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ESTABLISHING A CORRELATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE AND RELIGIO- POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Boniface Omatta

Abstract

This paper aims to establish a correlation between religious intolerance and religio-political conflicts in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, religio-political conflicts in Nigeria have been ubiquitous over the years since independence in 1960 and have no end in sight - we shall find out this in the course of this paper. Establishing such a correlation deserves more favourable attention than ever. Favourable attention in our case is centred on a reflexive history of Nigeria as a way of unravelling her complex and shaky foundation. This historical approach will greatly assist us to establish a correlation and comparatively analyze the level of intolerance of each of the three main religions of African traditional Religion (ATR), Islam, and Christianity in Nigeria. Thus, this paper aims to argue that an establishment of this link will significantly contribute to the debate on the reason why religio-political conflicts in Nigeria are rife and unabating.

Introduction

Religio-political conflicts in Nigeria have been ubiquitous over the years since independence in 1960 and have no end in sight. Many factors could be responsible! However, we shall concentrate on a major factor of religious intolerance. Thus, this

article aims to establish a correlation between religious intolerance and religio-political conflicts in Nigeria. Establishing such a correlation deserves a more favourable attention than ever. A favourable attention in our case demands a reflexive history of Nigeria as a means of unravelling her complex and shaky foundation. This historical approach will greatly assist us to establish a correlation and comparatively analyze the level of intolerance of each of the three main religions of African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity in Nigeria. Thus, this paper aims to argue that an establishment of this link will significantly contribute to the debate on the reason why religio-political conflicts in Nigeria is rife and unrelenting. We shall navigate through this paper with the following sub topics: A Reflexive History of Nigeria; A Comparative Analysis of Religious Intolerance in ATR, Islam and Christianity; A History of Religio-Political Conflicts in Nigeria; Establishing a Correlation between Religious Intolerance and Religio-Political Conflicts in Nigeria; Conclusion. We do not in any way claim that this singular attempt will be exhaustive and we take responsibility for any shortcomings. Our guiding question is: what is the correlation between religious intolerance and religio-political conflicts in Nigeria?

A Reflexive History of Nigeria

The outcome of an arbitrary¹ amalgamation in 1914 is what is geographically called Nigeria.² Like most colonized territories, Nigeria had a shaky or faulty foundation that has not been corrected. It is hard to call Nigeria a nation without this rectification, in the form of adhering to true federalism³ that is yet

¹ The peoples who suddenly found themselves locked together in a nation-state were not part of the decision regarding nations that should be part of the new country. See K. Maier, *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000: 9; A. I. Ayua, and D. C. J. Dakas, "Federal Republic of Nigeria," in *Constitutional Origins, Structure, and Change in Federal Countries*, vol. 1., ed. J. Kincaid and A. Tarr (Montreal: McGill-Queen University Press-MQUP, 2005), 239.

² The name Nigeria itself was given by Flora Shaw, the wife of Lord Lugard, to describe areas around the River Niger – which was eventually adopted as a name at amalgamation. It meant nothing more than that. Lugard was the British colonial Governor-General from 1912-1919. See D. Lamb, *The Africans* (New York: Random House Inc, 1983), 299.

³ R. T. Suberu depicts the main tenets of federalism as: "the constitutionalized, or largely irrevocable division of governmental power and functions on a territorial basis within a single country... and that the constituent units cannot be unilaterally abrogated by the centre." See R. T. Suberu, "Democratizing Nigeria's Federal Experiment," in *Crafting the New Nigeria: Confronting the Challenges*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (London: Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 61. Itse Sagay notes that federalism "is an arrangement whereby powers within a multinational country are shared between a federal or central authority and a number of regionalized governments in such a way that each unit, including the central authority, exists as a government separately and independently from the others. Each operates directly on persons and property within its territorial area, with a will of its own and its own apparatus for the conduct of affairs." See I. E. Sagay, "Reordering Nigerian Federation:

to be formulated in a congenial constitution⁴ by all the constituent parts, which many people are advocating for. The lack thereof has left Nigeria “rudderless,” according to Matthew Kukah in his address at a burial of a seminarian that was murdered by a terrorist-related attack in Kaduna. Kukah says: “Nation-building cannot happen without adequate representation and a deliberate effort creating for all members a sense, a feeling, of belonging, and freedom to make their contributions.”⁵ A Nigerian conflict resolution scholar Monica Emmanuel did not mince words about the lack of political will being the bane of Nigeria’s rudderless condition:

Nigeria is a product of the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates by the British Colonialists. The amalgamation of these protectorates was the singular primary cause of the Nigeria’s political problem as it did not factor in the consequences of bringing together peoples with disparate culture and religion. The secondary cause

Making it More Confederal,” in *Crafting the New Nigeria: Confronting the Challenges*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (London: Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 85.

