



I LORIN: **HISTORY, CULTURE** **AND** **LESSONS OF PEACEFUL** **CO-EXISTENCE**

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Inter-Faith Relations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Clashing Cymbals of Discordant and Harmonious Tunes

Gbemisola Abdul-Jelil Animasawun

Introduction

Globally, there have emerged two broad types of religious conflicts amidst diverse manifestations of identity conflicts since the start of the twenty-first century. These are pristinely religious conflicts as variants of ideological conflicts and pseudo-religious conflicts as a result of the instrumentalisation of religion. In the emergent crises, religion appears as Janus-faced (Scahffer 2004) and self-contradictory because its actualities starkly negate its potentialities for peace. To some, it is a threat to peace and security which simultaneously holds a lot of promises for global peace and security (Vlass 2010). Amongst a number of non-doctrinal issues that conflate religion with conflict, this article engages two out of the factors that have returned religion to the centre of politics. Some of these are the attempt to impose or decree democracy and its contents from the West as spear-headed by the United States especially under former President George Bush Junior and the basal internal squabbles for power which have made democratization bloody in many of the countries that embarked on democratisation since the end of the Cold War including Nigeria.

Despite the popularization of the concept of democratic peace, the validity of the argument of its proponents that democracy will bring about a peaceful world hinged on the argument that two democracies do not go to war against each other has come under scrutiny (Mazrui 2006). This is based on empirical evidences showing that democracy or the struggle for it has actually precipitated unprecedented conflicts and killings with Muslims and Arabs being the worst hit. The limitation of the democratic peace theory is further exposed by the upsurge of domestic conflicts in many countries that embarked on democratization. For example between the Gulf War of 1991

and the Iraq war of 2003, over a million Muslims have been killed either by direct Western military actions coupled with the increasing Muslim infant mortality rate as a result of economic sanction and blockades (Mazrui 2006). Therefore, democratisation has emerged as a socio-political problem threatening peace and security in many of these countries in continuation of the clash of civilizations. This has configured democracy or democratization as the cause of war and human sufferings in many Arab and Muslim nations which puts a substantial fraction of humanity in crises. Therefore, it becomes pertinent for the United States and the international community to support the amelioration of the causes of intra-state wars ranging from poverty to repression, to ethnic and religious conflict rather than merely promoting democratic elections and constitutions (Encarnacion 2005).

In Africa, democratization has bred the *reculturization* of politics and *religicization* of social relationships since the end of the Cold War (Adebanwi 2005). The resort to these practices can be traced to a number of factors such as the failure of post-colonial development nationalism in Third World countries (Senghass 1998) and "failed nationalism or nation-building processes leading to the formation of "new visions of collective identity" (Eisentadt 2000: 4). These two cumulate in the production of different types of movements such as religious, secular, multicultural or fundamentalist and communal or ethnic. Subsequently, there has been the emergence of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism mostly driven by youths and embodying the expectations and promises of millennial capitalist ideals (Alcinda and De Boeck 2005). Most of these movements make use of "violence and ritual in the reinvention of culture and as instruments in the negotiation of power" (Adebanwi 2005). These violent and somewhat contrarian movements are mostly led by youths described as lumpens because they have been economically dislocated due to lack of required skills for employment in a fast globalizing world and the consequences of the economic reforms undertaken by many of the Third World countries since the mid-1980s (Abdullahi 2004). Consequently, religion and ethnic extremism have provided shelter and refuge for this category of dislocated youths.

The preceding arguments are telling of the extant salience of religion and the invalidity of the democratic peace model in the context of internal peace based on realities within democratising states. This is because these realities query the earlier assertion that: "religion had lost relevance in political matters" (Fox 2004). The salience of religion in politics has remained since the Iranian revolution which brought down the regime of the Palhavi monarchy in 1979 (Meredith 2006). Even during the reign of strong men in North Africa the salience of religion in politics was still unquenchable going by the strong opposition constituted by the Muslim Brothers to the autocratic regime of Hosni Mubarak (The Economist Magazine August 2011). In Algeria, the imminent victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in the January 1992 national elections was stopped by the military in a manner suggestive of international conspiracy against a political party believed to be founded on extreme Islamic ideals (Hoffman and Graham 2006). This plunged Algeria into a civil that claimed over 150,000 lives (White and Scott 2001).

