

A comparative Study of Inter Religious Tolerance among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Ethnic Groups in Nigeria

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Abstract.

This study examines the nature of ethno-religious tolerance among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba. Religious fundamentalism and ethno-religious intolerance are, no doubt, undisputable factors that often instigate violence among these ethnic groups. While innumerable literatures have saturated the sphere of 'Religious Fundamentalism in Nigeria', 'Ethno-Religious Tolerance in Nigeria' has received little or no attention - what usually occur are blame games over the degree of religious intolerance among these ethnic groups. For example, the Hausa/Fulani of northern Nigeria are often accused of this inhumane atrocity. Therefore, this paper investigates the veracity of this and related accusations and counter accusations. In doing this, this work provides answers to the following questions : to what extent do Hausa/Fulani Muslims accommodate christianity in the North? Is there any discrepancy between the level of religious tolerance they give to Hausa and non Hausa Christians in the North? What is the attitude of Igbo/Delta Christians

towards Islam and its Igbo and non Igbo adherents in the south-east? What is the perception of Yoruba Christians on the religious activities of Yoruba and non Yoruba Muslims; and the perception of Yoruba Muslims on the religious activities of Yoruba and non Yoruba Christians in the South-west? What are the differences between the ethno-religious attitudes of these ethnics when they are in their homelands, and when they are away from their homelands? What is the nexus between religious intolerance and religious violence in Nigeria? What is the role of religion in intra-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria? Why do we have higher records of religious conflicts in the North? The outcome of these and other questions would complement the efforts of literatures on 'Religious Fundamentalism in Nigeria' in their endeavor to explain the causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Introduction

Religious violence and ethnicism have abruptly become two sides to a coin: impediment against Nigeria's peace and unity. The two of them are unquestionably the greatest threats to security of lives and properties in Nigeria. The former has been so bloodletting, particularly since 2009, that Nigeria had to be ranked among the world nations housing deadliest terrorists organisations. Of course, this is not astonishing - In 2013 alone, two of Boko-Haram attacks in Beni Shiek and Bama (in northern Nigeria) were ranked among the worst 20 terrorist attacks in the world. In fact, the worst of all these attacks was that of Beni Shiek, which took place on 17th September, 2013, where 142 civilians were maimed by members of Boko-Haram who, in disguise, dressed in army uniform¹. On the other hand, ethnic rivalries among Nigerians have also brought about different set backs to Nigeria's development and unity. Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are usually at loggerheads over ethnic, political and socioeconomic issues. The one million deaths from starvations and attacks recorded in the 1967-70 civil war in Nigeria² is newsworthy, if we decide to ignore other ethnic induced incidents. An important point to note is the problems of that religious intolerance and other issues generating brouhaha among these groups are not insurmountable on two major reasons. First, Islam and christianity has in no way instigate extremism. Secodly, even though, these ethnic groups claim to have ancestral links with Mecca and Jerusalem, non of these two religions are among the premordial religions in Nigeria.

However, the fact that Islam and Christianity are respectively claiming that they are the only way to eternal salvation left much to be desired. This is one of the important reasons why Muslims and Christians are always at loggerheads. Unlike African traditional religions, the adherents of the two religions often proclaim the superiority of their religions over other faiths. Muslims held tenaciously to the conception, according to the Qur'an, that "Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the hereafter he will be one of the losers"³, the same way Christians uphold Jesus' " I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to father except through me"⁴.

Although some critics, pointing to some Quran verses, argued that Islam is intolerant, and responsible for most of the religious violent conflicts around the world. In reaction to this, a Muslim cleric pointed out that

Islam encourages defensive wars - not aggression. That is why the Qur'an told Muslims to fight only, only and only those that fight them in the course of Allah.... A good analogy of this is the Americas bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Like Islam America used this attack to prevent Japan from carrying out another aggression on America..... War in Islam is also diplomatic.....⁵

Meanwhile, Nigeria is not the only nation in the world that houses different faiths and ethnic groups. In fact, all other nations in the world, with the exception of a few states like Australia and New Zealand, are heterogeneously composed⁶. Unlike Nigerians, their ancestral and cultural differences do nothing but enhancing the development of these states⁷. Yet, ethno religious intolerance is one of the catalysts of violence among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Nevertheless, the level of ethno religious tolerance differs among these ethnic groups; partly because of the discrepancies in their cultures, and Islam and Christianity.

