

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FORCES AS A MAJOR CAUSE OF RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN THIRD WORLD STATES

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ABSTRACT

Issues such as lower per capital income, low level of human capital, high level of poverty, high population growth rate, corruption, unemployment, coup d'état among others are characteristics of third world countries. Indeed, these are salient features of poor third world states such as Africa, Asia and Latin America. Perhaps, it is appropriate to say the aforementioned are most prevalent in those countries just as it would be correct to say they are almost non – existent in advanced western countries. The paper adopts the modernization theory which stipulates that third world countries are only going through a stage which western advanced countries had passed through. In other words, such issues aforementioned that are synonymous with third world states are clear manifestations of stages through which they are going through before getting to the final stage of development just like first world countries went through. Consequently, these have impacted on the socio-economic as well as political forces of the states. To this end, certain structures and institutions have been affected negatively of which the outcome is devastating. The outcome of this faulty structure is multifaceted but for the purpose of this paper, we shall limit ourselves to result that bother on ethnic divide, ethnic religious dichotomy to a more complex full blown religious crisis resulting in war as witnessed in many countries across the world such as Asia, Africa and Nigeria inclusive. In addition to these, it intends to expose some obvious or covert reasons for this through the study of documentation and content analysis. At the end, the paper made recommendations could help minimize the indices of socio-economic crisis and invariably religious crisis.

Key words: Poverty, Corruption, Unemployment, Socio-economy, religious crisis

1.0 Introduction

Religious crisis amongst other sociopolitical complexities is a direct outcome of issues such as ethnic division, corruption, unemployment, high levels of poverty, coup d'état, social injustice/inequality and bad leadership. These features listed above are salient characteristics of third world countries. There is no doubt that third world countries are bedeviled with such challenges. This is contrary to what is obtainable in advanced western countries. Because third world countries are constantly embroiled in such issues, the status quo has provided a crack in the system which allows anti-progressive elements to flourish.

A critical analysis of the aforementioned reveals that they are pro-conflict issues i.e issues aiding conflict in any political system. However, it will be perhaps right to accept these challenges attributed to third world countries as permanent features of the latter. Mainstream theories such as the modernization and development theorist have clearly alluded to this fact. According to Rostow

“crisis is inevitable in Africa because the society is experiencing like the western society did, some transition from traditionalism to modernity”(Ogundiya, 2012).

Rostow propounded a model which became popular and known as Rostow’s stages of growth. He argued that development took place in 5 stages; traditional society, pre – conditions for take – off, take – off, drive to maturity, age of mass consumption. Rostow, therefore, maintains that third world countries are only passing through a stage which western advanced countries had passed through before attaining full modernity.

What this paper seeks to do is to create a link between the prevailing socioeconomic structure of a third world country like Nigeria, for example and religious crisis. It also hopes to outline the various characteristics of the latter and point out how this can cause national disintegration.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 Third World

The concept of third world countries came into limelight during the cold war era. This was done with the aim of classifying countries that were neither aligned with the NATO nor with the communist bloc. The United States, Western European nations and their allies formed the NATO which was known as the First World. The Soviet Union, China, Cuba and their allies constituted the communist bloc and also represented the Second World. This concept of ascribing nomenclature in numerical terms to the countries of the world was simply an attempt to provide a broad plat form for categorizing the countries of the world into three (3) groups using political, social, economic and cultural factors as parameters.

Naturally, almost all the African countries that had one form of stint or the other, with Europe and other western colonial powers were automatically under third world nations alongside Latin America, Oceania, and Asia. In the so – called dependency theory of thinkers like Raul Presbich, Walter Rodney, Theotonio Dos Santos and Andrew Gunder Frank, the third world has also been connected to the world economic division as “periphery” countries in the world system that is dominated by the core countries (Tomlinson, 2003).

As a result of complexities of history resulting from definitions and contexts there has not been a clearly defined and unanimously accepted definition of third worlds. The reason for this is because some countries in the communist, bloc such as Cuba were categorized under third world. It is important to note that countries that were originally categorized under this group were countries of the world that were extremely poor and non – industrialized, it therefore became stereotype to refer to poor countries as such. However, the term also encompassed newly industrialized countries such as Brazil, India, and China. Note also that, it was on record that there are countries in Europe that were not aligned to either Bloc during the cold war, yet some of them were prosperous such as Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland and Ireland.