Since then, many other conflicts have shown religion to be influential in political contests. From Afghanistan to Sri Lanka to East Timor, Kashmir and several states in the Middle-East, the September 11 2001 attacks on the USA and Boko-Haram attacks in Nigeria; the rise of religious fundamentalism in political discourses has emerged as a global concern for peace, security and democratization. The causes of the resonance of religion in politics and public life especially in the Third World include:

- failure of governments to modernize,
- backlash against modernity because it undermined community values, traditional lifestyles and morals;
- expansion of the sphere of influence by state and religion leading to clashes between the two; opening up of the political space which has enabled religious organizations to impose their wills on others;

exportation of religious views through the use of information and communication technology; the rational choice theory which enables individuals to choose their religions have increased the number of religions and the rejection of western secular ideas and cultural colonialism (Fox 2004:58).

From the foregoing, it is evident that religion continues to be a topical issue in socio-political discourses and has also emerged as the cause of war and human sufferings in a number of places. However, the continued presence of religion in socio-political affairs of states has not produced uniformed effects. While in some settings it has led to full blown wars and intractable crises, inter-faith relations have been constructively managed to prevent total break-down of law and order in some other countries. In Nigeria's fourth republic, religion has retained a prime place in political discourses and sometimes appears to be more of a problem than a solution to the nagging problems of national question, peace and security. This is because it has produced a number of challenges such as violent inter and intra-faith conflicts and fundamentalism both of which threaten the country's fourth republic and stability. Nevertheless, cooperation across faith-lines despite the existence of bold fault-lines between the leading faiths – Islam and Christianity remains one of the stabilizing forces of Nigeria's fourth republic despite the dialectical relationship between the two establishments.

Inter-Faith Relations, Fundamentalism, and Religious Conflicts

Nigeria's social landscape is dotted with many religions. Amongst these are the ethnic-based traditional religions, Islam, Christianity and what has been described as the civil religion (Olupona 2003). However, the dominant ones have been Islam and Christianity both influenced by local beliefs and customs in the way they are practiced (Adogame 2010). Relations between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have similarities and

sharp differences which seem irreconcilable (Campbell 2010). Shared similarities at the vertical level is evident in that both reject the separation of religion from state life as done in the United States and many European countries while competing to outdo each other in enhancing public morality. For example, both reject homosexuality and refer to it as a sign of Western wantonness. Their dialectical relationship is characterized by mutual suspicion; Christians see Muslims as profoundly backward and enjoying a demographic advantage because of polygamy, ignoring the fact that informal polygamy is equally widespread among Christians. Muslims hold the view that Christians are aggressive in evangelizing, addicted to sharp business practices and lack integrity. Each believes that the other receives huge foreign assistance. In this context, Muslims cite American evangelicals and Christians point to Saudi Arabia (Campbell 2010).

At the horizontal level, there have been both conflicts and an improvement in the cooperation between the two faiths. Since the heated debate at the Constitutional Conference of 1979, other issues such as the; contestations over Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic States (OIC) in 1986, the disputes on the appropriateness of wholesale application of the Sharia and the extant debates on Islamic Banking. As stakeholders in the Nigerian project, they continue to jointly pursue laudable objectives. This is evident in the premium placed on inter-faith cooperation by the Sultan of Sokoto on his assumption of office by repositioning the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) jointly chaired by himself and the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The purpose and activities of the Council has been supportive of peace and security because it constitutes a mechanism for bridge-building and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Campbell 2010). Despite these efforts, the localization of the media in the south-western part of the country; its simplistic and insensitive reportage about Northern Nigeria and Islam still sustain a superficial Western view of northern Nigeria in the south (Adebayo 2012).