⁴ Cf. A. Odubajo, “An Exploration of Contending Issues in Nigeria’s Federal Practice,” *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2011): 27. According Mark Enemali, it is high time Nigeria took responsibility for her failures: “Our crises should not be blamed on outside forces only but on all of us.” M. Enemali, “Human Fallenness and African Christian Theologies,” *African Journal of Contextual Theology* 9 (2019): 225.

⁵ A homily presented by Matthew Hassan Kukah, Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, at the February 11, 2020, funeral of Nigerian seminarian Michael Nnadi, accessed from <https://zenit.org/articles/homily-at-funeral-mass-of-nigerian-seminarian-michael-nnadi/> (accessed on 25.02.2020).

was the lack of political will of Nigeria's political leadership to emplace institutional framework, to wit, the political system, political leadership, political structure and relevant constitution, which had promoted peaceful co-existence and tolerance in plural societies elsewhere.⁶

Indeed, Emmanuel is forthright in indicating the core problematic of Nigeria not being a nation. Amalgamation of "peoples with disparate culture and religion" without a congenial system of government of true federalism prevented the constituent parts from consummating into a united nation.⁷ The first republic, starting from independence of 1960, not only practiced an inchoate federal system of government, but was not allowed to transit into true federalism before it was aborted in the 1966 military coup. A unitary system of government that was not congenial to the amalgamated constituent parts was imposed by the military government led by General Aguiyi Ironsi. An immediate counter coup that installed Col. Gowon did not establish true federalism. Moreover, the famous *Aburi* accord that intended to reconcile the warring parties failed because of differences in interpretation⁸; and eventually led to a catastrophic

⁶ Monica Emmanuel, *Federalism in Nigeria between Divisions in Conflict and Stability in Diversity* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016), 15.

⁷ S. Adejumobi and A. Momoh, "The National Question in Comparative Perspectives," in *The National Question in Nigeria – Comparative Perspectives*, ed. A. Momoh, and S. Adejumobi (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 245.

⁸ E. E. Osaghae, *Nigeria since Independent: Crippled Giant* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), 64. Anthony Kirk-Greene corroborates: The delay about the implementation of the Aburi Accord came down to the conflict between the agreement and the legality of the accord, in the eyes of the Federal Permanent Secretaries. A. H. M. Kirk-Greene.

civil war that last from 1967-1970. Subsequent attempts by both military and civilian governments till date did not succeed in returning to true federalism. The current president of "Nigeria" attests to that.⁹ The lack of emplacement of "institutional framework" that prevented Nigerian from attaining nationhood resulted to unwelcome consequences that are generally referred to as national question.¹⁰

Obafemi Awolowo, one of Nigeria's "founding" fathers opines: "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English,' 'Welsh,' or 'French.' The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not."¹¹ He also echoed this view in another form again that Nigeria "is at best an aggregation of different distinct organic units"¹² that has failed to

Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1970, vol. II (London, New York, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1971), 33.

⁹ President Buhari of Nigeria addressing the APC Governor's forum says: "Your Excellences, it will be belabouring the point to say that true federalism is necessary at this juncture of our political and democratic evolution." Accessed from <https://businessday.ng/politics/article/president-buhari-calls-for-return-to-true-federalism/> (accessed on 10.06.2019).

¹⁰ Adejumobi and Momoh, "The National Question in Comparative Perspectives," 245; D. Smith. *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹¹ O. Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 47-48. Awolowo was always critical of the artificiality of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates.

