

THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: THE NORTHERN NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Northern Nigeria has become a boiling point lately where Christians and Muslims kill each other in the name of God. African philosophy survey argue that Nigerian politics has served as an instrument of escalation, generation, and de-escalation of religious-related conflicts in the Northern part of Nigeria. The main focus of this paper is to analyze the nature, causes, character, and dynamics of the different conflicts that took place in some states in northern Nigeria. The secondary data sources were based on primary method. From the analysis, the paper showed that the political and religious leaders had contributed immensely to the escalation of these conflicts, which consequently affected the socio-economic development of northern Nigeria in particular and the nation at large. Therefore, the paper recommends that religious, political, ethnic, and other leaders should stop using religion and ethnicity for their selfish ends to avoid religious conflict to promote unity and national development.

Keywords: Conflict, Ethnicity, Politics, Religion, Violence.

Introduction

Religious conflicts of varying scales and intensities have been witnessed in this century in different parts of the world. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of these religious conflicts. Still, it is safe to say that these social unrests have taken a toll on humanity in terms of deaths, displacements, and disruption of economic and social activities (Falola, 1998; 28 – 30). Indeed, massive violent conflicts on a scale previously unimaginable have come to stare humanity in the face with their attendant adverse effects on the socio-economic development of the society (Falola, 1999; 21).

Conflicts, in general, are not new to human societies; they are as old as human society because they have been in existence in all spheres of human life since the beginning of history. According to Otite and Albert (1999), conflicts are necessary characteristics of every human society – a “normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce,” (ib. 45). A conflict, however, becomes an abnormality when it results in violence. The religious dimension in conflict is not a new phenomenon, as casual checks of some religious texts reveal accounts of bloody conflicts fought in the name of religion. Religion can serve as a force for good and evil in violent conflict situations (Egwu, 1998; 63).

However, experiences have shown that many of those involved in violent conflict situations have used religion or ethnic identities to rally support, justify their actions and proclaim a “moral superiority” over others (Ikenga, 2012; 111 – 112)

Nigeria has recorded bitter experiences of violent conflicts in various forms and religious conflicts in particular. Since the early 1980s, ethnic and religious crises have become a re-occurring decimal, especially in northern Nigeria. Among the 19 states that constitute Northern Nigeria, virtually none has not witnessed one form of religious conflict. The spate of violence has increased steadily (Ikenga, 2012, p. 112). Some conflicts included the *Maitatsine* crises in Kano in 1980. Zuru 1980; Maiduguri 1982; Yola 1984, Ilorin 1984; Bauchi 1984 and Kano, 1984. Others are the crises in Kafanchan 1987, Gure Kahugu 1987, Birnin Kebbi 1990, Katsina 1991, Tafawa Balewa 1991, Kano 1991, Jalingo 1992, Kaduna Polytechnic 1992, Kasuwar Magani (Kaduna) 1994, Kaduna 2000, Jos 2001, Kano 2001, Tafawa Balewa (since 2000) and

Nasarawa 2001, Jos 2004, 2008 and 2010. There have also been the Chamba-Kuteb crises in Taraba State in 2013, the Tiv-Jukun crisis in 2013, the Bassa-Igbira crisis in Toto 2012, and others. Ikenga Metuh (2012) identified two broad types of religious conflicts, namely. Intra-religious occurs between different denominations or sects; inter-religious conflicts prevalent between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimension; and inter-religious conflicts that have political origin end up in the form of religious conflicts" (p. 112).

With particular reference to Nigeria, Ikenga (2012) observes further that most inter-religious conflicts usually develop into inter-ethnic conflicts even where and when they begin as purely religious disagreements. The reverse is often the case that some socio-ethnic or political conflicts are deflected and fought under the inter-religious banner (p. 113). Religion conflicts, according to Alemika and Okoye (2002) "often categorised in terms of their origin, domain of expression and issues or grievances that are canvassed," (p. 113). However, according to him, such categorization is not mutually exclusive because issues at stake in any conflict may traverse several domains, culture, ethnicity, religion, economy, politics, race, and gender. Nonetheless, it is common in the literature to classify intra-group or inter-group antagonism and aggression as class, political, cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts (Alemika and Okoye, 2002; 113).

