RELIGION, POPULATION GROWTH AND VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN NATION

Clara M. Austin Iwuoha, PhD
Department of Religious Studies
Faculty of Humanities
Imo State University, Owerri
ausiwuoha@yahoo.com

Abstract

With a population of about 190 million, Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation by double and fertility levels remain higher than most other sub-Saharan African nations. Throughout the last decades, the fertility gap between Christians and Muslims has widened with significant political implications for her nascent democracy. Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, thousands of people have died in the wake of identity-based vicious, murderous and destructive violence mostly fought along ethno-religious lines. In 2009, a radical Islamist sect from north-eastern Nigeria, Boko Haram, started a campaign of terror that has so far intensified the schismatic and apprehensive religious atmosphere in the country. This had been preceded by the vicious Maitatsine sect of the 1980s. The formal institutionalization of Sharia law in the North in 1999 have also not helped matters. While the Boko Haram crisis cannot be said to be strictly religious, this paper will locate the group within the context of the mobilization and politicization of religion in Nigeria, which along with the heavy-handedness of Nigeria's conflict management processes, informs religious militancy and sectarian violence in the country. The paper argues that a process of transition from a killing society to a non-killing society is needed to provide an alternative perspective to the existing pedagogy of religion, violence and population growth for which northern Nigeria is notorious.

Keywords: Religious violence, politicization, Boko Haram, population growth

Introduction

Religious violence in Nigeria is vividly linked with the proliferation of uncompromising Muslim and Christian activism, a relationship that has led to a burgeoning culture of religious intolerance particularly in northern Nigeria. Prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, African Traditional Religion, was the religion of Africans and during this time when Africans worshipped God the indigenous way religious violence was rare. The introduction of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria marked the beginning of religious violence as both religions struggled for supremacy. The concept of national security encompasses both military and non-military security such as economic security, energy security, food security etc. Security threats can come in any form. The present security threat in Nigeria is the Boko Haram terrorist attacks on the government and the

country at large. Equally, religious violence is a threat to the well-being of the adherents of the religions in Nigeria.

Several political problems assume religious dimensions; manipulated by politics, poverty, illiteracy and ignorance in Nigeria. Violence predicated on religious affiliation and religious policies has indeed caused physical and psychological damage to several people, thereby legitimizing religious schism among Nigerians who simply have different religious affiliations. It is therefore paramount that we look at factors responsible for religious violence in Nigeria since the inception of democracy in 1999 and to find out how religion can bring about peaceful co-existence.

The 1980s witnessed an upsurge in violence resulting from the death of Mohammed Marwa, the leader of a sectarian group known as "Maitatsine". At about the same time, the former self-styled military president of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida, enrolled Nigeria in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, OIC. This move aggravated religious tensions in the country, particularly among the Christian communities. Since the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, Sharia has been instituted as a main body of civil and criminal law in nine (9) Muslim-majority and in some parts of three (3) Muslim-plurality states. The then Zamfara State governor, Ahmad Rufai Sani Yerima is known to have started the push for the institution of Sharia at the state level of government.

In the 1980s, serious outbreaks of conflicts between Christians and Muslims occurred in Kafanchan in southern Kaduna State in a border area between the two religions, propagated by extreme leaders who were able to rally a young, educated group of individuals who feared that the nation would not be able to protect their religious groups. The leaders were able to polarize their followers through speeches and public demonstrations. The activities of some of these sects led to the loss of lives and properties as they moved about destroying government facilities which they saw as legacies or replica of western cultures in their various communities. These religious campaigns have seen an increase in sophisticated gun battles between the members of these sects and security forces with loss of precious lives witnessed on both sides.

Although direct conflicts between Christians and Muslims were rare from the outset, tensions did flare between the two groups as each group galvanized and radicalized. There were clashes in October 1982 when Muslim zealots in Kano were able to enforce their power in order to keep the Anglican House Church from expanding its size and power base. They viewed it as a threat to the nearby Mosque, even though the Anglican House Church had been there forty years prior to the building of the Mosque. Similar thing almost happened at the University of Ibadan when the Muslim worshippers demanded that a cross which had been there years before the mosque be pulled down because they faced it when praying. Christians stood their ground to protect the cross and tensions escalated. To ensure peace, a wall was raised between the cross and the mosque. Elsewhere, there were two student groups who came into contestation in Nigeria - the Fellowship of Christian Students and the Muslim Students Society. On one occasion there was an evangelical campaign organized by the FCS that questioned why one sect should dominate the campus of the Kafanchan College of Education. This quarrel escalated to the point where the Muslim students organized protests around the city which culminated in the burning of a Mosque at the college. The Christian majority at the college retaliated. Twelve people died, several Mosques were burnt and a climate of fear and apprehension was created. The retaliation was pre-planned.

Exploitation of the media as a means of propagating the ideas of the conflict, have also contributed in radicalizing each force even more. Media was biased on each side so while places like the Federal Radio Corporation discussed the idea of defending Islam during this brief moment of terror, it did not report the deaths and damage caused by Muslims, thereby galvanizing the Muslim population. Similarly, the Christian papers did not report the damage and deaths caused by Christians but rather focused on the Islamic terror. Other individuals leading these religious movements used the media to spread messages which gradually became more toxic and intolerant of other religions, and because of these religious divisions radical Islam continues to be a problem in Nigeria today.

