THE NEXUS BETWEEN RELIGION, CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Daniel Chigudu

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The nexus between peacebuilding, conflict, and religion has been portrayed too often in a binary way where religion has been viewed either as a source of conflict or peacebuilding. This perception obscures the intricacy of the nexus showing that not much is understood about religion. This study sought to understand how religion interacts with human experience at the national and international levels to provide a detailed understanding of how it relates to peacebuilding and conflict in Africa.

Methods: A qualitative and interpretive approach is employed predicated on a critical literature review of documents from various sources.

Results and conclusions: It is revealed that religion should not be seen as an isolated or static entity, but viewed as a fluid system, dependent on historical and contextual variables. Experts, academics, and policymakers must be cautious not to give unjustified eminence to religion because it is not always a main factor in every conflict.

Originality/Value: For a long time conflict and peacebuilding in the continent has been not vigorously included the religious sector. Where the religious community has been involved it has generally been initiated at a country level by peacebuilding actors without much amplification at the continental level. This is one of the few studies if any that champions this matter and complement the African Union’s African Peacebuilding and Security Architecture.

Keywords: Conflict, Religion, Africa, Peacebuilding, Policy.

A RELAÇÃO ENTRE RELIGIÃO, CONFLITO E CONSTRUÇÃO DA PAZ NA ÁFRICA E AS IMPLICAÇÕES POLÍTICAS

RESUMO

Propósito: O nexo entre a construção da paz, o conflito e a religião tem sido retratado muito frequentemente de forma binária, onde a religião tem sido vista como uma fonte de conflito ou construção da paz. Essa percepção obscurece a complexidade do nexo mostrando que não se entende muito sobre religião. Este estudo procurou entender como a religião interage com a experiência humana a nível nacional e internacional para fornecer uma compreensão detalhada de como se relaciona com a construção da paz e o conflito na África.

Métodos: Uma abordagem qualitativa e interpretativa é empregada baseada em uma revisão crítica da literatura de documentos de várias fontes.

Resultados e conclusões: É revelado que a religião não deve ser vista como uma entidade isolada ou estática, mas como um sistema fluido, dependente de variáveis históricas e contextuais. Especialistas, acadêmicos, e legisladores devem ser cautelosos para não darem uma eminência injustificada à religião, porque nem sempre é um fator importante em todos os conflitos.

Originalidade/valor: Durante muito tempo, o conflito e a construção da paz no continente não foram vigorosamente incluídos no setor religioso. Nos casos em que a comunidade religiosa esteve envolvida, ela foi geralmente iniciada a nível nacional por agentes de construção da paz, sem grande amplificação a nível continental. Este é um dos poucos estudos, se é que há algum, que defende essa questão e complementa a Arquitetura Africana de Construção da Paz e Segurança da União Africana.

1 University of South Africa, South Africa. E-mail: danchigudu@gmail.com
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0984-9337
EL NEXO ENTRE LA RELIGIÓN, LOS CONFLICTOS Y LA CONSOLIDACIÓN DE LA PAZ EN ÁFRICA Y LAS IMPLICACIONES POLÍTICAS

RESUMEN

Propósito: El nexo entre la consolidación de la paz, el conflicto y la religión se ha retratado con demasiada frecuencia de manera binaria donde la religión se ha visto como una fuente de conflicto o consolidación de la paz. Esta percepción oscurece la complejidad del nexo, mostrando que no se entiende mucho acerca de la religión. Este estudio buscó comprender cómo la religión interactúa con la experiencia humana a nivel nacional e internacional para proporcionar una comprensión detallada de cómo se relaciona con la consolidación de la paz y los conflictos en África.

Métodos: Se emplea un enfoque cualitativo e interpretativo basado en una revisión bibliográfica crítica de documentos de diversas fuentes.

Resultados y conclusiones: Se revela que la religión no debe ser vista como una entidad aislada o estática, sino como un sistema fluido, dependiente de variables históricas y contextuales. Los expertos, los académicos y los responsables de las políticas deben tener cuidado de no dar una eminencia injustificada a la religión porque no siempre es un factor principal en cada conflicto.

