

Religious Experience and Its Propensity towards Conflict: the Nigerian Context

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Abstract

The spate and rising wave of terrorism, violent conflict, and religious insurgency has given rise to the need to study the phenomenon of religion. While on the one hand it underscores the importance of religion, even in contemporary societies, it tries to understand why religion wields such huge influence to occasion terrorism and violent conflict. With the Nigerian context in mind, the paper seeks explanation for the prevalence of religious conflict in the Nigerian polity. It assumes that there exists a close relationship between religion and social conflict. With reliance on expert studies and assessment of materials from the news media on conflicts in Nigeria, it comes to the conviction that while religion can be altogether wholesome in itself, it can become a tool for creating and reinforcing conflicts. It concludes with some recommendations for government and policy makers and all relevant bodies on the project of conflict resolution, and management, peacemaking and peace keeping. The paper would be of great help too to students of peace and conflict studies among others.

Keywords: conflict escalation, insecurity, religious conflict, religious ideology and violent conflict

Introduction

Religion has remained at the centre of life in most African societies. As sociologists consider it as a social institution, historical accounts show that has remained the pivot of social engineering in both traditional and contemporary African societies. This is true of each and every one of the diverse ethnic and cultural groups that make up the Nigerian state even till today. Assessment of the works of historians of religion, research articles and papers unanimously agree that religion is indeed an inestimable treasure to the human society. One cannot but give a nod to this observation especially when one casts a look at the roles it played national development in Nigeria, especially in pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence Nigeria. Omenka (2009) instantiates this with particular focus on its contribution to education in South Eastern Nigeria.

Across every land and clime, and over the centuries, religion has shown to have implications that by far reach beyond the realm of religion itself, especially in pluralistic societies like Nigeria. The most readily available indicators of its positive contributions, in the Nigerian context, is the nation's socio-economic and political and human capital development. In the East, for instance, formal education introduced by early Christian missionaries accounts for the high literacy levels the region continues to reap till the present day (Arinze, 1965; Okoro S.I., 2018). On the other hand, an indicator of its negative influence on the national psyche is the number of religious motivated conflicts reported in various news media since the 1980s. Thus, the experience of many Nigerians on the role of religion in Nigeria's national history has been both glorious and painful. It would be glorious if one calls to

mind the numerous benefits in both nation making and nation building in Nigeria, especially in the areas of social cohesion and the overall socialization of the populace. It is on the other hand painful considering the role of religion in much of the conflicts that have befuddled post-military era Nigeria and their impacts on both human and national development. For the purpose of arresting, healing the pains of conflicts, and of building bridges of unity and social cohesion, and for the purposes of rebuilding national trust, this this paper is set to look at the basic understanding of religion and its importance in building the new Nigeria nation of the 21st century.

While these examples extol the positive roles of religion in social engineering and nation-building, many other writings expose the many challenges religion poses on society, especially as it affects integration and political stability. The experience in Nigeria is far from being commendable. An instance is the burden of violent conflict and carnage on Nigeria as a result of religious insurgency. To instantiate the enormity of the situation, a serving Nigerian Senator, Smart Adeyemi of Kogi West senatorial zone, recently described the Nigerian state as a “nation on fire” (Camillus Eke, 2021). The number of internally displaced population centres spring up every day as a result of conflicts. As a land where armed conflict, insecurity, and underdevelopment has become the order of the day, a bleeding nation because of intolerant and extremist religious ideologies, Nigeria has become a battlefield and the epicentre of conflict. Thus, the agelong mutual suspicion between Christians and Muslims, beginning from the formation Nigeria, has witnessed constant lethal expressions. The last straw that breaks the carmel’s neck is the widespread terrorism and religious tension in every part of the land. The reality on ground is that Nigeria is bleeding.

Public opinion in Nigeria suggests that religion is the root cause of conflicts in Nigeria. Ejizu (2008) makes a salient observation on the practice of religion in Nigeria. He observes that Nigerians today “find themselves stuck in the sea of religions, but the country’s moral tenor is about the lowest the world currently knows” (Ejizu, 2008). Thus, the Nigerian state of this third decade of the 21st century serves as a case study for the negative power of religion in a state. This draws the attention of this paper for any theoretical explanation for this detour of religion or is conflict imbedded in the nature of religion. The paper begins by taking a brief on the place of religion in social life across several cultures and climes. An x-ray of different theoretical perspectives and a look at the role religion played in traditional societies in Nigeria come next. After an exposé of the religious landscape of contemporary Nigeria, the paper goes straight to look at the challenge of religious conflict in Nigeria. This informs the conclusion of the paper which tends to suggest that there is an abuse of religion in the land that is crying for correction.

