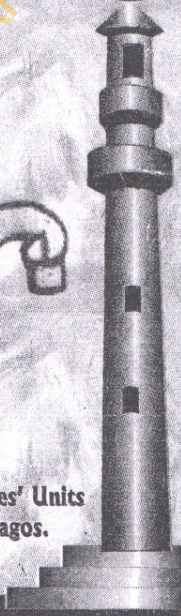
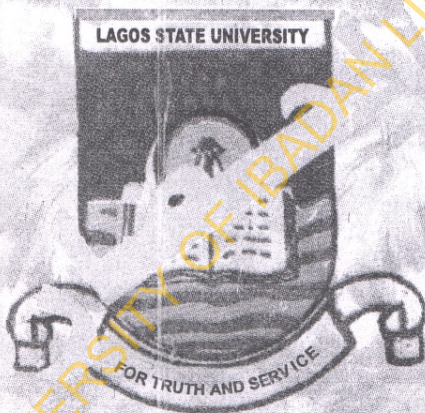


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NIGERIAN CENSUS FIGURES AS THEY AFFECT MUSLIMS

By

L. O. ABBAS

1. Introduction:

One of the programme of the Federal Military Government towards transition to civil rule that should command admiration of all and sundry is the population census held in November, 1991. It is considered to be one of the most important components of the transition programme of the Babangida Administration. This may be so considering its huge benefits to the country and the amount of revenue committed to it.

The government, realising the in-avoidability of accurate and acceptable count this time when many Nigerians had resigned themselves to the belief that accurate census was impossible,¹ made frantic effort to convince the public of its sincerity. The fact that no military regime has been able to organise an acceptable² head count further lent credence to the seeming non-chalance of most Nigerians. However, the long time of preparation and good execution of the programme by the qualified personnel may have been responsible for the result which, in the history of head count in Nigeria, is considered the best though, there are few states which are dissatisfied with the result and such states, sought redress³ in the tribunal set up for the purpose. The tribunal had since completed its assignment and all cases has been disposed off.

The mode of conduct of the 1991 head count showed that government was very sensitive to two areas that could mar the whole exercise and took care of them. These are ethnic and religious differences, since they are very volatile in Nigeria's political system. Adherents of the two main religions (Islam and Christianity) are always at logger heads as to which group is in the majority in the country. A lot of adverse comments were passed on the head count of 1973 that was cancelled as allegations of mass fraud and large scale manipulations were made. These allegations emanated from suspicions of one ethnic group or the other or of one religious preparations on the part of the military government at that time. The government for example, did not give enough time to the body in charge of it to do a good job. An exercise of this type required a time lag of about three years⁴, and this is what obtains even in advanced countries. The administration did well for giving National population commission about three years to operate.

2. Need for Population Census

A population count could be defined as an organised and systematic enumeration of all the people in a delineated area within a defined period⁵. The exercise of population census is not a modern invention, it had been in practice since the reign of prophet Dawud (David) in about 1000 B.C.⁶. The old testament⁷ described the prophet as having carried out census in his time. Also, Augustus Caesar⁸ ordered census at a time that coincided with the birth of Jesus Christ. In 1869 A.D.⁹ India carried out a census which was only limited to the city of madras. America's census dates back to 1790¹⁰ while Britain started its own in the year 1801¹¹. Since then, it has become a common phenomenon for countries all over the world to count themselves, usually at an interval of ten years.

In Nigeria, attempts at conducting population census has been made fourteen times¹², apart from the last one conducted in November 1991. The first attempt being in 1863¹³, a year after the founding of the colony of Lagos, none of them could be said to be accurate, they were accepted for use with the exception of those of 1962 and 1973 which were cancelled outright.

That none of the census conducted was accurate does not render those approved for

use in-valid. If an exercise does not attract major criticism, it could be accepted for use. This is because even in advanced countries, amendments are made to validate such figures. A typical example is the census conducted for New York in 1990 and which result was greeted with a loud voice of discontent merely because the figure arrived at fell short of the estimated by the city planners. A suit¹⁴ was filed in a law court for amendment.

Few criticisms expressed after the release of the result of 1991 census could in no way invalidate the whole exercise. This is because for Nigeria which occupies a total area of 923,765¹⁵ square kilometres and the most heavily populated African Country to eventually fail in the exercise, the failure would not only portray it badly among the comity of Nations, it will also show the kind of leadership it gives to other African nations which look up to it for direction as the 'giant of Africa'.

The need for the head count differs from one country to the other. The general aims behind census are however, among others, to enable planners, policy makers and indeed the government know the number of people it has with a view to accurately planning in terms of social and economic developments. With population census, a country is able to know its size, growthrate, fertility and the rate of mortality. Others are rates of migration and emigration, occupational as well as geographical distribution etc. It is also with the knowledge of population through census that government runs programmes that improve the supply of food, industrial out-put and health care facilities.