¹² O. Awolowo, *Thoughts on Nigerian Constitution* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1966), 10.

integrate. Many others have repeatedly echoed Awolowo's views over the years – that Nigeria is not a nation: Raymond Aina indicating his second motivation for his PhD thesis says: "Second, as a Nigerian, burdened with the past, I am desirous for it to reach nationhood and not just remaining a mere geographical expression' (O. Awolowo)".¹³ Aina also presented statements by Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu and Wole Soyinka re-affirming the fact Nigeria is not yet a nation.¹⁴ John Onaiyekan observes: "We have often been speaking of our country as a 'potential great nation.' We cannot forever remain in potency. The 'potential' must somehow be translated into reality".¹⁵ For Matthew Kukah, Nigeria remains trapped in the colonial trap set for it from the beginning of the country's existence.¹⁶ The colonial trap planted the centrifugal forces which still haunt Nigeria today. Nigeria remains divided, because the country's independence, suggests

¹³ R. Aina, "Overcoming 'Toxic' Emotions and the Role of Restorative Justice: A Christian Ethical Reflection on Restorative Justice's Promises, Ambiguities and Inspirations Towards Peace-Building in Nigeria" (PhD diss, Katholieke University Leuven, 2010), lxxxv.

¹⁴ Aina, "Overcoming 'Toxic' Emotions," lxxxv, footnote 14. Citing Lucky Nwakwere, "Nigeria not a Nation Yet – Ojukwu," *Daily Sun*, <http://odili.net/news/source/2009/dec31/515.html> (accessed 07.01.2010); Wole Soyinka, "Between Nation Space And Nationhood", *The NEWS*, <http://thenewsng.com/opinion/between-nation-space-and-nationhood-%E2%80%9494wole-soyinka/2009/03> (accessed 09.03.2009).

¹⁵ J. Onaiyekan, "Repositioning Nigeria to Greatness: The Moral Challenges of Resource Management in the 21st Century" (2006 Distinguished Annual Lecture of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru), 8.

¹⁶ M. H. Kukah, *Witness to Justice: An Insider's Account of Nigeria's Truth Commission* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2011), 2.

Iheanyi Enwerem, only led to the civilizing process of factional groups.¹⁷

Compounding Nigeria's quagmire is the conflictive nature of religion in politics. Ibrahim Ahmadu comments: "Certain injudicious decisions of the colonial government on the political structure of Nigeria have contributed in no small way to the problem of instability in the country. First and foremost was the adoption of Islamic feudalism in Northern Nigeria as model of government..."¹⁸ The civilizing process of politics started by the colonial rulers continues with disturbing regularity today, Enwerem notes again: "On a more disturbing note, however, religion has become so politicized in Nigeria that the country's stability is threatened and, consequently, its search for economic development and reduction of poverty is impeded."¹⁹

There are three main recognizable religions in Nigeria: African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam. Christianity and Islam came to Nigeria as foreign religions with a sustained missionary zeal to evangelize the natives. The colonial government suppressed ATR during colonization. The jettisoning of ATR was informed by the "civilizing mission" during colonialism with the aim to "eradicate the practices and symbols of traditional African Religions."²⁰ By doing so, Christianity and Islam were apparently given official approval as authentic religions. A fierce witch-hunt was initiated against

¹⁷ I. M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* (Ibadan: IFRA, 1995), 45.

¹⁸ I. M. Ahmadu, "Peace and Stability in Nigeria: The Role of the Church," *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 2, nos. 2-3, no. 1 (1990): 44.

¹⁹ Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening*, 2.

²⁰ J. Ibrahim, "Religion and Political Turbulence in Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29, no. 1 (1991): 116.

practitioners of ATR and other sects that were deemed non-orthodox. According to Jibril Ibrahim, the attack on indigenous belief and practices was so belligerent that "most practitioners could no longer publicly admit their adhesion to the religion of their ancestors."²¹ Since practitioners had no official channel to express themselves religiously, they found shelter under either of the two religions; which does not necessarily imply their commitment to it. Ibrahim demonstrates a clear view in this account:

Whereas, in the 1931 census, as many (or, perhaps, as few) as 50 per cent of those enumerated agreed to be registered as 'pagans', this figure had declined to 34 per cent in 1952 and to only 18.2 per cent in 1963. By way of contrast, during the same 23-year period the number of registered Muslims rose from 44 to 47 per cent, while the corresponding increase for Christians was from 6.2 to 34.6 per cent.²²

With ATR officially suppressed or de-legitimatised²³ by the colonial government, Christianity and Islam became the umbrella for official religious expression. But there is a caveat, as succinctly put by Tokunbo Williams, "Christianity was nowhere entrenched in the political system as was the case of Islam in the Sokoto Caliphate and British Northern Nigeria."²⁴ In fact, the British colonial government accepted not to interfere with Islam

²¹ Ibrahim, "Religion and Political Turbulence," 116.