Originalidad/Valor: Durante mucho tiempo, el conflicto y la consolidación de la paz en el continente no se ha incluido vigorosamente en el sector religioso. Cuando la comunidad religiosa ha participado, en general ha sido iniciada a nivel de país por los actores de la consolidación de la paz sin mucha amplificación a nivel continental. Este es uno de los pocos estudios, si acaso alguno, que defiende este asunto y complementa la Arquitectura Africana de Consolidación de la Paz y Seguridad de la Unión Africana.

Palabras clave: Conflicto, Religión, África, Consolidación de la Paz, Política.
While academic attention has intensified in Africa on the civil wars, no methodical empirical study has been conducted to analyse the role of religion in peacebuilding (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021). Terms like spirituality, religiosity, identity, faith, transcendence, belief, culture, sacred and sense of belonging are elements of the concept and have often been synonymous with religion, however, they all have different meanings in Africa (Oladosu, 2017). Just like its opposite term, secularism, religion as a concept is a new intellectual and social construction of the West, particularly a creation of the Protestant Reformation, which made it a power relations function (Hurd, 2009; Thomas, 2005). According to Hurd (2009), religion is a concept that has been thrust upon the behaviour of human beings by Christianity, especially as a variant of the Protestant. The Protestant idea of religion turned out to be a tool of intellectual supremacy given the spectacular power and spread of the United States (US) and the British Empire (Hurd, 2009).

Scholarly publications dealing with peace, conflict and religion started to emerge in the 1990s (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021). According to McNamee and Muyangwa (2021), some theologians and political scientists believe that religion should never be involved in social and political issues. However, there is impeccable evidence showing that traditionally religion has had a critical role especially to do with political issues in Africa. Wilson (1983) opines that more often religion legitimises what society does. For example, it justifies wars, provides reasons for adversities, and functions as a dispute-resolution platform. Abu-Nimer (2001) argues that religious rituals and beliefs have an integral capability of motivating people to unite or fight, and this could be useful in peacebuilding in Africa. The input of religion in dealing with transnational conflict is quite important since each religion has its potential peace brokering mechanisms that contribute to democracy and diplomacy. Said and Funk (2002) postulate that religion is a perpetual and possibly unavoidable element in both peacebuilding and conflict transformation. According to Oladosu (2017) close to two thousand people who attended the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in New York were renowned religious leaders including others from Africa. For Geertz (1993), religion adjusts human activities to an envisioned cosmic direction and projects cosmic imageries of direction on human life (Geertz, 1993). The wish to achieve this cosmic order or direction is what produces thoughts held by a religious body concerning the legitimacy of political power and authority worldwide (Philpott, 2007). This view of political authority and global order makes religion germane to international relations studies in general and Africa in particular. Religion provides more persuasive reasons than economic and realpolitik advantages for society to risk their lives, as it offers a real vision that goes beyond earthly and temporal life (De-Juan, 2015).
Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2005) advance that conflict is an expression of the varied interests, beliefs and values that rise as new realisations made by societal change come up against constraints that are inherited. Therefore, this study assumes conflict in a broader sense, which subsumes both asymmetric and symmetric conflicts (encompassing dissimilar and similar parties) in Africa. It also adopts the widely acknowledged view by Galtung (1969) that violence ensues not just directly (as in killing or harming) but is hidden as well in social structures (juridical or socioeconomic systems) and beliefs. These beliefs or culture and social behaviours in Africa should be tackled concurrently for peace to be achieved. Given the variegated and fluid stature of conflict, it is not easy to untangle cause and effect and make perfect conclusions, therefore a universal approach is required that takes into account all appropriate variables (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021). One of these variables could be religion, whether it may help to solve or incite violence. There exist implications of adopting one fixed terminology over another as it relates to peace-making, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. For conciseness, this study employs these three words interchangeably, while acknowledging that transformation procedures are pivotal to pathways that lead to peace in Africa. This steady and transformative aspect involves stages of positive and negative peace and is particularly essential when appreciating the contribution of religion to peace in the continent of Africa (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021).

