

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religious pluralism is a situation where people of different religions and faith live together within a given social structure and interact at all levels. The three main religious groups in Nigeria include Christianity, Islam and African Religion. The relationship among these religious bodies has generated the problem of persistent prejudice, suspicion, distrust, intolerance, aggression, destruction of lives and property as we oftentimes experience in several parts of the country. These conflicts had left trials of political, social, economic and psychological losses which have also injured and poisoned established relationships among Nigerians. In this paper, after the examination of the dimension and causes of religious crises in Nigeria, the study observed that Nigeria is a diverse country with over 150 million people; it is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. It is widely believed that there are differences in understanding and projection of the religions which resulted into the various religious crises in the country that led to the destruction of lives and properties worth billions of naira. The method used in this study is historical phenomenology. This paper was aimed at reducing or putting an end to religious crises in Nigeria. The paper recommended that Government should create more job opportunities for the youths in Nigeria, religion and moral education should be made compulsory at primary and secondary school level of education in Nigeria in order to have good understanding of each other's religion, government should set up religious councils at both the state and local government areas and Challenges of poverty should be addressed in a more creative manner.

Key Words: Religious Pluralism, Challenges, National Development, and Nigeria.

Introduction

Sir Frederick Lord Lugard with Florence Shaw who later became his wife gave birth to an entity known as Nigeria on 1st January, 1914 through the proper unilateral amalgamation. When the Northern and the Southern protectorates became amalgamated, Sir Lord Lugard became the Governor General of the unified entity called Nigeria (Nwaoga, Nche and Odibe, 2014).

Nigeria is a diverse country with about 150 million people; it is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious, largely pluralistic and clearly heterogeneous (Umar, Ahmed, Musa and Abdulahi 2014). Three major religions are distinguishable in Nigeria and they include Christianity, Islam and African Religion. As a religious pluralistic society, religion has a place in addressing and analyzing national issues, but based on the increasing rise of religious bigots and extremists, one may be tempted to suggest that religion is not relevant to societal development hence should be extricated from human life. Religion has been used, abused and misused by political elites and unfortunately by the so called clerics of Christianity and Islam so much that it has continued to cause conflagrations in Nigeria. Even in the so-called secular societies, religion has not only penetrated but has also continued to be a source of concern as a result of its damaging nature in those societies. Nigerian society is witnessing Islamic extremists' senseless killings and maiming of innocent lives (Gbadegesin and Adeyama-Adejolu, 2016).

Religious issues play roles in crises generation and resolution. The plural religious identities may lead to persistent prejudice, suspicion, distrust, intolerance, aggression, destruction of lives and property as we oftentimes experience in several parts of the country (Ekwete, 2006). The pluralistic religious nature of Nigeria as well as the seemingly incompatibility of the diverse religious groups has immersed the country in cataclysmic religious conflicts that have mollified any attempt at achieving national development. These conflicts had left trails of political, social, economic and psychological losses. It had also injured and poisoned established relationships among Nigerians. Therefore, this paper examines the dimension, causes and effects of religious crises on national development in Nigeria with the aim of putting an end to religious crises in Nigeria.

The paper adopted historical phenomenological method for proper articulation of the subject matter. The research made use of secondary source of obtaining pieces of information. The data were derived from existing published works. These include textbooks, journals and newspapers and the unpublished work including seminars papers, project, internet and periodicals. The information gathered was presented using descriptive method for easy comprehension.

The Concept of Religious Pluralism and National Development

A pluralistic society refers to one in which there co-exist more than one ethnic and religious groups and there are some degree of recognitions by all the parties concerned (Laguda, 2013). It is the existence of diverse cultures within the same society. It is the harmonious and enriching co-existence within one political community of people of divergent, at times incompatible views, establishing and promoting their common goals (Idakpo, 2016). Religious pluralism according to Idowu-Fearon, (2009) is a

situation where people of different religions and faith live together in a given social structure and interact at all levels. It is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. It therefore, enables a country made up of people of different faiths to exist without sectarian warfare or the persecution of religious minorities. Religious pluralism is an attitude of policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society.

The concept of development has been a controversial issue. This is so since the 18th century when it was transformed from a scientific to an ideological issue in defense of the inequalities within and among nations (Dana, 1987). Development is also multi-faceted and is closely related to the ideas of ‘progress’ and ‘growth’. Rodney, (1990) defines development as the improvement and ability of a society to influence its environment technologically, economically, politically and culturally for the advancement and living condition and well-being of all in the society. Odiba, (2007) defines development as “a process by which man’s personality is enhanced” (p49). Ireogbe, (1996) defines development as a progressive realization of the fullest possible balanced flourishing human and natural resources. From the above definitions, national development can be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This can best be achieved through development planning strategies mapped out by the government of such nation.