There are many types of social conflicts. However, it is challenging to isolate which conflicts are primarily provoked by political, ethnic, religious, cultural, or economic factors in practice. Occurrences from the past have shown that most violent conflicts result from the interplay of religious, political, socio-economic, and cultural differences. Therefore, according to Alemika and Okoye (2002), "Classifying the conflicts as solely religious, economic, ethnic, cultural or political may turn out to be misleading," (p. 117). This is because ethnicity and religion are two broad concepts that could be treated on their merits. In Northern Nigeria, however, the two concepts are so interwoven that conflicts between groups in the region tend to be quickly interpreted as religious conflicts. This tendency does not establish the boundary between religious, cultural, or political issues, especially during moments of conflicts and violence. It has been captured by some scholars as "ethnoreligious conflicts" or identity conflicts (Egwu, 2001; 3).

These concepts of ethnicity, religion, culture, and politics are closely associated, so the boundary is sometimes difficult to draw. Therefore, the concept “ethno-religious” is used in this paper to refer to these various identity-based violent conflicts, which are ethnic, political, religious, or economic in their manifestations. In this sense, the coinage “ethno-religious” is used in this study (Egwu, 2001; 3). Nigeria, as a nation-state, has had and continues to have its share of ethno religious conflicts.

The first major religious conflict in post-colonial Nigeria occurred in Kano between December 18th and 29th, 1980. Since then, the relative peace and harmony in the country have been shattered. After several years of independence, one of the significant problems retarding Nigeria's socio-economic and political development has been the recurrent incidences of religious crises and the attendant destructive effects. The growing propensity of protracted religious conflicts is potentially destructive to the extent that it can compromise the country's corporate existence if nothing is done.

So far, there appears to be no singular phenomenon in the history of Nigeria that shows the inability of the various identities to live together peacefully and pursue the goal of development than the regular occurrence of this monster called religious conflict. The country is experiencing a recurring decimal of violence that is deeply rooted in mutual suspicion and hatred among the country's various ethnic and religious groups. The aftermath of these violent conflicts and, indeed, “religious wars” bear destruction, physical and mental devastation, death, deprivation, dislocation of people, destruction of property, and massive economic stagnation (Egwu, 1999, p. 43). In the last three decades alone, Nigeria has witnessed so many ethno religious-based violent conflicts that it is difficult to track the number appropriately. These violent occurrences have destroyed lives and properties worth several trillions of naira. As a result, many have lost their lives while many more have suffered injuries, including permanent disabilities.

The humanitarian tragedy in terms of loss of lives and property in this chain of violent encounters can only be imagined. For instance, many Nigerians were surprised why a cartoon in faraway Denmark should lead to so much destruction of lives and property in Nigeria. This

resulted in widespread violence that led to several lives and property destruction in many parts of northern Nigeria.

Major Religious Conflict in Nigeria since Independence

It is important to state from the beginning that the various religious conflicts that have swept across this country in the past three decades are too numerous to outline and analyse in this paper. The main focus of this paper is to describe and analyse the nature, character, and dynamics of the different conflicts that took place in some states in northern Nigeria in the past three decades as a necessary background to the analysis of the effects of these conflicts on national development.

i. The *Maitatsine* Crises

The *Maitatsine* conflicts in Kano between December 18th and 29th, 1980, appear to be the first major religious conflict in Nigeria since independence (Yusuf, 1992; 236). For a long time, Kano has been under different Islamic influences, particularly from scholars from North Africa and neighbouring countries like Cameroon and Chad Republics. According to Isaac Albert (2004) some of these scholars introduced Kano to “fundamentalist” religious activities, which led to the emergence of several Islamic sects in Kano city. However, the *Maitatsine* conflicts were the first in a series of violent demonstrations of the activities of some of these sects in Kano (BBC News, 2004, n.p).