This study does not endeavour to offer a conclusive answer to the fundamental question of whether conflict is caused by religion in Africa, and if it does how religious conflict that has dogged this epoch can be dealt with. Instead, it does reflect on the interpretive language and lenses used when dealing with such a question. Further, it is an attempt to provide an intellectual apparatus for handling the multidimensional religion concept in terms of peacebuilding and conflict in Africa.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is reviewed based on the following themes; peace and religion in a global view, peace and religion in Africa, conflict and religion in Africa, religion as a conflict driver and religion as a peace driver.
2.1 PEACE AND RELIGION: A GLOBAL VIEW

Violence and discrimination veiled with religion, as well as injustices, have been witnessed for quite some time (Silverstri & Fba, 2015; Oladosu, 2017). Examples can be drawn from East Timor, Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan and the Balkans (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021; Hidayat, 2023) where outbreaks of conflict have been caused largely by religion. However, religion has also provided amazing conduits for peacebuilding and this cannot be overlooked. Some religions like Buddhism, Islam and Christianity have values and faith teachings that encourage and motivate followers to resolve conflicts and peacebuilding (Freston 2016). In Africa, religious actors have actively played a role in processes of peace to augment conventional diplomatic peace missions (Marie et al., 2017). As asserted by Appleby (2000), although religion has been instrumental to violations of human rights, extremist violence and intolerance, it has been instrumental as well to conflict transformation in a non-violent way. It has defended human rights and, in some cases reconciled and restored stability and peace in broken societies. In this regard, Smock (2006) and Reychler (1997) cite the expression made by the American religious leaders in the 1980s during the nuclear-powered artilleries debate and the church’s responsibility in the freeing of Eastern and Central Europe. Pope John Paul II a Christian leader, for example, spectacularly promoted justice and peace in several countries like Lebanon, Haiti and Poland (Oladosu, 2017). In Jerusalem, Patriarch Michel Sabbah; in Mexico, Bishop Samuel Ruiz; in the DRC, Archbishop Monswengo; and East Timor, Bishop Belo. These church leaders have substantially contributed towards promoting justice and peace (Smock, 2002). Similarly, in the 1980s, the American Mennonites between the rebel group and the government of Nicaragua (Oladosu, 2017) brokered a peace agreement.

In 2003 during the war in Iraq, religion massively mobilised towards the need to respect human rights and for peace (Oladosu, 2017). The churches significantly reacted as well from Spain, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) despite that their governments supported the invasion of Iraq. The Catholic Church was very vocal through Pope John Paul II, who tried in vain to stop the war (Oladosu, 2017). The Vatican City (2003) advances that top Vatican Officials under the guidance of Pope John Paul II denounced attacks by the U.S. military on Iraq, labelling the act as a crime in contradiction of peace, risky and immoral. The Pope argued that war should never be viewed as inevitable and that weapons will never solve human problems (Vatican City, 2003). The World Council vehemently condemns the superpowers who believe war is suitable for enforcing foreign policy (WCC, 2014). In 2006,
The spread of religion today is practically expressed in the public domain in most societies located in the global south (Moghadam, 2003), especially in the African continent where state and political structures hold very little or no legitimacy and credibility (Matthias, et al; 2016). Religion in Africa has resurfaced as a forceful socio-political mechanism in supporting systems and people (Adesina 2013; Laguda 2013). As such, Rubin (1999) postulates that the significance of religion to politics resonates well with a special power in these civilisations. In Africa, therefore, the socio-political problems have positioned religion as crucial in the desire for a peaceful and better life.

This is because the value, moral and belief system of anyone or society is located in the realms of their religion and culture. Said and Funk (2002) believe that religion is such a powerful element of cultural values and norms which is deeply embedded in social and individual peace conceptions. Thomas (2005) posits that religion has attained a greater impact in several nations irrespective of their socioeconomic development status. Even though religion enjoys great social bearing in Africa, McCauley and Gyimah-Boadi (2009) argue that in all peace efforts, it is imperative to involve both secular and religious actors to have a collective appreciation of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

The role of the church in Africa’s peace initiatives is exemplified by the following; the mediation by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) during the Peace Agreement in Addis Ababa which saw the ending of Sudan’s first civil war (Oladosu, 2017); the involvement by church leaders in South Africa such as Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu (Reychler, 1997), in the apartheid epoch (Tutu 2012). During that same period, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) several times through open activities confronted the state. Hudson-Allison (2000) observes that the church moved from being a central theological practice of submission towards embracing different theological discussions. This was described by Hudson-Allison (2000) as the theology of resistance that put the church at the forefront of the battle against the system of apartheid in South Africa.

