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Religion and Geography: Location, Size, Neighbours and Boundaries of Nigeria

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Abstract

The concept of religion varies widely across different cultures and individuals. Some view religion as a source of meaning and guidance in life, while others may see it as a way to seek supernatural protection or avoid punishment after death. Regardless, religion often plays a significant role in shaping personal and societal values and practices. This work explores Religion and Geography: Location, Size, Neighbours and boundaries of Nigeria and relays the synergy between religion and geography as one area cannot do without the other, because geography is basically the study of the environment and how people live in it while religion occupies itself with the study of human beliefs and practices living in that same society. The methodology adopted in this work is purely descriptive approach. The findings show that religion and geography are interwoven in the sense that religion is anthropomorphic and deals with human beings and their belief system whereas geography is the scientific study of the earth's surface, analyzing them, describing them and explaining them all with a view to seeing how mankind can live a richer, better and safer life. The invisible supernatural beings in the study of religion are made manifest through the study of geography in the mundane physic-visible world. The work recommends that no one aspect should

be neglected but rather geography is a platform upon which religious beliefs and practices find expression in humans and man is at the centre of the study of religion. The research work concludes that both the study of religion and geography should be integrated properly in human development in this country Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Geography, Location, Size and boundaries of Nigeria

Introduction

Religious scholars, both in the past and present are awash in trying to arrive at a consensus in the definition of the concept of religion. This is because defining religion is a difficult task, as difficult as the phenomenon. Religious phenomena and their study are not done in isolation, they are concepts that interact with the society and other sectors inherent in the economy and geography is a major sector in the study of religion because studying the people, one must study the geography and ecology of the place. Therefore, what happens in the society affects religious beliefs and practices vis-a-viz. Religion interfaces with the geography of the people. Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines geography as the scientific study of the earth's surface, analyzing them, describing them and explaining them all with a view to seeing how mankind can live a richer, better and safer life. Geography asks and tries to answer questions such as, in what ways does the surface of the earth differ from place to place? What objects of economic value occur naturally in different places? Why are there more people in some places than others? Why do people live in towns in some places and in villages in others? How do people earn their livelihood in different places? How does the environment pose a threat to human lives and property in different places?

Religion has been variously conceptualized as it has been seen to mean different things to different people. In the first instance, it is seen by many in a narrow sense to refer to a particular group. Some look at it from the point of view of the belief systems, moral norms, and values held by members of the society. Some others see it as an integral part of the culture of the people and as such, opined that there should be an examination of the influence of society on religion and the effects which religion has on society. Religion according to J. O. Awolalu is;

The means of communion and communication between the human and super human beings, between the sensible and the supersensible, between the finite and the infinite, between the visible and invisible in one word, between man and God (1979:187).

Religion is an intrinsic aspect of every human life and it forms the essential bed-rock upon which people's moral and social obligations are based. The question that has hitherto agitated the human mind is what is the relationship between religion and morality or better still, what is the origin of morality? In response to these questions, scholars are of divergent views. In the first instance, some held the view that what we call morality has its origin in the society in as much as the society has inculcated in people the sense of right and wrong. Also, it is contended that what we call "conscience" was inculcated in persons through the agency of the society. Another category opined that morality is a product of common sense.

Experience, they say, is the best teacher, as it is the constant accumulation of this experience over a long period of time that brought about the sense of right and wrong. Yet another group claimed that morality is a product of religion. It is God who put in people the sense of what is right and what is wrong thereby bringing about the sense of obligation. This is clearly attested to by Alan Richardson (1932) when he said that; “The sense of obligation to do that which is believed to be right is, in fact, the pressure of God upon every human life...” Emile Brunner (1989) corroborates this fact when he asserted that “man is unable to construct an ethical system without recourse of the deity” (EO). The same fact is expressed by a theologian, Karl Barth (1969:205) that, “Ethical knowledge and achievement are only possible through God's revelation, especially His final revelation in Jesus Christ”. This portends the fact that morality is indeed the idea of God who has imbued people with the consciousness of distinguishing right actions from wrong ones. Therefore, we assert that morality and religion are two sides of the same coin and cannot be detached one from another.

