

# Clash of Religious Civilisations in Nigeria: Understanding Dynamics of Religious Violence

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## Abstract

This paper examines the clash of religious civilizations in Nigeria to understand the dynamics of religious violence. The paper posits that religious violence in Nigeria dates to the era Islam and Christianity through the activities of the missionaries was introduced among the various ethnic groups from the North and South Poles respectively. The two religions with ‘messianic’ mission of civilizing the world, transformed into competition for converts. In the search for converts the missionaries perpetuated violence against indigenous populations, their cultural and religious systems. The hitherto existing indigenous religion – the African Traditional Religion – cemented relationships between people, society and nature. With the arrival of ‘new religions’ – Islam and Christianity, in their quest to dominate led to conflicting relations among various ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian federation. The collision of these religions gave birth to the clash of religious civilizations, which have become unprecedented in contemporary time. The nature of religious violence in Nigeria is tied to elite manipulation of religious adherents to advance their own interests in the political arena. The paper concludes that putting religious differences to culture is central to curbing religious violence in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Religious civilization, Islam, Christianity, religious manipulation, religious violence

## 1. Introduction

Imported Destroyers: before our imported truths, Africa had her truths, our shrines and Priests; war was not recorded between one truth and another.

- Kefas Bako, *The Imported Destroyers*, (2013).

Nigeria with over 140 million people (National Population Commission, 2006), is no doubt one of the most populated countries in Africa, and indeed, one of the most religious in the world (Lenshie & Abel, 2012). As a matter of fact, religion in Nigeria occupies the prime of the socio-economic and political life of the country, that is, the process of policy making and implementation of the government in Nigeria is guided by religion among other factors. The process is usually informed by the religious heterogeneity of the country, which if not taken into consideration usually leads to conflict, and consequently, violence. Despite religious heterogeneity, dominant religion in Nigeria include Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Religion is a force which has packaged the thought pattern of most Nigerians not to think outside what they believe in, and anything that appears to contradict their belief systems, they tend to oppose it vehemently, which consequently has been a major source of conflict among various religious adherents, especially Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The contradictions arising from the contraption of these religions explains the dynamics associated with power struggles and power relations in contemporary Nigeria.

However, the ascendancy of religious identities in Nigeria is rooted in the historical evolution of the country, particularly the manner in which these religions penetrated Nigeria and the role played by the colonialist to nurture the elites and exacerbate ethnic and religious consciousness and intolerance among the people of Nigeria (Akinwumi, 2005).

Since independence, religious as an instrument of political manipulation of the masses for the pursuit of state based resources continued, and gradually but also steadily surmounted the desire and effort to ensure peaceful co-existence and national transformation in Nigeria (Adebanwi, 2004; Smah, 2008; Østby 2008). Despite the philosophy of peace claimed by the various religions appears to appeal to the need for unity and harmony internally among various sects of the religion. Inter-religious relations, in most circumstances, has been marred by acute level of religious hatred, intolerance and violence since the end of the cold-war. Since the 1990s, Nigeria became increasingly divided along religious lines, and open confrontations via most religious messages became fierce (Okpeh, 2008). This was not the case before Islam and Christianity entered Nigeria. Although, precolonial Nigeria was not without conflicting relations that turned out violently, but not on the bases of religion. It is in this context that this paper is set out to examine the dynamics of religious violence in contemporary Nigeria.

## 2. Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

Religion throughout the world is emotionally driven. Often, at a slightest provocation religion transforms from an instrument of peace-building to an instrument of violence. The attempt to understand the logic, which inform the violent nature of religion poses serious challenges. Scholars (Haynes, 1999; Stephen, 1999; Otite & Ogionwo, 2006) have associated the religious violence to the manner which preachers and their adherents behave towards opposite religions. On the contrary, Mamdani (2002 & 2004) refuted this claim that it is rather the non-religious intellectuals that are responsible for violent religious motivations. Either way, it is evident that religious practices have been violent in contemporary times under the façade of fighting God's battle.