Religious conflict between Muslims and Christians has erupted several times since 2000 for various reasons, often causing riots with several thousands of victims on both sides. Since 2009, the Islamist movement 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 deemed enemies of Islam. The Chibok Girls saga and the abduction of Leah Sharibu are still very fresh in the mind. The thrust of this investigation is propelled by the ferocious and colossal eruptions of religious conflict occasioned by extreme display of religious fanaticism and intolerance and how it has impacted on the peace and progress of the populace.

Religious Violence

Among scholars, there is no acceptable definition of violence. Violence is viewed from diverse perspectives. Riches (1986:8) cited in Afolabi (2016) defines violence from an anthropological point of view as "an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses". Riches' definition according to Afolabi (2016) is compatible with "basic properties" of violence, which have cross-cultural validity, i.e. that the performance of violence requires relatively little by way of specialized equipment or knowledge, that the practice of violence is highly visible to the senses and that, therefore, violence as such is unlikely to be mistaken. Afolabi (2016) maintains that discrepancies in basic understanding amongst those implicated in the performance of a violent act are likely to be minimal. Nevertheless, violence is inherently liable to be contested on the question of legitimacy. Hann (2008) asserts that Riches' incorporation of the concepts of legitimacy and illegitimacy in the definition of violence raises problems because it is unclear how the discrepancy in basic understanding amongst those implicated in the performance of a violent act can be 'likely to be minimal' when an act of violence by definition is deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses. In an attempt to introduce a more systematic, comprehensive analysis of violence, several propositions have been made for a more extended notion of violence which is defined in a more inclusive way.

Two examples of inclusive definitions of violence presented by Barak (2003) and Henry (2000) will suffice. Barak (2003) has made an attempt to be conceptually inclusive, that is, to take into account the full range of harms associated with a variety of interpersonal, institutional, and structural relationships and behaviours and to not exclude any form and expression of violence, whether they refer to individual acts, institutional arrangements or structural conditions as well as whether or not they are prohibited by law. To this end, he adopts a definition of violence as "any action or structural arrangement that results in physical or non-physical harm to one or more persons" (Iadicola and Shupe, 1998: 26; quoted in Barak, 2003: 26).

In a similar vein, Henry (2000:3-5,116) suggests that a more inclusive, integrated definition of violence is necessary, which replaces the term 'force' with 'power' and takes a more comprehensive view of harm. Violence is thus defined as "the use of power to harm another, whatever form it takes". In this case, harm is not only physical pain and suffering. It can also occur along many dimensions beyond the physical to include psychological or emotional, material or economic, social or identity, moral or ethical, and so on. Within each dimension, the harm can be of two kinds: 'harms of reduction' and 'harms of repression' (Henry and Milovanovic, 1996:103). Harms of reduction remove something from a person's existing status as a human being. For instance, physical harms of reduction produce bodily pain or loss (of blood, organs, limbs, physical functioning). Material harms of reduction threaten or downgrade some of the person's economic status (property, wealth, money). Psychological harms of reduction have destructive effects on the human mind and weaken a person's emotional or mental functioning (such as in posttraumatic stress syndrome). Social and symbolic harms of reduction lower a person's social status (by violating their human rights, sexuality or social identity). Moral or ethical harms of reduction corrupt standards of concern for the well-being of others (as in hate, pressure to cheat, and the like). In contrast, harms of repression reveal how the exercise of power acts to systematically limit another person's capability of achieving higher levels of accomplishment along any of these dimensions. Violence, then, is the exercise of power over others by some individual, agency, or social process that denies those subjects of their humanity either by reducing them from what they are or by limiting them from becoming what they might be.

After looking at the concept of violence from the perspective of inclusive and restrictive definitions, Hann (2008:29-33) came to the conclusion that depending on the contexts of discovery and justification, valid arguments are feasible for either inclusive or restrictive definitions of violence. Any definition of violence, however, should be considered as a temporary outcome of theoretical debate – an outcome which may or may not prove to be useful in future research. Exploring diversity of definitions is useful in understanding violence from a religious perspective.

From these definitions, it can safely be deduced that "religious violence is a term that describes a phenomenon where religion is either the subject or object of violent behaviour. Religious violence is, precisely, violence that is motivated by or in reaction to religious precepts, texts, or doctrines". It involves all forms of violence against religious institutions, persons, objects, or when the violence is motivated to some degree by some religious aspect of the target or precepts of the attacker. This phenomenon does not only refer to violent acts committed by religious groups, but it also includes acts committed by secular group against groups. Thus, it is pluralistic in its incidence.

Religious violence in Nigeria has caused not only physical pain but also psychological, emotional, material, economic and social loss. It has also caused harms of reduction and repression. Many people have been dehumanized, lost their wealth and sources of livelihood to intermittent religious conflicts in several parts of the northern states. Religious violence has weakened their emotional or mental proper functioning. The exercise of power and domination by Hausa-Fualni indigenes in the north on the settlers limit the latter from achieving their utmost potential. The violent and murderous activities of the Maitatsine sects in Nigeria between 1980 and 1985, and the present Boko Haram violence are few examples of sad situations religion has caused humanity.