The importance of population census cannot be over emphasized, it involves people and their welfare since people form a vital part of the economic system. They supply labour which is a function that is a primary factor in the production of all goods and services, they are also the consumers of the end products.

3. The Relevance of Islam In Population Census

Any mention of religion in issues of national interest always attracts suspicion and criticisms from those that are either ignorant of the importance of religion to human life or mischief makers, whose aim is to suppress a particular religion for their own. Religions (Particularly, the revealed) advocate and teach human welfare. It is an indisputable fact that everyone likes good things for himself and would not want any evil act from others towards him. The Holy Prophet Muhammad once said that "None of you is a complete Muslim until he loves for others what he loves for himself"¹⁶. The basis of welfare and goodness to one another is for the citizenry to relate nicely to one another without enmity or ran-cour.

In Islam, Almighty Allah mandates the Muslims to ensure that others in the society live a good life and that is why He has made Zakat (almsgiving) one of the pillars of Islam. A certain percentage of one's wealth that is with one for a complete year is required to be distributed among some eight¹⁷ categories of people to alleviate their suffering. Therefore, the question of relevance of religion to census becomes solved if one sees census as a means of national development resulting in the attainment of the welfare of the citizenry. In matters of social relationship, Islam does not discriminate, it rather enjoins Muslims to interact together even with others¹⁸ who are not Muslims.

The volatile nature of religion in Nigeria and the seeming ungodly attitudes of some religions leaders have robbed religion of its effects to the extent that it is now being removed from national recognition. Government cleverly deemphasized religious affiliation in the questionnaire filled for 1991 census¹⁹ exercise. But because the adherents of the two main religions (Islam and Christianity) caused it through un-healthy rivalries, they could not contest it. Religious bodies should rather cooperate together for society's spiritual development for the betterment of the community. Otherwise, their roles and positions may soon be forgotten in the scheme of things.

4. The Roles of Muslims In The National Head Count

There were some general duties expected of Muslims to perform collectively or otherwise during the last head count or even prior to its commencement. As part of members of the community, one was expected to:

- (i) Embark on the enlightenment campaign within and without one's family since it was a civic duty.
- (ii) Answer any call that may be made to him by the authority in the conduct of the exercise. It is even a directive of Allah to **obey the** rightly constituted authority according to Al-Qur'an²⁰.
- (iii) To block or expose any act of sabotage that **may be** introduced into it, even if those involved are of the same family or religious belief with one. Truth should be told at whatever odd.
- (iv) Ensure that his Muslim names are clearly reflected, inspite of the fact that religion was not to be used, so that he may not be mistaken for a non Muslim. It is not only during the census exercise that one needs to reflect his/her Islamic names. It should also be written clearly anywhere one finds self. Be it at work in the school or even in the hospital.

The above are general rules a Muslim should be ready to carry out. The specific roles are those that should have been played in preparation for the exercise. It is doubtful if there was any effort by any Islamic body towards this directions as some organised bodies and individuals were ignorant of what census was all about in Nigeria and this affects Muslims most. Realistically, the Christians have gone a long way ahead, they have communication facilities and they use them effectively. They even at times, go ahead of government in projections. But the pertinent question is, why cannot the Muslim do same? Is it that they do not have resources or man-power to positively plan and execute programmes?

In my view, answers to these questions are in the affirmative. Like them (Christians), Muslims have organisations that are heavily funded for missionary activities. Such organisation like World Assembly of Muslim Youth with its office in Lagos; International Islamic Relief Organisations, which has its main office in Kaduna and Darul-Iftah with headquarters in Mecca has many of its workers in Nigeria. The first two also have their headquarters in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and all of them get funded from the kingdom. It is unfortunate that one can hardly feel their impact. One also believes that there are qualified and competent people who know what the problems are and how to go about solving them, only those in charge many never wish them do the job. Until Muslims face realities of their pathetic situation and address their problems with a view to solving them, the situation may continue to be worse. Evidence abounds that it is at the eleventh hour that they run helter-skelter for a way out in competition with a well articulate and well organised body.

For some years back, there have been controversies on who are in the majority among the Muslims and the Christians. The 1963 census which is the official figure in use was also quoted by the two groups to authenticate their claims. Incidentally, the Official result of the 1963 census put the Muslim in the majority, what parameters can they present to prove that or would they say it is because they practise polygamy and have more children. What of the assertions by some Christian leaders too that they are really in majority. Both were allegedly sure that the result of the 1991 census will prove them right that they are in the majority.