From this background, it is therefore relevant to understand what religion is all about. Otite & Ogionwo (2006) cited Emile Durkheim as defining religion as, "...a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unites into one single moral community." Religion, according to Karl Marx, in the words of Giddens (1971:110), is '...the transmutation of representation of values which are in fact, created by man in the society, and the provision of principled support for an existing social and political order...' purported to achieve class interests. Because of the claim to sacredness, religion is seen as an indisputable and non-interrogative phenomenon. However, the implication of religion in negotiating the contours of intergroup relation has been far reaching. Evidence abound that religion create, nurture and determine group consciousness that can be transformed easily into violence, depending on the circumstance that warrants it, and the magnitude of 'we feeling' among members.

According to Lenshie (2010:16), often religious rhetoric or propaganda are used to galvanise sympathy in order to effectively garner support to assert collective conscience which may be real or given, notwithstanding the political undertones promoting violence. In most parts of the world, the attempts to question certain religious tenets have led to wanton killings of lives and destruction of properties with many people displaced. Nnoli (2008), while explaining the reason why religious violence occur in diverse societies, stated thus:

Religious differences have a high potential for separating people from one another. Throughout history these differences have been the basis of tension, animosity and even war. Many times a certain fanaticism is associated with people of a different religion, or hampers mutual trust and confidence when such relations happen to exist. This is because religion tends to define what constitutes appropriate social behaviour. When this definition is at cross purposes with another, normal relations become difficult.

This also goes to explain that, religion is dynamic and can direct peoples sense of reasoning. Stephen (1999), buttressed this assertion further thus:

...religion provides definition, principles of judgment and criteria of perception. It offers reading of the world, of history, of justice and of ultimate truth. Religion limits or increases the conceptual tools available, or channels them, and withdraws certain issues from inquiry. It inculcates a particular way of perceiving, expressing and responding to reality. Religion can legitimize new aspirations, new relations and a new social order. Every religion involves struggles to conquer, monopolize or transform the systematic structures which order reality.

Because of the role religion play in negotiating group relationship, it is central to the clash of civilisations, which Huntington (1993), considered to be decisive to determining the nature of the global relations in the post-Cold War era. Since the end of the Cold War, religion tends to have a composite effect on intergroup relation. Religion tends to unite members of the same faith across the world, but it also tends to pitch members of different faith almost in a constant ideological confrontation, and often, violent conflicting relationship. Although notwithstanding, there exist internal differences in each religion, which manifest dramatically based on doctrinal differences. Conflicts arising within the same faith on doctrinal differences have been evident between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, and Catholic and Protestant Christians.

Why the inter-religious intolerance and violent relationship when there are so much that unite them than what divides them? More often, however, in religiously divided, complex and competitive societies, religious zealots and bigots have exploited religion for selfish interests (Haynes, 1999). In this task, the insignificant differences have been overemphasised among religious adherents as major areas of conflict. The motivation of religion to violence does not occur in a vacuum, there are conditions that necessitates its occurrence, which can be internal, external or both, depending on the manifest reality. Internally, religious violence can occur when particular adherents perceive that their belief system is superior to other religions, or a when a sense of religious deprivation is nurtured or alternatively, a competitive equality with other religion is established.

Religious violence instigated by external sources occurs when there is perceived internal weaknesses vis-à-vis other religions among adherents of a religion. In order to dispel competitive equality or dominance, the adherents turns to external support from the brotherhood across the world to assist them. The support for

religious operation come mainly from the non-state actors and state actors, both within and outside the country. They provide both 'fiscal and physical resources'. The fiscal and physical resources come in the form of financial support and material support respectively. Sometimes, physical resources also include human support, such as the importation of martyrs, who have only their labour to offer in exchange for the life-here-after. These are religious expendables. The state actors may not directly and openly support the crusade. They may hide behind the non-state actors to offer support to brotherhood. Beside the fiscal and physical supporters, there are also ideological supporters. These are people who provide the rationale for such crusade. These would be detailed in the proceeding discourse. The activities of fiscal and ideological supporters reflect elitism.