Since the 29th of May 1999 when the fourth republic was inaugurated, Nigeria has witnessed the return of religion, particularly Islam

to political discourses and activities (Mahmoud 2004). This has also marked the beginning of the *Talibanization* of Nigeria (Mahmoud 2004:58). This was informed by the decision of twelve states of core Northern Nigeria to implement full Sharia based on Quranic injunctions with prescribed punishments for the following: unlawful sexual intercourse between persons who are not married (*Zina*) for which punishment is stoning to death; theft (*sariqa*), punishable by amputation; robbery (*hiraba*); punishable by death or amputation; drinking alcohol (*shurb al-khamr*) and false accusation of unlawful sexual intercourse (*quadhf*), punishable with lashing (Mahmoud 2004). The promulgation of the Sharia law by twelve states of northern Nigeria marked the culmination of a watershed in the quest for Islamism in post-colonial Nigeria with mixed implications for inter-faith relations and conflicts and the rise of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria's fourth republic.

Since then, religious conflicts especially inter-religious ones have manifested in varying degrees that are reflective of global trends in the often conflictive relationship between religion and politics. In the contemporary world, religious conflicts have been classified into: religious fundamentalism, religious terrorism- predominant in failed states like Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia and tension arising from the clash of civilizations (Haynes 2009). Religious fundamentalists are united by certain characteristics such as: a perception of being under threat which makes them to adopt strategies for the preservation of their identities and ideologies in response to real or imagined attacks from non-believers, whom they assume are hell-bent on luring them into a syncretistic, areligious or irreligious cultural milieu. In such circumstances, fundamentalists' protection of religion takes socio-political offensives with domestic and/or international dimensions (Vlass 2010).

Also, failed states also provide fertile ground for religious conflicts and terrorism (Jurgensmeyer 2010). This is because of the lack of effective and responsible government in such places, which makes people to seek fulfillment of existential needs in religion. This also creates room for international religious terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda. The third type is the

clash of civilizations hinged on the argument of Samuel Huntington that the end of the Cold War would mean the start of another war between political Islam and Western/Liberal democracy. His main argument is that the democratic 'Christian' West came into conflict with radical Islam – a political system focused on changes in the political order and inspired by anti-democratic religious and cultural dogma termed – Islamic Fundamentalism and described as key threat to international stability. On the other hand, Huntington conceptualizes 'Christianity' as conducive to the spread of liberal democracy citing the succession of dictatorial regimes in Southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s by liberal democratic political norms (rule of law, free election and civic rights) as indicative of the synergy between Christianity and liberal democracy. Others who share this thought opine that: Islamic fundamentalism has a more than superficial resemblance to European fascism.

Within states, those who clamour for a dominant place for religion in the conduct of affairs and politics have been grouped into three. They are; *fundamentalists*, *extremists* and *ethno-religious fundamentalists* (Appleby 2001). The extremists are like the religious militia because they make use of violence as an instrument of sanctifying the community and waging war against threatening outsiders (Albert 2005). The extremists believe that the suppression, conversion or elimination of the enemy is a sacred right or obligation for which they adopt *civic intolerance through* the use of coercive forces of the state against their targets by subverting the political and legal systems or outright use of extralegal violence (Albert 2005). The fundamentalists believe that religion should determine the culture, politics and laws of the society and that nothing should challenge its place. In the third category are the ethno-religious nationalist groups, - who equate their religious traditions with that of a nation and assume that a threat to either is a perfidious attack on what is sacred (Appleby 2001).

Conceptually, this article locates the Sharianisation or *Talibanisation* as a type of fundamentalism common to religious and secular movements - abhorrent of debates and discussions with those who hold contrary views. Also, it smacks of an attempt to *Islamise modernity* defined as: "accepting

the West's technology and administrative skills while reforming its moral corruption in accordance with Islamic law and Islamic institutions as the basis of government" (Kepel 2004). In the midst of controversies generated between the Christian and Muslim establishments and the violent conflicts triggered in parts of the country by pronouncements of full implementation of Sharia by some states (Aiyede 2001), *the adoption of a constitution that arose from a Christian civilization; Kafirish law or Judeo-Christian law to implement full-fledged Sharia, which is Allah's divine law has been described as contradictory* (Harunah 2002). Also, the *localisation* of the *Sharianisation* policy to the twelve core northern states and the attendant host-settler conflict that it resuscitated implies a displacement of ethnic politics by religious politics (Adogame 2006).

