

**THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY
AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CHALLENGES**

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**JOHN ARCHERS (PUBLISHERS) LIMITED,
40 Ojerinde Quarters, Jiboye, Apata
GPO Box 339, Dugbe, Ibadan.**

FIRST PUBLISHED 2016

ISBN: 978-978-54255-7-4

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Religious Crisis as Bane of Economic Development in Nigeria

by

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Introduction

Nigeria, according to Awoniyi (2012), is a religiously pluralistic society but constitutionally, a secular state. In Nigeria, people practice three main religions - Christianity mainly in the south and Middle Belt, Islam, mainly in the north, and Traditional Religion in every part of the country. Every Nigerian according to 1999 constitution is entitled to practice religion of his/her choice including freedom to change his/her religion or belief; and freedom to manifest and propagate his/her religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. Meanwhile, a cursory exploration around the country recently reveals a lot of ugly and terrifying news of wanton destruction of lives and property as a result of incessant religious crisis most especially the Boko Haram insurgency. Indeed, it has been estimated that not less than fifteen thousand Nigerians have lost their lives while about 1.5 million have been displaced as a result of Boko Haram activities between 2009 and 2015 (Sadjere, 2015). This has great negative economic influence on the Nigerian citizens. In this connection, Awoniyi (2012) while quoting Gabriel Umezurike underscores the inherent danger and heavy penalty of religious fanaticism. He remarks that fanaticism ruined Jerusalem, destroyed Constantinople in the 15th century, and brought about the demise of Spain. The Nigerian government and the intellectuals and various inter-religious organisations have spent a lot of

time, energy and resources to work out modalities for amiable religious inter-group

relations. But it is disheartening to say that solutions toward religious crisis in Nigeria seem to be a mirage. Consequently, economic development is hampered. Therefore, this paper examines the perennial incidence of religious crisis in Nigeria and its negative economic influence on the Nigeria citizens.

Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Religious crisis in Nigeria refers mainly to Christian-Muslim strife and which is dominated today by insurgency of Boko Haram, which aims to establish Islamic state and impose Shariah on the country. Religious crisis in Nigeria according to Augustine (2013) goes as far back as 1953, and in the case of the town of Tafawa Balewa, to 1948. The Igbo massacre of 1966 in the north that followed the counter-coup of the same year had as a dual cause, the Igbo officers' coup and pre-existing (sectarian) tensions between the Igbo and the local Muslims. This was a major factor in the Biafra secession and the resulting civil war (Augustine, 2013). The trend of religious crisis in Nigeria since 1980 will now be briefly considered.

1980s

The 1980s saw an upsurge in violence due to the death of Mohammed Marwa (Maitatsine). In the same decade the erstwhile military ruler of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida enrolled Nigeria in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). This was a move which aggravated religious tensions in the country particularly among the Christian Community (Holman, 1986). Popular among the religious crises that occurred in the 1980s include: the Maitatsine riot in Kano (1980), Muslim-Christian crisis in Maiduguri, Borno state (1982), Kaduna religious crisis, (1983), Yola crisis, Gongola state (1984), Kafachan crisis, Kaduna state (1987), and the Muslim-Christian crisis at Kaduna Polytechnic in 1988, Kaduna, Kaduna state (Adesupo, 2011). All these crises led to the

loss of lives and properties worth billions of naira while large numbers of people were displaced.

1990s

Nigeria witnessed several religious crises in the 1990s which led to wanton destruction of lives and properties. These include: Bauchi crisis of 1990 among secondary school pupils, Toro-Ninja Muslim-Christian riot, Bauchi State (1991), Muslim Youth riot against Reinhard Bonke's crusade in Kano, Kano state (1991), Hausa-Fulani Muslims versus Yoruba tribe and Christians at Ishaga Onipanu, Lagos (1999) and the Hausa-Fulani Muslims versus Christians at Ilorin-Offa, Kwara state in 1999 (Adesupo, 2011).