Churches in Cameroon have often assumed political roles particularly when some civil society groups that would ordinarily carry such duties are aggressively stifled by the state...
The Nexus Between Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Africa and Policy Implications

(McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021)). In Mozambique, the Rome-based Community of Sant’Egidio successfully mediated resulting in the consummation and end of the 1992 civil war (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021). The Catholic bishops have contributed in Burundi to the creation of an integral government (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021). These are good illustrations of how religion has addressed conflicts and peacebuilding in Africa. Basedau and De Juan (2008) conclude that if there is a common and shared religious identity it could be used to unify a divided society.

Gopin (2000) suggests that religious values should be integrated into the conventional Western practices and policies of conflict resolution. Further, religious values like nonviolence, human sanctity and empathy should be employed to develop conflict transformation and peacebuilding language (Gopin, 2000). Even if a particular conflict does not have an element of religion, religious leaders still have to play a role in promoting peace. Abu-Nimer (2001) and Istiawan et al (2023) believes that religion could bring moral, spiritual and social resources to the process of peacebuilding, thereby constructing a sense of obligation and responsibility. Certain religious principles and rites have the potential to promote healing and restoration (Nolte-Schamm, 2006). Principles of peacemaking such as compassion and forgiveness could be considered in religious literature and theological narratives equipped to cause genuine conflict transformation and peacebuilding (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013).

2.3 CONFLICTS AND RELIGION IN AFRICA

Basedau and De Juan (2008) assert that in Africa the ambivalence of religion in conflicts has been under-researched. Even so, they contend that in most of the conflicts, it appears that religion has both an influence on conflict de-escalation and conflict escalation. In terms of conflict escalation, conflicts due to religion have been described as fault-line wars (Huntington, 1996) meaning societal conflicts occurring between groups or states from different people. As these conflicts occur, various identities fade away while the most meaningful identity related to the prevailing conflict emerges and becomes dominant. That dominant identity is defined more often by religion according to Huntington (1996).

More than 20 African states have experienced one or two cases of civil war in the past 60 years, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa (Elbadawi & Sambanis 2000). In this region, almost 20 per cent of the populace has lived in countries that have had violent conflicts and wars (Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2000). This presents sub-Saharan Africa as a highly conflict-saddled region providing a better foundation for assessing the conflicting position of religion in...
prompting conflict. A conflict prompted by religion is thought to exist if people disagree due to their identities or beliefs in terms of their religion (Svensson, 2013). Different from the cases of Somalia and Sierra Leone, where conflicting groups are not significantly divided based on religious identities, most countries in West Africa are polarised because of religion. For instance, in Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire, violent conflict is widespread between two main religious groups, Christians and Muslims. Basedau and De Juan (2010) note that religious borders and conflict somewhat run parallel. They cite four cases involving Nigeria, Sudan, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of Congo where the borders of the conflicting groups are parallel. All these four states are conflict-ridden with Sudan, Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire being good exemplars of experiencing conflicts due to identity.

In sub-Saharan Africa Ellis and Ter Haar (2007) believe that identities related to conflict could be classified into three main taxonomies of religion that is Islam, Christianity and Traditional religion. These three have at some point in time been involved as instruments of both oppression and emancipation in different parts of Africa. This means they have been contributing to peace efforts, and connived in public violence, and armed conflicts.

2.4 RELIGION AS A CONFLICT DRIVER

More often religion is viewed as the main driver of conflict, in both national and international settings (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021). Advocates of this view are many including Huntington (1997), Galtung (2014), Fox (2003) and Lewis (1990). Huntington (1997) who partly borrowed an idea propounded by Lewis (1990) prominently claimed that cultural and religious identities stood to be the key drivers of conflict among nations when the Cold War ended. He maintained that even though a state would continue to be the influential actor, the clashing of nations or societies would turn out to be the new driving force of conflict (Lewis, 1990). His classification of the globe into various types of categories is informed by religious grounds. Lewis argues that conflicts can happen locally within the state due to groups with different religious inclinations (fault-line-related conflicts) or between neighbouring countries (Lewis, 1990); and similarly on a global scale among and between countries (core-country conflicts) with different religious orientations. Lewis contends that countries contest at the international level such that this rivalry can develop into violent conflict, especially because of the dissimilarity in religions that created these states (Lewis 1990). At the international level, conflict fault lines are predominantly those between non-Muslim and the Muslim world, which indeed have accounted for conflict for decades (Huntington 1997). Several scholars on politics
and religion, peace and conflict concur that usually conflicts are epitomised by some incentives and hence conflict drivers should never be confined to just one dimension, be it economic, religious, historical or political (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021; Ibrahim, 2018; Deng, 2018). The primary causes of ethnic conflict according to Fox (2003) are nationalism and self-determination, though religious issues can influence the conflict dynamics and its intensity. Besides, religion triggers violent conflict only if it is in combination with some other factors (Fox, 2004).