Therefore, the pursuit of *Sharianisation* by a section of the country that is ethnically and religiously homogenous can be described as ethno-religious nationalism or fundamentalism. This is because it became a basis for seeking political power and it was characterized by the use of violence against those who opposed it in the affected parts of the country. This alludes to the argument that: when economic and political resource is too scarce to be used for reaching political and economic goals, elites can construct conflictive sceneries and mobilize people along ethnic and religious lines (Schaffer 2004).

Religious fundamentalism has characterized the Third Wave of democratization in many third world countries with an exceptionally high rate of casualties in Africa which has drawn attention to the reality that democratization and power-sharing have not promoted peaceful co-existence in many African states (Albert 2011). This desecration and perversion of religion has worsened Africa's conflictive environment defined by dialectical and violent struggle for domination by its disparate peoples amidst misery (Adebanwi and Obadare 2010). This has produced many roaming and stationary ethnic and religious militias in the continent which further underscore the *religicization* of politics and the politicization of religion. In Liberia the guerrilla known as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) played a major role in the re-

escalation of the Liberian crisis in 1999. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) played an active role in the Ugandan crises; in Sudan there were the Janjawiid and the government militias and the Casamantis Separatists of Senegal (Boas and Dunn 2007). Also, in Nigeria, the Yusufiya Movement popularly known as Boko-Haram continues to threaten public peace and security.

As one of the mechanisms for creatively managing plurality and promoting the nation-building process, democratization in Nigeria like many other countries of the continent has lost touch with the lives and aspirations of the citizens and has been reduced to *electoralism*, which is merely aimed at satisfying minimum requirements for continued patronage from the international community (Joseph 2003). This has produced a divergence between the citizens and the state in many of these countries including Nigeria and unlimited opportunity for conflict entrepreneurs (Kew 2010). Consequently, instead of relating as a collectivity by consciously working together in achieving shared objectives that are not limited by religious or ethnic identities, most Nigerians take to community-based or affective relations guided by exchange and reciprocities which militate against cooperation across identity divides (Hyden 2006).

Despite the inaccuracy of statistics on deaths from religious conflicts, "Nigerian fatality rates from: "ethnic and religious conflicts ... on a proportional population basis from 1999-2002 were 62% of the global average and 11% of the sub-Saharan African average" (Erubami and Young 2004:4). But in 2002, the World Bank placed Nigeria among the most politically unstable and violence prone 7% of the world's population. During the first term of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2002) two discrete episodes of inter-communal violence jointly contributed 56% of the total violent fatalities (4300 out of 7612); Kaduna and Abia during February 2000, involving 2000 Muslim and Christian fatalities over the enactment of Sharia's criminal law; in September 2001 in Jos, having "primarily and secondarily religious" casualty, with 80% of the 2300 victims being Hausa Muslims (Freedom House 2002). By 2004, over forty-seven incidences of violent conflicts had been documented with uncertain casualties (Campbell

2010).

The foregoing has informed a conceptual division of the phenomenon of inter-faith conflicts into two compartments. These are violent inter-faith conflicts embedded in identity and existential struggles which are conceptualized as *resource-based* conflict. An example of this type of resource-based conflict is the recurrent violence over the choice of the Chairman of Jos North Local Government Area of Jos which often turns the Hausa-Fulani - Muslims against the indigenous Beroms – Christians. At the establishment level, the dialectical struggle for dominance of the public space, irreconcilable differences on the role and limitation of religion in governance and policy matters, and the identity of the Nigerian state represent a type of *value-based* conflict because each establishment struggles to dominate the other in this regard. However, when religious sentiments are used to mobilize for political gains as sometimes done when political appointments are to be made, the conflict in this context takes form of a non-violent value and resource-based conflict. For example the recent clamour for a Christian Governor in Lagos state in 2015 illustrates such non-violent competition for resources which implies a latent conflict between the two establishments (Sobowale 2011).

Religion in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Whither Post-Modernist Thesis?