Religion in general

Religion is a fundamental characteristic of the human person, who is essentially a “*homo religiosus*” (Ejizu, Religion and Morality). There is no available historical account of any people without any form of religion or the other (Eva Nahid, no date). As members of a society, we belong to one belief system or the other (cf., Ejizu, 2008).

Religion is imbedded in all facets of African life. African societies’ narratives, for instance, are expressive of one form of faith or belief system or the other. These belief systems condition lifestyles and bring about change in both individuals and whole groups on the one hand, and the formation of individual and the collective conscience of the society. This is understandable, given the symbolic interactionists perspective that beliefs and practices Once they are regarded as sacred, these take on special significance and give meaning to people’s lives. The gains include behaviour regulation on the part of individuals, the formation of the collective conscience of the society, provides basis for morality (see Ejizu, Religion and Morality), and enhances economic and social harmony. For these reasons, many scholars argue that no society or social group can function without religion. According to Nahid Eva, religion’s influence on society ranges from a simple influence to a complete control of society, though that depends on the culture and governmental style (Nahid Eva, no date. “Importance of religion in today’s world”, in <https://www.academia.edu/3838157>).

The French sociologist, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, re-echoing the Enlightenment perception on religion and religious doctrines, belittles the above perception. She opines that religion was a powerful presence in public life everywhere, especially in the 1970s, it has become more or less an identity marker in the present age (Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 1993). This similar view is shared by the political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, whose work, *The End of History and the Last Man*, predicted the end of religion (Fukuyama, 1992). Common to the views of both Leger and Fujiyama is this subtle reiteration of the death of God philosophy. Their view represent statistical affirmations on the decline in religious participation, especially in Western societies, a trend that is felt lately in developing countries. Contrary to this perception, recent events of conflict and the rising wave of religious wind across the world. While Christian churches may be becoming empty, writes Colin Randall (2009), the mosques are getting full. This justifies the prevalence of religion even in the contemporary society. In this age, religion has continued to play the very active roles in social mobilization and behaviour regulation as it has ever done.

The Pew Research Centre study of 2015 affirms this with a statistical data on the perception of US adults, for instance, on the importance of religion in the United States. The report shows that three quarter of US adults hold that religion is somewhat important while 33% turn to religion as a source of guidance. This trust on religion for moral guidance cuts across every tradition and across world

cultures. Recent recent literary works of authors from different parts of the globe lends support to the perception represented in the Pew report above. Muhammad Baloch, et als (2014) shows the influence of religion on lifestyle. Nwachukwu (2019) illustrates its import on social behaviour. Brown-Rice & Burton (2010), Daniele Hervieu-Leger (2004), Einoff (2011), Farmer & Meston (2009), Beyers (2014), Eva (2015), Branas-Garza, Espin & Neuman (2014), Wong (2009), amongst many others, all expound the importance of religion and religiosity on social behaviour. Ejizu's inaugural lecture (2008) dwelt on this same perception. However, his is a critique of religious practice in Nigeria. He titled his lecture, "Between religion and Morality: Their Inter-Connection and Significance in Public Life,". These authors unanimously agree that religion has such a tremendous power to shape individual lifestyles and social behaviour.

Theories Perspectives on Religious Conflict

Theories in general are explanatory notes. They provide explanations for our claims, assumptions, and propositions (see A. Faleti in Peace and Conflict). A number of theoretical explanations has been given on the role and power of religion in every society. Functionalism and the theory of conflict are outstanding on their perspectives on religion. Though opposed to one another, a survey of these theories of religion shows that religion wields positive influences as much as it can cause and perpetuate conflict in the society (cf., Emerson, Monahan, & Mirola, 2011). Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Green, and Talcot Parsons, all allude to the power of religion in shaping social behaviour by reinforcing social unity and social stability. To Durkheim and Malinowski, together with other functionalists, religion strengthens and promotes social solidarity. For Durkheim, it is able to do this in either of the following ways: first, since it gives people a common set of beliefs and thus serves as an agent of socialization. Secondly, since people come together in worship, religion therefore has a way of fostering unity by facilitating social interaction, communication, social solidarity and strengthening social bonds. Max Weber identifies in it the capacity for social change and social control. An illustration can be found in the Jude-Christian religious groups where the Decalogue provides rules for moral behaviour and social relationship (see Author, unknown, 2010. Sociology). Its impacts on people's psychological wellbeing is noted by functionalist theorists. Moberg, for instance, affirms that religion promotes better physical health (Moberg, DO., 2008), while according to Morris, it motivates people to work for positive social change. He illustrates this point with the example of Martin Luther King, Jr. who drew his views from his religious convictions (Morris, A., 1984). To functionalists therefore, religion plays a wholesome role for the society. A.W. Geen points out that religion has the supremely integration and verifying force in human society. It has a number