²² Ibrahim, "Religion and Political Turbulence," 116.

²³ Ibrahim, "Religion and Political Turbulence," 116.

²⁴ P. A. Tokunbo Williams, "Religion, Violence and Displacement in Nigeria," *JAAS* XXXII (1997): 39.

in its political role as a compromise.²⁵ Many people interpret this gesture as a way of handing over power to the north for the sole reason of assisting the colonial rule. For Kukah, the populace believes that the colonial administration created political imbalance in favour of the Muslims who are the majority in the North.²⁶ Almost a decade after Kukah's observation, Chima Korieh offers a similar position that strongly echoes Kukah's:

The ambivalent nature of colonial attitude towards religion in particular introduced two significant currents that retained the old politico-religious order in the north but increased the expansion of Christianity in southern parts of Nigeria.... Many aspects of the Caliphate's structure, including the Islamic legal system, were retained and incorporated into the colonial bureaucracy. For the British, it was less costly to cooperate with the leaders of Moslem communities under its indirect rule system than it was to crush them.... The British encouraged Islamic institutions in order to overcome local resistance and legitimize British power.²⁷

²⁵ This compromise resulted in banning the Christian missionary work in the North. See A. Barnes, "Religious Insults: Christian Critiques of Islam and the Government in Colonial Northern Nigeria," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, nos. 1-2 (2004): 62.

²⁶ M. H. Kukah, "Christians and Nigeria's Aborted Transition," in *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*, ed. P. Gifford (Leiden; New York, NY: Brill, 1995), 225. See also M. H. Kukah, *Religion Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993).

²⁷ C. Korieh, "Islam and Politics in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives," in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu*, ed. C. Korieh and G. Nwokeji (Lanham; Boulder; New York, NY; Toronto; Oxford: University Press of America, 2005), 113.

In principle, the colonial government approved political Islam by not tempering with the religio-political system of the Sokoto caliphate. Chima Korieh reminds us of the collateral consequence of the tacit approval of 'political Islam' in Nigeria: "As a result many Moslems elite (sic) see religious politics as legitimate."²⁸ This implies that from the beginning of the arbitrary creation of Nigeria, two different attitudes towards a relationship between religion and politics developed. The fact of these two attitudes in relation to politics and religion has not changed in Nigeria. This is so because secularity is being differently construed by both Christians and Moslem. Adogame agrees that "the desire of the Muslim population to shape and define Nigeria as a theocratic Muslim state and the Christian counterpoise that define Nigeria as secular"²⁹ is a reality.

In Christianity a lot of adaptations were made to contain the political strength of Muslims. Afe Adogame sees "CAN and PFN, not only as political 'watch-dog' of Christians, but also in their capacities as the most visible corporate megaphones of Christians in Nigeria."³⁰ Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic

²⁸ Korieh, "Islam and Politics." 110

²⁹ A. Adogame. "Politicization of religion and Religionization of Politics in Nigeria," in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Ogbu U. Kalu*, ed. C. J. Korieh and G. U. Nwokeji (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 133. For a detailed discussion on OIC, see S. Yusuf, "Nigeria's Membership in the O.I.C: Implications of Print Media Coverage for Peace and National Unity," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs Law and Religion* 19, no. 2 (1999): 235ff.

³⁰ Adogame, "Politicization of Religion," 136.

Affairs (NSCIA) and Jama'atu Nasril Islamiyya (JNI)³¹ are the equivalent organs for Muslims. According to Williams, the rivalry between Christians and Muslims has inevitably prevented "a creditable national ideology by which people could be mobilized" in Nigeria.³² Most analysts interpret the strategies employed by Christians and Muslims to achieve a balance of power as the source of religio-political conflicts.³³ We shall come back to this point later.

A History of Religio-Political Conflicts in Nigeria

We adopt John Paden's tabulation of the different religio-political conflicts from 1977 to 1997 below for analysis.³⁴

Date	Location	State	Principal source of conflict
October 1977	Zaria	Kaduna	ABU Muslim and Christian Students
May 1978	Kaduna/Zaria	Kaduna	I FOUND It (Jesus Salvation)

³¹ Ahmadu Bello founded the movement to Islamise those who were still non-Muslim in Northern Nigeria, while at the same time promoting the legacy of Dan Fodio.