The transition to democracy which translated to the actual commencement of the struggle for democracy in many Third World countries was based on certain assumptions which have been rendered misleading based on experiences in many of these countries. These assumptions resonate based on experiences in Nigeria since 1999 when democratization started:

... fourth assumption is that the underlying conditions in transitional countries – their economic level, political history, institutional legacies, ethnic make-up, sociocultural traditions, or other

structural features will not be major factors in either the onset or the outcome of the transition process... fifth, the transition paradigm rests on the assumption that the democratic transitions making up the third wave are being built on coherent functioning states (Sobowale 2011:15).

The collapse of these assumptions has informed descriptions such as: *semi-democracy*, *formal-democracy*, *electoral-democracy*, *facade-democracy*, *pseudo-democracy*, *weak-democracy*, *illiberal-democracy*, *virtual-democracy* and *at-risk democracies* (Carothers 2002). These democracies located in the *gray-zone* are characterized by a public-perception of politics as stale, corrupt and elite-dominated based on what is observed of the state. The dominant systems in these places are conceptualized as *feckless pluralism* and *dominant-power politics* which is immediately relevant to our discourse is explained as:

“demonstrating limited political space, some political contestation by opposition groups . . . Yet one political grouping – whether it is a movement, a party, an extended family or a single leader – dominates the system in such a way that appears to be little prospect for the alternation of power in the foreseeable future”.

The above has informed the structural classification of Nigeria by this article as one of the centres of dominant-power politics perpetuated by

the agency of the dominant political party. The description of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that has been the ruling party since 1999 alludes to this:

... a coalition of some of the nation's most powerful neo-patrimonial networks came together to form the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and was little more than oligarchs sitting atop these personal networks from across the nation particularly the northeast, Middlebelt, Niger Delta and the southeast Igbo nation. Most of these individuals have worked with military governments in the past and had grown rich from their association, and thus were seen as largely safe for the exiting military (Kew 2010:514).

After emerging president from what some describe as a *pacted* (Adekanye 2005) deal between the military and civilian power elite, former president Olusegun Obasanjo emerged as the leader of the party. The choice of former president Olusegun Obasanjo has been explained as arising from a combination of his personal disposition and attitude to liberal democracy as captured below:

Obasanjo has never favored a multi-party system for African countries. Twenty year ago, he pointed out in

his native tongue, Yoruba the word for "opposition" also means "enemy" and advocated single-party systems for African countries. During his tenure as president, distinctions between party and government disappeared: looking forward to one-party rule (Third-term through reliance on dominant power politics), he and many other politicians flouted the constitution (Herskovitis 2007: 120).

The elite consensus or pact that produced the presidency was conscious of the need for ethnic and religious balancing or correction hence, the emergence of two Yoruba Christians as leading contestants in the presidential election. In recognition of the salience of ethnicity and religion in Nigeria's politics which also encouraged the emergence of Nigeria's *theocratic class* made up of Christians who sort to advance their personal and institutional position in relation to competitors; based on a social standing that derives from a variety of traditional sources and common endorsements and usage of salvationist discourse to analyse Nigeria's political process (Haynes 1995).

However, just like the conflictive inter-ethnic relations amongst the country's ethnic nationalities, this article situates the emergence of the *theocratic class* in the context of a conflictive inter-religious relationship between the Muslims and Christians which is illustrative of a non-violent conflict for scarce and limited political resources between the two. This is corroborated by the view that: "the emergence of the Christian *Theocratic Class* is clearly related to the suspicion of the desire of the Muslim population to shape and define Nigeria as a *Theocratic Muslim State*" (Obadare 2006:667). This underscores the conflictive and fragile nature of Nigeria's inter-faith. However, in a paradigmatic shift, there was the

Christianization of Nigerian politics as Christians changed from political apathy to political engagement at the inception of the fourth republic (Obadare 2010). The resolve of the Christians led by the *Theocratic Class* to Christianize Nigerian politics can be teased out from the following admonition and charge to members that:

Truly politics may be a dirty game - but who will make it clean? If Christians distance themselves from politics that leads to leadership, then demons will have a field day as has been the case with Nigeria up till today. If demons govern and rule us and burn our churches and marginalize us and treat us like second class citizens in the country of our posting, then why should the Christian complain? . . . When will the righteous be in authority? . . . Christians ought to be interested in politics which is the vehicle used in reaching the position of leadership in the country. Genuine, properly born-again Christians filled with the Holy Spirit should come and contest elections (Obadare 2006:661).