of significant cementing factors which strengthen unity and solidarity (cf., Nahid Eva, no date. in <https://www.academia.edu/3838157>).

The conflict theorists are critical of the functionalist perspectives. Thus, despite the observable important roles of religion has played in societies and the lives of individuals persons and groups, conflict theorists, championed by Karl Marx, emphasize the negative roles and problems religion engenders. According to Marx, religion is an exploitative tool in the hands of the bourgeoisies who use it to entrench their hold on the proletariat. Conceiving it as a manipulative tool, Marx described religion as an opiate (a sedative substance) for the masses (Marx, K., 1964). Thus, while functionalists underline the role of religion in reinforcing social unity and solidarity, as an agent of social control and motivation towards positive change, conflict theorists say that it reinforces and promotes social inequality and conflict (Author, Unknown, 2010. Sociology).

In summary, common to these different theories is that religion has an enormous influence of the society. As Eva opines, it has benefited humanity as the springboard to basic values and social cohesion. It also lays heavy laden on the social shoulders of a society. As Eva notes, all depends on the culture and the governmental style (cf., Nahid Eva, no date). This has a long bearing on the Nigerian society, both in the prehistory and in its journey into a modern state.

Religious Experience and Practice in Nigeria: Past and Present

Religious practice is pervasive among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Some writers have regarded Nigerians, either derogatorily or otherwise, as the most religious country in the world. What cannot be denied, as Ejizu points out, is the fact that our societies' narratives are expressive of one form of faith or belief system or the other. This holds true for both traditional Nigerian societies and the present. Generally, African societies were ultimately religious in character. Religion permeated the superstructure and every facet and fabric of their life and society. Religious influence was so pervasive that early anthropologists like Major GA Leonard unanimously describe Africans as a deeply religious people (G.A. Leonard, 1900. in Nwachukwu, 2018). Religion does not just express their worldviews but equally how those worldviews engendered the laws and customs that guided their lives. Laws governing their societies in those days, for instance, were religiously based. Also affected and influenced by their religious worldviews were their social, recreational, economic, political lives, and their processes and pace of development.

Historical narratives and literary works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Parrinder (1962, in Nwachukwu, 2018) contain portions that show the pervasive influence of religion in traditional African societies. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* describes how the Igbo reserved the week preceding the commencement of the farming season as a "Sacred Week" and "Week of Peace" in reverence for

the earth goddess and the god of agriculture, Ahiajoku/Ifiejoku (Achebe, C. *Things Fall Apart*). Parrinder (1962), on the other hand, notes that everything that concerns the family is of interest to the ancestors since they are its elders who will also seek rebirth into the family. According to Basil Davidson, every African lived in an age of faith like the Europe of the Middle Ages (AD 800-1350). In a manner that reflects the pagan Greco-Roman religious worldviews, the various peoples of Nigeria acknowledged that the gods and goddesses took care of every aspect of the people's lives. However, they were quite different in the sense that while the Greco-Roman pagan religious system was polytheistic, the African societies had a henotheistic religious worldview.

As it was in other African societies, religion and other facets of private and public life were interwoven in all the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. Religion was a binding thread that knit every aspect of the peoples' life, including their socio-political lives, in all the diverse ethnic and cultural nationalities that compose the Nigerian state. Their codes of conduct were each tied to religion. These unwritten codes defined good and bad conduct and provided guides for such performances like marriage, the naming of a new born, birth and death ceremonies and the age grade system. Because of this pervasive influence, homogeneity, cohesion, unity and peace were very manifest. Among the Igbo, for example, there were such punitive and reconciliatory measures like ostracism, "Ikwa Ala" (ritual purification), and "Oriko" (communalism) were deterrent measures that guaranteed conformity in social behaviour. This affirms the assertion by Emile Durkheim, one of the foremost and early social scientists, that engenders social stability and cohesion.