Following a study conducted by Fox (2001) in the Middle East, it was revealed that religion has a very central role to play in ethnic and religion-related conflicts, in states that have a majority of Muslims lying outside the jurisdiction of the Middle East. If religious factors are essential, they can shift the conflict dynamics and this can only be ascribed to both the role of the church or religious bodies in the country (Fox, 2001) and how the religious system influences international ethnic conflict intervention. Within a country, religious bodies tend to cause protest if grievances have religious significance; but stifle the protest if their importance is attached to religious issues.

The theory by Galtung (2014) concerning the potential of peace through religion is focused on factors that make religions inclined to incite violence. Then it infers from these the factors that help lead religions to potentially build or maintain peace, contending that the latter should be supported. Although Galtung (2014) observes that different, religious groupings have varied levels of the potential for peacebuilding, and dismisses the concept of religious conflicts because conflicts are complex and multi-dimensional to be attributed to a single contributory factor. Concerning direct violence, Galtung (2014) laments that the notion of aggressive missionaries and the value of being a chosen people constructed into the basic system of a religious belief could result in the perpetration of direct violence by its followership. Just war and holy war are terms then used to rationalise the application of violent conflict against some people.

2.5 RELIGION AS A PEACE DRIVER

Policy-related and academic literature on international affairs and religion is replete contending that religion is an expedient tool for realising peace (Ibrahim, 2018; McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021; Deng, 2018). What is more pertinent is that religious values, faith-based organisations and religious leaders are understood by several scholars to have high prospects of supporting peace (Little 2006; Johnston 2003; Smock, 2002; Appleby 2000; Gopin 2000;
Shah et al. 2012). No wonder, the US Institute of Peace provided considerable resources for interreligious publications and programs, while the US government established a religious office for engagement under the State Department (Mandaville & Silvestri 2015; Johnston 2003). In this regard, some milestones have been noted in Europe (Galtung & MacQueen, 2008). Some non-governmental organisations and faith-based groups continue to mobilise and produce policy-related reports to enhance the religious actors’ contribution to reconciliation and development (Mandaville & Silvestri, 2015; Johnston, 2003).

Some references were been made as to how Christianity has contributed to peacebuilding and non-violence (Appleby, 2000; Gopin, 2000; Shah et al. 2012). The main idea is reconciliation, based on how God reconciles with sinners in the model of Jesus who personally sacrificed to save humankind. Jesus told people that they should give the other cheek to their aggressors when spanked; he attended to the marginalised and poor. This has encouraged the Christian world to respect human sanctity and dignity. Christianity projects a positive relationship between reconciliation and social justice; one cannot exist in the absence of the other (Philpott, 2007). This explains the importance of Christians in supporting transitional justice and mediation (Philpott, 2007). At the core of human rights conception from the Western world, there are Christian values as well, although sometimes there exists a competitive and parallel secular narrative.

After the Second World War, the ecumenical movement and Christians were critical factors in Europe’s peaceful rebuilding (Thomas, 2005; Leustean, 2014), even if the integration of Europe later assumed a very liberal and secular character, mainly focused on political and economic thinking. Butry (1994) expounds on how Christianity inherited peacebuilding and non-violence, arguing that Christian values and teachings provide the basis for making peace. Sampson and Lederach (2000) conducted a groundbreaking study that demonstrated the innovative role that the Mennonite people played in the past contributing towards non-violent peacemaking. Moreover, two Christian groups namely Jehovah’s Witnesses and Quakers made clear their stance towards peace and non-violence (MacCulloch, 2010).

