



# Challenges of Tourism promotion in Nigeria: The Case of Religion

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## Abstract

Religion encompasses the belief in superhuman force(s) that govern the universe. This belief controls the entirety of human actions and inactions and therefore, can be used and abused. Among scholars the duality of religious function has continuously fuelled unending debate as it can instigate development and simultaneously destruction, especially in a multi-religious nation. Nigeria in all its regions is endowed with unique natural and cultural resources of immense benefit to tourism development if regularly consumed by tourists. The consumption of these tourist attractions are beset with challenges emanating from religious beliefs. These pose a huge threat to tourist safety and security and consequently restricts tourist inflow, dwindle the financial earnings and deter tourism promotion in the affected regions. In the light of the above, this paper employing a desk research method explores religion induced crises and possible ways of managing them for the enhancement of effective tourism promotion and regional sustainability.

**Keywords:** Religion, religious crises, tourism, Nigeria, violence.

## Introduction

The tourism industry is an amalgamation of various sectors offering travel related services. The uniqueness of the industry in providing numerous services has made it a multifaceted activity which touches many areas of human life. In other words, the tourism industry involves the business of providing tours and services for persons travelling locally and abroad. The provision of these services by different industries sets tourism as a global industry with the highest employer of labour. In view of this, tourism acts as one of the most viable economic industries generating millions of dollars annually which contributes to the growth of numerous economies around the globe. In 2013, tourism generated large numbers of international arrivals which amounted to 1087 million with prospects of international arrivals rising to 1.8 billion by the year 2030 (Kester, 2014). Travel accrues numerous benefits to any destination, one of which is the creation of critical employment opportunities for millions of people. Knowing the benefits of developing the tourism sector, the Nigerian government has since the era of democracy in 1999 not relented in the pursuit of developing its tourism potential so as to diversify its oil monopoly economy. While in response to the present global economic state described as recession or meltdown, the government has given increasing attention to tourism within their overall strategy for economic growth (Leslie, 1995). Hence, with an abundance of natural and cultural attractions, tourists should select Nigeria as one of their destinations of choice.

Despite the immense benefit of the industry to Nigeria's economy it can easily deteriorate at the slightest hint of social unrest. To a great extent, the political atmosphere of a nation does restrict the influx and movement of tourism. This is as a result of the industry's dependence on travel traffic. As Telfer and Sharpley (2008) observed, not only is tourism highly susceptible to external



forces and events, such as political upheaval, natural disasters, health scares, but it is also sensitive to religious induced crisis which most times impede the safety and security of tourists. The concepts of safety and security are amongst the priority factors that influence tourist choice of destination and are thus paramount conditions for tourism development in any country or region. To amass the full benefits of tourism requires peace and stability. However, the incessant religious induced crisis in Nigeria has threatened the safety and security of tourists. Nigeria is not immune but vulnerable to religious instigated crises which is a global menace hindering the growth of the industry since the incident of September 11, 2001 in the USA. Upon this premise of religion posing a challenge to tourism, it is the objective of this paper to explore the various religious practices in Nigeria that threaten the regional development of tourism and also to proffer how well religious activities could be exploited in promoting tourism in the country.

### **Nigeria religious background**

The contemporary Nigerian society is the product of the amalgamation of various ethnic groups by the British colonial administration in 1914 (Ezenagu, 2014). Pre-colonial Nigerian society is a conglomeration of independent autonomous entities bound by culture, but with the amalgamation concept these independent cultural entities were merged into one ethnic group without taking into consideration independent cultural variations which have never ceased to ignite conflicts. Therefore, following the heterogeneous nature of the country's ethnic and cultural background, the amalgamation of 1914 cannot be adjudged as successful, judging from the cultural differences of most religions. The religion of the different independent entities residing in the region practised before the creation of modern Nigeria was African traditional religions. This indigenous religion though similar in principles varies from one cultural group to another. In other words, Nigeria was not only a multiethnic and multicultural state but also multi-religious, even before the advent of foreign religions. Religion seems to be a significant form of identity despite diverse ethnic and cultural relations. That is the reason religion is most often a strong motivator for people's behaviour, traditions and practices. Hence, in exploring the religious crisis that have beset Nigeria's tourism sector would require an understanding of the country's religious background so as to identify areas of conflict and seek redress.

African traditional religions find their roots in the people's way of life. Against this background many Africans have been described as being notoriously religious. This religious belief system believe in the existence of a Supreme Being known to different ethnic groups by different names. The Igbo call him *Chukwu*, Yoruba – *Olodumare*, Efik – *Obasi*, Benin – *Osanobua*. The Supreme god oversees the affairs of men through his intermediaries or pantheon of divinities, deities, gods and goddess including ancestors (the living dead who were the deceased members of the community). The creeds of this religion though unwritten, are expressed in the people's tradition used for ordering human relations and activities on earth. Włodarczyk (2013) summed this religious system up as being a repository of oral traditions without a single founder or central sacred text but, nonetheless, with a striking number of coherent themes across the vast continent. Adherents of this religious system instigate acts of violence only when the traditions are violated and the gods' demands retribution.