The events of Abuja in 2000 and Jos in 2001 were riots between Christians and Muslims in Jos, Nigeria about the appointment of a Muslim politician, Alhaji Muktar

Mohammed, as local coordinator of the federal programme to fight poverty. Another such riot killed over 100 people in October 2001 in Kano State. In 2002, the Nigerian journalist Isioma Daniel wrote an article that led to the demonstrations and violence that caused the deaths of over 200 in Kaduna, as well as a fatwa placed on her life. The 2002 Miss World contest was moved from Abuja to London as a result. The rest of the 2000s witnessed continuous inter-religious violence in Jos and Kaduna. The reaction to the Mohammed cartoons brought about a series of violent protests in Nigeria. Clashes between rioters and police claimed several lives, with estimates ranging from sixteen to more than a hundred. This led to reprisal attacks in the south of the country, particularly in Onitsha. More than a hundred lost their lives. A woman was killed in Kano for her early morning ministrations which the Muslim youths considered as disturbance. Recently, Fulani herdsmen have been known to commit all manners of unrestricted violence in almost all parts of the country with reckless abandon.

Overview of Religious Violence in Nigeria

1. 01-Jul-99: Sagamu, Ogun State - Crisis between Yoruba traditional worshipers and Hausa groups as a result of the killing of a Hausa woman by the Oro Masqueraders for violating traditional rites.

2. 20-Dec-99: Ilorin, Kwara State - Muslim fundamentalists attacked and destroyed over 14 Churches, properties worth several millions of naira destroyed.

3. 28-Feb- 00: Aba, Abia State - Religious crisis that led to the killing of over 450 persons.

4. February 21-22, 00: Kaduna, Kaduna State - Crisis over the introduction of Sharia, an estimated 3000 people died.

5. 12-Oct-01: Kano, Kano State - Religious crises, in protest to U.S. invasion of Afghanistan over Osama bin Laden. Over 150 persons were killed.

6. September, 7-17, 07: Jos, Plateau State - Religious crisis between Muslims and Christians. Mosques, churches and several properties were damaged.

7. 16-Nov-02: Kaduna, Kaduna State - Attack of Christians by the Muslims over article written by lsioma Daniel on Miss World, over 250 people were killed and several churches destroyed.

8. 14-Feb-04: Numan, Adamawa State - Religious crisis between Christians and Muslims over location of the Central Mosque close to Bachama Paramount ruler's palace. Over 17 persons killed.

9. 18-Feb-06: Maiduguri, Borno State - Religious crisis between Christians and Muslims over Danish Cartoon on Prophet Mohammed in Jyllands-posten newspaper. Over 50 persons killed and 30 churches destroyed over 200 shops, 50 houses and 100 vehicles vandalized.

10. 22-Mar-07: Gombe, Gombe State - Religious crisis over the killing of a Christian teacher for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an while attempting to stop a student from cheating in an examination hall.

11. 28-Nov-08: Jos, Plateau State - Religious crisis between Muslims and Christians over the controversial results of local election. Over 700 people killed.

12. July 26-30, 09: Bauch, Borno, Kano and Yobe States - Religious crisis unleashed by Boko Haram sect on Christians. Over 700 people killed 3,500 persons internally displaced, 1,264 children orphaned, and over 392 woman widowed, and several properties destroyed.

13. 07-Mar-10: Jos, Plateau State - Attacks by Fulani Moslems on Christians-dominated villages of Dogo-Nahawa, Shen and Fan. 13 persons killed.

14. 11-Jul-10: Jos South, Plateau State - Attack on a Christian village by Fulani herdsman. 3 houses and 6 vehicles were torched.

15. January 5-6-12: Gombe, Gombe State - Gunmen stormed a Deeper Life Church, shooting indiscriminately at worshippers. The Boko Haram Islamist sect claimed responsibility for the shooting.

16. January 5-6-12: Mubi, Adamawa State - Suspected Boko Haram militants stormed a gathering of Igbo Christians and shot sporadically, killing over 12 and injuring others.

17. May-2016: Padongari, Niger State - Religious crisis that left 4 persons dead.

18. 08-Jun-16: Kakuri, Kaduna State - A Christian man was stabbed for not joining Ramadan Fast.

19. 14-Mar-18: Abuja - Protest by Muslim Groups Rocks National Assembly on the Public Hearing over Amasa Firdus, Law School Hijab controversy.

Source: Adapted from Sampson, 2018; Sahara reporter, 2018; Apuwabi, 2018.

Factors Responsible for Religious Violence

Religious violence has become a defining personality of Nigeria and her politics since independence. Kukah (1993:9) argues that both Islam and Christianity are straddled across the Nigerian polity, each no longer knocking and pleading to be admitted, but seeking to take over the architectural design and construction of the Nigerian polity. Thus, religion has been politicized and politics has been religionized thereby making it difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the two entities. Religion that has bound us together in two strands has caused much damage than good in northern Nigeria.