Etymologically, French demographer and historian, Alfred Sauvy in an article published in the French magazine *L’observateur*, August 1952, coined the term ‘third world’ referring to countries that were unaligned with either soviet communist bloc or the capital NATO bloc during the cold war (Derek, 2009). He used the third world as a reference to the third Estate, the commoners of France who before and after the French Revolution opposed the clergy and nobles who made up the first

and second Estate respectively. In the words of Sauvy, “this third world, ignored, exploited despised, like the third estate wants to be something”. By this, reference is being made to the unequal and exploitative relationship that existed between the “periphery” and the “core” countries. In this relationship, the western advanced countries exploited the natural resources of the periphery countries to develop their countries to underdeveloped Africa.

Derek *et al* are of the opinion that as a result of complexities of history evolving from meanings and contexts, there is no clear or agreed upon definition of the third world. Some countries in the communist bloc such as Cuba are regarded as the “third world”. The reason for this is that many countries in the third world are extremely poor and non – industrialized. This is a contradiction to the first definition which aptly categorized the countries of the world into three, namely first, second and the third and categorized Cuba under the second world. It has now become stereotype to view or classify poor countries as third world countries.

However, note that apart from this categorical distinction, the concept of third world is often loosely used to refer to newly industrialized countries such as China, Brazil and India. Another point worthy of note is that, although third world concept was used categorically to refer to those countries that were non – aligned either to the communist nor to the west, and at the same time encompassing extremely poor countries. History has it that, some European countries were part of the non – aligned movement and a few were and they are very prosperous including Austria, Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland. This is yet another contradiction as western European countries were all categorized as first world under NATO. Note however, that in the last few decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, the concept of the third world has been used interchangeably with the least developed countries, the Global South and developing countries. These are concepts which emerged to equate the concept of third world to refer to those poor countries that strive to attain steady economic development. (Gregory, 2009),

Bauer offered a totally different dimension in the understanding of the concept of third world. In his view, the attachment of third world status to a particular country was not based on any stable economic or political criteria, but rather an arbitrary process of assigning nomenclature to the countries of the world. He maintains that “the large diversity of countries considered part of the third world – from Indonesia to Afghanistan – ranged widely from economically primitive to economically advanced and from politically non aligned to soviet or western leaning (Macleans, 2010).

According to him, this argument could also be put forward to defend how parts of the US are more like the third world. Evidently, Bauer does not share the view of others in their understanding of the concept of third world which categorically encompasses the whole of African countries as economically backward countries. If that were the case, then how would one explain the presence of some countries in the United States under the umbrella of third world states, after all the US and its allies are all categorized under the first world.

A characteristic point of convergence he found amongst the states in the third world is that they all demand and receive western aid which he strongly disagree with. The term therefore has been regarded as misleading even during the cold war period as the term lacks collective and consistent identity with amongst the countries it supposedly encompassed.

2.2. Religious Conflicts

Religion has since the beginning of time till date played a very significant role in the life of man and society. It has remained the single spiritual stabilizing factor in man's existence no matter his position, wealth or intellect. Religion draws this unbeatable influence from the knowledge and realization that 'Religion is God'. Man has equated religion with God. Man believes, it is only through religion that he can discover God. Thus, it plays a significant role in shaping the attitude and thinking of man. According to Anyawu and Nwanja

Africa as a continent seems to confirm the long lasting belief that man is deeply religious because of the plurality of religion and religious beliefs which are found in it: there are moderates and extremists, fanatics and realist, simple minded believers and complex adherents, liberals and conservatives, and they all contribute to the multi religious nature of Nigeria (Anyanwu, 2010).

Because of the power of religion to either cause development, stability and other positive variables necessary for national integration or retard progress or cause disintegration, it therefore becomes necessary to examine the link between religion and conflict. The link between these two variables has thus resulted in the concept of religious violence. According to Wellman (2004:4),

religious violence is a term that covers phenomena where religion in its diversity is the subject or object of violent behaviours. Religious violence then becomes motivated or indulged by the reaction of the adherents to either their own or other's religious beliefs, values, norms, doctrines or set action.

Various research works have pointed to religious conflicts as a direct outcome of prevailing political and socioeconomic issues such as poverty, failure of the social contract and wrong indoctrination of religious teachings as well as attitude of intolerance. In his own view Emo (1995) opines that religious conflict could be caused by the "inability of a society or a religion(s) to understand and harmonize conflicting issues with other religious (inter-religious) while the other is a function of the diversity of the doctrinal interpretation within the same religion (intra – faith conflict)". Thus, religious crisis is a situation of social instability, chaos, unrest resulting from the people of two religions or more and inability to respect, tolerate or accommodate one another on the basis of each religious teaching and doctrines or a situation where one religious group claims superiority over the remaining religious groups and seeks to impose or enforce its teachings and doctrines or adherents of the remaining religious groups in an entity. A situation of this nature would no doubt create friction amongst the various adherents and thus lead to instability. A religious conflict metamorphoses into full – blown war if not properly contained and checked early enough.