The Christian faith like African traditional religions believe in a living God, but specifically in Jesus Christ in whose life God was made known and was present in a unique way (Arthur, 2006: 9). Christianity is rooted in the existence of one, Almighty God who has three personalities of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The Christian creed written in the Holy Bible



teaches Jesus Christ as the only way to the father. The Christian religion was brought to Africans clothed in western culture which has always been its point of conflict with Islamic fundamentalists. In Steffen's (2013) opinion the Christian religion actively seeks converts, and with such an approach many Nigerian traditionalists converted but the continuous use of this approach brews conflict.

Islam when translated means one "religion of peace" and secondly "submission to the will and commandments of God" (Ahmad, 1977). The very name of this religion sums up its central message, that human beings must surrender themselves to God. The creed of this religion is documented in the holy book of Islam, the *Quran*, which tells Muslims how to obey the will of God (Gulevich, 2009: 33). They believe in one God – Allah and in all his prophets, the last was Muhammad to whom his divine will was revealed. Following the words of the Prophet the Muslim faith revolves around the five or possible six pillars of the religion consisting of the belief that there is only one God (Allah), belief in formal prayer, or *salat*, almsgiving or *Zakat*, participating in fasting, or *sawm*, and lastly Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca including Jihad- holy war which most Muslims regards as the sixth pillar of Islam (Gulevich, 2009; Tyerman, 2004). The premise of submission to the will of Allah through the words of the Prophet has always been misinterpreted by fundamentalists as a reason to perpetrate violence.

### **Tourism and Religion: the nexus**

Tourism is an activity that is solely dependent upon the business of providing tour related services. These tour services gave rise to the establishment of tourism industries to cater to the numerous needs of tourists. In other words, the tourism industry is a conglomeration of services offered by restaurants, hotels, motels, travel agencies, transport etc (Ezenagu and Olatunji, 2016). The diversity of activities associated with tourism broadens the scope of the industry that it is difficult to postulate a definition that would embrace all its components. To this end, experts are confined to define the term from different perspectives. Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) posed four different perspectives from which tourism can be identified namely: the tourist, the businesses providing tourist goods and services, the government of the host community or area, and the host community. More elaborately they defined tourism "as the processes, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host government, host communities and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting and hosting of visitors" (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009: 6). This definition shows the interrelationship between tourism industries, tourists, host communities and governments. For uniformity in the industry, the UNWTO in 1991 laid down a precise definition of tourism which incorporates who a tourist is and the extent of its activities within a destination in the following words: "tourism is the movement of a person travelling outside his /her usual environment for less than a specified period of time, whose main purpose of travel is other than for the exercise of an activity remunerate from the place visited". The purpose of visitation triggers tourism and without motivation, tourists have no business or pleasure in visiting any destination. The motivation and satisfaction derived therefrom sustains the industry. Amongst the motivation for choice of destination is religion.

Whenever the word "Religion" is mentioned what readily comes to mind is the institutionalised religious beliefs (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism) but its meaning goes beyond that and centres on the totality of belief rooted in principles from which human actions are interpreted (Eller, 2007). It entails the practices, rituals, beliefs, discourses, myths, symbols, creeds, experiences, traditions, and institutions by which individuals and communities conceive,



revere, assign meaning to, and order their lives around some account of ultimate reality generally understood in relation to God, gods, or a transcendent dimension deemed sacred or holy (Carlson, 2011). The influence of religion on humanity sets it aside as a social phenomenon existing in human society from the primitive African communities to the modern European society. Not only is it a universal practice, but it is also a necessary alternative to scientific limitation. Built around conviction otherwise founded on faith which Barrett (1982) describes as firm or unquestioning belief in something for which there is no proof. In this context, religious behaviour will inevitably appear irrational and eccentric to nonbelievers. Its ideology can incorporate absolutist, idealistic, exclusivist, and unquestioning beliefs and goals (Eller, 2007). Different religions embrace different beliefs, and express them in different ways. Religious beliefs, for most believers, are not just theories. They offer codes of moral behaviour that provide a guide for action and a particular lifestyle. This is what Kong (1990) describes as the latent function of religion (it provides a socially cohesive force), in contrast to its manifest function (of explaining that which is outside humankind and mysterious to it). Religion according to history, is a potent force necessitating change through development and conflict. It turns out that all religions serve multiple functions in the lives of individual people and human communities.

On the one hand, tourist visits to sacred sites could be regarded as a religious act commonly found in major religious traditions of the world. Tracing back this route of religious history of tourism of the world, major religions globally have stimulated forms of “tourism” as a foundation for spreading their own religious beliefs” (Mu et al., 2007: 98). Therefore, travel to sacred places to participate in religious ritual is a common phenomenon amongst world popular religion. Today we see that all over the world, more and more people are travelling to sacred sites (not always sacred to their own religion, even when they have one), taking part in religious festivals and events, and more and more people are making pilgrimages to their religion’s sacred sites (Blackwell, 2007). With the growth in this trend of touristic religious movement, sacred sites are gradually opening up to tourism development.

