land.⁷

The kidnappers' mention of the Ibadan-Lagos expressway, which is in Yoruba land, immediately calls to mind that it is not only Igbo people in South East Nigeria that are in danger; the Yoruba people of South West are also at the mercies of these kidnappers. This fear is further heightened by the development in Ondo State (a Yoruba state) on 05 June 2022, just 7 days after the kidnapping of the prelate of Methodist Church Nigeria. It is reported that gunmen suspected to be bandits disguised themselves as worshippers and entered St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church. They opened fire on the members who were celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus after his ascension, leaving at least 50 people dead (Akingboye et al. 2022). According to an eyewitness, Mr Kehinde Ogunkorode, 'some church members were abducted to an unknown place by the bandits' (Akingboye et al. 2022). While these are very unfortunate situations and highly condemnable, these are some of the results of British amalgamation in Nigeria and their total neglect of the compatibility and the possibility to peacefully cohabit among the various ethnic groups. It justifies why the 1914 amalgamation was 'a mistake' (Adeyemi 2018:35). Nigeria is, in fact, a European experiment which has failed, turning rather into a time bomb for its present occupants, especially in the South.

On the other variable, politics in Nigeria have turned into a nightmare for Nigerians. There is hardly any time Nigeria engages in political elections without the loss of lives and property (see Amnesty International 2011; Isma'ila & Othman 2015; Nwolise 2007). At the moment, Nigeria is in the electioneering campaign period prior to the 25 February 2023 election. Usually in this period, there are hardly any records of loss of lives and property precisely on election matters (although there is a reported case of politically motivated cult clashes in Ondo; see TVC news 2022). But it is expected in full

7. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_Bn4eln6zY

force 'prior to, during and after elections' (Ighodalo 2012:21). Nigerian elections have been characterised by heavy presence of rigging, light arms distribution, thuggery and other kinds of violence, and some oral statements have started pointing to the banditry attacks from Fulani herdsmen and other militias in the recent times as a distraction to the real disreputable activities from these politicians. This gives the impression that Nigerian politicians can and have over the years employed religious tricks as a smokescreen over the populace to achieve their clandestine purposes. Given that 'Christianity and Islam have expressed a high degree of political competitiveness with each other at least since the 1970s' (Nolte, Danjibo & Oladeji 2009:11), it is not surprising when these politicians bend to the will of the powers behind their religions to achieve their political whims against people of the other religions. This is best exemplified in Atiku's removal of his recent tweet condemning the killing of Deborah Yakubu because of pressure from people from his Muslim religion. It is alleged that his political ambition was threatened, leading to the sudden withdrawal of the said tweet. Akinkuotu (2022) reports that:

Atiku, who is running for President on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party, had taken to Twitter to condemn the mob action, saying, 'There cannot be a justification for such gruesome murder. Deborah Yakubu was murdered and all those behind her death must be brought to justice. My condolences to her family and friends'. The former Vice-President, however, came under threats from some Muslim northerners who threatened not to vote for him if he emerges as the Presidential candidate of the PDP. However, Atiku later deleted the tweet amid the threats.

It seems from Atiku's statement that the said tweet credited to him came from his media aids without his approval because he insisted that:

[E]very tweet has to get my approval ... unfortunately, this tweet – because I was travelling all over the country – did not have my approval. So I said it should be taken down and that every tweet must have my express approval. (Channels Television 2022)

With these developments that highlight that religion in Nigeria has over the years been hijacked by political bigwigs to achieve their evil intentions, it is clear that the two variables are inseparable in the Nigerian situation, causing massive setbacks and brain drain that Nigeria is currently witnessing.⁸

Religious and political turbulence as causatives of the brain drain in Nigeria

While the current religious and political turmoil in Nigeria has been briefly chronicled in this study, the study observes from reviewed literature that academic commentators have not done much in associating this turmoil with the constant escape of qualified and skilled Nigerian youth who flock to Europe and America in search of safety and greener pastures.

8. In what he called 'elite rascality', Okolie-Osemene (2021:64) demonstrates 'how the privileged few use ordinary people who belong to different religious movements to achieve their selfish political interests'. This is primarily the case of religion in the hands of Nigerian politicians.