³² Williams, "Religion, Violence and Displacement in Nigeria," 41.

³³ The first major such religious crisis was Maitatsine riot in 1980. Another one occurred in Yola in 1984 that claimed lives. See R. Arazu, *With Upurges of Religious Intolerance How Far Can Nigeria Go?* (Enugu: Lenjon, 1985), 9-10.

³⁴ J. N. Paden, *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenges of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 30-31.

			Christian Students' Demonstration
1978	Kaduna/Zaria	Kaduna	ISLAM ONLY (Muslim students demonstration)
1980	Kano City	Kano	Maitatsine riots
October 1982	Maiduguri	Borno	Bulumkutu riots
October 1982	Rigasa	Kaduna	Maitatsine riots
March 1984	Yola/Jimeta	Adama wa	Maitatsine uprising
November 1984	Gombe	Bauchi	Maitatsine uprising
May 1986	Ibadan	Oyo	University of Ibadan Chapel resurrection crisis
1986	Ilorin	Kwara	Palm Sunday conflicts
March 1987	Kafanchan/Kaduna	Kaduna	Religious crisis
March 1987	Zaria/Ikara	Kaduna	Students and community. Kafanchan spill over
March 1987	Funtua/Kaduna	Kaduna	Students and community. Kafanchan spill over

March 1987	Kankia/ Makarfi	Kaduna	Students and community Kafanchan spill over
1990	Bauchi	Bauchi	Muslim and Christian student riots
October 1991	Kano	Kano	Bonke crusade uprising
1991	Katsina	Katsina	Governor Madaki vs. Muslim student crisis
April 1991	Tafawa Balewa	Bauchi	Christian vs. Muslim community conflict
April 1991	Bauchi Town	Bauchi	Tafawa Balewa spill over
March 1992	Zangon Kataf	Kaduna	Christian vs. Muslim community over market site
1992	Jalingo town	Taraba	Muslim and Christian students clash
1993	Kaduna/ Katsina	Kaduna/ Katsina	Fun Times newspaper, blasphemous article, riots

1994	Ibadan	Oyo	Government schools assembly prayers crisis
1994	Jos	Plateau	Ethnic-religious crisis (indigene vs. settlers)
December 1994	Kano	Kano	Gideon Akaluka saga
1995	Tafawa Balewa	Bauchi	Second Christian vs. Muslim community conflicts
May 1995	Sabo Gari Market	Kano	Christian and Muslim (Igbo and Hausa) traders crisis
1996	Ilorin	Kwara	Islamic religious knowledge teaching to mission sch.
June 1996	Kaduna	Kaduna	Kaduna Polytechnic student riots
1996	Kafanchan	Kaduna	Second Kafanchan religious crisis
1996	Kaduna/Zaria	Kaduna	Second Kafanchan religious crisis

May 1997	Jos	Plateau	Ethnic religious (Birom vs. Hausa) community conflicts
1997	Kafanchan	Kaduna	Christian vs. Shi'ah Muslims
From 1998 – 2020		mostly northern states	Religio-political conflicts have occurred and continue to occur. We shall not tabulate these more religio-political conflicts for want of space.

Nonetheless, it is worthy to note that Boko Haram terrorist group has been responsible for most killings resulting from religio-political conflicts since early 2000. Between 2002 and 2012, more than eight hundred Nigerians have died, mostly in Northern Nigeria, due to the Boko Haram terrorist attacks.³⁵ Moreover, Boko Haram, though the most popular, is one amongst extreme Islamic groups causing havoc in the northern region. Comparatively, the violence as is evident from the table above is

³⁵ Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 250.

between Muslims and Christians and took place mostly in northern states. African traditional religionists are absent from the “crime scene.” What is responsible for their absence?