However, on the other hand, despite religion been a driver for tourism it has proved to be one of the most significant causes of war and conflict across the globe, as the followers of the world’s faiths have fought amongst co-religionists and against those with different beliefs (Broadhead and Keown, 2007). The consequences of such conflict are the unending death-tolls. Hence, killing in the name of God constitutes a major driver of violent conflicts today (Markham and Abu-Rabi, 2002). The misinterpretation of religious doctrine (dogma, beliefs, and practices) amongst members of same religion and other religions have been at the core of religious conflict. This has been responsible for the causes of past and present religious conflict. Also with the formation of state religion in a secular nation whereby a clerical authority amasses political power, violence is inevitable. Those non-compliant to the set down state religious rules are officially punishable by law. Fundamentalist capitalizing on this infringes on the rights of non-members of state religion. In order not to be victimized by members of state religion, leads to the outbreak of religious violence by those who do not adhere to it. With these continual crises no business can survive, including tourism enterprises. In Nigeria, the tourism images of certain regions have been tarnished by incessant religious crisis. From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that religion, though an abstract concept, can neither be relegated nor neglected in matters of development.



## **Religion a continuous threat to tourism development in Nigeria**

Religion is a multifaceted phenomenon which permeates all human activities. Religious beliefs influence many aspects of peoples' daily lives, so it is plausible to argue that religion affects some of humanity's most central endeavours, such as trade, migration, foreign investment and tourism. In tourism, religion could influence the choice of destination and even in chosen destinations restricts tourist movements and participation in certain activities. As a motivating factor for tourism one would wonder how religion stands to threaten the development of tourism in Nigeria. Religion as a continuous threat to tourism comes from its ability to stimulate certain negative actions in people. Against this background, religion can instigate violence either within a particular faith or put one faith against another. When religious extremists are convinced that their cause is sacred and ordained by God, they are capable of savage and relentless violence. In this case, "violence becomes sacralized as a heroic act and a religious duty" (Wright, 2009: 17). With this spiritual perception of violence and the misinterpretation of certain religious scriptures (Holy war) both in the past and present, this has aggravated religious violence. Considering the very nature of religion and its meaning one would ask, why does religion seem to need violence, and why is a divine mandate for destruction accepted with such certainty by some believers? (Juergensmeyer, 2003). This answer lies in most holy scriptures filled with records of wars, great bloody conflicts between those whom God has elected and those whom God has rejected (Markham and Abu-Rabi, 2002). Thus allowing oneself to be indoctrinated by the scriptural passages which advocate violence in the expression of faith, fuels religious violence in any destination.

Therefore, as religion motivates tourists to travel and participate in rituals, it also instigates violence. The tourism industry provides tours and essential services to tourists which require peaceful and stable environments and nothing less. The political stability of a destination can be destroyed by religious clashes leading to social unrest, riots, and possibly wars if not checked, and they can cause significant negative impacts on tourism.

### **Intra religious crises**

Intra religious clashes arise within the confine of a particular religious body. It is not strange that certain persons from a particular religion would arise to indoctrinate vulnerable adherents with words from their holy scriptures. This forms the major challenge in the contemporary Muslim world where different interpretations are given on modes of worship by various Islamic scholars and rulers. Such divergent elucidations breed misunderstandings, unnecessary conflicts and violent protests (Daily Post, 2016). Accounts of such indoctrination and misinterpretation of Islamic precepts abound in Nigeria. Such activities have been at the very root of religious violence such as the Maitatsine riot of the 1980s. The Maitatsine movement instigated a series of religious uprisings by an Islamic bigot in northern Nigeria from 1980 to 1985 and even through the 1990s. The momentary success of this riot could be said to be the dawn of religious terrorism, ethno-religious clashes and militia activities in Nigeria. It equally sowed seeds of discord amongst members of the Muslim community in the country. The ringleader of the Maitatsine uprising was a Cameroonian, Muhammadu Marwa, who settled in Kano, northern Nigeria. He entered the city as an Islamic scholar and declared himself a prophet sent to the black Africans.