2000s

Since the restoration of democracy in 1999, Christian governments have dominated the country at the federal level; while the Muslim dominated northern Nigeria states have implemented strict Sharia law. Religious crisis between Muslims and Christians has erupted several times since 2000 for various reasons with several thousands of victims on both sides. Some of these crises include: Kaduna riot (2000), Damboa crisis, Borno state (2000), Saki crisis, Oyo state (2000), Kano crisis (2000), Lagos crisis at Mile 2 and Alaba (2000), Kebbi crisis (2001), Jos crisis (2001, 2008 and 2010), Osogbo crisis, Osun state (2001), Abuja crisis FCT (2002) and the Bauchi crisis, of 2009 caused by the Boko Haram Jihadist group (Adesupo, 2011).

Since 2009, the Islamist movement called "Boko Haram" has fought an armed rebellion against the Nigerian military, sacking villages and towns and taking thousands of lives in battles and massacres against Christians, students and others (even Muslims) deemed enemies of Islam. The wicked and heinous acts of Boko Haram sect since 2009 have in various ways affected the economic landscape of this country.

Causes of Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Religious Particularism

Religious particularism according to Awoniyi (2012) is the belief that one's own religion is the best that gives assurance of salvation to man. Particularism is a safeguard against the integrity of one's faith (Dopamu, 1984). Thus the impression is that one of them, on the long run is holding onto a wrong faith or true faith and while the two of them cannot hold the same truth at the same time, hence the occurrence of opposition, friction and crisis between them. The fact remains that this is the exact position in Nigerian society. Nigerian being a religiously pluralistic society inhabited different religious adherents who often compete for their faiths, assert and super impose over one another (Mala, 1985).

Religious Misconceptions

Religious misconception according to Ayantayo (2005) as a factor causing religious crisis in Nigerian society could not be down played. He posits that the prevalence of religious misconceptions among different religious adherents in the society could be seen as a problem. Religious misconception is tantamount to holding a religious idea which is wrong or untrue, but which people believe because they do not understand it properly. For instance, Muslims often interpret the concept of trinity in Christianity to mean the presence of three gods while Christians often misinterpret Muslim concept of slavery to mean that the Muslims are really slaves in the practical sense of the use of the word. In reaction to various misconceptions among adherents of different religions, verbal and physical confrontations usually ensued. This type of prejudice has done much havoc and horror to the citizens of this country.

Ignorance and Parochial Interpretation of the Scriptures

It is important to note that many religions adherents are ignorant about the doctrines and practices of their religions (Awoniyi, 2013). It is painful that such adherents are not even ready to accept their

impoverishment of the subtlety or nicety concerning the details of their faiths (Mala, 1985). Moreover, some religious leaders/preachers according to Ayantayo (2005) are unknowledgeable or half-baked with little or no education at all, but still venture into the religious enterprise. This category of people interprets the scriptures with little or no regard for the principles of logicity and reasonability. Most of these preachers interpret the scriptures to suit their desires. However, any religious teaching combined with falsity, libel or slander has the tendency to provoke religion tension (Adesupo, 2011).

Religious Intolerance

Religious intolerance according to Awoniyi (2012) is unwillingness to tolerate and endure a different religious opinion idea or practice. In Nigeria today, for mere doctrinal differences and lack of the spirit of tolerance, every religion is competing and not ready to tolerance the other. It goes to the extent of making an effort to extirpate other living religions and their adherents (Awoniyi, 2012).

Unemployment

Unemployment, according to Omotoye (2010) can be regarded as one of the factors that contributed to religious crisis in Nigeria. Omotoye (2010) posits that most of the religious crisis in the northern part of the country is the handiwork of unemployed youths. These numerous unemployed youths are ready tools in the hands of misguided religious and political leaders.

Government

The Nigeria government cannot be exonerated as a factor contributing to religious crises. Although the Nigeria constitutions of 1979 and 1999 categorically enshrined it in chapter four "every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion ..." but in the country today, many government officials at both federal and state levels are guilty in the implementation of this law. Omotoye (2010) while

corroborating this view cites the example of how the then erstwhile president, General Ibrahim Babangida changed the status of Nigeria from being an observer in the Organization of Islamic Conference to full membership. This act nearly caused religious crises in the country. In the same vein, some state governors in the North some years back imposed Sharia law on their citizens not minding their religious affiliations. Zamfara state is a good example to buttress this fact.