The following could be extracted among the good imports of religion on the contexts under study:

- i. **Social Cohesion:** it contributed to the cohesion and maintenance of social and cultural order in the society. As values were held in high esteem, every marriage, for instance, was contracted with the fear of the ancestors and gods. This belief reduced the rate of divorce. Among the Urhobo, for example, divorce was uncommon because of the belief that the ancestors had received the drinks and food given them during the marriage ceremony. Stability in marriage in turn contributed to stability in the whole social structure.
- ii. **Regulation of Social Behaviour:** The gods and ancestors were the only regulators of morality and conduct. Secret societies enforced compliance and orthodoxy. The Ogboni and the Oro in Yorubaland, the Ekpe and the Leopard society in Cross River, the Aro among the Igbo, the Owegbe in Bini, and the Igboze in Urhoboland formed an essential part of the native court government.
- iii. **Aiding economic development:** Religion played very positive roles in the system of production and exchange of goods and services. Almost every factory/craft served both economic and religious needs. Carvers were responsible for the production of images of lesser gods and masquerades. The

Oba of Bini established the guild system for craftsmen in order to satisfy his religious needs. This improved the economy of the societies.

- iv. Political harmony: They saw political authority as an act of God and the Spirit, far beyond ordinary human reach. Instances abound in the well-established kingdoms and empires where rulers combined priestly functions with political powers. For the Bini, for instance, the Oba was seen as a direct descendant of God and therefore divinely ordained to rule the world. His office was revered as a sacred office since he commanded both spiritual and temporal powers as the spiritual and political head of the empire.

The Religious Landscape in Contemporary Nigeria

Present day Nigeria has three major religious bodies: Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. As it is, most Nigerian elites, especially from 1960 onward, claim allegiance to Christianity or Islam. Many expert studies commonly agree that each of the two major religions, Christianity and Islam, approximately the larger percentage of the total population of Nigeria, though they scarcely agree on the exact figures or the exact percentages. Different sources give different figures. The Pew Research Center compared reports from several sources in 2010. These sources present the following results:

- the 1963 Nigerian Census: 36% Christian, 38% Muslim and 26% other
- the 2008 Measure Demographic and Health Survey: 53% Christian, 45% Muslim and 2% other
- 2008 Afrobarometer: 50% Christian, 49% Muslim and 1% other
- 2010 Pew Research Centre: 49.3% Christians, 48.8% Muslims

Other sources have the following:

- 2001 the CIA's World Factbook: about 50% Muslim, 40% Christian and 10% local religions
- 2010 census of the Association of Religion Data Archives: 47.5% Christian, 45.5% Muslim, and 7.0% other religious groups.

Despite the disagreement over the exact figures, these statistically based reports show that Nigeria has very large Christian and Muslim populations. Given Nigeria's total population, they reveal that Nigeria is one country that hosts the largest number of both Muslim and Christian populations in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This religious affiliation is distributed along Nigeria's geographical and ethnic cleavages. Northern Nigeria's (the Hausa) population is predominantly Muslim, though the South-West (the Yoruba) has a sizeable number of adherents of Islam. The South is predominantly Christian. Among Nigeria's major ethnic groups' religious affiliations, the Hausa (in the North) is mostly Muslim, in the East (the Igbo) the dominant religion is Christianity, while the Yoruba are divided among Christianity, Islam and traditional religion. Nigeria's middle belt region has the largest number of minority ethnic groups.

There in the Middle Belt, Christianity is predominant. They have members of traditional religion in their large numbers, and few Muslim converts.

The advent of Christianity and Islam into Nigeria put the country in a religious complex situation. The consequence is that the country's independence constitution of 1960 as amended by the 1963 defined Nigeria as a secular state, meaning that the affairs of state must not be mixed with religion. That is to say, religious belief and worship were to remain strictly personal. Unfortunately, this could not contend the mutual suspicion engendered by the ideologies of these two religions. For instance, Nigeria's second Republic was inaugurated amidst certain fears, especially the fear of religious wars. As a consequence, and early enough, that is, soon after independence, the country began to find herself engaged in a number of conflicts that have more or less religious motivations. This has cost, and is still costing, the country much in terms of instability, manpower loss, and underdevelopment.

Religion and Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria of the third decade of the 21st century is best described as a battlefield and the hotbed of religious conflict. Though root cause of conflicts could be traced to a number of interdependent variables such as politics, ethnicity, religion, economic, corruption, and others, the preponderance of religion behind any other variable makes Nigeria a sample case of a nation where religion undermines national integration and political stability and development.