His nickname 'Maitatsine' developed because he would say, in halting Hausa " *Wanda bata yarda ba Allah ta Tchine*", "May Allah curse the one who disagrees with his version"--thus, *Mai*



*Tachine*, later rendered more accurately as Maitatsine (Isichie, 1987). He distorted and misinterpreted the teachings of the Qur'an. Consequently, Maitatsine became famous for his controversial interpretations of the Holy Qur'an. His entire ideology was to eliminate western influence and possibly also the Arabian culture in which Islam was founded. As Harris (2005) noted it is clear, that Muslims hate the West in the very terms of their faith. Evidence of Islamic hatred of the West lies in the ideology of fundamentalist propaganda and such hatred was clearly portrayed in Maitatsine teachings which condemn Muslim reading of any book other than the Koran. Also he condemned the use of radios, cars, watches, bicycles, etc and all other necessities of life which emanated from western ideology, technology or culture. Despite denying people the necessities of life, he had followers in their thousands, who keyed into his folly and were willing to die as if for a just cause. With all the indoctrination, his followers took his fallacies to be an act of piety and accorded him the fame of 'a prophet' to the irritation of other Muslims. Against this background, the first Maitatsine riot broke out in Kano and its consequences shocked many Nigerians as the crisis led to the loss of about 4,177 lives including the destruction of properties (Kumolu, 2011). Though the riot took the life of the ring leader himself, Maitatsine's followers took over from him, leading to the reoccurrence of the riot until it was stopped. Such occurrences undoubtedly halt all business activities in the region including tourism.

Another intra religious conflict is the Sunni-Shiite Muslims conflict. The Shiite Muslims follow senior clerics of their own choosing, shaping their practices and behaviours around particular Imam's Edicts (Irekamba, 2015). They formed the body called the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN). To this effect they are always in conflict with the Sunni Muslims. As a result of this conflict their activities were banned in some states in the northern regions of the country. The Shiite Muslims observe a long hour parade - "Arbaeen" – an annual religious event during which its members trek for many miles from various towns to Zaria – their spiritual headquarters (BBC News, 2016). The march was declared unlawful since it is in solidarity with Palestinian Muslims on the grounds that, if militant Palestinian groups, like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Al-Fatah carry out violent acts like suicide attacks, throw petrol bombs, and knife innocent Israelis in the name of the *Intifada*, the same might be applicable to Shiite Muslims of Nigeria (Irekamba, 2015). However, in the course of the parade they dress as warriors which the government perceive might someday lead to the formation of a militant group. Thus they were banned but rather than heed the law, they fought against it and also other Muslims. Such religious combat made the northern regions of the country very unsafe for tourists. With the uprising in progress most tourist destinations in the northern regions of the country were deserted.

### **Ethno-religious clashes**

Religion cannot be separated from Nigeria's traditional life. Most ethnic groups find expression not within the identity of the group, but rather in shared religious belief. Falola (1998) observed that religion is used to consolidate existing identities and to forge new ones. This is a common behaviour among the Muslims of northern Nigeria whose ethnicity derives unity from Islam. To a large extent, their ethnic identity seems to be vague outside their religion. Against this background their religion has become a symbol of communal identity and solidarity and consequently a vehicle for the expression of grievances (Hauss, 2009). Religious communities take up such conflict, justifying it and sanctifying it, according to their religious ideologies (Philpott, 2013). In this light, it is not strange that most of the ethnic clashes that have been witnessed in the country are religion based, especially between the two foreign rivalry religions



– Christianity and Islam, sometimes amidst the northern ethnic groups and sometimes between northern ethnic group other ethnic groups in the country. In the regions where these crises are frequently experienced unique tourism attractions exist. Thus, between tourists and attractions stands religious crisis, and as a result religion will continuously threaten tourism when ethnic groups refuse to associate on the bases of group norms rather on the platform of shared religion. In a situation when members of same ethnic group are of different religious backgrounds violence seems to be lurking. At the slightest provocation from misinterpretation of religious doctrine violence ensues. Since the 1980s through 1990s to date, Nigeria is still in the process of curbing ethno-religious crisis. In other words, over three decades now, such conflicts have progressively increased in proportion from one incident to another. Sometimes minor and at other times major clashes lead to massive destruction of life and property.

In 1982 a calamitous riot broke out between Christians and Muslims in Kano known as the Fagge crisis. The uprising emanated from Christian efforts to reconstruct their church building in a predominant Islamic community. The Muslim community saw the church as a threat to their religion and made ceaseless efforts to stop the project including using the government but the Christians prevailed. When these protesters could not carry out their threats on the Fagge church due to police intervention, they redirected their aggression to the Sabon Gari settlement considered to be the haven of the Christians (Albert, 1994). In frustration the angry militia burned down some churches and before more damage was done, the government intervened through the police. The aftermath of these event is the damage done to the tourism image of northern Nigeria as a no-go area for tourists.