It is against this backdrop that this work examines the degree of religious intolerance among these groups. In doing this, firstly, the dynamics of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba cultures in relation to Islam and Christianity would be examined. Also, religious relations particularly, the events that accompanied the propagation of Islam and Christianity among them as well as

social relations like Marriage, neighbourhood, education, trade and employment among these groups would be examined.

Theoretical framework

The truism that religion is a source of peace needs no contestation. The Bible wrote: Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy.....⁸. Invariably, the Qur'an also encourages peace in different chapters, and more importantly, it declared that "there is no compulsion in religion..."⁹ on the other hand, all traditions and customs from ethnic groups in Nigeria are pointing to one form of inter ethnic or group tolerance or the other. Most Nigerian cultures encourage peace and harmony¹⁰. For Instance, welcoming strangers with hospitality and friendliness is among the traditional customs of the Yoruba. But, Unlike the above central tenets of religions and ethnic traditions in Nigeria, the adherents of Islam and Christianity on one hand, and Bayagida, Arochukwu and Oduduwa on the other are usually at loggerheads over ethno religious issues.

John Hicks, one of the proponents of Rational choice theory of religious pluralism opined that religious pluralism would enhance religious goods and vitality. This position was a response to Berger's position Which concludes that religious goods and vitality of a people would dwindle if new faiths are introduced to them⁹. Rational choice theory therefore argues that a religious propagation by a particular faith would encourage other faiths to reciprocate by embarking on more sophisticated events that would not only enable them retain their adherents but also attracts the interest of the members of the contending faiths¹⁰. This theory captures the ethno religious competitions among Nigerians. For example, Muslims are now coordinating Asalatu on Sundays to prevent their adherents from the influence of church services being held by Christians on Sundays. This step came up as a result of the fact that a number of muslims have been converted to Christianity because of the lack of any prayer gardening from muslims on Sundays¹¹. Similarly, camps and vigils are now being organised to prevent Muslim from going to church on December 31st. Similarly, Churches are also organising crusades and vigils during Ramadan (Muslim's Obligatory fasting month) to prevent Christians from the influence of the activities of Ramadan¹².

However, religious propagation does not always enhance religious vitality particularly where a particular faith is dominant in a particular area; level of religious tolerance are usually low. The account of the ethno religious tolerance among Nigerians revealed that crisis usually erupt in places where a new faith is trying to draw adherents from the members of a dominant faith. Among the Hausa, the diffusion of Christianity, as well as its propagation usually results in violent conflicts the same way Islam finds it difficult to establish it self among the Igbo. Although, the reasons why there is no serious violence in Igbo land is because Igbo Muslims are incapable of staging jumbo propagating events that could threat the dominance of Christianity in the east¹³.

Moreover, rational choice theory of ethnicism argued that individuals often form ethnic groups because they are aware that it would enable them get their desires¹⁴. The history of Nigerian politics supplement this assertion. Up til date, nigerian politicians still follow this evils. The 2015 general election was dominated by ethoreligious politics. Jonathan was overwhelmingly supported by his Igbo/Delta, while Buhari overran Hausa/Fulani Lands.

Nigerian Cultures, and Islam and Christianity: An Assessment

Like Islam and Christianity, the tenets of most Nigerian cultures and traditions are centered around the propagation of peaceful coexistence among individuals, families, Clans, ethnics and nations around the world¹⁵. None of these cultures encourages ethno religious intolerance. That is one of the reasons why Islam and Christianity were able to - after relative resistances - penetrate these areas, and converted more than 90% of the people. In fact, the number of shrines in nigeria is obviously not comparable with those of mosques and churches: there are more than 50 churches in the settlements between Ajah/Badore road in Lagos, but the shrines there are not up to 15¹⁶.