Abu-Nimer (2001) a Muslim scholar maintained that the Islamic faith is founded on the basic human morals enshrined in the holy Qur’an, including any related Islamic tradition and religious works. Informed by these values, the Muslim community developed a set of tools for peacebuilding and non-violent conflict resolution. The mechanisms used by the Arab-Muslims for resolving any type of conflict include arbitration and mediation by third parties (MacCulloch, 2010). These mechanisms involved traditional methods of reconciliation, based mainly on the values of repentance and forgiveness. The faith-based mechanism of mediation
is viewed as a vital means of conflict resolution and promoting peace. Yet, there is very little work that portrays it as a useful substitute for traditional political strategies. Based on their research findings from Zimbabwe, the Philippines, East Germany and South Africa, Johnston and Sampson (1994) argued that those who predicated their works on either spiritual or religious thinking were well placed to have access to local and regional actors. Likewise, Cox et al. (1994) claimed that religion could be suited well to dealing mostly with the protracted, intractable and stalemated nature of conflicts. The central factors enabling religious leaders to deal with conflict consist of trust, authority, effectiveness, culture and proximity to the parties involved (Smock, 2002; Lederach, 1996). Given this review, this study projects the nexus between religion, conflict and peacebuilding.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION THEORY

This study is informed by the conflict transformation theory developed by Lederach (1997). This theory centres on transforming deep-rooted violent conflicts into peace, constructed on a distinctive comprehension of peacebuilding and proposes the use of the concept of conflict transformation to replace conflict resolution (Rupesinghe, 1995). Conflict theories are important as they underpin and guide practical conflict interventions (Paffenholz et al, 2009). The conflict transformation theory is employed here as differentiated from conflict resolution and conflict management theories through its thrust on the quest for change, which is systemic. As applied to Africa in this study it seeks to change the conflict parties, institutions and social structures in which conflicts are entrenched. Given that most conflicts are located in a public context, which influences and could propagate the conflict development, conflict transformation requires a change in the context of the prevailing conflict (Paffenholz et al, 2009). According to Lederach (1997). This implies that conflict transformation theory should extend past the proximate conflict site to become a conflict-in-context theory. Conflict transformation theory goes further to change the contextual settings, basic relationships and social structures that originally caused the conflict (Lederach,1997).

This theory is premised on the fact that conflict results from concerns of inequality and injustice conveyed by the competing economic, cultural and social structures (Lederach, 2000a). The proponents of this conflict transformation theory argue that present-day conflicts require a lot more than just negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution. They suggest that the nature of disputants and their relations could be deep-rooted beyond the envisioned particular conflict setting. Therefore, the practice of conflict transformation seeks to transform
the interests, dialogues, relationships, and every order that can potentially sustain some kind of conflict or violence. The theory underscores peace as the outcome of fairness and justice - it canvases for justice and fairness established on good social structures and relationships through respect for fundamental human rights (Lederach, 1996). This is what peace initiatives in Africa should embrace in search of peace in collaboration with religious leaders.

Lederach (2000b) has described conflict transformation as envisioning and responding to the flow and ebb of social conflict when life opportunities create positive processes of change that increase justice and reduce violence. In analysing what conflict transformation means (Lederach, 2000b) breaks it down into four parts namely; leg, hand, heart and head. He associates the head with the way conflict is seen and believed and links it to verbs; respond and envision, arguing that attitudes, orientations and perceptions exist in the head bringing forth purposeful and deliberate ingenuity to conflict transformation (Lederach, 2000b). Thus, the transformation approach is poised to understand the specific occurrence of conflict not in seclusion, but in its entrenched broader order of ebb and flow (Lederach, 2000b). The heart being the spiritual life is likened by Lederach (2000a) to the significance of conflict transformation and the relationships of conflict at any given level. Therefore, conflict is like a heart.

As likened to a hand that touches and feels things, conflict transformation can be seen as a hand seeking to cultivate change with an emphasis on producing negative conflict. When likened to a leg, which represents take-off, conflict transformation responds to challenges and realities of conflict. The focus is on transforming relationships, be they intergroup or interpersonal and socio-political structures from the local to international level (Lederach, 2000a). As opposed to the regular wars, which are economic and political, the new wars in Africa are driven more by convictions and beliefs based on identity, values and ideology. Hence, the approach of employing force as an avenue to peace is steadily becoming unpopular and ineffective. Moreover, experiences have shown that conflicts by their nature are rarely resolved since they continue to recur over time. This leaves newer approaches informed by the conflict transformation theory to deal with current conflicts in Africa rather than conflict resolution. The framework of conflict transformation is a holistic approach to conflict management (Väyrynen, 1999; Väyrynen, 1991).