The analytical tool to explain the dynamics of elitism is to situate the discussion in the writings of Roberto Michel (1911), Vilfredo Pereto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), Charles Wright Mills (1959) and Thomas Dye (1972). They have offered different explanations to situate the character of the elites (Verma, 1975). From their diverse analysis, there is exist certain commonality about who the elites are. Definitively, the elites are a 'small minority group', who by their possession of social and political power, influence the majority group in the society. They are a successful group of people who have risen to the top in every occupation and stratum of the society (Mahajan 1988). They are prime movers, agents, symbols of the entire common life, and the embodiments of the values that maintain society. They belong to an exclusive class from which the rest of societies are short-out (Aghahowa & Atuanya, 1996:447-484).

Ihonybere (1999) puts it that, elites does not only control and dominate the commanding heights of the economy but also exercise legal monopoly over the means of coercion and dominance of the structures and institutions of politics and economy. They shape the ideological and philosophical direction of society. These they do easily because materially they are empowered through their educational exposure, connection and talent (Shopeju & Ojukwu, 2010). In other words, they are a privilege minority within a larger group imbued with, or characterised by, organisational skills, leadership abilities, knowledge and information, drive and ambition. They are societal agents through which broader social forces such as ethnicity, class and religion are filtered to ordinary people. They determine the strings of character which play out in intergroup relations across every layer of the society.

In the discourse of power elites, Mills (1956) and Dye (1972) postulated that the elites occupy the 'top positions' of authority to run programmes and activities of major political, economic, legal, educational, cultural, scientific, and civic institutions. By virtue of their positions, they control half of the nation's industrial, communications, transportation, and banking assets, and two-thirds of all insurance assets. This can also be applied to local communities where a small number of individual have the control of the societal wealth and as such influence society (Verba, 1975). Mills classified the elites into three, which are: firstly, the highest political leaders including the president and a handful of key cabinet members and close advisers; (political elite); secondly, major corporate owners and directors (economic elite); and thirdly, high-ranking military officers (military elite).

In African societies, there are more to this classification. There are rather six power elites in Africa namely, the political elite; the economic elite; the military elite; the traditional elite; the educated elite and lastly, religious elite. Accordingly, they have mutually but also exclusive interests at stake, which requires collaboration to dominate the masses (Dunmuye, 2006). These elites individually and collectively have the capacity to create and determine the political atmosphere of African states, to render it peaceful or catastrophic. Though they differ, their interests are common. They conflict however, when their interests is across purposes, which they use to mobilize and crystallize the masses into social actions that often leads to violence.

The dynamics of the clash of religious civilization in Nigeria can be understood in this context. Despite the classification seen above, in this study the elites are broadly classified into two: firstly, religious elites and secondly, non-religious elites. Beside the religious elites, every other elite group identified above (political elites, economic elites, military elites, traditional elites, educated elites and religious elites) constitute the non-religious elites. The religious elites are those group of people having the obligation of sermonizing religious ideology. They are responsible for preparing the adherents mentality and spiritually for the life here on earth and the life-here-after. Because they are also part of the elite class, in their preaching they rationalize and justify the operation of elite groups over the masses as divine. The masses have no objectives to question the rationale of such message but take as divine so long it emanates from their spiritual leaders.

The religious elites at this juncture, because of the enormous powers they wield over the mass mind, they can enforce some dogma that has the capacity of transforming the population of adherents into instrument of violence. However, at the same time giving them the hope of the life-here-after, if their resources were judiciously used to promote the religion. The rationalization of the mass mind find expression in the application of the logic of transcendental myth. This transcendental myth makes meaning only within a particular scripture which the adherents holds as a 'holy books'. The religious elites keep harping on certain areas within the 'holy book' that speaks much about the unbeliever and the treatment to be mated on them if they refused to accept the new faith. Also, across different religions, religious elites cite areas of minor doctrinal differences and verses of

the scriptures that seemingly appear warlike to ignite violent feelings against other religious adherents (Mamdani, 2002 & 2004).

Nevertheless, the non-religious elites consist of the intellectuals and the non-intellectuals. The intellectuals are a particular group endowed educationally in the knowledge of religion and otherwise gained through research. They are outspoken and have the capacity to apply mundane myth to rationalise the mass mind and justify certain actions as necessary. The non-intellectuals consist of those groups that does not belong to the teaching profession nor do they engage in scholarship, knowledge production and distribution. They consist of people possessing enormous economic, political, military and traditional powers or resources at their disposal. They can make use of these resources or powers to create a niche for themselves within the religious group, and also mobilize and instigate members into social action, offering them all the required supports needed for undertaking such actions (Mamdani, 2002 & 2004).