Although there had been a series of religious tensions and skirmishes across the country before 1980, the ravages of the *Maitatsine* crisis in Kano later spread to Yola, Maiduguri, Bauchi, and Gombe, took Nigerians by surprise. The crises caused considerable losses in human and material terms. The crisis shocked many Nigerians to their marrow, and according to Anthony Akaeze, about 4,177 lives were lost (The Times Newspaper, 2012, n.p). Members of the sect led by one Muhammadu Marwa, otherwise known as *Maitatsine* (meaning “the one who continues to curse” because of the abusive nature of his sermons), had a long history in Kano. The sect shot their way to notoriety when they took to the streets proclaiming their brand of Islam to be superior to every other one. In the process, it initiated an orgy of violence that claimed many lives and properties According to Hussaini Abdu (1986):

The *Maitatsine* phenomenon did not start in 1980. On account of Islamic fundamentalism, he was earlier deported in 1962 by Alhaji Mohammed Sunusi, then the Emir of Kano. He was later put in preventive detention in 1975. Long before the outbreak of the disturbances, *Maitatsine* had become a stormy petrel in Kano society and generally among Muslims. He arrested and detained people illegally and indiscriminately; some said he had a slaughterhouse where he made meat out of people. Many women and children were kidnapped and made to slave-work for the group. The group mobilized *almajirai* children to prosecute the war. *Maitatsine* was further accused of intimidation and molestation of innocent people, particularly the occupants of neighboring houses in *yan' Awaki* Quarters (*Maitatsine* Quarters). He forcefully ejected people from their houses, handed over the houses to his fanatical followers, and seized public places like primary schools and markets (p. 27).

For the ten days that the crisis lasted in Kano, law enforcement agencies had difficulty containing the crisis. To prevent the crisis from further spreading, the military was called in to quell and restore order after the police had battled endlessly, fruitlessly, and futilely to achieve the same. Alhaji Shehu Shagari's administration reportedly followed this up by signing into law the unlawful society. In all the crises involving the *Maitatsine* men, the sight of cudgel-wielding fanatics, mutilated bodies, and burnt houses were everyday scenes. They were among some of the charges many of the group's followers had to face in the law courts, leading to the prosecution of some of them. In all the areas where *Maitatsine* struck, Kano, Maiduguri, Kaduna, Yola, Gombe, and Bauchi, many sect members died, many were injured, and many were captured and detained by the police. Eventually, their leader, Mohamradu Marwa, was killed during one of the confrontations with soldiers. Although the crises started as intra-religious, the killing and destruction from them were not limited to Muslims alone, some Christians were also affected, and many churches were destroyed (Albert, 1999; 274 – 309).

ii. The *Sharia* Controversies

Sharia is the moral code and religious law of Islam. *Sharia* deals with many issues addressed by secular law. *Sharia* is a system of law inspired by Islam and the Koran and Arabic traditions, and early Islamic scholars. *Sharia* is understood to rule not only Muslims but also those living within Muslim society and govern all realms of a person's life (Irshad, 2010, p. 32). Though interpretations of *Sharia* vary between cultures, in its strictest definition, it is considered the infallible law of God instead of the human interpretation of the law (*fiqh*) (Irshad, 2010, p. 32). The word *sharia*, Bernard G. Weiss (2002) argues, is an archaic Arabic word denoting "pathway to be followed," or "path to the water hole," (pp. 24 – 26). The etymology of *Sharia* as a 'path' or 'way' according to Irshad (2010), "comes from the Qur'an 45: 18." Abdul Mannan Omar (2002), in his *Dictionary of the Holy Quran*, believes the 'Way' in 45: 18 comes from *Shari'a*, meaning "He ordained." *Sharia*, in its strictest definition, is "a divine law, as expressed in the Qur'an and Muhammad's example. As such, it is related to but different from *fiqh*, which is emphasized as the human interpretation of the law" (pp. 117 – 142).