Developed nations are generally categorized as countries that are more industrialized, enjoy industrial growth and flourishing economy. They are not characterized by shortcomings. Developed countries have higher per capita income levels. In general, per capita income of developed countries is above \$12,000 and has an average of \$38,000. The population of developed countries is more stable and it is estimated that they will grow at a steady rate of around 7% over the next 40 years (Sunningham, 2017).

Developing nations are nations that are less industrialized and are characterized by shortcomings. Developing countries have lower per capita income. Developing countries are categorized into moderately developed and less developed. Moderately developed countries have an approximate per capita income between \$1,000 and \$4,000. The less developed countries are characterized by having the lowest income, with a general per capita income of less than \$1000 (Sunningham, 2017).

Nigeria as a nation is among the developing countries. Specifically is in the group of moderately developed countries. There is need for the government to boost the economy through diversification if not, poverty and various form of moral decadence will linger.

Dimensions of Religious Pluralism in Nigeria

Nigeria is a diversified society with the people practicing three major religions; African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. However, the most two dominant religions are Christianity and Islam. The two dominant religions are foreign to Nigeria. In spite of their alien nature their advent not only suppressed the original traditional belief

but caused dissension, consternation and upheavals that had consequently led to the loss of lives and property.

The history of religious crises in Nigeria runs like a colossus. Nigeria has witnessed about fifty (50) religious crises from 1980 to date. When these riots occur, numerous lives are lost, property worth hundred of millions of naira are destroyed. When religious crises occur there use to be reprisal attack on other people and in another place or town. The following are examples of religious crises in Nigeria.

S/ N	Date	Town or State	Cause of Riots/Irritators	Number of casualties	Government response
1	December, 1980	Kano	Abubakar, Rimi Formar civilian Governor of Kano State issued quit notice to Muhammed Maitasine to leave the area illegally occupied by his group.	About 4,177 people were killed	Government paid N8 million as compensation to victims
2	1982	Bulukutu Maiduguri	Maitasine sects attack under the same guise of quit notice	400 lives were lost and property worth N3 million were destroyed	Military and police were used to quell the crises
3	1984	Jemita and Gombe	Maitasine sect attack under the quit notice	763 lives were lost and about 5,913 people were displace	Military and police were used to quell the crises
4	April 26th 1985	Bauchi Gombe	Maitasine sects attack under the quire of quit notice	More than 100 people died after about ten hours fighting	Government intervene using armed force
5	1986	Ilorin	Muslim attack Christian palm Sunday procession	None	Government intervene
6	May 3 1986	University of Sokoto	Muslem student society attack Christian students	Injured but no death. VC office set on fire	Government intervene
7	1986	University of Ibadan	Uni-muslim community opposed to position of crucifice on campose	None	
8	1987	Kafanchan, Kaduna, Zaria and Funtua	A new Christian convert made comparism between passages in the Bible and Quran	Over 19 died 61 injured	Government intervene
9	1990	Kano	Triggered by an Igbo Christian, Gideon Akaluka who was alleged to have defecated on the Koran	Many people died and properties were destroy	Government uses police and military to quell the crises
10	1991	Kano	Triggered by Muslim Fanatics who claim to be protesting the Christian religious crusade of evangelist Reinhard Bonnke	People died, churches and mosques burnt	Soldier deployed to quell the crises
11	1992	Kaduna	Between Zango Kataf Christians and Zango	300 people died	Panel of inquiry was set up

			Muslims		
12	10 September, 2001	Jos	A Christian woman attempted to cross a barricaded street. This led to a scuffle between her and a group of Muslims.	300 people died a reprisal attack in Aba, owerri and Umauhia	Obasanjo visited the scene
13	2006	Maiduguri in Borno State and Onisha in Anambara State	Reprisal attack by the Igbos on the House indigene as a result of killing of innocent citizens under the guise of protesting against a publication of prophet Muhammed by Dannish newspaper	Over 50 died in Maiduguri over 30 churches and hotels were burnt	Governor Ngige and Borno counterparts intervened
14	December 4, 2010	Potiskum	Consequent upon the conversion of one Cathrine Abbans to Islam	2 lives were lost	Government intervene
15	January 17, 2010	Nassarawa Gwon	Muslim youths attack Christians worshipers on Sunday	Over 100 people died and properties worth millions of naira destroyed	Government intervene
16	July 26, 2009	Teshim in Bauchi and later spread to Kano, Yobe and Borno State and other parts of Nigeria.	Boko-Haram crises started	Many lives were destroyed and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed	Government have been trying to put an end to the activities of the sect but to no avail

Sources: Nwadoito, 2012, Ibenwa and Ngele 2010 Ekele, 2007

Factors Responsible for Religious Crises in Nigeria

Several factors are identified as source of religious conflicts. Religious intolerance and fanaticism is one of such factors. In Nigeria the problem confronting the relationship between Christians and Muslims is attempt to interpret and impose the various doctrines by the various religious groups. To this effect, Umar, Ahmed, Musa and Abdulahi (2014) observe that;

... Describe the religion or ethnic group as majority or minority for the sake of access to resources. Huge energies are expended and wild argument thrown around on who is the majority, minority etc. Through careless handling, some of these arguments degenerate into violent ethnic or religious conflicts that tend to be extremely savage and bloody with no end, because either group can effectively, let alone permanently neutralize the other (p. 113).