3.0. Theoretical Framework

It is necessary to adopt a model or theoretical framework which will best explain the position of this paper that socioeconomic forces are pivotal to religious crisis in the third world.

3.1. The Modernization theory: This theory is also known as development theory. It is one of the several approaches that have been adopted to analyze political, economic and social processes in Africa basically and other third world states in the globe, taking into consideration particularly those states that have had the encounter of an unbalanced exploitative relationship with the west. Some of

the major concerns of this school include subjects relating to democracy, national integration and stability in the various institutions. Foremost amongst the scholars in this school are Gabriel Almond, David Apter and others. Rostow put forward the major arguments in the school. According to him, crisis is inevitable in Africa because the “society is experiencing like the western did, some transition from traditionalism to modernity” (Ogundiya and Baba, 2012). Therefore, the process of state evolution, transition or modernization is characterized by the replication of the social, economic and political system of the developed or civilized western advanced democracy. Rostow maintains further that the

process of transition or shift from traditional to modernity will be unavoidably faced with the challenges identified by Lucian Pye as the crisis of identity, crisis of political penetration, crisis of political participation, crisis of political legitimacy, crisis of economic distribution (Pye, 1971).

A careful study of the crisis or challenges enumerated by Pye will reveal that they are the same challenges which form the bedrock of any third world. Basically, religious crisis are often sparked off by any or a combination or better still all of the following:

1. Poverty;
2. Unstable government;
3. Bad leadership;
4. Unemployment;
5. Ethnic divide;
6. Zero Tolerance level of different ethnic and religious adherents;
7. The emergence of new religious ideology and doctrines; and
8. Absence of developed intelligent and matured intellectuals especially in religious teachings.

In view of this, it is clear that modernization theory is the most appropriate model to be employed in analyzing this paper.

4.0. Establishing a Link between Socio – Economic Forces and Religious Crisis in Third World

Socioeconomic factors are essential tools of analysis in understanding stability or instability in a state. Socioeconomic factor can be viewed as a single compound word which refers to or explain social and economic realities of an entity. Social factors for example include such issues as religion, culture, beliefs/attitudes, norms/values in a society. These variables to a large extent impact either positively or negatively on the thinking of peoples of that society which consequently determine the social structure in that environment, i.e whether weak or strong social structure.

In the same vein, economic forces are issues relating to economic distribution, condition of living, issue of per capita income, equal and unequal distribution of resources amongst the various institutions, individuals and structures. Thus, economic forces may also allude to economic empowerment of the peoples of that country. For instance the availability of jobs or non – availability of jobs or in a nutshell, the general condition of existence. Economic factors are also integral to the factors aiding and promoting political and social stability as the case may be (Wiarda, 1990). Thus, cultural factors such as religion, ethnicity and primordial attachments in political processes of Africa are necessary as well as critical factors to be considered in trying to understand instability in Africa.

Indeed the factors above are essential tools to be used in explaining crisis in third world states. Summarily, poverty, political, economic, and social inequalities between groups predispose them to conflict.

A careful look at the social dimensional factor as generating conflict in third world states, would suggest heavily that many groups of people who take part in conflict see themselves as belonging to a common culture (ethnic/religion) and perhaps perceive it that they are fighting for the simple cause of retaining their cultural autonomy. No wonder, wars have been attributed “primordial” ethnic passions (Turton, 1997).

As for the economic aspect which present dimensions to it; this includes (1) group motivation (2) private motivation hypothesis (3) failure of the social contract (4) green war hypothesis. However, for the purpose of this paper, we shall restrict our discussion to the failure of the social contract. The social contract is derived from the view that social contract is based on a hypothetical social contract between the people and the government. People accept state authority so long as the state delivers services and provides reasonable economic conditions (employment/income). With economic stagnation or decline and worsening state services, the social contract breaks down and violence results, hence high and rising levels of poverty and a decline in state services would be expected to cause conflict (Nafziger and Auvinen, 1985).