A Comparative Analysis of Religious Intolerance in ATR, Islam and Christianity

ATR is not a missionary religion. Naturally, it offers a hand of fellowship to other religions. Hence, its members were targeted as possible candidates for conversion by the aggressive missionary religions of Christianity and Islam. In due course, Christianity and Islam got engaged in cross conversions of members between the two religions. Quite unlike ATR, Christianity and Islam make absolute claims to the truth: for Christianity, salvation comes only through Christ; and Islam regarded anyone who does not belong to Islam as infidel. This may explain the aggressiveness with which missionary activities were, and are still being carried out by the Christians and the Muslims in Nigeria. Religious intolerance in Nigeria is predicated on these orientations by these religions.³⁶ Subhash Kak says: “Religious conflict may be viewed as a struggle between the word and image, between human conceptions of

³⁶ B. Takaya. “The Foundations of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: Backgrounds for Understanding the Maitatsine Phenomenon,” *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 2, no. 1-3, no. 2 (1989/1990): 32; M. Kukah and T. Falola, *Religion Militancy and Self-Assertion: Islam and Politics in Nigeria* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), 1; R. O. Aina, “A Christian Response to Insecurity and Intractable Conflicts in Nigeria: A Challenge to the Youth,” *Nigerian Journal of Religion and Society* 3 (June 2013): 34; Stephen Bake, *Urbanisation and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria* (Ibadan: IFRA, 1999).

morality and unfolding of nature. Violence arises out of lack of knowledge of the self and society."³⁷

Some scholars have averred that Islam and Christianity have been harbingers of violence and division among Africans.³⁸ On the other hand, ATR has been and has remained largely pacific.³⁹ We do not think anyone puts it better than Jude Madu. He avers: "Thus, we can see that A.T.R is very tolerant to other religions. That is why we hardly hear of religious riots between African Traditional Religion and the missionary religions. In spite of the onslaught Christianity and Islam had on the traditional religion of Nigeria, the traditional religion has kept a calm and silent stance."⁴⁰ From the foregoing, ATR is apparently tolerant and respects the alterity of the other and hence exhibits no correlation between intolerance and religio-political conflicts in Nigeria. We shall now examine this correlation in Islam and Christianity.

³⁷ S. Kak, "The Hindu Tradition and the Current Religious Crisis," in *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora*, ed. Afe Adogame and James V. Spickard (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 37.

³⁸ I. Ozigboh, "Religious Co-Existence in Nigeria: An Inquiry and Suggestions," *The Nigerian Journal of Theology* 7, no. 1 (1993): 58; F. Duniya, "The Challenge of Religious Intolerance in the Third Republic," *The Nigerian Journal of Theology* 7, no. 1 (1993): 45.

³⁹ Arazu, *With Upsurges*, 31-32.

⁴⁰ J. Madu, *Fundamentals of Religious Studies* (Calabar: Franedoh, 1996), 136. See also Jude Madu, "The Message of Jesus in the African Church: A Theological Reflection in Acculturation," *Asian Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2005): 283.

Establishing a Correlation between Religious Intolerance and Religio-Political Conflicts in Nigeria

As stated earlier, Islam and Christianity are generally intolerant on the basis of absolute claim to religious truth which does not necessarily lead to deadly violence as we see carried out by fundamentalist or terrorist groups like Boko Haram and Maitatsine. However, Muslims, unlike Christians, expand religious intolerance into the political sphere and take steps to Islamise government institutions. Northern states in Nigeria are involved in the islamisation of government institutions. The only difference between the northern state governments and the fundamentalist groups is the level and method adopted for this islamisation. While the former wants the islamisation to take place through negotiation, the latter wants it done through violence. Besides, the fundamentalist groups go as far demanding the establishment of an Islamic state. This was exactly what Boko Haram tried to do when large territories were annexed in the north eastern state in the early 2000. The fight to reclaim all the territories annexed by Boko Haram is still going on. There is a history of various attempts at enforcing the practice of pristine Islam under sharia law.

A puritan ideology of Islam was established and spread by a Fulani Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) through the jihad of 1804-1808. In the process emirate system was forcefully instituted and Fulani emirs were imposed to oversee the restoration of pure Islam in Hausaland and Kanem-Borno

Empire.⁴¹ The main goal of that jihad was the restoration of the “supposedly” pristine practice of Islam that Dan Fodio felt was compromised by Muslims in the then Hausaland and Kanem-Borno Empire.⁴² According to Kukah, however, the goal of the jihad was defeated: “In seeking to expand its economic and political hegemonic spheres of influence, the caliphate leaders soon began to sacrifice the spiritual fervor that had necessitated the Jihad.”⁴³ Hence, there is no evidence that the jihad achieved its goal of restoration of pure Islam at the time. Rather, it was division and conflicts that ensued. Unfortunately the fundamentalist groups (Maitatsine, Izala or Boko Haram) claim to be following Dan Fodio’s tradition of restoring pure Islam that never took place at his time. Williams avers that fiery Muslim students in the 1980s expressed their determination to achieve what their fathers failed to do – to restore the purity of Islam:

In 1980, under the guise of youthful exuberance, the northern or wing “A” of the Muslim Student Society launched a campaign to restore pristine Islam in Nigeria. They dismissed ... the Nigerian Constitution, the flag, the anthem and the pledge. These fundamentalists advocated the institution of the Shari’a as the means of confronting the societal ills of Nigeria. They found support in a new group, *Jama’at Izalatil Bid’a wa Iqamatus Sunnah* (Movement against

⁴¹ O. Vaughan, “Religion and State Formation,” in *Nigeria in the Twenty-First Century: Strategies for Political Stability and Political Coexistence*, ed. E. I. Udogu (Trenton, NJ; Asmara: Africa World Press, 2002), 115. See also W. F. S. Miles, “Religious Pluralism in Northern Nigeria,” in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. N. Levtzion and R. L. Pouwels (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), 210.

⁴² Paden, *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution*, 183.

⁴³ Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, 2.

Negative Innovation and for Orthodoxy). Known as Yan Izala, this organization was formed in Jos on February 8, 1978 by a former military imam, Mallam Ismaila Idris. With the support of Abubakar Gumi, these two groups criticized other Muslim groups, even orthodox ones, for backsliding in their faith.⁴⁴

We need to underscore the fact that the flame of religio-political conflicts was actually rekindled in 1976 during Murtala-Obasanjo administration, when the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) recommended the establishment of a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal. This was submitted to the Constituent Assembly in 1977 for debate. However, this demand was rejected when the pro sharia members walked out of the assembly.⁴⁵ But this demand was brought back at another Constituent Assembly that led to the production of 1979 Constitution. Even if the agitators of Sha'ria did not succeed at the Federal level, notes William, they succeeded to get the Sha'ria to be constitutionally recognized at the states' level in the 1979 Constitution.⁴⁶ This incorporation happened after a compromise to also include a

⁴⁴ Williams, "Religion, Violence and Displacement in Nigeria," 43. See also A. Gumi and I. A. Tsiga, *Where I Stand* (Kaduna: Spectrum Books, 1994), 64.

⁴⁵ Paul Unogo, a middle-belter Christian and a member of the constituent assembly of 1977 was reported as saying: "There is no basis at all to even discuss the probability of providing a court structure or system which by definition is a religious court and use federal funds to maintain such a religious court in a basically secular state ... sharia system runs counter to the political objectives and the social order on which we seek to build our nation." See Magbadelo, *The Politics of Religion in Nigeria*, 78.

⁴⁶ Williams, "Religion, Violence and Displacement in Nigeria," 42.

conflicting section.⁴⁷ Perhaps, the violent clash at Zaria in October 1977 between ABU Muslim and Christian students was not unconnected with the debate on sharia court of appeal at the constituent assembly in the same year. Religio-political conflicts have continued since then.⁴⁸

Continually, various governments of the northern states give signals to these fundamentalist groups by the type of policies they promote. Magbadelo opines: "In some northern states ... policies were made to islamise the governmental structures and even such policies were extended to areas of public life and public morality."⁴⁹ He gives an example: "The Sokoto State House of Assembly, for instance legislated against the sale of alcohol beverages in certain places in the state."⁵⁰ For him such policies

⁴⁷ The internal conflicts in the 1979 Constitution about Nigeria's secularity and theocratic inclination were carried over into the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. Part II, section 10 states: "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State religion." The same 1999 Constitution of Nigeria in Section 275 states: "There shall be for any state that requires it a sharia court of appeal for that state." This internal contradictions leads Kukah to aver: "Over the years, perhaps the thorniest issue that has continued to cause the greatest tension in relations between Christians and Muslims has been the issue of the Islamic law, known as *Shari'a* in Nigeria's public life." Matthew H. Kukah, "Persecutions of Christians in Africa: Contexts, Contents & Opportunities," in *Peace and Reconciliation: A Nigerian Conversation*, ed. Cornelius A. Omonokhua, Anne Falola and Kathleen MacGarvey (Abuja: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria and The Kukah Centre, 2014): 6.