Parrinder (1968:13) remarks that religion, defined by Tylor (1871) as a belief in spiritual beings and by Bellah (1970:21) as a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence, has been more misunderstood and has suffered greater distortion by early writers than any other aspect of African life. Peel (1968:xi) suggests that religion maybe the most difficult subject for a sociologist to write about. As Evans-Pritchard (1965:15) points out, most of the influential writers on religion were agnostics or atheists who thought religious belief was absurd. Their intention was to explain away primitive religion as ‘an intellectual aberration, as a mirage induced by emotional stress or by its social function’. In a similar vein, Keesing (1976:385) states that anthropologists have tended to regard religion and world view 'as reflections systems in their own right. Bellah (1970:233) asserts that social scientists in general, have been inclined to explain religious beliefs as ignorance and an error, or as deliberate falsehoods propagated by elite to keep the lower classes resigned to misery. There is also the symbolic interpretation: the view that religious beliefs and actions really stand for something else, whether it is one's ancestors, one's dreams, or one's society.

This relentless reduction of religion to other levels of explanation eventually inspired a number of scholars trained in theology, such as Barrett (1968), Baeta (1962), Sundkler (1969), and Turner (1963, 1965-66, 1967), all of whom had studied independent church movements, to deliver the first blow on reductionism. They insisted on the fundamental importance of the theological perspective in the context of religious movements in Africa, namely, taking as the analytic starting point, the actor's belief in God, rather than reducing it to sociological, political, economic and psychological dimensions, or dismissing it as slicer error and ignorance. Several historians and social scientists, among them Peel (1968), Mitchell (1970) and Isichei (1982), delivered the second blow, in the course of which they considerably, deepened the explanatory efforts of the theologians. Their central assumptions included the recognition that people do believe in non-empirical entities (spiritual beings), and that associated with such belief in awe, faith and the sacred. They also assumed that these beliefs do have causal consequences for social action, and that meaning and ideas in general must be included among the social scientist's raw material and conceptual tools.

The implication so far would almost seem to be that religion is a unique subject, requiring a unique scholarly approach. Evans-Pritchard (1965:121), recognizing the difficulty in penetrating the inner essence' of religion, evoked Schmidt's viewpoint that the non-believer will talk of religion as a blind man might of colours, or one totally devoid of ear, of a beautiful musical composition. Sundkher (1961:15), in his study of prophetic missionary movement in South Africa, commended that his own view as a missionary was a decided asset in his research. Yet, the non-reductionist approach does not necessarily mean that the investigator must be a believer, or must be concerned about the ultimate validity of religious beliefs. As O'Dea (1966:117) has stated, the sociology of religion does not concern itself with the truth or worth of the supra-empirical belief upon which religion rests. Goode (1951:12) has remarked that ...whether or not religious ideas are true is probably the least important question for social science.' Even Evans-Pritchard (1965:121), a sharp critic of functionalist and symbolic anthropology, took a similar position with regard to the analysis of the social, as opposed to the supra-empirical aspects of religion.

How relevant are social-structural properties to the understanding of religion? In the Middle Ages, as we know, the higher clergy originated from the ranks of the upper class, the Lower clergy from the lower class (O'Dea 1966:75). Weber (and Marx) pointed out that early converts to Christianity were heavily represented among the middle classes of urban society, and argued persuasively that distinct social groups are idea-prone in specific direction. Then, too, there is the sociological finding that the lower a person's class position, the more probable the association with a religious sect as opposed to a church. Finally, we must recall Mannheim's classical analysis (1949) of ideology in terms of social class interests. Religion, in other words, appears to be quite amenable to analysis in terms of social structure. Indeed, as O'Dea (1966:1) has remarked: 'no explanation of religion can be complete without considering its sociological aspects. Religion, concerned as it is with shared beliefs and practices, is preeminently social...'