The social contract aptly explains the status quo in most third world states. Thus, one would witness a break down or failure of the social contract. In this situation, the citizenry would turn against the constituted authority and thus a legitimate cause for conflict will emerge. The truth is that, most contemporary wars are not carried out as a result of an innate aggression, but a social and economic construction (Groebel and Hinde, 1989). War thus, is an attempt of course, through violence to settle disputes over political power, territorial and ethnic issues, and societal problems such as injustice. It is also an attempt to put right what has been wrong, restore justice, and emancipate people from the shackles of poverty.

The question now is ‘How does socioeconomics forces aid religious crisis?’

The answer is simple; a country embroiled in issues of socioeconomics is easily prone or susceptible to religious crisis and crisis of any nature for that matter. It is also important to stress that the challenges or issues in question are inherent problems in the third world. As result of these, the institutions have become weakened in an already shaky foundation. Similarly, the breakdown of the social contract is one strong point fueling religious conflicts. Government has failed in its ‘deal’ to deliver social services and amenities to the citizenry. Thus, the failure of the government in its executive capacity has provided a reason for people to seek mutual solace in one another, thus turning their backs on government because it has failed them. One of the ways in which they could do this includes ethnic and religious solidarity.

At this point, the government is already unstable and violence can break out at the slightest provocation. It is also important to stress that the status quo at this juncture is already creating divisions on ethnic and religious borders. Therefore, hostility amongst the various ethnic and religious groups is becoming manifest and at the same time a zero level tolerance attitude is developed. If the status quo continued in the manner portrayed for some time, the segregation amongst the groups is likely to deepen and strong animosity will exist between the various divisions.

War will erupt at any time and more than 90% of the people fighting the war are doing this for monetary gains in order to survive.

A good example of this can be found in some African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Egypt and others. No doubt, the crises in most African countries today have their genesis traceable to the above reasons which consequently result in war. Yemen is another country whose present crisis can be traced to the collapse of the social contract alongside other factors. Today, Yemen is one of the poorest and impoverished nations of the world.

In Nigeria, the issues, factors and the causes are not any different regarding the Boko Haram insurgency in the country's north eastern part. Socioeconomic factors have been cited as one of the major embers fueling the growth of the terrorist group, Nigeria is a country endowed with abundant natural resources with the potentials of being the largest economy in Africa and even beyond. However, bad leadership has resulted in high rate of poverty in the country. High level of unemployment, social inequality, corruption, bad governance, lack of security in a population of about 170 million with over 65% of this population accounting for youth. The rate of poverty is alarming.

It is suddenly dawning on the citizenry that the dividend of democracy is not getting to them and it is resulting in frustration. Against, this development, the group emerged to fight anything western and pro – government. Of course, with the coming of this group, many people who had felt isolated readily pitched tent with it. It was a fight against oppression, corruption, social injustice, low standard of living, poverty, marginalization and ultimately freedom to create their own perceived “ideal state”. In addition to this, the membership of this group increased in number because of the material gains that was likely to accrue from being a member of such a group as a result of the prevailing poverty on the side of the citizenry. This would have happened at the risk of compromising their religious ethics because they are well aware of the erroneous religious indoctrination the group was preaching, but the need for money was greater.

This is the reason for the views that the insurgency arose from socioeconomic sources and not religious. Thus religious crisis in third world countries usually is an outcome of socio-economic forces resulting from bad governance, corruption and weak institutions. It could be noted that the period since the 1980s has been spectacular for many African societies as the harsh economic conditions of the people have resulted into an upsurge of internal crisis. The period proved that there is a symbolic relation between poverty and internal conflicts in these societies.

It is clear from the above that the topic of this paper which states clearly that socioeconomic factors account highly for religious conflicts in many third world countries is a statement of fact. However, this paper recognizes the presence of other factors responsible for religious conflicts outside socioeconomics in developing countries. External influence is yet another factor that could explain religious crisis in the latter countries. This may be viewed at in two ways. The first could be as a result of loose security network along the various borders of that country which allows disgruntled elements freely into the country as it is the case with Nigeria and Boko haram insurgency.

Similarly, the contagious syndrome is yet another factor which a crisis in country A if not properly managed and contained may likely spill over to country B and C respectively. In addition to these, the case of refugees seeking asylum in neighbouring countries is another likely cause.

In the Nigerian situation vis – a vis the Boko Haram insurgency, the Arab spring fighters who ran away from Libya to join the Nigerian terrorist group reinforcement for the country and was a positive gain for the group. This is because it was reinforcement in all ramifications, strength, might, finance as well as moral and psychological support thus instilling in the group a renewed energy and valor. Money, arms, ammunitions (more sophisticated) and above all expertise were provided.