From then, the hitherto dormant Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) founded in 1989 became a vocal voice in the polity marshaling strong positions on matters of global and local relevance led by personalities like; Bishop Alaba Job, Archbishop Anthony Olubunmi Okogie, Archbishop Sunda Mbang, Rt. Rev. Emmanuel Gbonigi, and Revd. Ayo Ladigbolu (Obadare 2006: 669). Also, since 1999, the body complemented by the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) which was set up in 1991 has sharply and stoutly pursued a dialectical relationship between the Muslims in the country on issues of national interests (Obadare 2006).

Furthermore, the Christian theocratic class has sustained the explanation of political events in Nigeria through the Salvationist discourse. In an article by Bishop Mathew Kukah, he explained the ascendancy of President Goodluck Jonathan as a: "monumental act of divine epiphany" "this man's rise has defied logic and anyone who attempts to explain it is tempting the gods." These utterances from the cerebral and revered cleric did not go unchallenged as pointed by Obadare (2010: 51):

Take for instance the claim that President Jonathan's rise to the presidency 'defies logic' and the threat that 'anyone who attempts to explain it is tempting the gods'. As a topic for bar room chatter and a sop for the unlettered, this is all well and good. But for serious academic analysis, the kind that one has come to expect from Father Kukah, it fails miserably. To start with, if there is anything that is clear about the rise of Goodluck Jonathan, it is that it is in fact analytically apprehensible. Jonathan is the beneficiary of

a swindle imposed upon the generality of Nigerians by former President Obasanjo and the inner caucus of the Peoples Democratic Party. It is in the public domain that Obasanjo favoured the late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua for the presidency, in full awareness of the latter's precarious medical state. What we are yet to fully understand is the exact reason he did this, though some have suggested that he hoped to benefit from the chaos that a full blown constitutional crisis, occasioned by the sudden demise of his stooge, might have precipitated. Rather than draw conclusions from existing facts, Father Kukah, rather disappointingly, privileged the path of mysticism.

Discordant Inter-Faith Tunes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 marked the formal incorporation of Islam and Christianity in a single political entity. This implies that the *Mistake of 1914*, in addition to bringing diverse ethnic nationalities together, also meshed two different religions into a political entity. In the first republic, there was relative religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence while religious friction, tension and

conflict were more pronounced in the intra-faith context (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992). Inter-religious conflicts started in the seventies and came boldly to the public space during the Constituent Assembly of 1978 over the issue of the establishment of the Federal Sharia Court of Appeal in 1978 (Kenny 1996). Thereafter, Nigeria's stealthy joining of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the D8 – (economic group of Muslim state) in 1998 and International Islamic Liquidity Management Corporation (IILM), based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2011 continue to fuel mutual suspicion (Jimenez and Laremont 2010).

One of the issues fuelling adversarial relations between the establishments of the two faiths is the alleged politicization of the census on the data of adherents of Islam and Christianity since Nigeria's independence. This informed the exclusion of this from the last census conducted in 2006. Contestations on the population of Muslims and Christians also illustrate a form of value-based conflict. This is based on the psychological feeling of numerical superiority in confers on adherents. This article argues that if the two faiths are not thinking of going to war as done in the dark ages and if the Nigerian state is seen as protective and impartial to all, it should not count if the adherents of one's religion are few or many. It is also reflective of the extent of mutual suspicion and the dialectical struggle between the two establishments.

Another example of the dialectical struggle between the faiths is the debate over the return of schools founded by missionaries taken over by the state governments to their founders. Since, the Fourth Republic began, it has also become the norm for political appointments to be made in due recognition of the presence of the two faiths; leading to the emergence of Christian governors and Muslim Deputies and vice-versa depending on presence and scheming prowess of the two camps in respective political parties and perceptions held by the electorate.