The *Sharia* question has become a recurring issue in the relationship between Muslims, Christians, and the Nigerian state since the 1970s, as all constitution-making processes have had the *Sharia* question to grapple with. However, *Sharia* is not a new issue in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern part of the country, because the pre-colonial political system of most northern states was organized based on *Sharia* (Abdu and Alabi, 2009, pp. 133 – 156). *Sharia* has been an issue in Nigeria since the early 19th century because it can be argued that the basis of the Jihad was the establishment of an Islamic State based on the *Sharia*" (Turaki, 1993, 165). Therefore, it is not entirely correct to say that the *Sharia* debate at the Constituent Assembly in 1977/78 marked the beginning of the introduction of religion into Nigerian politics. This position is supported by some Muslim's view that "there is no separation of the sacred and the mundane." By extension, the introduction of *Sharia* into Nigerian politics is as old as Nigeria because the British Colonial Administration had in 1900 accepted the *Sharia* courts as being at par with the customary courts when the issue of *Sharia* came up in the Constituent Assembly in 1978 (Turaki, 1993, 165).

Nigeria has almost torn apart because of the acrimonious controversy between Christian and Muslim members in the Assembly. It almost paralysed the assembly proceedings until the Federal Government made the *Sharia* debate “a no-go-area” (Oluwasanmi et al. 2016, p. 15). During *Sharia* debates in the Constituent Assembly in 1977/78, the Muslims Students Society called on the members of the Assembly to stop the opposition to *Sharia* or be prepared to take full responsibility for putting the entire nation in chaos (Kukah, 1993, 127). The *Sharia* controversies in the Constituent Assembly drew reactions in the Northern States as protesters took to the streets in Zaria and Kaduna with banners like “No *Sharia* No peace, No peace No Constitution, No *Sharia* No Muslims, No Nigeria,” (Kukah, 1993, 127). The *Sharia* debates and controversies continued from the Constituent Assembly of 1977/78 until the “mother of all controversies” in 2000. This is because the emergence of democratic government in 1999 provided the space for expressing previously suppressed agitations. In almost all states, there were a series of the form of agitation. In light of this, the then Governor of Zamfara State, Alhaji Sani Yerima Bakura, launched the adoption of *Sharia* as a legal system in the state. This singular action changed the political situation in Nigeria and the northern states in particular. There were a series of debates for and against the introduction of *Sharia*. Many states with majority Muslim populations in the ‘North’ followed suit in the introduction of *Sharia*. During this controversy, attempts toward adopting *Sharia* moved to Kaduna State, indicating a movement from States with a large Muslim population to a state with a sizeable Christian population.

In December 1999, the Kaduna State House of Assembly set up an eleven-man committee under the Chairmanship of Alhaji Ibrahim Ali to collate popular views on the applicability of *Sharia* in Kaduna State. This action polarized the House of Assembly along a religious divide as there were a lot of misgivings and mutual suspicion among members of the House. During the sittings of this committee, Muslims were mobilized throughout the state and daily, took turns local government by local government to submit a memorandum in support of *Sharia*. On 14th February 2000, the Muslims decided to stage continuous demonstrations in Kaduna town for five days. These were characterized by processions along the major streets and climaxed with an outright demand for introducing complete *Sharia* law in the state and the appointment of an Emir in Kaduna city (Gofwen, 2004; 124).

After completing the assignment of the eleven-man committee on 21st February 2000, the Christians under the umbrella of the Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN), mainly from the southern part of the state, decided to organize their peaceful protest against adopting *Sharia* in the State. What started as a peaceful demonstration resulted in violent crises spanning three days, spread all over Kaduna town, and spilled over to other local government areas in the state. As a result of this crisis, many lives and property were destroyed. Women and children were displaced, and victims spread across about 23 different refugee camps. Scholars saw this crisis as the worst since the Nigerian civil war and the most destructive in the history of Nigeria. As Hussaini put it, “It was three days of agony for the people of Kaduna and the entire nation” (Hussaini, 1986; 27).