This migration of sharp and trained young minds is called brain drain. Brain drain has been described as the 'large emigration of individuals with technical skills or knowledge from one country to another usually for better conditions of service and good living environment' (Ojo, Ugochukwu & Obinna 2011:434). For example, Nigeria is said to have the highest number of African migrants to the United States with 134 940 persons (Moyo 2013:1). But we must understand that this migration is not self-propelled; there are observable indices fuelling it. Crises in the areas of religion and politics, not excluding communal and educational, are said to be some of those indices, making up 11.46% cause of brain drain in Nigeria (Ojo et al. 2011:446). By this data, it is clearly established that religious and political crises are key players in the loss of great brains to the advanced world, who should have developed Nigeria in all its ramifications. Obviously, religious and political crises in Nigeria, as discussed earlier, are results of poor leadership, which on its own is said to have contributed 17.27% to brain drain (Ojo et al. 2011:446). Despite the fall in Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its deepest recession in four decades since 2020:⁹

[D]evelopment scholars [have] revealed that problems arising from dearth of skilled manpower particularly in the scientific, engineering, technical and managerial areas are indeed more critical and serious than those associated and connected with mere scarcity of capital. (Emeghara 2013:111)

While terrorist insurgency is the major cause of the 'dearth of skilled manpower', economic collapse of the nation, especially in Northern Nigeria, and deradicalising these insurgents are also contributory factors on their own in making funds for the training and maintenance of experts nearly impossible. These experts have deserted the country, which has become more sympathetic to religious extremists than technical experts. As conflict or lack of security is one of the reasons why people migrate in any given nation (Iravani 2011:284; Ogbu 2019:44), the migratory action of Nigerian experts does not come as a surprise. Besides religious causes, political challenges have also played a significant role in brain drain. Poor leadership (as earlier opined) is central to the major causes of brain drain in Nigeria because after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates, Nigeria has been grappling with the problem of poor leadership. This has been generously discussed previously in this study.

Recommendations

Based on the two variables discussed in this study, this article makes the following recommendations. To manage the above-mentioned problems leading to brain drain, Nigeria must revisit the history of amalgamation to find ways to redress issues surrounding it. Such issues include compatibility of all component parts of the ethnic groups that presently make up Nigeria. This is the most important recommendation this study would make, owing to the fact that ethnicity and tribalism are the greatest challenge Nigeria has at the moment, which has led both to political and

⁹See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/publication/nigeria-development-update-ndu>

religious intolerance. Until the case of incompatibility is discussed and an atmosphere of equity and fair play ensues, there is but little that will change from the present condition the country currently faces.

Nigeria must strongly emphasise the secularity of the state on matters of religion, as enshrined in the 1999 constitution. Failure to do that will sustain the impression in the North that Nigeria is a Muslim state, which gives the jihadists the impetus to carry out their mayhem on religious offenders.

Furthermore, substantial attention must be given to intellectual and technological experts on whose shoulders the development of any country lies. Without mincing words, brain drain is a global phenomenon, but it is worse in the developing nations. This, in fact, is one of the reasons that perpetuate their status as developing nations.

Finally, highly skilled workers at home should be encouraged by being given the same privileges and opportunities with their counterparts abroad, to remain motivated to serve their fatherland. This will help curb the menace of brain drain. Religious and political stakeholders in Nigeria must learn to be patriotic instead of parochial. Without this, they will continue to place their individual selfish interests above the national interests, thereby discouraging these experts from contributing their quota towards bringing Nigeria out of the pit of utter collapse.

Conclusion

The brain drain is discussed in this study as caused by religious and political upheavals. This study observes that the wrong foundation upon which Nigeria was built was the unwarranted amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, especially without any efforts by the colonialists to emphasise the need for unity in diversity. This study blames the religious and political crises often experienced in this country on this unhealthy amalgamation. It goes forward to blame these crises that are the aftermath of the amalgamation for driving away young highly skilled experts from Nigeria, leading to the perpetuation of Nigeria as a developing country. The study therefore suggests a visit to the situations leading to the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria and to find ways to address the case of incompatibility.

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Authors' contributions

E.A.I. was involved in supervision; K.O.O. was responsible for conceptualisation; and P.E.P. was involved in methodology, investigation and writing of the original draft.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards of research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Disclaimer

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