As earlier noted one of the reasons behind the incessant ethno-religious clashes is the search for converts through revivals. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kano branch in conjunction with the Reinhard Bonnke Ministry of Germany, organized a crusade with the theme Kano for Jesus. Ordinarily the word crusade is a registered Christian term for jihad to Muslims so in order not to misunderstand the word in the Christian context, it was translated in both the Hausa and Arabic languages. The translation however, rather than help in understanding of the context of the word became highly provocative. To heighten the Islamic irritation there were photographs of miracle on the posters and handbills of blind people seeing which implies that Muslims would be converted to Christianity based on what they saw. To this end, they determined to abolish the event, but only succeeded in changing the venue. The attempt to use force in stopping the programme resorted in an outbreak of brutal violence. As reported by Yusuf (2009), Muslims and Christians were wantonly killed and many lives were lost, business places burnt or looted and complete anarchy loomed in the entire North and in Kano in particular. There were reprisal attacks in the South-East, South, and in parts of North Central and South West Nigeria, as Christians in these regions launched counter-attacks on the Muslims. The counter-attacks became an ethnic conflict, with the Igbos killing Hausas in their community and the Yorubas doing the same in their areas. It took the government and several agencies to calm the angry ethnic and religious groups before the crises ended. Amidst the uprising tourist attractions were also destroyed and tourist inflows in the affected regions decreased to virtually nothing.

From the foregoing, it is not strange that at the slightest misunderstanding or perhaps misinterpretation of Islamic religious doctrine, the result is violence. With Muslims guarding their religion jealously, a south-easterner, Mr Akaluka, was accused of toying with the Qur'an. He was arrested but in the process was beheaded by some Shiite fundamentalists at the Bompai prison where he was awaiting trial. In broad daylight, his head was stuck to a spear and taken



round the city of Kano by the “victorious” Islamic faithful (Taiye, 2012). With the head of Mr Akaluka in the hands of the extremists only his body was given to his people for burial where it's an abomination to bury a headless corpse. Not satisfied with his death, the fanatics took to the streets attacking non-Muslims and hoodlums began burning and looting business places perceived to be owned by non-Muslims (Yusuf, 2009). This ended in massive loss of life and property and also resulted in a counter-attack on Muslims in other parts of the country where Christianity is dominant.

With these religious uprisings the declaration of any religion as state religion in a multi-religious nation and its code as the law of the state, usually ends in fatal religious violence outbreaks. The enrolment of Nigeria into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) along with the introduction of Sharia (Islamic legal system) in the northern states was not a welcome idea to members of other religions in the country. Membership in the OIC was made public in 1986. The sudden announcement created an uproar within Christian circles (Tesfai, 2010). In 2000, Tesfai (2010) continued that the announcement by the Zamfara state governor to declare Sharia as the law of the state after which twelve other northern states followed suit, provoked the anger of the Christians in many states resulting in the death of hundreds. After these major crises other ethno-religious uprisings followed suit in the 1990s through 2000 to date. Clashes between Christians and Muslims, continued and in 2002 religious riots broke out because the Miss World Pageant was scheduled to be hosted in Abuja, Nigeria, as the previous year's Queen was a Nigerian. The date of the event collided with the season of Ramadan and the Muslims were infuriated that an unholy event should be scheduled in a holy month. A riot took place in Kaduna and not Abuja which was the venue of the event, and in the end many lives were lost in the process and potential visitors to the events were frightened away. With numerous encounters of ethno-religious crises in Jos Plateau, it was clear that most started from politics but ended in inter-religious clashes. Since 2001 ethnic clashes in most parts of the country over cattle grazing have aggravated the situation. Hausa-Fulani Militia are destroying the lives and properties of Nigerians including businesses activities, and more especially, tourism in the country.

Furthermore, apart from the northern region been proliferated with ethno-religious crises, the South western region has also joined in the violent trend. In 2016, the Islamic community of Osun state filed a case in court over Islamic female dressing. The Muslims had dragged the state government headed by Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola to court over the refusal of some 'Christian' public schools to allow their female students wear the Hijab. After the judgment which favoured the aggrieved party, CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) Osun State Chapter instructed Christian pupils to wear church robes to school if the state government dared implement the judgment (Abbason, 2016). The Muslim community in Osun claim the act is to propagate their faith but the Christians saw it as an act of the Islamization agenda of the state governor. Subsequent to the court ruling, Christians in the community vowed that if the Osun State Government is inclined to implement the judgment Christian students in all public schools founded by Christians will have no choice but to start wearing Christian garments and vestments as part of their school uniform for the propagation of their faith (Oluwole, 2016). With the Christian decision, schools in Osun state were turned into a religious theatre with the display of different religious regalia by the students. Both Muslim clerics and Christian leaders were at the schools to ensure that religious clothing was not disputed. The traditional community in the state also threatened to permit their ward to wear attire that conforms with their religion especially masquerading regalia or the attire of respective religious cults. Fortunately with the



timely intervention of the government the matter was put to rest before escalating into a violent outburst between the Muslims and Christian community of Osun state.