Not everybody is persuaded that conflict transformation has bigger value and application compared to conflict resolution. Mitchell (2002) contends that conflict transformation appeared because the concept of resolution had been corrupted. He argues that employing this comparatively new concept of transformation was a response to the rising misapplication of the word resolution standing in for almost everything except total victory,
revenge and defeat (Mitchell, 2002). For one scholar of peace, the resolve is clear, Galtung (1995) provides some reasons why the perspective of conflict transformation has much to offer. Galtung asserts that what underlies the perspective of conflict resolution is a belief that each conflict’s life is finite and therefore solvable. Given this contention, the fact that conflicts are non-stop and growing characterised by a decrease in social interactions comes with the sense that this will not be responsive to resolution, yet requires transformation (Botes, 2003).

4 METHODOLOGY

Given the convoluted nature of this subject matter in this study and the fundamental questions it generates, the interpretive and qualitative approach was adopted through a critical review of extant literature. Interpretivist approach is concerned with qualitative research seeking to create a greater understanding of the phenomenon under study (Saunders, 2007). This literature was obtained from various sources of academia, including: history, conflict studies, sociology, politics, international relations, peace, theology, social psychology, terrorism studies and security. Materials were also examined from easily accessible faith-based organisations related to peacebuilding and conflict. About 50% of the sources were drawn from peace and conflict studies. Then 30% from faith-based organisations (such as the World Council of Churches, Islamic Relief, CARITAS, World Vision, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and 20% from others. The study uses secondary sources of data employing a trust-entrenched approach to understand international collaborations in selected contexts in Africa. Data analysis was triangulated through discourse, content, narrative and analysis of existing documents and newspaper reports, expert and academic study reports. This inclusive methodology was considered relevant to ensure depth and breadth, nuance and objectivity in the interpretation of such a multifaceted and complex topic.

4.1 CASES INTERSECTING RELIGION, CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING

Chronological analysis confirms the domestic nature of conflicts in Nigeria and the difficulty of their peaceable resolution (Linden & Thorp, 2016). Leaders of religions have conventionally contested for political positions with other players and are still doing that. However, the widespread culture’s religiosity is a way that religious leaders in Nigeria can substantively contribute to defying religious fanaticism and peacebuilding when given the opportunity and means to do that. Due to
Nigeria’s demography, geography and history, elections have been critical in the eruption of conflicts including religious tensions. It is imperative to distinguish genuinely between conflicts and religious conflicts that are fundamentally socio-economic or to do with contestation for political space, which brings religion. The advent of the terrorist group, Boko Haram, could be tracked down to anti-Sufi activities and intra-Muslim conflicts (Linden & Thorp, 2016). However, this mirrors no less poverty and the underdevelopment of the northeast region, and the corruption impact on the perception of the national government. Awareness is growing on the peacebuilding needs throughout the different faiths (Ludovic, 2020). The Central African Republic and Côte d’Ivoire are examples of a wider development in inter-faith interventions, where secular leaders and Christians lead while the Muslims follow. Indeed, bemoaning the low Muslim visibility as peacebuilding actors Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana (2008) opine that the paucity of regular studies that analyse and identify the shortcomings and contributions of peace-building by Muslim actors creates the idea that no peacebuilding institutions or organizations exist in the world of Muslim. Yet, there are several nongovernmental organizations and local leadership of Muslim origin resolving conflicts, peacebuilding, and encouraging interfaith discourse. These cases corroborate the nexus between religion, conflict and peacebuilding in the African continent.

5 MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The announcement by the European Union in June 2017, to support governments in the Sahel region in countering religious extremists was a response to the pervasive religious-related violence (Basedau, 2017). By the middle of 2017, 80 per cent of armed conflicts experienced in the region showed a religious element. Warring parties differed either due to religious belief or due to incompatible conceptions about how religion should relate to the state (Basedau, 2017). Conflicts related to theological differences have recently been on the increase. Geographic hotspots of armed conflicts related to religion in Africa are Nigeria, Central African Republic and Côte d’Ivoire (Ludovic, 2020: Linden & Thorp, 2016).

The conflicts either may have slopped now to adjacent countries or are more likely to do so eventually as supported by MacCulloch (2010). The effects of such conflicts have been dangerous; millions of people have been displaced internally, thousands of lives lost, and millions of refugees produced. The violence continues to undermine the socio-political and economic development of all the countries affected. While Islamist insurgencies lead to religious ideas-based conflicts, Christian insurgent groups in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the
Congo and Congo-Brazzaville have as well been lively ever since the beginning of the millennium.