Worsley (1970:307) complains that sociologist and anthropologists often not only ignore... 'the philosophical problem of the meaning of religion, but even sometimes neglect the meaning of religion to the actor.' Worsley's criticism is well-founded, but even in this respect, there is nothing unique about religion, What other institution would not benefit from a similar emphasis on meaning and ideas? Whether one is investigating marriage: patterns or a political party, the meaning of the institutional activity to the actor is sociologically pertinent. Of course, it is the rare study, regardless of the institution, that provides a sophisticated analysis of meaning. The reason, I suspect, is perfectly clear; it is relatively easy for a sociologist to depict the role structure and institutional framework of a community. It is immensely more demanding to determine what social roles anti interaction means, especially when studying 'other' societies.

Even an examination of religion in terms of the several functions that have been attributed to it fails to mark it off as unique. Religion, for example; does not have the sole market on morality. Other institutions such as education and law claim part of this territory. Moreover, as Keesing (1976:36) has pointed out: religions may govern people's moral conduct of be unconcerned about morality. It is sometimes thought that religion provides the individual with relief from stress. But so, ideally, does one's spouse and family. Religion provides fellowship; so do voluntary organizations such as the Ekpe Society or the Rotary club. Religion gives meaning to life; but this also is said to be the province of politics. Religion explains the

world; but science does too. Indeed, a prevalent (but mistaken) view has been that a 'mechanical' relationship, to use Bellah's expression (1970:237), exists between science and religion; the more the one, the less the other: The very fact that this mechanical relationship lacks empirical support witness the revival of fundamentalism in the USA, - and even signs of a religions thaw in socialist-bloc countries leads us finally to the one unique feature of religion: the belief in non-empirical or supra-empirical entities, and the translation of that belief into mundane social action. While meaning, values, motives and ideas are intrinsic to all social institutions, only religion rests on a presumed transcendent foundation. The lively exchange between Ifeka-Moller (1974) and Horton and Peel (1976) about the relative merits of the social-structural and intellectualist approaches to religion clarify many of the issues that we have considered so far. To begin with, it should be pointed out that the intellectualist position is quite distinct from the erstwhile rationalist approach (see Bellah 1970:4). Rationalism, closely associated with the rise of secular thought and skepticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth century France and England, held the view that established religion was based on ignorance and deliberate manipulation of the masses by priests and their superiors. The non-rationalist position regarded religion as a reality *sui generis*, but grounded in emotion engendered by traumatic life experience. For the rationalists, religion was a deception; for the non-rationalists, it was a crutch.

Geography of Nigeria and Development

Nigeria is located in West Africa, roughly between latitude 4°N and 14°N and longitudes 4°E and 15°E. The country's most southerly point is near brass in the Niger Delta, which is roughly north of the equator. The country's northern boundary is approximately at 14°N. Her westerly boundary runs roughly along longitudes 3°E. Her easterly boundary runs from a point to the south west of the estuary of the Cross River to northwards almost to longitude 15°E, south of Lake Chad. The country is located almost in the centre of the great curve made in the west by the continent of Africa. This means that it is roughly equidistant from the extreme corners of Africa. The flight time to any place in Africa is relatively short. It is only a few hours to Dakar, less than four hours to Tripoli or Algiers, about three hours to Cairo and to Addis Ababa.

Nigeria has a total land area of 923,768 square kilometers. This is four times the area of Ghana and about thirteen times the area of Sierra Leone. It is four times the area of the United Kingdom, Nigeria covers about one seventh of the productive area of West Africa. The location and size of the country are very important for a number of reasons: because of its location close to the equator and the Atlantic Ocean, Nigeria enjoys a hot tropical climate. Rainfall decreases from over 4000mm in the Niger Delta less than 250mm in the northeast. There is sufficient rainfall for some form of rain-fed agriculture in the country. Because of its location and large size, Nigeria has the greatest diversity of climate, vegetation and soils as well as human population in West Africa. Thus, unlike some of its neighbours such as Niger Republic, Nigeria has a very wide range of national resources. The country's large size means that it must have a large police force to protect its entire territory from lawlessness.