### **Violent religious beliefs**

The most horrific problem of the entire religiously induced crisis is the execution of violent religious beliefs by the Boko Haram sect which has plagued the nation beyond description. The menace of Boko Haram is an off-shoot of the Maitasine movement. After due consideration it is clear that both sects share common ideology and have one common enemy – the West. Boko Haram is an Islamic extremist sect seeking to expel foreign influences and secular regimes to establish government based on Islamist rule under the guise of religion. The activities of this sect have depopulated the country's population, which is usually referred to as the giant of Africa. This has been especially the case in last decade with an increase in death-toll resulting from bomb blasts and shootings. The name "Boko" means "fake", but is used to signify Western education, while "Haram" means "forbidden", so Boko Haram colloquially translates into "Western education is sin". The formation of this organisation was perhaps politically oriented (grievance over Western culture) but in order to justify their mandate of terror, it was clothed in religious regalia. The Boko Haram sect employed the instrumentality of armed combat in executing their divine mandate. They perceive armed combat as a sacramental rite while they view combatants as "holy warriors" (Wright, 2009). Clearly, these men "presumed they were being good Muslims – in fact, that they were being the best of Muslims, the most devoted to the teachings of their faith" (Cobb, 2002: 138). As a result, their actions are sanctioned by Islamic law (Markham and Abu-Rabi, 2002). The scriptural backing of the terrorist violent killing is the mainstay of Boko Haram activities. In Harris's (2004: 33) words "many Muslims are eager to turn themselves into bombs these days...because the Koran makes this activity seem like a career opportunity". To date Boko Haram activities have taken a different turn by inflicting terror on the entire nation and they pose a great threat to the growth of tourism and the stability of the nation.

### **Implications of induced religious crises on Nigeria Tourism industry**

The various religious crises that have plagued the nation have dealt a huge blow to the tourism sector. Though the affected regions were mostly located in the northern regions of the country, gradually other regions were equally threatened as is the case with Boko Haram and cattle herders Militia. Nigeria is gradually losing its unique cultural and natural attractions to religious violence. The incessant religious violence creates an unstable political environment in the country and consequently many foreign nations like the US have placed travel warnings on Nigeria. Also the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has issued warnings that people should avoid public gatherings which are one of the major targets of the Boko Haram sect (Smith, 2014). With the official decrease in travel business and avoidance of certain destinations in the country, Nigeria's tourism is gradually dwindling. As Oketola (2015) rightly observed, in spite of Nigeria's robust cultural assets and rich natural beauty, the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East is driving local and foreign visitors away from the country's tourist destinations. He stated that because of the level of insecurity in the country, tourists are shunning tourist destinations. He further noted that in the Yankari National Park resort with 108 guest rooms and 31 chalets, occupancy rates have dropped due to insecurity. Apart from the low patronage in hospitality sector, National Parks which were designated as tourist attraction sites have been



taken over by criminal elements, making them unattractive to tourists. Nmodu et al., (2015) reported that most of the Nigeria national parks in the northern regions have ceased to be tourist destinations but rather dens of militants. In other words, numerous national Parks were abandoned, notably Gumti Park, Kamuku National Park, Lake National Park, Chad Basin National Park Borno State, Yankari National Park and Sambisa Game Reserve which were attractive places for tourists, but are now situated in unsafe areas in the country.

However, of a great irreparable loss is that of hundreds of years of heritage site which once destroyed lose their originality. Garba (2017) confirmed that the first UNESCO (United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture) World Heritage Site in Nigeria, “Sukur World Cultural Heritage” in Madagali local government area of Adamawa state, was destroyed by Boko Haram insurgents in 2014. The landscape has since been shut down after the attack in September 2014. Before the advent of Boko Haram, the site was considered the biggest international tourism centre in Nigeria and Africa’s first cultural landscape patronised by significant numbers of international and domestic tourists on a daily basis. Government and the inhabitants used to generate a lot of money from the tourists and other visitors. Therefore, the sites devastation is a huge loss to both the government and the people in general.

Equally, the Kano monumental dye pits of over 500 years have lost their place as tourism attractions and as an economic means of livelihood for locals. The 125 “*Kofar Mata*” pits were constructed in a walled compound in central Kano in 1498 and assigned to individual families whose descendants are said to still control the trade. It is one of the flourishing indigenous technologies of the community. But the frequent intervals of religious violence in the area have led to significant drops in the number of visitors to the site, especially western tourists who also purchase the locally made clothing materials (Inquirer.net, 2013). The decline in tourism activities in the area has devastated other businesses in the area as well.

Furthermore, religious crises with their repeated occurrences threaten the annual celebration of Nigerian traditional festivals. Due to the incessant attacks, virtually all traditional festivals of northern origin have been put on hold until the violence has abated. In 2012 the Afan Festival, also known as Kagoro Day in Southern Kaduna, was put on hold. The event being the largest and most popular ethnic festival in Northern Nigeria is normally held on the 1st of January. To date the festival is still awaiting resuscitation. The three day legendary Argungu Fishing and Cultural Festival was also suspended since 2009 following the regularity of Boko Haram attacks in the region, along with other religious crises (Daily Times, 2017). The suspension of the event is not without its consequences on tourism activities, posing a huge revenue loss to the local economy and the country at large with evident low patronage of fishing business in the community. Also in 2009 the Durbar, horse riding festival was suspended. The festival has taken place in Kano, the largest city in northern Nigeria, for five centuries, featuring a horse pageant called a durbar, where riders in colourful robes and turbans pay homage to the local emir. Usually, the durbar draws spectators and tourists from within and outside the country to view hundreds of horse riders. According to Alabelewe (2015) the feast is celebrate at the end of the Ramadan fast. In anticipation of this every Muslim in Kano and other northern states looked forward to the captivating feast where horse riders displayed their equestrian craft. Not only does the festival promote tourism, but it also attracts economic activities into the area. The suspension thus is a huge loss to the local economy and the entire state as foreign tourist expenditure injected into the economy was also suspended along with the festival. However it should be said, that if these festivals were not suspended, they would have been easy targets for mass destruction which would further tarnish the already poor tourism image of Nigeria.