It is revealed as well that effective efforts of conflict management in Africa cannot be possible without religious involvement. There exist emerging divine practices and ethical and theological inputs for the hermeneutics of peace. In as much as religion could be an instrument for fomenting conflict, its spiritual element could be employed as a necessity to break the vengeance cycle generally related to the existing conflicts. As such, without the elements of reconciliation and forgiveness, challenges of conflict transformation may continue unabated. African countries with mixed forms of religion are susceptible to inter-religious conflicts, which have occurred in Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Central African Republic (Ludovic, 2020). The actual causes of conflicts are not understood fully but they seem to show a mixture of secular and religious roots.

Weaker states in Africa have both enabled the religious extremists’ activities and made their ideologies attractive alternatives for the people. There is a serious problem being posed by religious extremism, which is externally supported by countries located in the Middle East and North Africa (McNamee & Muyangwa, 2021). Attempts to counter conflicts related to religion should be focussed on non-religious and religious causes in addition to development and security. The increasing international interest in how religion influences peace and conflict is a good move, but this subject should be undertaken with great nuance and sensitivity. Religion per se is not a self-contained and tangible object; therefore, it could be reductive trying to recognise it wholly as a body of creeds and dogmas, a particular establishment, a specific group or person. Instead, it should be taken as a construction of intertwining variables, which is dynamic, expands and shrinks depending on historical trajectories, exogenous factors and certain circumstances. The following policy implications provide broad guidelines for how the nexus between conflict, religion and peacebuilding should be understood by policymakers for effective conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

6 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Having recognised the tenor of religion in conflict, it is essential to underscore the religious role in peace-building in Africa. Indeed, public policy and religion interface because they both purport to provide authoritative solutions to key questions concerning how citizens ought to live. Traditional African religions are well endowed with reconciliation rituals to
rebuild social harmony (Ludovic, 2014). For this paper, there are key issues of policy that require urgent policymakers’ attention as highlighted below.

- The Western and secular values and assumptions are hegemonic conceptions hampering Africa’s full appreciation and nuanced religion. As a result, in terms of peacebuilding and conflict, this could limit what religion is and the approaches to take in the African continent.
- The use of religion in peacemaking or peacebuilding should never be overrated to the extent of excluding or overshadowing other dynamic factors at play.
- Equally, when religion is engaged it should not be seen as a substitute for other approaches but rather as complementary to finding lasting solutions.
- Diplomats, governments and peace actors should desist from wholesomely taking an instrumental slant to religious societies, their leaders and civil societies so that the integrity of religious-based actors stays intact.
- Intellectually, no ideal or best discipline or methodology can be employed to fully understand religion. Hence, debating about scientific qualitative or quantitative approaches to studying religion may not be appropriate.
- Attempting to find a relationship of cause and effect between violence and religion, peace and religion, appears both to be inappropriate and unworkable. Even though scholarship has addressed how such elements interrelate in different circumstances, no study has developed a scientific method or formula to forecast when radicalisation would occur, and how or whether the war outcomes depend solely on religion.

7 CONCLUSION

What emerged from this study is that religion matters in conflict prevention, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. However, actors should take time to analyse the complex relationship and deep understanding of religion in every given context. This implies making a critical analysis of which characteristics to consider as related to religion in each case. No impeccable evidence exists to show that certain religious groups are, based on their theology, more likely to lead to peace or conflict, or more susceptible to violence than others. But there are enabling and underlying factors making some political leaders, religious communities or individuals hold a religious institution, discourse or representation to justify or carry out violence. At the same time, religion should not always be regarded as useful in all dynamics of
peace and conflict. Hence, the connection between peacebuilding, conflict and religion is neither one-dimensional nor static. It remains critical not to have Western secular parameters imposed when assessing actual or potential situations of conflict in Africa. Above all, what affects outcomes are contextual variables (like cultural, socio-economic and historical); and there is no situation that is indistinguishable from another, hence even the most successful leader or group that ably negotiated peace in a given country may not succeed in a different country or set up.
REFERENCES


The Nexus Between Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Africa and Policy Implications

Peace Research, 54(4), 574–587.


The Nexus Between Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Africa and Policy Implications

British Academy.