Conflicts between groups that (in)correctly present themselves as Christians and Muslims have led to horrendous acts of violence, vandalisation of properties, loss of lives and internal displacement of over 1.2 million Nigerians according to official records (Campbell 2010). Identity

crises and specifically religious crises configure Nigeria's Middle-Belt akin to the Middle-East going by myriad of religious crises that constituted security challenges in Tafawa Balewa (1991, 1995 and 2001); Zango-Kataf (1992); the Sharia crisis in Kaduna and other northern states (2000) and the Jos crises since 2003 which alone has generated over 258,000 internally displaced people (Gwamna 2008). Also, there have been over 13500 deaths arising from ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria since the return to civilian rule in 1999 (Campbell 2010). Since 1999, religion has become problematic to peace and security in many parts of the country largely due its politicization which torpedoes the realization of its potentialities for the enhancement of peace and security.

The conflictive relationship between Islam and Christianity dates back to the country's independence. One of the points of disagreement between these has been on the character and image of the Nigerian state. Udotai (2005) argues that based on observed pattern of engagement with the Nigerian state and its positioning, it can be inferred that Islam is being positioned to define the Nigerian state as an Islamic entity while the implementation of Sharia implies the superiority of one religion and ethnic group against the rest in the country.

This is observable in the mainstreaming of the Sharia into the legal and judicial processes. However, the Christian establishment ostensibly preferring to preserve the secular nature of the Nigerian state has resisted this. In this context, the establishment the CAN appears like a direct challenge to the dominance of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA) and Jama'atu Nasir Islamiya (JNI) of Nigeria's religious public space. This article posits that Nigeria's membership of the OIC and the introduction of the Sharia are illustrative of the discordant tune on the character of the Nigerian state by Christian and Muslim theocratic classes.

Also contested, is the control or management of education which has geo-political dimensions. In the north, the Christians allege that the governments have taken over Christian mission schools and compelling the Islamisation of the educational system. However, in the south especially south-west, Muslims have continuously opposed the control and ownership of schools by the Christian missionaries since independence. There has also

been insipient rivalry in the drive for membership or adherents by these two faiths leading to the establishments of crèches, primary schools, secondary schools, Bible and Quranic schools and universities.

Recently, the step taken by the governor of the country's apex financial institution the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi to introduce non-interest Banking system dubbed Islamic-Banking has also generated heated debate on the place of religion in Nigeria's public life. The reactions from the Christian establishment have further revealed the extent of mutual suspicion between the two faiths. According to Rt. Rev. Peter Akinola, a former primate of the Anglican Communion while commenting on the non-interest Banking, he opined that:

Even the so-called Islamic Banking of Sanusi Lamido, it's still part of the whole thing (Islamisation of Nigeria). Look at our currency, the Nigerian currency; when Charles Soludo was there he removed the Arabic script and put the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. Sanusi got there and removed them; it is back to Arabic again. Haven't you seen that, you have not noticed that, as if Nigeria was an Arab state. . . . it's part of the national agenda to Islamise Nigeria.

In another interview, Primate Nicholas Okho of the Anglican Church Communion expressed opinions similar to that of his colleague. When he was reminded on the similarity of Islamic Banking with the Biblical injunction that usury or interest is not encouraged, he retorted thus:

Yes because it has Biblical justification. Nothing is wrong

with it. However, I should say something more about this issue. What we have now is more than Islamic banking; people see that Islamic banking is not standing alone. It is part and parcel of an ongoing process. First, in a kind of unacceptable way we were smuggled into OIC. The OIC generated a lot of controversy that polarized the country and they are still there. More than that during the regime of president of President Olusegun Obasanjo, suddenly Islamic Sharia became an issue and that is without regard that we said this country must not accept a particular religion. Twelve states or so all of a sudden became Islamic states. And then the same people took Nigeria to D8-what they call the Developing 8. And of all of them only Nigeria is a non Muslim state. We see that this Islamic banking is another further step in the same direction coupled with what Boko Haram is demanding, we say there is cause for worry.

The President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor minced no words in expressing the reservations of the Christian community against Islamic Banking. In an interview by positing that:

Islamic Banking is not the only type of non-interest banking

... The Bible had been written long before Quran and there is something about non-interest banking in the Old Testament.

... Sanusi is not the governor of Central Bank of Islam, but the Central Bank of Nigeria. The money he is spending to promote Islamic banking belongs to Nigeria and Sanusi did not get it from a mosque.