Divergent Decoding of Religious Scriptures

The Bible and Quran as rightly puts by Awoniyi (2012) are capable of being subjected to diverse interpretations. Mala (1985) posits:

The fact that both of them (the Bible and Quran) contain the revelation of God through a particular people, initially to a particular society means that several other societies may, in process of adapting them to suit their particular problems have their own meanings similar or dissimilar to those of the original societies who first heard the message.

It must be noted that this divergent decoding of religious scriptures accounts for various sects and denominations within and outside many religions especially Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Hence, in both intra- and inter-religious affairs, this has also served as a major channel of religious crisis in the society.

Religious Crisis as a Bane to Economic Development in Nigeria

The negative effects of religious crisis are immeasurable and unquantifiable. In most cases, it retards progress and hinder national development, because development cannot take place where there is insecurity and lawlessness. Meanwhile, religious crisis has a great negative influence on the economic landscape of this country.

Destruction of Lives and Properties

The greatest harm, which religious crises inflicted on the economy, is that they leave in its wake loss of lives and properties (Ehianu, 2012). Men and women who would have contributed their quota to the economic development of the nation were killed or maimed during religious crisis. Children are orphaned at tender age, thereby cannot go to school and so grow up to constitute socio-economic problem for the society. It has been estimated that about fifteen thousand people have been killed by Boko Haram militants ³² since 2009 to date (Sadjere, 2015). Similarly, public goods and buildings are destroyed, public, and private properties were vandalised when there is religious crisis. Consequently religious crisis leads to set back on social infrastructures such as schools, health centres, and tourist sites and in most cases, communication equipments are vandalised. For instance, mobile communications operators in the country especially in the north-eastern part of the country (Borno, Adamawa, etc.) attribute their poor services to what they term as the frequent vandalism of their equipment. Even individual sources of livelihood, goods, stores, vehicles, farms, etc. are either destroyed or carted away by rampaging youths during religious crisis, leaving victims economically handicapped (Awoniyi, 2012).

Discouragement of Foreign and Local Investors

As a matter of fact, religious crisis is capable of scaring investors (local or foreign) because none would like to take a risk of investing in an environment that is not conducive for business. Isiramen (2010) succinctly expresses this view when he said that, the religious crisis of 1999 made many people especially foreigners to unceremoniously abandon the National Sports Festival that took place in Bauchi.

President Olusegun Obasanjo on assumption of duty in 1999 made it the priority of his government to attract direct foreign investment into the nation's economy. It must be admitted however, that inspite of the

incentive promised the would-be investors and the abundant human and material resources in the country; passionate appeals to foreign investors have not yielded the anticipated response (Awoniyi, 2012). The apprehension of the international community concerning security in the country was confirmed during the 2000 Kaduna riot when foreigners in the state had to flee in their numbers to their various countries (Awoniyi, 2012). Similarly, in 2000, the Kaduna Chamber of Commerce and Industry had its trade fare cancelled owing to religious riot. This was a great economic loss to the association and the entire citizens of that state and Nigerians at large. Also, following the upsurge of the shariah on Zamfara, many non-indigenes of the state relocated their business. This no doubt will affect the economy of the state as according to Ehianu (2012), "the economy of the fledging state is in the hands of non-indigenes who are mostly Christian's resident in the state ... If non-indigenes are forced to leave, then the state economy will be in tatters". Furthermore, the style of operation and sophistication of weapons used during religious crisis makes an effort to contain them very daunting and cost intensive. Violence throws up refugees, men women and children in dire need of life's basic needs - food, shelter and clothing. The onus often falls on the government to provide these needs and to set up committees of enquiry to unravel both remote and immediate causes of the crisis of the (Ehianu, 2012). All these take toll on state and or national economy. Thus the nation's hard earned currency which could have been channelled to such positive development programmes like education, health and other social services is often spent quelling religious crisis. Consequently, religious crisis slow down the pace of progress and development of a country and inflicts irreparable economic pains on both society and the victims. Adekunle (2010) corroborates this view when he said that all the factors of production, that is, land, labour, capital and entrepreneur are affected during religious crisis. He added that, thousands of people may be displaced from their places of work. Farmlands may be abandoned; industries such as small and major ones may be closed down. Besides,

trading transaction both within and outside the state may be affected or neglected. All these will hamper the economic development of a nation.