The second view is the western interference in some instances; religious crisis is sparked off in developing states as a result of western interference. It would be recalled that the Arab spring which started in Tunisia which finally led to the dethronement of Ben Ali was at the instigation of western powers and like was observed earlier on, the contagion syndrome took effect and the crisis in Tunisia replicated itself in Egypt and the rest. It is sad that decades after the era of colonialism, the colonial powers are still nursing the dream of continued ownership of huge natural resources of their colonized states in what some scholars called ‘colonial hang – over’.

This they hope to do by meddling in the domestic affairs of their former colonies. By causing chaos in such countries, the government would be unstable and this will afford them the opportunity of having access to the abundant natural wealth in that country. Like the cases of Iraq and Libya respectively. The US was instrumental in toppling the regimes of Saddam Hussain and Muammar Gaddafi in order to take advantage of the resources in those oil regions. The presence of the Islamic state for Iran and the Levant (ISIL) and the ISIS are the direct outcome of the wars in Iraq and Libya. The wars in those countries resulted in various sectional religious groups which had zero tolerance level toward one another and even the central government itself and this resulted in various factors which is spreading to not only the Arab region but beyond.

5.0. Conclusion

This paper has true to its claim of the topic that “socioeconomic factors largely influence religious crisis in the third world” put across a number of arguments to substantiate the claim. Having established this, the task left is to come up with strategies to change or minimize the status quo as we identified the reason responsible for this as inherent characteristics of developing states. When we say something is inherent means it is an innate thing which is part of something and it is difficult to separate. Therefore, in the opinion of this paper, it might be difficult to find total solution to this, but efforts can be made to reduce the trend to below minimal level.

Thus the issue of religious crisis in third world states is one requiring collective efforts by all stakeholders. The government is an important element in this crusade. There is need for complete restructuring of the leadership style. The fulcrum on which the political system is structured needs to be re-examined. A good government that is conscious of its people, the needs and aspiration is highly desirable. Pro – masses policies need to be implemented to enhance socioeconomic status of the citizenry. Beyond that, policies on equity, social justice bridging the gap between the rich and poor need to be focused on.

Corruption needs to be tackled headlong, no half measures. This has become necessary in order to enhance good governance which is pivotal to stability in any entity. Most importantly, it is necessary that third world countries should not make open the choice of leadership to ‘all and sundry’. The candidate for the esteemed position of president should be reserved for selfless, credible worthy and compassionate patriotic personalities.

A leader possessing this character trait will certainly move the country ahead. This paper is placing so much emphasis on leadership because in the absence of it there cannot be stability. With good leadership and governance all other problems can be addressed gradually. Good leadership will alleviate sufferings of its citizenry. It will provide economic relief and excellent social services will be provided. An atmosphere of peace, friendliness tolerance and security will prevail. This is contrary to what will be obtained when poverty and bad governance is the prevailing situation.

This paper based on findings cannot but conclude that basically that poverty or socioeconomics which is the major cause of religious intolerance in the third world is a direct result of bad governance and other related ills that accompany bad leadership. In the case of Nigeria, there is no mincing words that bad leadership, corruption is responsible for the present economic woes in the country, thus leading the country to where it is today. Given the position of Nigeria as the sixth oil producing nation in the world, one would naturally expect that the resources accruing to the country will be more than sufficient to cope with the needs of her citizens. Sad to say, that has not been the case. No year passes without the eruption of severe conflicts within and between religious groups in Nigeria. This is alluding to the fact that despites Nigeria's distinct and upper position in the hierarchy of oil producing nations in the world, bad leadership and corruption economically has led to the neglect of its people to the to the extent that economic frustration now provokes religious crisis.

On the part of the citizenry, there is need for them to be enlightened on the importance of abiding by rules of the governed. The importance of honouring the social contract deal between the citizenry and the government should be stressed as long as the government discharges its own part of the deal. More so, individual citizens should not allow themselves to be used by some disgruntled elements who are out to cause disability in the polity.

In addition to the above, education for all on religious doctrines should be a regular activity on the agenda of the government. This is necessary in order to equip the citizenry with requisite knowledge on religious doctrines so that no one would be carried away by some erroneous religious preaching by some religious fundamentalists.

Armed with these few points, it is the view of this paper, that third world countries would no longer be fixed with not only religious crisis but also will be taking a giant step towards transcending to second world if not first as the saying goes. Slow and steady does it.

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