Among the Yoruba, there are several customs and traditions that disuade them from societal decadence. For instance, suicide, murder, and same sex marriage are highly prohibited¹⁷. Also, there are some traditions that align with Islam. For example, Islam and Yoruba traditions allow polygamy with the intention of increasing the family for religious and societal developments. Also among Hausa and Igbo, polygamy is encouraged for similar purposes¹⁸. Albeit, the domination of Christianity in Igbo land has dwindled the rate of

polygamous families among Igbo people, particularly those that are away from their homelands¹⁹; they have abandoned most of the Igbo customs and traditions. Also, polygamy is also limited, unlike their muslim counterparts, among Yoruba and Hausa Christians²⁰.

Similarly, these customs and traditions also prohibits suicide and murderer. Prior to the advent of colonialism, there were different customs that dealt with murder and suicide cases. There were zero tolerance for such crimes.

Among the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa, murders are usually convicted and executed. Also, additional fines and penalties were imposed on the families of offenders²¹.

In the same vein, these traditions also encourage the tolerance of non indigines among Nigerian tribes. The Yoruba acknowledged the importance of visitors or non indigines in the development of the society. They believed that kingdoms or any settlement without visitors would lack exposures and development :"*Alejo lo n mu ilu dun*" (visitors are the usherer of goodness)²². Igbo and Hausa's customs and traditions also acknowledge the importance of visitors in the community. In their non centralised political setting, each Igbo household used to have special rooms set aside to entertain visitors. There is evidence that traders from Yoruba, Tapa, Hausa lands, including neighbouring African countries were received with kindness by their Igbo hosts²³.

On the other hand, there are a lot of contradictions among the tenets of Islam and Christianity, and Nigerian cultures. One of the differences lies in the opinions of these religions and cultures over the act of prostration and kneeling - while greeting. Among the Yoruba prostration is one of the traditional ways of showing respect for elders, appreciating assistances, and begging for forgiveness. Variably, such act was rejected by all muslims; although to a varying degree²⁴. Sunnis: Tabligh, The Muslim Congress (TMC), Salafiyyah, to mention but a few, rejected the act of prostration and rendered it *Shirk* - the act of associating partnership with *Allah* (God). They argued that the interpretation of *Sujud* (prostration) is not restricted to prostration, rather it include bowing, stooping. According to them all forms of prostrations are due for Allah alone²⁵. But, other muslims particularly Sufi have a similar but divergent view. prostration was not classified as a *Shirk*, rather *Haram* (forbidden)²⁶. Like Islam, Christianity as well as Igbo and Hausa cultures does not recognize prostration as an act of greeting, kneeling.

Ethnic aggrandizement is another point that received

Diffusion of Islam and Christianity among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba

This section examines the respective actions and reactions among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups over the course of spreading Islam and Christianity. Its end product would, to a large extent, exhume the degree of tolerance/intolerance in diffusing new faiths in areas where they were hitherto unpopular. Meanwhile, numberless literatures had been written on the origin, growth and development of Islam and Christianity among Hausa and Igbo People respectively. More importantly, the history of Islam in Hausa Land and Christianity in Igbo Land are no longer newsworthy since these religions -Islam and Christianity - have over the years taken the positions of ATR, they have succeeded in converting most of the people. Thus, writing on Islam in Hausa Land and Christianity in Igbo land may akin to rigmarole. This section therefore focuses on the diffusion of Islam in Igbo and Yoruba Land, and Christianity in Hausa and Yoruba Land.