Displacement of People

Religious crisis always lead to displacement of people. In most cases, the people who are lucky to escape death are displaced from their original homes/working places to become refugees elsewhere as a result of crisis. The victims in this category, in most cases find it difficult to find a new job or to set up a new business elsewhere. In fact, such people may remain economically handicapped throughout their lives. For instance, it was reported that about 1.5 million people have been displaced in Nigeria as a result of the heinous activities of the Islamic exterernists-Boko Haram since 2009 to date (Sadjere, 2015). Those displaced are camped in various places provided by the government while the responsibility of caring for such people rests majorly on the government-state or and federal. This is a great double economic tragedy for developing nation like Nigeria since these people could not wok or render any service in their precarious condition but they must be fed and taking care of health wise. This again will lead to food insecurity as most of them who are farmers have been displaced from their farmlands, rendered jobless and have nothing to contribute to the economic development of their state/nation. Nwakaudu (2010) while buttressing this fact stated that, the Jos crisis of 2010 made about 3,000 residents of the state (Plateau) to flee to Bauchi, consequently, the Bauchi State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) Mohamed Garba stated that, the repeated religious crisis in plateau state have placed economic and social strains on the Bauchi and Kaduna states in a way to cater for the needs of the displaced people during the crisis.

Insecurity

Whenever there is religious crisis, people feel Unsecured going to their places of work. The artisans, civil servants, market women and other private workers attend their places of work with fear because none could

guaranty their safety. In fact, most markets and stores are closed while most inter-state businessmen and women are rendered powerless economically during the crisis time because no motorist would, want to go to the crisis areas due to lack of security. This, people could not go about their daily legal business anytime religious crisis erupted. Besides, religious crisis according to Jawondo (2010), inflicts psychological stresses not only on the victims but the entire citizenry. He buttressed this fact when he said that, each state, local government, tribe group and clan continues to think about the situation of their members living in the affected places.

Conclusion

Religious crisis has impacted negatively on the economic development of this nation. It is a cancer that must be excised. This is because peace is significant in the development of any given society. A state where there is no peace cannot develop. A situation where religious crisis has become a potent instrument of disturbing the peace of the community as in the Nigerian experience, may lead to perpetual underdevelopment. The words of Jerry Gana (Director, 1999) are apposite as words of caution, admonition and conclusion to this study:

We simply cannot face the challenge of the 21st century divided by religious conflicts, torn by wars and devastated by ethnic disturbance. The 21st century

Recommendations

Findings indicate that religious crisis has been a clog on the wheel of economic growth and development in Nigeria. Based on these findings, some policy recommendations are hereby offered which includes:

- (i) Promotion of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence of the citizens by all stake holders.
- (ii) National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) should be more empowered by the government so as to nip in the bud any religious crisis before it degenerate to a major one.

- (iii) Religious leaders in Nigeria should lay more emphasis on the grounds that are common to all religions and de-emphasise their differences.
- (iv) Ignorance is a common cause of religious crisis. Therefore, comparative religious study should be made compulsory at all levels of education. This would afford every Nigerian student to know the fundamentals of his or her religion as well as those of others.
- (v) People from different religious groups should be given equal status in terms of recognition, respect, voice and power when they come together. Besides, different religious group in Nigeria should be given the opportunity to know each other as individuals and not to be judged primarily by their group identity.
- (vi) Moreover religious crisis should be addressed in a way that transforms differences and disagreements into positive lessons for the people of Nigeria.
- (vii) The government must be sincere and should put the, unity of the country before personal or sectional interest. As the country is multi- religious, secularity remains the best option if the state is to remain peaceful and united.
- (viii) Religious faithfuls must recognise the fact that religion itself must be dynamic. Yesterday's evangelisation strategy may not be suitable for today. So, religious groups must continually appraise their strategies to win converts. Conversion by intimidation, coercion, or force is outdated and will naturally breed chaos.

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