Under the guise of religion, many religious fundamentalists and violent religious fanatics have frequently plunged the country into unnecessary wanton destruction of innocent lives and properties (Iwe 4). In Nigeria some Islamic fundamentalists and fanatics have in the guise of religion, knowingly or reluctantly, repudiated the spirit of Islam as a religion of peace and social justice, by their irrational and reckless destruction of the lives and properties of their fellow citizens and their defiance of constituted military and civil authorities. The intermittent outburst of violent destruction of lives and properties by ill-advised Moslem youths who sometimes surface from their Mosque or after a secret deadly resolution to impose catastrophe and havoc on their fellow citizens for flimsy and unjustified reasons is also another instance. These fanatics and fundamentalists, misguided by a wrong understanding and interpretation of the true spirit of Islamic jihad have often sought to provoke war and violence for selfish interests (James 143).

Several factors responsible for religious violence in Nigeria have been identified in literature (Omotosho, 2003; Gofwen, 2004; Iwara, 2006; Salawu, 2010; Sampson, 2012; Alao, 2019). Whereas most of these causes conflate, emphasis in literature has been on the underlying socio-economic, political and governance factors that gestate not only

religious conflicts, but violent conflicts in Nigeria generally. However this paper is focused on the immediate and visible factors that generate religious violence and how it impact on the population. Some of these factors include:

Personalization of religion

In non-western countries, people find it convenient to identify themselves through religion in terms of dressing, name or conversation. With the introduction of modernity, there was an increased amount of religious consciousness and personalization. In Nigeria, especially in the north, identity is based on primordial factors such as ethnicity, nation, race, language and religion. These primordial factors separate an individual from another. Religion, which is one of the most important primordial factors have led to personalization among the same citizens of different ethnicity, nation and language in Nigeria.

In the northern part of Nigeria, there are two distinct religions that are personalized, Islam and Christianity. The majority of the citizens are Muslims while the minorities are mostly Christians. This has generated discrimination by the majority against the minority. That is why Gurr (1993) argues that discrimination against an ethnic minority provides the basis for the minority to form an opposition to protest and terminate the perceived discrimination. Fox (2000) concurs with Gurr by stating that religious factors are capable of giving rise to discrimination and grievances, which can give rise to ethnic and religious conflicts. In a nutshell, religion personalization can lead to religious discrimination and ultimately degenerate to extremism, fundamentalism and terrorism. When religion is personalized, adherents tend to see their religion as superior to another which forms a strong mark in their mind to fight and die for their religious beliefs and use religion to justify the use of violence. This is the true picture of religious violence in Nigeria.

Extremism and Intolerance

Extremism is as good as fanaticism. Extremism on both sides is another important reason behind religious crisis in Nigeria. In most cases this extremism results from poor knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the religion being defended by the groups from the two sides. Religious intolerance means hostility towards other religions, as well as the inability of religious adherents to harmonize the theoretical and the practical aspect of religion. Intolerant devotion to one's opinions and prejudices especially the expression of intolerance and animosity toward persons of differing beliefs leads to violence.

Religious conversion

Religious adherents of both Islam and Christianity in Nigeria believe that their religion is not only superior but possess salvation for one's soul and the enjoyment of life after death. This is done by preaching religious conversion. Jenkins (2002) argues that the mechanism of religious conversion has the capacity to promote rivalry and shift the demographic balance between adherents of different religions within a state. Thus, religious conversion can bring about demographic shift and cause religious violence. Although, Boko Haram may not be able to account for religious conversion as a factor for religious violence because their activities have shifted from persecuting Christians to Muslims that they believe are not true believers of Islam. However, religious conversion is a significant threat to Muslims in the north who are dominant citizens in the area.

Depletion of Cultural Values

This is ramified in the fact that man no longer attaches the expected value to the sanctity of life. The African virtue of being our brother's keeper has been eroded.

Isolated Settlement and Heterogeneous State

Olomojobi (2013) asserts that Islamic faith is largely practiced in the northern region of Nigeria in sixteen States: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Jigawa, Nassarawa, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Three states, Benue, Plateau and Taraba have a Muslim minority while Kano, Kastina and Sokoto are historically centers of Islamic education and missionary activities. He notes that commercial activities and the existence of profitable opportunities in agriculture and trade, including the railway system and the establishment of federal institutions across the north led to the increased influx of other ethnic groups from other parts of Nigeria to the north. Instead of the indigenes of the north to allow other ethnic groups to settle wherever they found space, they are stationed to a particular territory called Sabon Gari quarters (strangers' quarters) across the north. This is so because the practice of Islam which is based on Sharia law divides men into two groups: those belonging to the Umma and those outside the Community. This brings us to the issue of heterogeneous states. Wimmer, 2003; Fox, 2000 and Gurr, 1993 argue that the initial stages of establishing a democratic order in a heterogeneous state are likely to produce ethnic and religious conflicts. Nigeria, which is a heterogeneous state have witness more religious and ethnic crises since 1999. Thus, separate settlement and heterogeneous states give room for contention between the indigenous Muslim and the immigrants especially those that belong to non-Islamic faith.