Neighbours and Land Boundaries

It is important to know Nigeria's neighbours for a number of reasons:

1. The country's relationship with her neighbours have implications for its own security.
2. Security threats in neighbouring countries affect Nigeria
3. There are many Nigerians living in these countries and the way they live and are treated have implications for security in Nigeria.
4. There are many criminal cross-border activities taking place between Nigeria and her neighbours.
5. All of this Nigeria's neighbours are former French colonies and have an approach to public law and international transactions and relations which is different from that of Nigeria;
6. From time to time, there have been ugly border incidents between Nigeria and her neighbours.

For these reasons, it is necessary for you to know whom Nigeria's neighbours are and what her boundaries with them are like. These are the people, Republic of Benin to the West, the Republic of Niger to the north, the republic of Chad to the north east and the republic of Cameroon to the east.

The Republic of Benin: This is a small country which extends, as a narrow territory, all the way from the Atlantic in the south to the River Niger in the north. The boundary between Nigeria and this country has split several ethnic groups including the Yoruba, the Baribo and the Hausa. This partition has always created social, economic, political and diplomatic problems for both countries. Thus: people on either side of the border continue to interact as if the border did not exist making life very difficult for law enforcement agencies such as the police to operate effectively. Because much of the Nigerian side of the border is out of the mainstream of the country's political, economic and social life, the people there avail themselves of services (e.g. health services), which are better on the Benin side. This has created security problems. For example, in a recent report in one of Nigeria's dailies, there was a story of Beninois gendarmes (i.e. policemen) invading a number of border villages in Sokoto State and wanting to enforce that country's tax laws there. (The argument of the gendarmes was likely to be, "If these people use our social services, they should pay our taxes." Can you fault this argument?). It is very easy for fugitive offenders (Nigerian and Beninois) to slip over the border and so escape from law enforcement agencies. There is a thriving smuggling business along the border in which second hand cars and clothes and other goods are brought into Nigeria. The point must be made, however, that the Government of Nigeria has almost always enjoyed excellent relations with the Government of Benin.

The Republic of Niger: Niger is a very large country (area: 1,267,000 square kilometres) It is mostly desert. The wettest areas are along the Nigerian border but even then severe periodic drought is a fact of life. Niger has a few minerals and also has livestock But all the same, it is a very poor country. The boundary between Nigeria and Niger splits the Hausa, the Fulani and other ethnic groups. The Governments of the two countries maintain excellent relations, but there are aspects of the geography of Niger and of the boundary between the two countries which are of security importance. The boundary is very long and the weather along it is nearly always hostile. It is therefore difficult to police effectively. The boundary area is mostly very open savannah where it is possible to stand and see the land for kilometres around. This means that, for a criminal on the run, there is literally nowhere to hide from law enforcement officers in pursuit of him. The most important aspect of the geography of Niger as far as crime and security in Nigeria are concerned, is the occurrence from time to time of drought in the Sahel

belt. Drought forces farmers and pastoralists from Niger to follow the footsteps of their Nigerian counterparts in this belt to move in large numbers into Nigerian towns. In these towns, they swell the ranks of the unemployed and constitute a serious security risk. Between 1980 and 1985, these ecological refugees participated in the serious Maitatsine urban revolts in Kano (1980), Maiduguri (1982), Kaduna (1982), Jimeta-Yola (1984) and Gombe (1985) in which thousands of people were killed.