Islam in Igbo and Yoruba Lands

Like other areas in Nigeria the account of the evolution of Islam in Igbo land, as well as the first Igbo Muslim adherent recorded diverse claims. There are two different versions of the earliest Igbo Muslim: Garba Okeme Abugu and Ahmed Ugokwe Oyima Ukaba. Although there are reliable indications that Ahmad Ugokwe is the earliest Igbo Muslim. Ahmad's contact with Usman Buzu, who converted him to Islam around 1907, preceded Garba Okeme's conversion into Islam, since the latter's first tax receipt as a Muslim was issued latter in 1928²⁷. In the same vein, trade is one of the important factors that necessitated the introduction and spread of Islam among Igbo people. According to O. Okoh, the Hausa/Igala Muslim traders made the earliest attempts to establish islam in Igbo land around 19th century²⁸. Like the claims over the earliest Igbo Muslim, two important cities, Ibagwa Nkwo and Amufie Enugu Ezike, are also claiming the earliest Igbo Land to have experienced is lame. The former was said to have hosted a group of Hausa Muslim traders, who introduced islam to its people, around 19th century²⁹.

On the other hand, Islam came into Yoruba land earlier than 1800's. Although, the specific date when Islam got into Yoruba Land is unknown simply because it was being practiced in seclusion. Nevertheless, mosques has been built in Yoruba land before 1900³⁰.

Meanwhile, there are discrepancies in the degree of difussion of Islam among Yoruba and Igbo lands. While, Islam was able to attract more followers since its inception in Yoruba Land, the minute level of its difussion in Igbo land left much to be desired. Meanwhile, there are contestations on the perception that Islam had been in Lagos before any other Yoruba states via atlantic trade routes. Although, muslims were unable to practiced their religions openly, because of the fear of persecution, until the coming of the repatriated slaves. The exposures and education of these muslim repatriated slaves contributed to the subsequent development of Islam in Lagos and some other Yoruba lands. For instance, in Lagos, Muslims population grew "from about 8000 in 1862 to about 14,000 in 1881, out of a total population of 42,000..."³¹. In fact, the number of muslims are not only increasing among common men in Lagos, but also extends to the Chiefs. This is of course one of the factors that prompted the brouhaha (Eleko Affairs) between Eleko and the colonial government during the 1950's³². Furthermore, the growth of Islam in Yoruba land experienced the evolution of different Islamic groups propagating Islam. As at 1960, Jam'at Tabligh has arrived in Lagos and spread their Dawah from there to other parts of Nigeria³³. The number of Mosques and Islamic Schools are not falling behind those of western schools and churches; there are more than four schools built by Muslims missionaries in Lagos Island alone.

Although some critics of Islam argued that one of the reasons why Islam have enormous adherents among Yoruba is that Yoruba Culture - like Islam - encourages polygamy. Thus, the lust for more women lured Yoruba men into Islam. In reaction to this, a muslim cleric countered that "if Polygamy attracts Yoruba men, what attracted Yoruba women? Dont forget the yoruba adage which says *oosa jen pe meji obirin o denu*" - *women dislike poligamy*³⁴.

Contrary to the claim that polygamy propelled the growth of Islam in Yoruba Land, Gbadamosi and Ade Ajayi revealed that:

Many reasons have been given to explain this rapid expansion of the religion. These include the Strategy of missionary agents to who aimed at the conversion of whole families or community units rather than individuals, the support of many traditional rulers and chiefs....³⁵.

On their parts, Igbo lands give less tolerance to the diffusion of Islam. Unlike in Yoruba lands where the numbers of Muslims are growing rapidly, Islam is still being regarded as non-Igbo religion. In fact, some informants agreed that they don't believe that there is any Igbo Muslim. Two forms of resistance are responsible for this shortfall: conceptual resistance and aggressive resistance. The former has to do with the rejection of Islam based on some beliefs on Islam or Muslims. A commentator concludes that:

Islam has failed to maintain a good image in the east for many reasons most important of which being the Nigerian-Biafran war. In the East, at that time, the war seen as an effort by the Northerners (namely the Hausa Fulani) to Islamize the East, thus the stigma. Nowadays, we are trying to find ways to harmonize our societies and establish peace between the adherents of Christianity and Animism. Christianity has already damaged and uprooted a large amount of the culture of the Eastern peoples; there is no need for Islam to enter the scene and wreak its own share of damage³⁶.