Religious hegemony

Both Islam and Christianity adherents fight for dominance of their religious faith. However, Islamic religion does not only unite ethnic groups but also dominate the northern part of Nigeria. Along this line, Lincoln (2003) argues that religious conflict arises when the 'religion of the status quo' is used as a source of domination over 'religions of resistance'. This, in the long run, can result in religious conflict between the dominant majority and the dominated religious minorities. Hence, while Islam is the 'religion of the status quo', Christianity is the 'religion of resistance'.

Unemployment/Illiteracy

Youth unemployment and illiteracy are no doubt major problems in Nigeria, threatening its national security, considering the inability of the government to adequately engage the teeming youth population to be productive. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), statistics show that unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 23.9 % during the first half of the year 2011. In addition to the already daunting statistics of over 43 million unemployed youth, an additional 1.8 million people joined the long queue. This was attributed to fresh entrants to the job market and worker layoffs across all sectors of the economy in the year (Afolabi, 2013:2). Also, of the 100 million Nigerians living in abject poverty, those who can afford essentials of food, shelter and clothing — the majority reside in the northern states. The north-west has the highest poverty rate with 70% of its people living below $1 per day. The north-east follows with 69% and the north-central with 59.5%. The three southern zones have no cause to rejoice either as poverty level there ranges between 49.8% and 58.7%. This shows the level of frustration of unemployed youth

who have constituted a threat to the national security of the State because invariably, an idle hand is the devil's workshop. Hence, the alarming rate of youth unemployment impact on the level of insecurity in the country whereby youths are recruited into terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, theft and also as instruments for religious violence.

Poverty

Poverty is a worst and unpalatable situation which can make man to think of getting rich by any means possible without thinking of the consequences. Some of our religious and political leaders are deliberately creating situations of poverty among their adherents and followers and they capitalize on the opportunity offered by this ugly situation to employ these hungry youths in unleashing terror and threat to life. The almajiri system is a case in point.

Negative Roles of some Religious Leaders

Obioha (2008) submitted that, the occurrence of these conflicts cannot be divorced from the activities of some religious leaders, both of Christian religion and Islam. According to him, some of them present their religion as the best, while others are no religion, or worse still, false religions. Some preach inciting sermons that encourages their followers to violence. Cases abound in Kano and Kaduna where Muslims would commence rioting from the mosque after listening Friday sermons from their imams. It is such that people approach Fridays with trepidations.

Suspicion among the Various Adherents Involved

It can be rightly said according to Alabi and Lateju, (2014) that, just as Christians are suspicious of Muslims, so also Muslims mistrust Christians. For clarification, Adeniyi, for example, blames Christianity for the violent religious climate in Nigeria. He explained that Islam and African religion co-existed peacefully until Christianity came in ten centuries later, with its evangelistic determination to wipe out Islam and African religions.

Religion and Population Growth in Nigeria

Literature confirms that Nigeria is the most populous nation in sub-Saharan Africa. But according to *Adekoya (*2017) and evidenced in Afolabo (2016) this rapid population growth is not an economic advantage rather it has become a looming disaster that politicians have either been powerless to stop or lacks the political will to control. A few years ago, when the "Africa rising" mantra was in full force, the continent's population growth was touted as an asset, a comparative advantage over the rest of the world. While Western populaces, particularly in Europe, were aging and was predicted to shrink in the coming decades, Africa's fast-growing and youthful population was expected to provide the dynamism and consumer base needed to power its economy and transform the continent into a global growth engine.

For *Adekoya (*2017), one country that to personified this narrative was Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa's most populous nation, which boasted between 7 and 8 percent GDP growth for much of the 2000s. Unfortunately, now that the global commodity slump especially in the oil sector has plunged Nigeria into its worst economic crisis in two decades, and pushed youth unemployment through the roof, it is evident that far from a dividend, the country's demographics is now a disaster waiting to happen. And the time bomb is ticking faster than we feared. For example, Hausa youths are being stowed to the

South as willing tools for violence. Back in 2017, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics revealed that the country's population was estimated to have surpassed 193 million, significantly exceeding the earlier U.N. projection of 187 million in 2016. Meaning that, the U.N.'s much-publicized forecast that Nigeria will overtake the United States as the world's third-most populous nation by 2050 will likely happen much sooner than projected. (Nigeria's fertility rate is 5.13 children per woman, compared with 1.87 per woman in the United States).

Part of the optimism surrounding Nigeria's population growth stemmed from the country's abundant natural resource wealth, which was expected to power investments in infrastructure, industry and education, among others. But with markets as volatile as they are, it is clear that oil and gas revenue - which accounts for 95 percent of export earnings and 70 percent of government revenue - is no longer enough to keep a country the size of Nigeria afloat. Indeed, since oil prices started to drop in mid-2014 to its current lowest, Nigeria's currency has depreciated more than 170 percent against the dollar while the country's GDP has contracted accordingly in dollar terms.