The Republic of Chad: Like Niger, Chad is a very large country. It has an area, which is about one and one third that of Nigeria. Its boundary with Nigeria is only 98 km, long but it lies entirely on Lake Chad. Chad, which is a relatively poor country, has been politically unstable since 1975 creating great problems both diplomatically and economically. It is also subject to periodic drought. Nigeria's crime and security problems, which are associated with Chad, include the following: the civil war in Chad led to an influx of Chadian refugees into Nigeria which had to accommodate and feed them. There is conflict from time to time between Nigerian and Chadian fishermen over fishing rights on the Lake Chad and Chadian gendarmes are sometimes involved. It seems as if armed bandits cross over into Nigeria to take advantage of the better economic conditions and inadequate security protection in north east Nigeria. They raid villages and rob road travelers deep into the country. Droughts in Chad invariably cause an influx of Chadian refugees into Nigerian towns such as Maiduguri, Kano, Bauchi, Jos, Ilorin, Ibadan, Lagos, etc.

The Republic of Cameroon: Cameroon is Nigeria's eastern neighbour, it is a large country with diverse resources and peoples. It has a long boundary with Nigeria, which runs through hills and mountains from the shores of Lake Chad. It runs through the Mandara Mountains which reach 1525m above sea level. It crosses the Benue Valley and passes through Bamenda Cameroon Highlands where the Shebshi Mountains exceed 1830m above sea level. It crosses the valley of the Cross River at Manife and crosses the Oban Hills before dropping to the sea south east of the Cross River estuary. Along the boundary, the vegetation changes from Sahel Savannah in the north through Montane Grasslands in the higher areas to Tropical Rain Forest, Fresh Water Swamps and finally Mangrove Swamps in the coastal area. The boundary cuts across numerous ethnic groups. The relationship between the Nigerian Government and the Government of Cameroon has not been very cordial especially since about 1975. Nigeria has a number of security problems which are associated with Cameroon: the boundary between the two countries runs through difficult terrain including mountains and thick vegetation. It is therefore difficult to patrol effectively. Cameroon gendarmes are in the habit of invading Nigerian territory in various places and subjecting innocent Nigerians to unlawful treatment. Cameroon has laid claim to parts of Nigerian territory. From time to time, Cameroonian security men have invaded these areas in an attempt to enforce their claim. Right now (March 2002), the International Court of Justice at the Hague is hearing a case in which Cameroon is claiming that the Bakasi Peninsula in Cross River State is part of its territory. Cameroonian security men also attack Nigerians fishing in Nigeria's territorial waters.

Nigeria's other West and Central African Neighbours: You need to know Nigeria's other West and Central African neighbours. This is because although Nigeria does not share boundaries with them, it is generally known that their welfare is Nigeria's welfare and any major threat to their security is a threat to the security of Nigeria. These countries include, Equatorial Guinea and the Central African Republic in the east and Togo, Ghana, Upper Volta, Mali, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, the Gambia, Senegal and

Mauritania in the west. They are important to the security of Nigeria for several reasons: because Nigeria's economy is basically stronger than theirs, their citizens seek better pastures in Nigeria when there is a depression. Thus, many Ghanaians flocked to Nigeria in the 1970s when the Ghanaian economy was in bad shape. Although most of such economic refugees engage in legitimate economic activities, many of them engage in criminal activities of one type or another. In any case, they take up jobs which could have been done by Nigerians and so worsen the country's unemployment problem. They also put pressure on social services in Nigerian towns. Again, Nigeria is often the destination of refugees fleeing from these countries as a result of civil war, e.g. Chad in the 1970s and 80s, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Drought victims from some of these countries also take refuge in Nigerian towns. Finally, there is a substantial population of Nigerians in each of these countries. Therefore, it is in Nigeria's interest that there is peace in them so that these people may not have numbers to swell the population of our towns.

Coastal Boundary and Territorial Waters: Nigeria has a coastline of about 560 kilometres. This is quite a long boundary to protect and defend. Moreover, inter-connected lagoons and creeks make the task of protecting and defending it all the more difficult. As a matter of fact, smuggling is rife, especially in the Niger Delta area and east of it. Smugglers are difficult to catch since there are many alternative routes for their boats. The area of the Atlantic Ocean over which Niger has jurisdiction, according to the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea extends 320 kilometres out from the country's coastline. Within this area, Nigeria has sovereign rights over the mineral resources of the sea-bed as well as the fisheries. It also has the right to build artificial islands and structures and to control pollution. Nigeria has the very heavy responsibility of protecting and defending this huge area of water against illegal intrusion of any sort. This responsibility has been assigned to the Nigerian Navy. But the navy is small and inadequately equipped. Therefore, it cannot be expected to discharge the responsibility effectively. As a result, piracy and illegal fishing by foreign ships occur, posing a threat to the country's economy.