Narrating the effects of the *Sharia* crisis in Kaduna, Abimboye (2009), in the *Newswatch* Magazine of 2nd November 2009, reported that over 2,000 people died, about 1,944 houses and 746 vehicles were burnt, and that this “marked a radical departure from cohabitations in the city as the living pattern was drastically altered,” (p. 11). Adherents of the two religions began to live in separate areas out of the fear of an outbreak of another crisis. According to Ademola (2006), the Kaduna River, which demarcates Kaduna North from Kaduna South, provided a natural border for this division (p. 35). After the crisis, most Christians living in Kaduna North relocated to the south of the state capital across the bridge. In contrast, many Muslims in the south relocated to the north. The preceding account of *the Sharia* crisis in Kaduna State was a clear manifestation of inter-religious crises and the attendant effects on the social, political, and economic development of the state in particular and the nation in general.

Religion Conflicts Generated through Additional Causes

Conflicts arising from Christian-Muslim relationships can be categorized as identity conflicts because they are very delicate to classify and handle. However, for historical reasons and the fact that the combatants in these cases are mostly Muslims and Christians, each time there are conflicts, no matter the remote causes, they usually assume religious colorations. Some of these conflicts may have originated from the issue of religious domination, land ownership, political participation, and appointments.

- **The Kafanchan, Kaduna, Zaria, and Katsina Conflicts**

Since the 1980s, conflicts in Kaduna state have taken the dimension of the Muslim versus Christian dichotomy. Toure (2003) observes that the Kafanchan conflict of 1987 departed from previous conflicts, which were essentially communal (p. 14). On 6th March 1986, there was a violent conflict between Muslim and Christian students of the College of Education, Kafanchan, and Kaduna State. Before then, the atmosphere at the College was already charged because of an earlier program organised by the Muslims Students Society (MSS), and the highlight of their program was a film depicting the Othman Danfodio Jihad (Boer, 2004, p. 186).

The immediate cause of these conflicts was the plan by the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS) of the College of Education, Kafanchan, to hold a weeklong of religious activities marking the end of its annual week of activities (Boer, 2004; 186). The FCS had invited Rev. Abubakar Bako, a Muslim convert to Christianity, as the Guest Speaker at the occasion. In his sermon, the speaker was said to have quoted from Quranic passages compared to the Bible. This did not go well with the Muslim students, who felt he was preaching heresy. Having accused him of denigrating Islam and Prophet Mohammed in his 'misinterpretations,' they decided that he deserved to be punished, more so that the preacher was a convert from Islam to Christianity (Boer, 2008; 76). The action of the invited preacher did not go down well with the Muslim Students Society (MSS).

As a result, what started as a minor misunderstanding among Muslim and Christian students in the College finally sparked the crisis. The resultant destruction spread beyond Kafanchan to Kaduna, Zaria, and Katsina and threatened the entire country's stability. Beyond the College, it exploded into a full-scale ethnoreligious violent confrontation between Muslims (largely Hausa) and the Christians (predominantly non-Hausa). Once the conflicts spread to Kaduna, Zaria, and other parts of the state, they assumed a religious coloration. In the process, many lives were lost. Churches, mosques, hotels, bars, and other property were destroyed (Boer, 2008; 76). This crisis lasted nearly two weeks before the situation was brought under control. By the time peace was restored, the scope of destruction was unimaginable.

- **The Zango Kataf Conflicts**

The remote causes of the 1992 ethnoreligious conflicts in the Zango Kataf area of Kaduna State can be traced to the heterogeneous nature of the dominant historical players in this area in the 20th Century (Boer, 2008; 18). The major ethnic groups in the Zango Kataf area are the Agan (Kalimantan), Atyap (Kalab), Bajju (Kaje), Ikulu, and Feulbe (Fulani), Hausa and Tacherack (Kachelere).