Oral or written statements made by the adherents or leaders either to show the superiority or inferiority of other religions leads to conflicts (Ezeh, 1999).

Poverty is another factor causing religious riots in Nigeria. The vast majority of Nigerians are desperately poor. They are simply living from hand to mouth. In many families, parents are out of work, children school fees cannot be paid, rents have accumulated and food is in short supply (Voice of the voiceless, 2002). The poverty rate of the North East and North Central zones are 70% and 50% respectively (UNICEF, 2001). In 2004 the North West zone recorded 71.1% North East 72.1% and the North Central zone 70% (CBN, 2004). World bank 2017 Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals shows that 35 million Nigerians are living in extreme poverty in 2013 than in 1990 which is defined as less than \$1.90 per day ([Documentsworldbanks.org/croated/en/275714938835556771atlasofsubstaninabledevelopment](http://documents.worldbank.org/croated/en/275714938835556771atlasofsubstaninabledevelopment)). According to Ejeh (2007) "poverty manifests itself in insecurity as people are forced to take certain actions to sustain themselves. Poverty has the cumulative effect of raising tension that easily explode on the slightest excuse" (p. 305).

Unemployment is another factor. Unemployment is at all times very high in Nigeria. Every year, hordes of young people graduate from secondary and tertiary institution with no prospects of employment. Onwubiko (2012) observed that;

Unemployment occurs when people are willing and able to work but find it difficult to get a job because the supply of labour outstrips the demand for labour. Unemployment becomes a problem when there is a saturation of labour market with labour to the extent that the supply of labour is far higher than the demand of it (p. 19).

The increasing rate of unemployment has made many of the youths to be ready-made tools and vulnerable to the manipulation of agents to commit all form of vices. Unemployed especially the *Almajiri's* can easily be mobilized to cause mayhem especially in the northern part of the country.

The heterogeneity nature of Nigeria is another factor. The pluralistic identities lead to persistence prejudice, hatred, lack of trust, suspicion, aggression, uncompromising attitudes, intolerance and destruction of lives and properties.

Effects of Religions Pluralism on National Development

Religions pluralism in Nigeria leads to the polarization of Nigerian Christians and Muslims as most of the Christians lives in the south and Muslims in the north. This religious pluralism causes religious conflicts and division among the adherents of the two religions. Religious crises in Nigeria have led to the destruction of lives and property. According to Elaigwu (2004) between 1976 and 2009 over 100,000 had lost their lives and property worth billions of naira has been destroyed in more than fifty recorded ethno-religious crises in northern part of Nigeria. Some of the people killed in these ethno-religious crises will no longer contribute to the development of Nigeria. The losses that come in the destruction of property affect the economy of Nigeria.

The continuous escalating of religious crises in Nigeria is gradually creating and conditioning people to harbour bitterness, hatred, rancour and grievances against each other, which has the potential danger of bursting into serious crises. Lack of peace will affect foreign investment which would have contributed to national development.

It is a fact today that where religious crises have occurred, a lot of arms have been stockpiled as a measure to either checkmate potential “opponents” or as deterrent to opposing religious foes in the future. This scenario has serious security implications for the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria (Gwamna, 2010). To this effect Egeh (2007) stated that; “no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of insecurity and a breakdown of law and order” (p. 306).

The image of the Nigeria nation in the international community has been smeared. The dislocation and relocation of people as a result of religious and ethnic crises have created socio-economic problems as some are thrown out of jobs. Some of these settlements have also become a haven of idle hands which constitute potential hands of armed robbers and other Social vices (Adama, 2016).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward.

Religious and moral education should be made compulsory at all level of education in Nigeria in order to have good understanding of each others religion. The curriculum should seek to inculcate religious tolerance.

Government should create more job opportunities for youths in Nigeria.

Government should set up religious councils at both the state and local government areas. Government should finance the council thereby consolidating understanding and co-operation.

Challenges of poverty should be addressed in a more creative manner. The conditions of the poor must be ameliorated in order to reduce the vulnerability of the poor to mischief making.

Conclusion

Religious crises are problems and a bottleneck to national development in Nigeria. Peaceful practice of religion is a pre-requisite to national development. These crises bring about hatred, rancour, bitterness and insecurity which are not indices for national development. The general knowledge about Nigeria should be promoted among the people. This paper identified religious intolerance and fanaticism, poverty, unemployment and heterogeneity nature of Nigeria as the causes of religious crises in the country. The various religious crises led to lost of lives and property, lack of peace, the image of the country is dented in the international community. No meaningful development can take place in a country with the problem of insecurity and break down of law and order.

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