Internal Boundaries: Before May 1967 Nigeria consisted of four regions. In May 1967, the country was split into twelve States. In 1976 it was further broken down into nineteen States and a new Federal Capital Territory was carved out. Since then, more States have been added and today there are thirty-six plus the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The Local Government Areas have similarly continued to be sub-divided so that today, there are seven hundred and seventy four. These State and Local Government creations have very serious security implications. Thus every time they were created, it meant that new artificial boundaries were drawn across areas that used to belong together in one entity. In many places when such a boundary is created on paper by the government: problems arose regarding how to demarcate the boundary on the ground; people resent the fact that their village or area had been put on the "wrong" side of a boundary, people resent the fact that the new boundary has apparently cut off land, which had been traditionally theirs. Many of the civil disturbances which have occurred in rural areas in different parts of Nigeria in recent times are due, at least in part to our internal boundaries.

Consequently, politics, governance have failed Nigerians. Cultural revival is the solution. How did we relate before colonialism? The water ways were our major means of symbolic interaction. Let's revisit history imbibe those aspects of culture that conform to universal morality. Embrace and improve on our

productive systems. Our home grown Option A4 is the best for us. You can't win election outside the people. For once let's recognize and applaud our own.

Conclusion

Religion is a set of shared beliefs, practices, and values that connect humans to something beyond the physical or material world. It typically involves faith in a higher power or spiritual entity and provides a framework for interpreting the world and one's place in it. Here are some common types of religions:

1. Abrahamic religions: These are religions that trace their origins to the prophet Abraham, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
2. Eastern religions: These religions are typically found in Asia, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.
3. African traditional religions: These are religions practiced by indigenous peoples of Africa, such as Yoruba or Zulu religion, etc.
4. Indigenous religions: These are religions of native peoples, such as Native American religions or Australian Aboriginal religions.
5. New religious movements: These are recent religious movements that are not part of the established religious traditions, such as Scientology or the Raelian movement.

In conclusion therefore, it could be said that the type of geography an area or society has determines the kind of religion that would be practiced in that society. For instance, in the northern part of Nigeria, the masquerade or cultural dances are symbolized by their environment that is to say, the masks carved and worn in the north are prepared with some ritual grasses since their green grasses signify their rich agricultural products, thus having their festival is to herald and accord respect to that they belief and practice as their culture. Similarly, in the coastal areas of the Niger Delta region in the southern parts of Nigeria, sea foods and other riverine foods are represented in their rich riverine fishing settlement thus representing their cultural and religious agro-cultural fishing and geographical heritages. Therefore, it could be said that the ecology and geography of an area influences the religious beliefs and practices of that culture and society to a large extent. The geography of an area is the ecological platform, upon which every religious tradition of a people is built, so religion and geography have a relationship, both the physical and spiritual entities are made manifest through these materials as seen above.

In Nigeria, there are three major religions practiced by the people. The three major religions are Christianity, Islam and African indigenous religion. Among these three religions, Christianity is dominant in the south, while Islam is predominantly practiced in the northern part of the country whereas African traditional religion is practiced in both southern, northern and western parts of the country. However, ATR is more dominant in the western and southern parts and north incorporates, enculturates/aculturates their Islamic practices with African traditional symbols in their Islamic belief. Thus, Islam is a fertile ground for African traditional practices. ATR is indigenous to the Africans in general and Nigerian in particular. Both Islam and Christianity are foreign religions and their incursion into Nigeria was greatly influenced by the region.

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