In terms of ethnoreligious diversity, the area can be described as a pluralistic society with its share of conflicts. The general stake of the Kataf people, who are predominantly Christians and traditional worshipers, is very similar to that of Kafanchan. For decades, a flaming situation existed between the Hausa and Kataf communities that perceived themselves as marginalized or dominated. The central issues in these conflicts included aristocratic oppression, political exclusion, and economic marginalization; some of which got violent and exploded from time to time (Boer, 2008, p. 119). This perceived political marginalization and the control of economic power by the Hausa gave rise to the expression of a series of crises primarily in ethnoreligious terms. Because of this, throughout the colonial period, Zango Kataf appeared to be the most restive of all the districts in Zaria province. It was a melting pot, and it produced all sorts of contradictions. One of the significant issues at stake was the question of a Hausa (Muslims) minority dominating local administration and economy over the majority (Christian) ethnic groups (Boer, 2008; 131).

- **Jos Conflicts of 1994, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2010**

For some time now, Plateau State and, in particular, Jos metropolis has been entangled in violent ethnoreligious conflicts, destroying lives and property. The state hitherto peaceful and serene atmosphere has been shattered and replaced with protracted social conflicts of diverse dimensions. The Jos crises have a long history. Whereas similar crises have taken place in other states in the Northern part of the country, the nature, dynamics, intensity, frequency, and level of devastation of the ones in Plateau State and Jos, in particular, have been different.

As a result of these violent conflicts, many people have been displaced. The previous harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships and co-existence have become a thing

of the past. These bitter experiences have continued to linger with no lasting solution. While some people see religion as the reason behind these crises, others trace the genesis of these violent conflicts in the state to the creation of Jos North Local Government Area in 1991 by Ibrahim Babangida's regime. Rather than encouraging grass-root development, some scholars assert that the outcome of the creation of Jos North Local Government Area is the architect of the constant violent conflicts that have plagued Jos city and indeed the entire state since 1994. The 'indigenous' ethnic groups of Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere perceived the local government's creation as a plan to turn Jos city into a Hausa enclave and alienate them from their land (Best, 2007; 44). The creation, therefore, was the genesis of discord between the 'indigenous' population and the 'settlers' as the battle for the soul of the new LGA began in earnest. This position, therefore, paved the way for the protracted conflicts the state has witnessed since 1994.

These violent conflicts have enormous negative consequences for the economy of the state and the nation in general. There is no longer mutual trust between Muslims and Christians in the city. The breathing pattern has been drastically altered as Muslims and Christians now live in separate city areas. The city of Jos, Plateau State, has been thrown into conflicts and has remained the ghost of its old glory to date. These conflicts also affected the political, economic, social, religious, and psychological development of Jos city and its environs. The economic impact came by way of the destruction of property and business. These conflicts led to the unprecedented large-scale destruction of private and public property in the town as regular business was disrupted. Perhaps the most significant economic impact came with the destruction of the ultra-modern market in the center of Jos. As a result, commercial activities in the city have been adversely affected.

Implications of Religious Conflicts

Religious conflicts constitute significant challenges to national development because religious conflicts destroy lives, property, and the environment. Therefore, the nexus between national development and violent religious conflict cannot be over-emphasized. Areas experiencing high rates of violent religious conflicts tend to experience declining progress concerning human development as measured by poverty and income index. Persistent violent conflicts lead to acute

poverty, a high unemployment rate, and hunger. The effects of conflicts on national development have been enormous. These conflicts have affected men and women and boys and girls differently. These conflicts also have adverse effects on development in all ramifications.

- **Economic Effects**

Religious conflicts have a lot of economic consequences. Conflicts in whatever form lead to unemployment and loss of income because of disruption of economic activities, infrastructure, uncertainty, increased cost of doing business, and capital flight. Furthermore, social spending is often reduced during conflicts to accommodate increased security spending as the economy undergoes structural changes. For instance, impositions of curfews during conflicts bring every economic activity to a standstill because of restriction of movements until normalcy returns. Also, in the areas of investment, persistent religious conflicts in Nigeria have added to the fear of foreign investors coming to Nigeria, especially with the rampant cases of kidnapping of expatriates. Conflicts, therefore, have severe economic effects on the larger society.