The 2017 national budget was the largest ever when measured in local currency, but at the then current market exchange rate - though not the official one, which has been largely fictitious - it amounts to a meager $15 billion. The government of Kansas, population 2.9 million, has a bigger budget than Nigeria. In per capita terms, the situation is even bleaker. The government had just $77 to spend on each citizen in 2017. A nation with a population fast approaching 200 million earmarked just $290 million for education (including capital spending), less than a third of what Harvard University spent on research and development alone - meaning that many of the country's newest citizens were likely to join the 62 million Nigerians who are currently illiterate and most of them from the North.

In other words, a large percentage of Nigeria's rapidly expanding population will have few or none of the skills needed to secure decent-paying jobs, build sustainable businesses, or otherwise contribute to a globalized 21st-century economy. Many are likely to join the already 30-million-strong army of unemployed youths aged 15 to 34. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, more than 45 percent of the country's 69 million youths are either unemployed or underemployed — and this is a conservative estimate. With such grim employment statistics, it's little wonder that violent crime, including kidnappings and armed robberies, is on the rise while ethnic tensions, never far from the surface in Nigeria, are growing.

So what can be done to defuse this ticking time bomb? Various Nigerian governments have attempted to promote family planning, but these programmes have had limited impact due to their modest scope and inability to change deeply embedded cultural and religious sensibilities that encourage large families and unbridled procreation through polygamy and multiple marriages especially in the North. Pushing birth control is not easy in a society where children are widely regarded as "blessings from God." Human interference in such heavenly matters is considered arrogant and presumptuous especially by the Catholics. Economic calculations also drive the desire for many children, especially in rural societies. In a society lacking a social safety net, parents rely on their children to provide for them in old age. The more future caregivers you have, the brighter your retirement prospects.

There is also a pervasive cultural belief, perhaps reinforced by the "Africa rising" narrative, that Nigeria draws strength from its numbers. A large and growing population is one of the two main pillars supporting Nigeria's vaunted status as the ordained "Giant of Africa" (the other pillar is the country's significant natural resource wealth, the value of

which most of the population overestimates). It is partly for this reason that family planning campaigns, perceived as driven by foreigners and especially white people, are often viewed as a conspiracy to weaken Nigeria and Africa in general.

Given these entrenched realities, it makes sense to turn to the only people capable of changing minds on issues as sensitive as family planning: religious leaders. Most Nigerians are fiercely attached to their religious leaders, be it the imams and mallams in the predominantly Muslim north or the charismatic pastors of the mostly Christian south. In a society where the corrupt political class has been thoroughly discredited, religious leaders are *the* authority figures. If enough of them could be persuaded that the country is heading for disaster if population growth is not curbed, they might be willing to support a broad-based family planning campaign. Traditional rulers could also be engaged in such an exercise, since they also retain significant authority at the grassroots level.

This type of cooperation between religious and political leaders has succeeded in promoting family planning in other deeply conservative societies - post-revolutionary Iran, for instance - and the basis for it is already in place. Nigeria's politicians and religious leaders have long enjoyed a symbiotic relationship: Politicians rely on religious leaders to bolster their legitimacy and in return provide generous funding to build mosques and churches. This quid pro quo is especially pronounced in the northern Muslim parts of the country where sharia, or Islamic law, is practiced, religious authority is especially strong, and birth rates tend to be higher than among southern Christians.

The latest population figures must serve as a clarion call for the Nigerian government and its international partners to come up with policies, programmes, and campaigns aimed at slowing down the birth rate while also providing better opportunities for those already born. The country's demographic explosion should stop being presented as an opportunity or an asset; it is a disaster waiting to happen for a nation with Nigeria's limited resources.

Effects of Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Critically speaking one does not need to be soothsayer, fortune-teller or a prophet to appreciate the fact that religious crisis has colossal negative effects on the socio-moral and economic growth of the society. Religious and ethnic crisis affects the foreign direct investment (FDI) flow into Nigeria. FDI has positive relationship with economic growth as the more FDI flows into the country the more jobs are created, the higher the per capita income and the higher the standard of living. This is buttressed by Onwumah (2014) who posited that in economic terms, religious and ethnic crisis damages resources and facilities which took time to acquire. No foreign investor will like to invest funds in a country that is divided by communal, religious and ethnic crises (Ayinla, 2003). The basic aim of foreign investment is to make profit which is not possible in an environment of crises. The resources invested already will definitely go down the drains.

Mechanism for Peace in Religious Violence

Paden (2005) argues that the first step in conflict resolution and mediation is to analyze the nature and dynamics of the grassroots conflicts, then to assess the human resources available for the conflict mitigation, including the capacity of traditional civic cultures to adapt to new conflict challenges. This is an important mechanism of bringing peace in religious violence due to the fact that conflict is fueled with resources which can be used to bring sustainable peace and development in the society. However, it is important to note that strategies used in curtailing conflict differ from one culture to the other. Moreover, resources should be distributed evenly across the country. Nigeria is too rich to be among