However, the suspension of traditional festivals also affected Abuja carnival which attracts no fewer than 3000 international tourists and over 50, 000 domestic tourists (Okeke, 2015). With the stay off public warning of foreign tourists to Nigeria, the festival has also been deserted by Nigerians both participating cultural troupes and domestic tourists. As 30 out of the 36 states of the nation did not attend the Abuja carnival in 2014 and also during the event there was no record of foreign visitors. In view of this, Okeke (2015) stated that Nigeria lost over N200 billion that would have accrued to the economy as profit from the festival when the tourists board flights, book hotels, eat and pay for other leisure associated with the festival. Also the sporting festivals were not spared from the destructive religious violence plaguing the nation as 2012 Super Eagles' friendly match with the Samba Boys of Brazil was cancelled due to insecurity (Ezeali, 2014). In addition, the Nigeria premier league football match was equally deserted by fans. Thus no part of the tourism industry in the country has been spared by religious violence.

The invading of Fulani herdsmen militia created artificial food scarcity by the destruction of farmland in Jos and other parts of Nigeria. This poses a huge threat to tourism because northern Nigeria is widely seen as the food basket of the nation and the implication of insecurity in that region is famine. Without our local cuisine what will the tourists eat in Nigeria? Idris et al., (2014) looked at the effect of the crisis on local cuisine and concluded that the current violent situation has succeeded in strangling the economy of northern Nigeria which is the food basket of the nation. Many markets that supply food items to tourism suppliers like the hospitality sector are all closing down. For instance, the famous Baga fish Market in Maiduguri, Borno State has restricted its trading activities. The market was attacked more than 20 times from 2009 to date. In all the attacks, lives have been lost, limbs maimed, vehicles destroyed and merchandise reduced to ashes by raging flames from improvised explosive devices (Idris, 2015). The destruction of farmland and market led to the hike in pricing of food items which is a serious threat to food production in Nigeria.

Apart from tourism industry other sectors of the economy have been devastated by the incessant religious violence. The manufacturing sectors in the affected regions are losing their investments and subsequently, there is general loss of jobs. According to Okereocha (2016) if the religious violence continues more manufacturers, especially those in the Northeast, may quit. With the continuous menace of the insurgence the affected regions has continued to witness the lowest tourists' arrival, including business visits. There has not been any opening of any international branded hotel. Most amusement parks, national parks, game reserves, eateries, restaurants, bars, and other public relaxation points have closed, as people heed calls by security experts and the authorities to avoid such places. With sharp reduction in occupancy rate of hotels and recreation facilities, the implication is that affected regions of religious violence continue to lose huge revenues that would have been accruing to them from tourism-related businesses.

### **Promoting tourism in Nigeria amidst religious crisis**

Promoting tourism is imperative in Nigeria so as redeem the tarnished destination image of the country. For the success of the image boost to result, the media have a gigantic role to play. Media here refers to the several mediums (Newspaper dailies, Television, Radio, Magazines, international networks etc.) through which information is disseminated. The information



disseminated through these sources has great impact on the audience. This supports the assertion that the media use information to exploit the audiences emotions either positively or negatively. As Howard (2002) observed, the media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can be a frightful weapon of violence when it propagates messages of intolerance or disinformation that manipulate public sentiment. On the other, an instrument of conflict resolution, when the information it presents is reliable, respects human rights, and represents diverse views. This dual function of media message centres on how the message was communicated and its appropriateness to given situation determines the audience interpretation or the success of the communication activity. To a large extent in the present global religious uprising, media messages both on air and print are conflict oriented. Subsequently, people are more interested in conflict messages but interpretation arises from the manner of message presentation. Most times, the media portray scenes of violence more than reality, which negatively influences tourist perceptions of Nigeria.