- **Political Effects**

The constant incidences of religious conflicts in Nigeria in the past three decades have contributed to overheating the nation's politics and political processes as the country is constantly threatened with disintegration and separatism. This tense political situation has become more severe as adherents of each of the two dominant religions in Nigeria, Islam, and Christianity, try to dominate the political landscape using ethnicity and religion as instruments for bargaining. The question now becomes, is he a Muslim or Christian President, Minister, Governor, or Local Government Chairman? Following these ethno religious conflicts, the consequent abuse of fundamental human rights cannot go unnoticed. As a result, politics in Nigeria is always volatile and usually leads to violence and the destruction of lives and property.

- **Social Effects**

The social effects of religious conflicts cannot be overemphasized. Incessant religious conflicts have continued to threaten Nigeria's socio-economic development, peace, unity, and stability in the past three decades. Religious conflicts have equally adversely affected the existing social relationships between neighbors living peacefully. These conflicts have further negatively

increased religious consciousness among Nigerians and have led to hatred, hostility, and persistent suspicions among the adherents of Islam and Christianity.

In Nigeria today, ethno religious consciousness has led to various social ills ranging from problems of ethno religious influence on job recruitments, promotions, and securing admission to schools. Religious conflicts affect children, girls, and women in various ways. The death of men during violent conflicts raises the proportion of female-headed households. After each round of religious conflict, women tend to face a much heavier burden of caring for their various families alone. Some deaths occur due to preventable infectious diseases, but public health programs such as immunization for disease control and prevention cannot be carried out during violent conflicts. This has implications for the health of the citizens in the conflict areas. Also, the adverse effects of violent ethno religious conflicts on women and girls' reproductive and sexual health cannot be overemphasized. Their psychological, reproductive, and overall well-being are often significantly compromised during violent conflicts. Another significant social effect of religious conflicts is the displacement of women and girls as internally displaced persons. In conflict situations, adults too need protection and are less able to support and defend their families.

Conclusions

It is undeniable that religion has been and continues to be deeply implicated in many of humanity's cruellest struggles. Still, with effective good governance, it can reduce religious conflict to the barest minimum. Effective good governance and education are fundamental to peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria. The mere existence of religious differences is usually not the primary cause of conflict between groups. However, culture is always the lens through which differences are refracted and conflict pursued. Many respondents suggested that education on the need to respect and understand other cultures and education on tolerance is the way forward. This paper finally concludes that religious conflicts are protracted, widespread, complicated, and dangerous forms of conflicts plaguing Nigeria today, especially the northern part of the country. These conflicts have lingered on for the past three decades without solutions. The aftermath of these conflicts have always led to the destruction of lives and property, physical and mental devastation, deprivation, and dislocation of many Nigerians.

The Way Forward

Therefore, to ensure peace, unity, and social equilibrium for national development in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, the study recommends the following:

- Conflicts as rooted in ignorance and prejudice, misunderstanding, contradictions, injustices, and lack of tolerance and love. And so education on the need to understand and respect other religions and cultures; Education on the need to respect other religions and cultures and avoid religious bigotry.
- Religious leaders should endeavour to give their followers proper teachings and interpretations of their religious tenets and dogmas to avoid religious extremism and fundamentalism.
- Good governance. "Peace is not the absence of conflict; it is the presence of justice." Structural injustices, religious preferences, Tribalism, nepotism, and domination of one tribe, culture, or religion over others result in a conflict when put together.
- Because of globalization, the world has become a global village. This has brought about extremist religious influences from outside Nigeria. The government should monitor the

influx of extremist religious literature and teachings capable of radicalizing our youths, thus making them prone to religious violence.

- Religious, political, ethnic, and other leaders should stop using religion and ethnicity for their selfish ends to avoid ethno religious conflict to ensure unity and national development.

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