... He cannot continue to do that. When he started, he said there is a 'Sharia Council of Experts' and when we shouted he changed it to 'Council of Experts'. Who is he deceiving?

From the statements above, the tenuous relationship and mutual suspicion between the two religions can be teased out. The two statements underscore the extent of mutual suspicion between the two faiths. Nevertheless, there have been instances of cooperation between the two of faiths on issues of common concern to humanity.

Concordant Inter-Faith Tunes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

In an unprecedented manner reminiscent of inter-faith cooperation against tyranny in Egypt (Adegbamigbe and Ademosu 2011) Muslims and Christians publicly demonstrated and spoke with one voice against the controversial

and punitive withdrawal of the fuel subsidy by Jonathan Goodluck despite his Christian identity. In many cities across the country, the Christians amongst the protester provided human shield for the protesters against attacks from soldiers and policemen deployed to quell the largely peaceful protests. This is a symbolic demonstration of cooperation across faith lines (Kenny 2011).

Also, in combating terrorism and fundamentalism, the Muslim and Christian establishments have been consistent and loud in condemning any act considered subversive of the country's peace and security. Despite the tensions, antagonisms and mutual suspicions that have rule the relationship of the two in the fourth republic, the Sultan of Sokoto initiated the revival of the National Interreligious Council (NIREC) which he chairs with the president of the CAN (Albert 2010). In clear terms, the body condemned the spate of bombings led by the Boko-Haram in statement jointly signed by the two co-chairmen and executive secretary; Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, Archbishop John Onayekan and Professor Is-Haq Oloyede (Albert 2010:6). This particular institution has tried to breach the gap of misunderstanding between the two faiths more than any other in accordance with its stated objectives and functions culled from its website and presented below:

1. To honestly and sincerely endeavour by themselves and through them, their followership, to understand the true teachings of the two religions - Christianity and Islam -including their peculiarities and personal mannerisms through dialogue discussions, workshops, seminars, conferences, pamphleteering, etc.
2. To create a permanent and sustainable channel of communication and interaction thereby promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria so that the members of both faiths may have mutual understanding of each other's religious position, co-existence among all the people of Nigeria irrespective of their religious or ethnic affiliations.
3. To promote and include moral, Ethical, social and cultural values of the two faiths for the rebirth and rebuilding of a better society.

4. To provide a forum for mutual co-operation and promotion of the welfare of all citizens in the nation;
5. To create for and channels for the peaceful resolution of any friction or misunderstanding that may arise from time to time.
6. To serve as an avenue for articulating cordial relationship amongst the various religious groups and between them and the Government;
7. To assist the Federal, State and Local Governments of Nigeria and the Populace by emphasizing and accentuating the positive roles religion should play in nation building and development;
8. To serve as a forum to achieve national goals, economic growth, national unity and promotion of political stability;
9. To consider and make recommendations to the Federal and other levels of Government on matters that may assist in fostering integral and spiritual development of Nigerians;
10. To make recommendations on such other matters as the Federal and other levels of Government may from time to time refer to the Council
11. To network with organizations of similar aims at home and internationally, for the furtherance of the objectives of the Council.

Without gain-saying, the establishment of NIREC and its activities more than anything else represent the boldest attempt at forging peaceful relations between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria despite the chequered history of inter-religious relations in Nigeria. Again this reiterates the stance of this article that religion remains relevant in public life and inter-group relations.

Conclusion

Religion remains a topical issue in inter-group and inter-religious relations in Nigeria's fourth republic since 1999. It has also emerged as a central concern for democratization, politics, peace and security in Nigeria's fourth republic; in utter rejection of the post-modernist assumption. In the context of inter-faith relations, bifurcation still exists especially when one

theocratic class perceives being short-changed in the distribution of the state resources and privileges and when one attempts to dominate the public space. The public space here is taken as that space which is physically separate from housework and an arena where everything is decided through words and persuasion, and not through force and violence (Obadare 2004). Also, the frequency and bestiality of both violent and violent inter-religious contestation reinforce the second argument of this article that the religion-peace synergy is not a given relationship.

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