While it appears to be true that Muslims increase in population because of the above fact, it is equally not out of point that the more increase in population of the Muslims, the more they drift into the net of Christianity already set for the purpose through high level evangelisation network. For example, 1952 census shows that 45% of Nigerian population was Muslims with

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While it appears to be true that Muslims increase in population because of the above fact, it is equally not out of point that the more increase in population of the Muslims, the more they drift into the net of Christianity already set for the purpose through high level evangelisation network. For example, 1952 census shows that 45% of Nigerian population was Muslims with

21% Christian and 34%²¹ pagans. But the 1963 census figures revealed that in the period of about ten years. There was a fall in the pagan population from 34% to 18.2% while Christian gained 13%²² (i.e., from 21% in 1952 to 34.6% in 1963).

In Yourbaland (South of Nigeria), Christian population went up from 40.5% in 1952 to 49.3% in 1963²³, while Muslims remained as they were. In 1952, the percentage of Muslim population was 41.5%, while in 1963 it rose to 42.4%²⁴, an increase of less than one percent. The pagan population however dropped from 17.9% in 1952 to 8.3%²⁵ in 1963 and the difference of about half went to Christianity.

In the defunct Northern Nigeria, population increased from 0.6% in 1931 to 2.7% in 1952 to 9.6% in 1963. In the Eastern part, the successes recorded by Christianity are more outstanding. While Muslim population dropped from 0.35 in 1931 to 0.31 in 1952 and to 0.30 in 1963, Christianity got increased from 16.28% in 1931 to 50.06% in 1952 and to 77.20% in 1963.²⁷

TABLE OF POPULATION FIGURES IN PERCENTAGES

	MUSLIM	CHRISTIAN	PAGAN
1952 Exercise	45%	21%	34%
1963 Exercise	47.2%	34.6%	18.2%

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION FIGURES IN YORUBALAND

	MUSLIM	CHRISTIAN	PAGAN
1952 Census	41.5%	40.5%	18.0%
1963 Census	42.4%	49.3%	08.3%

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION FIGURES IN THE EAST

	MUSLIM	CHRISTIAN	PAGAN
1952 Census	0.31%	50.06%	49.63%
1963 Census	0.30%	77.20%	22.50%

From the above analysis, one would clearly see justification for the Christians' claim. For one thing, there has been a high increase in the level of their evangelization between the 1963 census exercise and 1991, an interval of about twenty eight years. While Christian evangelization continues to yield the desired result, Muslims remain passive and unconcerned. Many Muslim parents do not even know what is befalling them.

What however could be called a rescue was first noticed through the aggressive activities of the Muslim youths, who felt ashamed of the trend of events. These youths mainly of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (M.S.S.N.), in higher institutions launched what is tagged "Missionary Campaign" around 1977 in a bid to stem the ever growing rate of conversion of Muslims into Christianity. The effort, though commendable because of the impact it had, could not match the well planned and well funded ones by their counterparts all year round. The campaign could not go beyond Oyo and Osun State due to financial limitations of the sponsor.

While this writer is not being pessimistic about effort that could be made by way of enlightenment by the Muslims against future headcounts, the success of such efforts is doubtful if Muslim leaders are not made to realise the implications of their passivity and the need to wake up from their slumber. While before the 1991 census exercise, Muslims could not account for a solid plan for anything, the Christians had come up with their population figures of 1986 described as 1986 C.A.N. Census²⁹. The result of C.A.N. i.e. (Christian Association of Nigeria) census is really revealing and is open to many interpretation and assumptions. From the available result, which is only for the Northern Nigeria, from a total of

61.6 million people purportedly living there, 35.63 million was said to be Christians representing 57.92% while 25.92 million representing 42.08% was allotted to both Muslims and others.³⁰ Also worthy of note in the breakdown of the C.A.N.'s result is that out of the former eleven states of the North (including Abuja and excluding Kastina), Christians led in nine leaving Kano and Sokoto State for the Muslims.

The correctness of the exercise and the authority obtained to conduct such an exercise are what could not be ascertained. Funny enough, no Muslim body or individual has been known to have called the attention of the authority to it until mid 1988 when the New Nigerian newspaper carried it. If the verdict of CAN on the population of the North is like that for the Muslims, one wonders what the result would be in the south should it be made available to the public.

Muslims have a duty generally to cooperate with the authority for the success of all activities including headcounts. Past events and experience should serve the Muslims as eye opener for them to retrace their steps and re-organise against future challenges. Muslims should understand the psychological warfare being played by their counterparts. The government is indirectly being put in a difficulty, particularly on religious matters and has to be extremely careful. That may have been responsible for exclusion of religious affiliation in the 1991 census so that the exercise might not be bedevilled with all sorts of manipulations and interpretations.

5. Conclusion

In looking up for future census exercise, Muslim organisations could organise some fora to discuss their problems and ways to solve them. This would enable them prepare for future in order to complete favourably with others.

International bodies saddled with propagation activities should open their hearts and enlist competent hands for better results.

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25. Ibid
26. Ibid
27. Ibid
28. The campaign was held during the long vacation of 1977/78 session and was sponsored by Alhaji Yisa Yagboyaju who is the Grand Patron of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria, Oyo Area Unit.
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