Variably to the above assertion, an Igbo Muslim argued that the religious tolerance in Igbo land is next to nothing. Igbo Christians often portray Christianity as if it is the ancestral religion of the land. Christianity and Islam are foreign religion. None of them has the right to persecute the adherents of the other. But what is happening here is really absurd. Igbo Muslims are considered cursed. "They are denied a lot of benefits being enjoyed by their christian counterparts"³⁷

Christianity among Hausa and Yoruba

The socioreligious and political patterns in the north was different from what took place in the south. This is partly because of the differences in the nature of resistance faced by the British in their attempt to colonise Nigeria. For instance, Lagos had fell as early as 1856 during the monarchical struggles between Dosunmu and Kosoko; while most of the areas in

the north were only conquered during the first decade of the 20th century. Of course, one of the important factors that prolonged the conquest struggle in the north is the dichotomy between Hausa's Islam and British's Christianity. More importantly, the British needed the support of northerners against ottoman empire during the first world war left British with no option than appeasing emirs by protecting their Islam³⁸. Hence, the need to respect the ethics of Islam in the north necessitated the establishments of indirect rule and the eventual recognition of different settlements: Bimi, Gwagwarwa, European Quarters, Sabongari, and Tudun Wada for indigenes, non muslim northerners, Colonial administrators and other European settlers, southern Nigerians and other west Africans, and non northern Nigerian Muslims, in that order of arrangements³⁹. Hence, the segregation had a lot of defects on the diffusion of Christianity in Hausa Lands; simply because missionaries were unable to penetrate northern hinterlands until 1920's. Important cities like Daura, Gwandu, Kano, Katsina, and Zazzau - that are now replete with Christians - were out of the influence of the missionaries in the 19th century when Christianity have already been well established in the south.

Before 1920, there were series of failed attempts to establish Christianity in the north. For instance, during the 1850's, Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Dr. William Baikie persuaded and won the confidence of some non Hausa northern Emirs - Bida, Nassarawa and Yola - after tedious efforts and persecutions. But these efforts yields nothing tangible⁴⁰.

Two important events motored the amendments of the British policies that prohibited the propagation of Christianity among the Hausa: the 1910 Edinburgh mission conference and the 1926 Lazoute mission conference. During these conferences, Christian missionaries urged the colonial government to relax some of its policies that restrict the penetration of christianity into Hausa lands⁴¹. The realisation of this demand became the watershed that necessitated the evolution of christianity in Hausa's Kastina and Kano emirates. The missionaries began the propagation of Christianity in southern Katsina. This justify the reason why most of the Christians in the state are found in local governments like Kafur, Matazu, Malumfashi, among others⁴². Like other domains in southern Nigeria, most of the northern areas that spearheaded the difussion of Christianity enjoyed the services of hospitals and schools built by the christian missionaries. In kano, Christians are commonly found in Karaye, Kura, Rano, Tudun, Wada, Taurani, among others⁴³. Albeit, colonial policies still

retains its interest in preserving Islam in the north by restricting building of churches to Sabongari. This is one of the reasons why there are more churches in Sabongari than any other settlements in the north⁴⁴. The Saint Bartholomew Anglican Church, Wusasa, Zaria is undoubtedly the earliest church in the entire north. Its year of establishment, 1929, is more reliable since there was no missionary penetration into the north until 1926. This shows that there must have been a problem with the dating of the earliest church in Kano, 1911⁴⁵. In all, Christianity has developed extensively in the north - there are over 150 churches in Kano alone⁴⁶.

Contrary to what happened in the north, the diffusion of Christianity in Yoruba land did not face serious obstacles. Perhaps, there were no segregation laws protecting any religion or culture in the entire southern region. Worthy of note is the fact that, unlike the misconceptions that European missionaries introduced Christianity to Yoruba land during the nineteenth century⁴⁷, Christian repatriated slaves who returned to West Africa around the eighteenth century were the earliest propagators of Christianity in Yoruba lands and other areas in Nigeria⁴⁸. Although fruitless efforts had been made by the Portuguese Roman Catholic missions during the 14th and 15th centuries⁴⁹. As early as 1842 the first sets of missionaries have landed in Badagry where they eventually took off to Abeokuta. By 1845, under the leadership of Ajayi, Townsend and Gollmer, baptism has been carried out on the first sets of Yoruba converts. Although, the missionaries encountered some problems as they were early rejected by Egba chiefs until 1946⁵⁰. Nevertheless, the contributions of the European missionaries to the development of Christianity in Yoruba lands, as well as other parts of Nigeria, are outstanding. Today, Christianity has been able to acquire about 47% of the entire Yoruba population in Southwestern Nigeria.