Though there have been a number of conflicts since her independence in 1960, the spate of conflicts since the 1980s, for instance, have religious undertones. Instances are the outbreaks in Kafanchan in Kaduna State, where extremist Christians and Muslims religious leaders radicalized and polarized their followers through speeches and public demonstrations. The outcomes were clashes in which lives were lost and properties belonging to both government and religious bodies destroyed (Wikipedia, 2021. "Religious Violence in Nigeria"). Another sample case of religious conflicts in Nigeria is the Kano riots in the 1982. Still in 1980, members of the Maitatsine Islamic sect struck, killing and destroying everything in their way. The Maitatsine riots were attempts by an Islamic sect to force its ideas on an unwilling society. Ever since, Kano has become known as the hotbed of the Islamic radicalism and agitation (see Wikipedia, 2021. "Religious Conflict in Nigeria" for a generalized timeline of religious violence in Nigeria).

Much of the conflicts have been between adherents of Islam and Christianity (inter-religious conflicts). The embers have been religious and political leaders with extremist tendencies who, through indoctrinations and extremist campaigns have unsettled sensitivity and the secularity of the country's constitution and the sensibilities of the ethnic and religious diversity of the peoples of

Nigeria. In consequence, the Christian and Muslim identities have continued to be the backbone of political disparity and conflict in the country till this day.

Other factors are the many sub-cleavages within the wide Christian and Muslim categories:

- i. The North – South geo-political cleavage, with a significantly predominance of Islam in the North and Christianity in the South. IRIN (2003) identifies the 1914 merging of Northern and Southern Nigeria as the foundation of rivalries in Nigeria (IRIN, 2003).
- ii. The Muslim – Christian cleavages with Nigeria’s citizens shared into two equal halves of approximately, 50% -50% split between Christianity and Islam. With contentious religious ideologies, every little thing could give a spark to religious conflict. For example, an article published by the journalist, Isioma Daniel led to conflicts that caused the death of over 200 people in Kaduna state in 2002. Reinhard Bonke’s attempted crusade in Kano caused religious riot in Kano in 1991. The proposed 2002 Miss World contest was moved to London from Abuja when rioting Muslim population alleged that it was offensive to Muslim sensibilities (cf., Human Rights Watch, of 23 July 2003).
- iii. The intra-religious cleavages as splinter groups abound in the name of denominations and sects among the larger Christian and Muslim populations (sub-cleavages). Among the victims of Boko Haram are moderate Muslims (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia, 2020) while Pentecostals are ever proselytizing on the members of the more orthodox Christian groups.
- iv. Ethno-religious cleavage refers to the mixture of religious and ethnic cleavages. With the North is predominantly Muslim, and the South Christian, the prevalence of ethnic, religious and geo-political considerations on matters of national interest abound. Muhammadu Buhari, as presidential candidate of Congress for Progressive Change is quoted to have criticised the use of military force in the fight against Boko Haram. According to him, it tantamount to attack on the North (The Nation, 2 June, 2013). This often slows down the action of state.
- v. External factors often led to violent conflicts in Nigeria. With such world events as the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran, radical fundamentalist activities increased among Muslim youths, leading to the formation of many Muslim fundamentalist factions such as the Maitatsine, the Isala movement and the Shiites, and others. The foremost example is the Mohamed cartoon brought about a series of violent conflicts in Nigeria (Agang, no date). A similar instance of external factors behind religious crises in Nigeria is the Algerian Afghan Mujahideens who had been radicalized by Osama bin Laden and the Algerian Islamist war of the 1990s. Jean-Pierre Filiu points out how this group after forming the Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), birthed a number of fundamentalist splinter groups that has spread throughout West Africa. According to his account, Boko Haram is one of these groups (Jean-Pierre Filiu, 2009). Other international terrorist groups operating in Nigeria presently are Islamic

State West Africa (ISWA), AL-Qaeda, and others. Common in their agenda is the establishment of a purist Islam based strictly on Sharia law and the creation of an Islamic theocracy.