the poorest countries in the world. The wealth of the country is more concentrated in few individuals and this lead to abject poverty of large percentage of Nigerian citizen where the gap between the rich and poor is wide. One of the root causes of religious violence is the poverty level in the country, most especially in the north. The poor in the north are the unemployed youth, miscreants, the *talakawa* and the *almajirai*. Olomojobi (2013) argues that in northern Nigeria, the root of religious clashes could be traced to class struggles and resources control. In social terms, the lack of economic independence for the young generation leads to denial of economic welfare such as housing and the lack of access to justice. This leads to the lack of education, producing disadvantaged adults, which leads to the tendency to commit crimes. In addition, the government should reduce the level of illiteracy by providing education to the teeming youth, most especially in the north where there is high rate of illiteracy. Also, they should imbibe the culture of accountability, good governance and bring the dividends of democracy to the grassroots by improving their quality of lives through economic empowerment. More importantly, they should be alert to early warning signals of conflict so as to prevent it early enough before it escalates. Moreover, religion can bring about peace where religious violence thrives by stressing the importance of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Though this might not go down well with some Muslims who view such tolerance as sacrilegious, but this can be done by various religious leaders in teaching their followers that both Islam and Christianity accommodates plurality of religious faiths. The government should take the responsibility to orientate the populace while the press should use their resources to curtail conflict by promoting inter-faith programmes and revealing areas of inter-faith harmony.

Conclusion

Although religion has been portrayed as a source of worry to humanity due largely to the vicious, violent and murderous activities of some religious zealots and fanatics; misconceptions and selfish interests of religious leaders which negates the spirit of religion, it can safely be deduced that religion as institution, play enormous role in the lives of a people. We can therefore conclude that, there is a need to understand the etymology of peace which is derived from the Latin word pax; meaning agreement or contract.

For peace to reign there is a need for agreement or contract between and among diverse religions, ethnic groups, languages, race and political parties etc. It is the people that would determine when and how they want peace in a given society. In a nutshell, if the spirit of true patriotism is instilled in the heart of every Nigerian citizen through transparent and exemplary leadership in political and religious practices, the rate of religious violence would be significantly reduced to a minimal level. It is important to conclude by affirming what Olomojobi (2013) said in suggesting that the basis of the ongoing religious crises in contemporary Nigeria is deeply rooted in the country's ontological and historical inheritance as a state. Also, it is due to perceived grievance in respect of ignorance, economic stagnation, youth unemployment and disempowerment in the northern part of Nigeria.

References

Abeysekara, A. (2002). Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity and Difference. Colombia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.

Adah, A. (2013). "Will relocation of Tafawa Balewa LG headquarters guarantee peace?" *Hallmark. Archived from* the original *on 2014-06-21*. Retrieved 2014-06-21.

Adamu, J. and Igboeroteonwu, A. (2014). "Nigerian Sharia architect defends law". BBC. Retrieved, 7 June, 2014.

Adekoya, R. (2017). **Only Religion Can Defuse Nigeria's Demographic Time Bomb** https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/10/only-religion-can-defuse-nigerias-demographic-time-bomb/ **Retrieved 18/05/2020**

Afeno, O. S. (2012). The Boko Haram uprising and Insecurity in Nigeria: Intelligence Failure or Bad Governance?

Afolabi O. O. (2016). Religious Violence and National Security in Nigeria, 1999 – 2011 *International Affairs and Global Strategy* www.iiste.org ISSN 2224-574X (Paper) ISSN 2224-8951 (Online) Vol.42, 2016

Afolabi, O. O. (2013). "The Rate of Youth Unemployment and its effects on National Security", Cultural and Religious Studies. Vol. 1, No1. 2.

Astill, J. and Bowcott, O. (2002). "Fatwa is issued on Nigerian journalist". Guardian Unlimited. Retrieved, 2007-07-21.

Awolalu, J. O. (1976). "What is African Traditional Religion?" Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol.10, No. 2. (Spring), 1.

Barak, G. (2003). Violence and Nonviolence. Pathways to Understanding, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 26.

Clinton, H. (2009). "Nigeria: Lack of Good governance", The Nation, 14 August, 1.

Dickson, D. (2008). Political Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Need for a New Research and Diplomatic Agenda. [Online] Available: http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr140.pdf (November 30, 2008).

Dzugba, A. (1991). "RES 214: An Introduction to Sociology of Religion. Second Edition", The Centre for External Studies, University of Ibadan, 93.

Eills, S and Haar, G. T. (1998), "Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa". The Journal of Modern African Studies 26 (2), 188.

Fox, J. (2000). "Religion as an Overlooked Element in International Relations", International Studies Review 3(3), 53-73.

Fox, J. (2000). "Religious Causes of Ethnic Discrimination". International Studies Quarterly, Sept, 423-450.

Fox, J. (2000). "The Effects of Religious Discrimination of Ethnic Protest and Rebellion". Journal of Conflict Resolution 20 (2), 16-43.

Funk and Wagnalls. (1993). Standard Desk Dictionary. U.S.A R.P Donnelley & Sons Company.

Gofwen, R. I. (2004), Religious conflicts in northern Nigeria and nation building: The throes of two decades 1980–2000, Kaduna, Human Rights Monitor.