As stated earlier most of the religious crises in Nigeria though incited by rival religions but where intensified by the media. In other words, as constructive as the media can be in disseminating objective information about tourist attractions in Nigeria it is also destructive in projecting and propagating religious violence turning tourists off the country. Against this background, it is no gainsaying that both tourism and terrorism use the media to their advantage. The Boko Haram terrorist sect in Nigeria use the media to reach their target audience employing the instrumentality of fallacious statements and falsified images so as to manipulate vulnerable Nigerians and foreign tourists. Korstanje and Clayton (2012) agreed that tourism and terrorism rely on media creation and manipulation of beliefs and perceptions. While Nigeria's tourism industry uses the media to advertise and lure tourist(s) to visit the numerous unique natural and cultural attractions in the country including tourism infrastructures and superstructures designed to satisfy tastes and classes of tourist, the Boko Haram sect and other religious extremists use the same media platform to terrify and demoralize tourists from visiting certain destinations in Nigeria because of their intended acts of violence aimed at sowing panic and fear.

Based on this boundless access to media, one would agree with me that it has a prime place in Nigeria's efforts to boost destination image. Therefore, all Nigeria media platforms should be mindful of the use of words and images in manipulating tourist perceptions about the country's tourism destinations and especially regions of religious violence. They should focus more in advertising Nigeria tourism attractions and also ensure that they present to the public alongside religious violence scenes, government efforts in restoring stability to the affected regions. This is what the developed nations do and that is the reason why they easily recover from terrorist attacks and other vices that impede the tourism industry. When tourists are updated with government efforts in curbing religious upheavals it reassures them that their safety and security is guaranteed upon repeated visits. At present, plans are in progress of reviving most of the suspended festival such as the Argungu fishing festival and Durbar. The Sukur annual festival that was suspended in 2014 was celebrated in February 2017. In reporting the calling-off of suspended festivals Onochie (2016) has noted that the hosting of the festivals was as a result of the decimation and denigration of Boko Haram and other religious crises, therefore, creating an enabling environment for tourism to flourish in Nigeria is vital.

Furthermore, in promoting the destination image of Nigeria as against the impact of religious induced crises, religion has a crucial role to play. Embedded within religion are precepts which guide human relationships and behaviour. These precepts are imbibed from religious teachings made elaborate on occasions of religious festivals or events. The opportunity to participate in



religious festival is provided by tourism. As Aktas and Ekin (2007) rightly stated that tourism creates a means of social interaction and provides opportunities for encounters in natural, social and cultural environments. In this case, the role of religion in tourism is to bring people together with the mission of not only dealing with religious issues, but also to disseminate peaceful messages (Bilim and Düzgüner, 2015). This type of tourism is known as religious tourism – a form of travel to participate in religious activities or express devotion to gods, goddesses or God while listening to words from sacred texts. At such events members of rival religions get exposed to the principles of other religions. Such enlightenment will breed religious tolerance. In other words, members of the three religions practiced in Nigeria especially the rivalry religions should endeavour to participate in the events of other religions. Such participation would help to clear the wrong view already in circulation, based on the misinterpretation of numerous religious doctrines by extremists. This would be a panacea as Professor Is-haq Oloyede, the Executive Secretary of Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) suggested when he said that the major cause of religious crisis in Nigeria is that many adherents of the two major religions in the country – Islam and Christianity – do not have sufficient information on what each other's religion preaches. The Muslims are poorly educated about Christianity and the Christians are poorly educated about Islam (Salau, 2015). Therefore, tolerance towards other religions can be achieved in Nigeria when members of other religions and ethnic groups constantly interact on religious matters. This would further diversify Nigeria religious tourism and also encourage domestic tourism. Invariably this would create the peaceful atmosphere upon which tourism would flourish in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Religion is not only about sets of beliefs, dogmas and practices associated with sacred existence, but it is also a vital element of ethnic identity in Nigeria. Its doctrine has both religious and cultural bonds on believers who are capable of doing anything for the sake of their religious beliefs. The vulnerability of Nigerians towards religions has been severely exploited by over-zealous religious bigotry which has given a personal prejudiced interpretation to certain religious statements just to 'smite' other religions in the country. This is done by using the advantage that large numbers of some ethnic groups in Nigeria practice the same religion. With the indoctrinated interpretation of some sacred scripture most times ending in ethno-religious crises which have ravaged the tourism industry of the country. Most destructive is the formation of the Boko Haram terrorist sect, whose activities severely impoverish the tourism sector. Despite, the frequency of such religious induced crises, the Nigerian tourism industry seems to be relatively resilient and to a large extent, has demonstrated great ability to recover from the devastating effect of religious crises.

With the Nigerian medias relentless effort in seeking to keep the world abreast of the Nigerian government's efforts in curbing religious crises, through inter alia, an improved military strategy of relocating the Army headquarter from Abuja to Borno, improvements are more noticeable and bode well. This strategic step not only helps in decimating Boko Haram but also in reducing the frequency of ethno-religious clashes in Northern Nigeria, thereby, restoring tranquillity in the affected regions which guarantees the safety and security of tourists. In addition, religious tourism facilitates the spread and general understanding of doctrines and messages of the different religions in the country. The participation of non-members in religious tourism of other



religions should be encouraged as it will create a platform for religious and diversity tolerance and at the same time promote domestic and international tourism in the country.

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