- vi. The politicization of religion is central in many conflict cases in Nigeria (Canci and Odukoya, 2016). Political cleavages of those in government as instantiated in the activities of former President Ibrahim Babangida in 1986. Then as President, Ibrahim Babangida, surreptitiously smuggled Nigeria into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) without the knowledge of either his Armed Forces Ruling Council or his cabinet. This entrenched mutual suspicion between Christians and Muslims in government. Next to this is the activities of many core-northern states governors who introduced the Sharia legal system in their states during the era of President Olusegun Obasanjo, between 1999 and 2007. This birthed the use of two legal systems in the same country. This negatively afflicted the process of national integration and development in Nigeria. It is pivotal to religious conflict in Nigeria. On another note, Osaghae and Suberu (2005) remarks that: "The church has played an important role in civil society in anti-military struggles and democratization. This has been made possible through umbrella bodies such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), and the Catholic Bishops Conference (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Discussion

The experience of religious practice has proved beyond doubt the explanations given in the theoretical analyses made earlier in this paper. Sociologists like Werner Sombart and Max Weber rightly affirmed the relationship of religion with politics, and even economic system. Weber observed the influence of Protestant ethics in the development of capitalism. Sombart's 1911 publication, *The Jew and Modern Capitalism*, traces this spirit of capitalism in Jewish norms. For the distinct religious principles present in Christianity, capitalism grew in protestant countries but not in the country like India, Pakistan etc. The Hindus lay great stress on spiritual progress than on material progress. Even in modern times in many countries of the world the religion directly and indirectly also influences political activities. The political system of the countries of the world like Britain, Pakistan, Italy, Germany, France, etc. are influenced by religion. This is an affirmation of the positive imports of religion as expounded by experience functionalists and social interactionalist theorists on religion. According to these perspectives attest that religion engenders social cohesion. Conflict theorists, on the other hand, in their criticism of functionalism, insist that religion displays more the power to cause conflicts.

The truth of such theoretical perspectives can only be measured in context. To the contrary, Nigerian experience shows that despite its relative contributions in human development and socialization, religious experience can be a combustible phenomenon in pluralistic societies like Nigeria. The

preponderance of abuse has high likelihood to manifest in a land with weak political system as one finds in this context. This complicates the case and gives reason for extremism, radicalization and incendiary comments by religious and even political leaders. This inflammable phenomenon is easily sparked into flame by incendiary remarks and actions of leaders in a context where mutual suspicion already exists. Perhaps this is responsible for such contentious policies like the Federal Character System and the catchment area phenomenon found in the education system (see Demarest, Langer, & Ukiwu, 2020). These are supposedly created to bridge the gap of horizontal inequalities in Nigeria. But it is left for analysts and critics to examine whether such policies have benefitted the country or not. But in a country where people are divided along religious, ethnic and geographical lines, and where the same serve as markers of social inequality, conflict and intolerance, one would not be surprised but become apprehensive when a national daily carries such captions as the following, Federal Character: Senate to probe Buhari's appointments" (cf., The Sun, 2018). Eva Nahid's allusion to context finds support in this Nigerian context. Owing to the prevalence of polarized political actors, Nigeria is a sample case of a country where "religion is politicized, and politics religionized". As predicted in the conflict perspectives, religion has rather reinforced and continues to reinforce inequality and conflicts the Nigerian context. The outcome as news in Nigeria indicate has not only turned North-Eastern Nigeria into an epicentre of religious conflict, Nigeria as a whole has become a battlefield and the hotbed of ethno-religious conflict in Africa. Thus, one can conclusively say, Nigeria is a 'cleft country' and a 'test case' of Huntington's Clash of Civilisations thesis.

Conclusion

In agreement with Canci and Odukoya (2016), in their research paper, "Ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria, A specific analysis upon identities, 1999-2013", ethnic and religious conflicts have not only pushed Nigeria hither and thither. These conflicts have more often impaired efforts at economic transformation, democratisation, national cohesion and stability. They have been, for the most part, violent and destructive to both lives and property, and impacted negatively on national development, national integration, and the political stability of Nigeria, among many others. This is the sad experience in the case of Nigeria where conflict seems to obliterate any positive outcome of religion in the society.

This paper has analysed the phenomenon of religious conflict in Nigeria from the theoretical perspective. The findings and contextual evidences drawn from history, the news media and researched works show that while the benefits of religion cannot be denied. But the evidence on ground shows that religion has turned into an exploitative tool, hence the number of religious insurgent groups and terrorism in present day Nigeria. The conclusion is drawn therefrom that

religion is a combustible phenomenon in pluralistic societies, hence its excesses need to be checked constantly. This would be possible where the government is strong willed and dispassionate over the rule of law.

While this paper may not have said everything, neither on religion in Nigeria nor even regarding these sociological theories of religion, it has only provoked thought on the way religious practice in Nigeria. An instance would be the symbiotic relationship between religiosity and morality.

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