Employment Relations

Nepotism is one of the challenges affecting the unity of Nigerians. Of course, religion intolerance and ethnicism are prominent among its catalysts. Ona Chigioke acknowledges this

when he identified six forms of nepotism: Blood tie, compensatory, corruption, pity oriented, skill induced, and crony capitalistic nepotism. In his analysis, Chugioke explained that social blood tie nepotism include - among others - all forms of ethnic, language and religious influenced prejudices in recruitment process⁵¹. However, unlike other yard sticks, nepotism in Nigeria is also aided by the uneven educational development policies of the colonial government. While the areas in the south have witnessed the growth and development of western education before twentieth century, northern emirates and kingdoms ignore western education for Arabic and Islamic education. Also, the colonial government paid little attention to the development of western education in the north. As at the end of Lugard's tenure in 1922, there were as little as 15 primary and industrial schools in the entire north with about 800 pupils in a population of 9 million⁵². This lopsided educational development persists till date. A record of primary and junior secondary schools completion in Nigeria in 1999 shows that only 34% of the children in the entire north west completed primary education in that year; compared with 91 percent in the south west. Also, 63% of the children in south south were able to complete their junior secondary educations in the south south, unlike the 20% record in the north west⁵³. The consequence of this inequality is that most northerners would not have the privilege to pick employment opportunities, not only in the south but also in the north. This is one of the important reasons why civil service in the north is dominated by southerners.

Meanwhile, ethnicism and religion play vital roles in employment relations among the Igbo. Non christian Igbo are rarely found in civil service in the east. An Igbo muslim lamented:

Muslim Igbos are not allowed to work in the services of their various states. In Ebonyi, I know of only four Muslims who are working with the state government. In fact, one of them converted to Islam when he was working. The perception is that if you are an Igbo man and you decide to become a Muslim, then you are not a normal human being⁵⁴.

Although, the reasons why there are few muslims among Igbo could be as a result of the fact that the entire population of igbo muslim is too few if compared with the number of Igbo Christians.

In addition, there are reports that Yoruba complained th are being sidelined from gaining employment into civil service in the east. According to some informants, they were neglected by the eastern civil service because of their ethnics. Others pointed out that they were rejected not only because of their ethnics but also their religion⁵⁵. A former Yoruba youth copper who served in the east expresses her displeasures over the unruly nepotism she encountered: "I was rejected because I am a muslim. This is injustice. Perhaps we have a lot of Igbo serving in Federal and state ministeries in Lagos"⁵⁶

Similarly, nepotism is also taking hold in Yoruba land. Some informants, most especially Igbo complained bitterly about this. They expressed their displeasures over the problem of ethnicism in recruiting workers in Yoruba land. According to them, ethnicism and party politics are the two problems of employment in Yoruba Land. For instance in Lagos, members of All Progressives Alliance (APC) usually have chances of getting employment than members of other political parties in Lagos⁵⁷.

Marriage Relations

Inter religious and ethnic marriages are among the issues that exhibit the vacuum in religious and ethnic relations among Nigerians. Inter ethnic and religious marriages is an important tool that can foster cordial relationship among Nigerians who are ethno religiously divided. However, in spite of the fact that the ethnic groups settled everywhere around the country, the level of inter religious and ethnic marriages among them is not up to 20% of the entire registered and non registered marriages - Igbo females usually prefer their male counterparts; the same way Hausa and Yoruba males usually long for Hausa and Yoruba Females respectively⁵⁸. Moreover, there are factors that often determine marriage partners in Nigeria: ethnic and religion. Most of the marriages in Nigeria are between Hausa Muslim Males and Females, Igbo Christian males and females, Yoruba Muslim male and female, or Yoruba

Christians males and females. Of course, among other reasons, ethnic and religious obligations contribute to this vacuum. Notwithstanding, the level of religious tolerance among these ethnic groups is tantamount to the degree of their marriages with other tribes and religions.