⁴⁸ Williams, "Religion, Violence and Displacement in Nigeria," 43.

⁴⁹ Magbadelo, *The Politics of Religion in Nigeria*, 80.

⁵⁰ Magbadelo, *The Politics of Religion in Nigeria*, 80.

inspire fundamentalism, notably in Sokoto.⁵¹ Conversely, there is no evidence that Christianity was directly factored into the colonial administrative structure and engineering that is largely operating till today. Olufemi Vaughan avers: "Despite the importance of Christian missionary activities in the colonial enterprise, Christianity had less direct impact on the administrative structure of the colonial state."⁵² Evidently, it was only Islam that was directly factored into the colonial administrative structure which has continued till date. Since Christianity did not have this political privilege *ab initio*, it neither attempted to Christianise government structures in the southern states nor did Christian fundamentalist or terrorist groups emerge to cause havoc, in the class of Boko Haram. It is no wonder that religio-political conflicts that are ubiquitous in the northern states are absent in the southern states. The correlation between religious intolerance and religio-political conflicts in Nigeria, nay, in the northern regions is hereby established: Religio-political conflicts in Nigeria (mostly northern states), is directly linked to Muslims pursuing the Islamisation of government structures through either negotiations⁵³ by politicians or the use of force by Islamic fundamental groups. In other words, every effort is made to administer public spaces and government structures as replicates of the then Northern Caliphate of Dan Fodio. Rotimi Suberu's seminal work, *Federalism and Ethnic*

⁵¹ Magbadelo, *The Politics of Religion in Nigeria*, 80.

⁵² O. Vaughan. "Religion and State Formation," 117. See also O. Vanghan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 14.

⁵³ For instance, the approval of the establishment of a Sharia Court of Appeal by any willing states was negotiated during the Constituent Assembly that led to the production of 1979 Constitution.

Conflict in Nigeria, powerfully captures the consequences of this islamisation policy through state capture, using the expansion of sha'ria law as a point of reference:

Beginning with Zamfara state in October 1999, several northern states enacted or proposed legislation that would extend the scope of Shari'a law from personal and civil cases all the way to criminal matters. This implied drastic changes to the North's pre-existing penal code, which was only partially based on elements of Shari'a. Despite the federal government's discouraging the push for strict religious law in the Muslim North, the judicial expansion of Shari'a eventually led to horrific sectarian and ethnoreligious bloodletting during early 2000, the exodus of several southern immigrants (mainly Christian Igbo) from the North, and even fresh talks about the confederalization or dissolution of the Nigerian entity.⁵⁴

Conclusion

We started by giving an overview of Nigeria's conflictive and chequered history. Doing so revealed that, religio-political conflicts bedeviling Nigeria unabatedly, was inbuilt in the colonial administrative design that allowed the Dan Fodio's Islamic Caliphate elements into the political arrangements.⁵⁵ Evidently, only Islam enjoyed such privilege in the Northern States till today. Usually the type of religious intolerance that is generally discussed by scholars as we have elaborated, is that based on the unwillingness to accept the other's belief and way

⁵⁴ R. T. Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 4-5.

⁵⁵ Vaughan, "Religion and State Formation," 115.

of life because of absolute claim to truth. Something different we have ventured into in this work is that religious intolerance that is causing religio-political conflicts in Northern States is emblematic of Muslims who go beyond mere unwillingness to accept the other's belief or way of life to imposing their belief or way of life on the society. For instance, as aforementioned, when a state like Sokoto bans the sale of alcohol in public spaces what is the implication? Or, when Boko Haram carves out territories or public spaces in order to enforce their religious belief by force, what does that imply?

Thus, Islamic intolerance is an agenda to structure Northern States in the image of Dan Fodio Caliphate, either through negotiation or the use of force. This is why it is not surprising that religio-political conflicts as we laid out, are mostly taking place in the Northern States and by Muslims. We can comparatively say that Christian intolerance has not risen to the level exhibited by Muslims in general and Islamic fundamentalist groups in causing religio-political conflicts in Nigeria. Knowing this helps in situating the root cause of incessant religio-political conflicts in Nigeria. Where do we go from here? We need to always ask the right questions in order to get the right answers.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ M. H. Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria* (Abuja, Spectrum, 2007), 6.