Gurr, T. R. (1993). Minority at Risk: A Global Viewpoint of Ethnopolitical Conflicts. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Hann, W. D. (2008). Violence as an Essentially Contested Concept in: S. Body- Gendrot and P. Spierenburg (eds.) Violence in Europe. Springer. [Online] Available: www.springer.com/cda/content/.../cda.../978038 7745077-c2.pdf? (July 28, 2015).

Harnischfeger, J. (2008). *Democratization and Islamic Law: The Sharia Conflict in Nigeria* Campus Verlag.

Henry, S. (2000). What is school violence? An integrated definition. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 16–30, 567.

Henry, S. and D. Milovanovic (1996). Constitutive Criminology. Beyond Postmodernism. London: Sage, 103.

Holman, M. (1986). "Nigeria, Politics; Religious Differences Intensify", *Financial Times*

Hornby, A. S. (1995). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: Students edition London: Oxford University Press.

http://hrmars.com/hrmars_papers/The_Effects_of_Religious_Crisis_on_Economic_Development_in_Nigeria.pdf

Iadicola, P. and A. Shupe (1998). Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom. New York: General Hall.

Ibrahim, J. (1989). "Politics of religion in Nigeria: The Parameters of the 1987 Crisis in Kadana State'. *Review of African Political Economy,* 45, 65-82. pp. 65–68, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4006011, accessed on 01/11/2011

Iwara, U.E. (2006). "Religious Violence in Nigeria: Causes and Consequences", Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy, 8 (2), 153–157.

Jenkins, P. (2002). The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Juergensmeyer, M. (2001). Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence. Berkeley: University of California Press, 105.

Juergensmeyer, M. (ed.). (2005). Religion in Global Civil Society. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 26.

Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African Philosophy for Christian-Muslim Relations in Northern Nigeria. In Mahmoud Misaeli (Ed.). *Spirituality and Global Ethics* (pp. 300-310). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kanu, I. A. (2016). Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria as a Religio-Political *Locus Theologicus* for *Misericordia Vultus. Harvard Journal of Humanities and Social sciences.* Vol. 3. No. 4. pp. 117-128.

Kanu, I. A. (2017). Igwebuike as an Igbo-African modality of peace and conflict resolution. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars. Vol. 1. No. 1. pp. 31-40.*

Kanu, A. I; Omojola, I. O.; Bazza, M. B. (2019). Boko Haram and Forced Migration: A Focus on the Northeast and Lake Chad Basin. Published in *Nnadiebube Journal of Education in Africa.* Vol. 4. No. 2. pp. 1-13.

Kanu, Ikechukwu A. & Ndubisi J. O. Ejikemeuwa (2018) (Eds.). *Religion, Morality and Peace-Building in Africa: Ambiguities and the Imperfect Human Condition.* Lambert Academic Publishing: Germany.

Kanu, I. A. & Ushe M. U. (2018). The Religious Politics of Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen Menace: A Resurgence of Islamic Fundamentalism. In Kanu, I. A. & Ndubisi J. O. E (Eds.). *Religion, Morality and Peace-Building in Africa: Ambiguities and the Imperfect Human Condition* (pp. 109-183). Lambert Academic Publishing: Germany.

Kukah, M. (2003). Human Rights in Nigeria. Hopes and Hindrances. Aachen: missio. [Online] Available: http://www. missio-aachen. de/Images/MR%20Nigeria%20englisch_tcm14-12285.pdf. 31.

Kukah, M. H. (1993). Religion, politics and power in northern Nigeria, Ibadan: Spectrum, 9.

Lincoln, B. (2003). Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11. Chicago, III: University of Chicago Press. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. (1995). 3rd edition.

Maier, K. (2000). The House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis. London: Penguin Books, 154. National Bureau of Statistics. (2010), National Survey, 2010. Abuja: Nigeria.

Minchakpu, O. (2001). "Religious Riots in Nigeria Leave Hundreds Dead". Christianity Today. Retrieved 2008-11-30.

Olomojobi, Y. (2013). Islam and Conflict in Northern Nigeria. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.

Omotosho, A. O. (2003). Religious Violence in Nigeria – The Causes and Solutions: An Islamic Perspective. Swedish Missiological Theme, 16.

Paden, J.N. (2005). Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria. Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 29.

Riches, D. (Ed.) (1986). The Anthropology of Violence. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 8.

Salawu, B. (2010). "Ethno-religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies". European Journal of Social Sciences, 13 (3), 345–353.

Sampson, I. T. (2012). Religious Violence in Nigeria: Causal Diagnoses and Strategic Recommendations to the state and Religious Communities.

THE "MISS WORLD RIOTS": Continued Impunity for Killings in Kaduna. Human Rights Watch, Vol. 15, No. 13 (A), 23 July 2003.

Ukiwo, U. (2003). "Politics, Ethnic-Religious Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria", Journal of Modern African Studies 41(1), 124.

"Understanding Boko Haram – A Theology of Chaos: by Chris Ngwodo". Nigeriaplus.com. 2010-10-06. Archived from the original on 13 March 2012. Retrieved 13 March 2012.

Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies, by Toyin Falola, pg 212.

Wimmer, A. (2003). "Democracy and Ethno-religious Conflict in Iraq". Survival 45(4), The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 111-134.