Meanwhile, Islam and Christianity shares different perceptions on interreligious marriages. According to Islam, the best marriage is the one between a pious male and a pious female muslim, followed by the ones between Muslim male and a Christian female, who is ready to accept Islam. Islam forbades Muslims from marrying non muslims.

And do not marry *Al-Mushrikat* (Idolatress) till they believe (worship Allah alone). And indeed a slave woman who believes is better than a (free) *Mushrikat* (Idolatress), even though she pleases you. And give not your daughter in marriage to *Al-Mushrikun* till they believe (in Allah alone) and verily, a believing slave is better than a free *Mushrik* (Idolater), even though he pleases you. Those (*Al-Mushrikun*) invite you to fire, but Allàh invites (you) to Paradise and Forgiveness by His leave, and makes His Ayàt (proofs evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations etc.) clear to mankind that they may remember⁵⁹

On its part, the Bible, unlike Quran, contains no verse that restricts Christians from marrying non christians. A christian wrote thus:

"I used to think the Bible said that I shouldn't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, but I went and looked at 2 Corinthians 6 in context and it doesn't seem to be talking about marriage at all, but rather about how Christians are to be separate from non-Christians within the church. I then tried to find one verse that says that a Christian shouldn't marry a non-Christian and I couldn't find one. I spoke to

Christians I trust and they couldn't find one either— not one verse!
So, I guess I was wrong, and I'm free to pursue this relationship...."⁶⁰.

Although, there are other Christians who, based on theological interpretations, insist that marriages between Christians and non-Christians are not biblical.

The above analysis revealed that religion has less roles to play than ethnicism in the problem of low inter-religious and tribal marriages among Nigerians. After all, the Qur'an did not discourage marriages among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Muslims; the same way Christianity does not preach against inter-tribal marriages among Nigerian Christians. Yet, the percentage of inter-ethnic marriages recorded among Muslims on one hand, and Christians on the other are too infinitesimal.

The report of a research questionnaire on inter-religious marriages among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups revealed that Yoruba engage more in inter-religious and ethnic marriages than Hausa and Igbo. The study shows that 45% of the inter-religious and ethnic marriages in Nigeria involved Yoruba and Hausa, 50% involved Yoruba and Igbo, while 5% involved Igbo and Hausa. The reason for low marriage relationship between Hausa and Igbo lies in the fact that majority of Hausa are Muslims, while Igbo are predominantly Christians. Islam's and, to a large extent, Christianity's rejection of interfaith marriages are largely responsible for this shortfall. Another cause of this problem is the traditional ethnic aggrandizement.

Conclusion

It is obvious that ethnicity and religion are mere tools of pretexts in the hands of vandals. This exploitation is possible because of the fact that most Nigerians often claim one or another religion or ethnic identity. This vacuum is therefore manipulated by politicians who are longing for power. Like else where around the world, religious homes are not marked by ethnicism in Nigeria. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba worship in the same churches and mosques. Social institutions also trailed this path; there are no separate schools for ethnic groups; no separate market or residence or Banks. Above all, the resident segregation policy of the colonial government in the north had been buried.

As far back as 1949's, the political elites have been exploiting Nigerians passion for their ethnics and religions. Of course, it is one of the reasons why Nigeria was politically divided into political regions. NPC controls the North, AG swept the Southwest, and NCNC took charge of southeast. The likes of Azikwe made ethnic aggrandized statements: " ...it is evident that the God of Africa created Igbo nation to lead the people of Africa out of bondage...." Such statements are made to gather support for leadership ambitions

Notwithstanding, ethnic aggrandizement is not really identified with Yoruba. Yoruba Christian and their Muslim counterparts created room for ethnic and religious tolerance. An Igbo Muslim advised that Igbo should emulate Yoruba's ethno religious tolerance.

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