The reason behind their support hinges on the fact that they have obligations to ensure that the God's own religion is expanded beyond their religious frontiers. In so doing interreligious conflicts becomes eminent. More often, the support which the religious and non-religious elites offer to adherents to trigger violence is construed by their selfishness – the quest to capture state power. As they grabble with power, they manipulate the people and present it as if they are struggling for a just curse to ensure that the religious group, which they belong are disposes of the control of power, or otherwise. To achieve the objective of capturing state power the feeling of insecurity is created to rally their followers, and the instrument which they use are transcendental and mundane myths (Harowitz, 1985). The logic of mundane myth finds expression in the social, economic and political material condition of adherents, whereas the transcendental myth finds expression in the use of religious dogma. The non-elites, merely religious zealots constitutes the foot soldiers, or at worse, the expendables. They are recruited to die in service of the religion which they belief strongly is the only source of eternity. The hope of these zealots is to make eternal life, which could be attained through strict obedience to the tenets of the religion.

The foregoing discourse reflect the contemporary realities in Nigeria, and indeed, in other countries across the world. The situation contradicts the theoretical postulations of the modernization and secularization theorists, who predicted the decline of religion in the modern global politics (Deutsch, 1953; Apter, 1965; Smith, 1970). Since the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States of America, religious violence across the world has been on the rise, affirming Huntington (1993) observation and prediction that, religion including its cultural composition will be major drive of contemporary global politics, despite continuous relevance of states entities as major actors in the international system. The evidence from across the world also point to the centrality of religion as a bolstering or undermining factor of state political legitimacy, because it can legitimise as well as undermine the state capability through consciousness building (Lewis, 1974; Haynes, 1994; Fox & Sandler, 2003). Nigeria is no less an example where religion is a major challenge to national integration and transformation despite its constitutionally defined secular nature.

### **3. Origin of the Clash of Religious Civilisations in Nigeria**

The origin of the clash of religious civilisations in Nigeria as it is throughout Africa, is rooted in the history of African encounter with foreign religions, particularly Islam and Christianity. Before their arrival there were several religious belief systems, collectively called the African Traditional Religion (ATR). It could be argued that Africa, and indeed Nigeria, was not unreligious before their encounter with Islam and Christianity. This assertion is upheld by Ekoko & Amadi (1989) thus:

Long before the coming of Islam and Christianity, the people who occupied the area of the present day Nigeria was not unreligious. A typical traditional society in the Nigeria area evolved religious strategies which ensured the survival of the cornerstones of social norms, hopes, expectations and existence.

It is plausible to state in tandem that, religious practices across Nigeria essentially traditional religion was not prone to conflict, both at the immediate and the larger social milieu. According to Ajayi, (1968:386-387), 'Religion ... was the cement of goodwill and the fear that kept the family as a unit and the village as distinctive community'. In fact, throughout the pre-colonial times, 'all activities and instrument of governance and survival were clothed in religion' (Kalu, 1989:11). This assertion may be disputed, but evidence from the extant literatures have shown that, Islam was never known to the Hausa speaking people and of course, other northern extraction, not until the second half of the fourteenth century, when it was introduced by refugees from Mali (Ubah, 1985:228).

Islam has been the practice in the Borno Empire before penetrating the Hausaland. It is equally evident that, in spite of the long history of Islamic religious standing among the Kanuri and the Shuwa Arabs, it has not defied their traditional religious practices in the present day Nigeria. The spread of Islam into other parts of the country was both piecemeal and forceful (Ubah, 1985; Barkindo, 1989; Mohammed, 1989; Okwori, 2003; Awu, 2008; Ahmad, 2010). With the conquest of hitherto existing state formations, it marked the beginning of Islamic domination, or alternatively, colonization of these states, that were arbitrarily 'independent and existing in varied



forms and sizes with different structures of political and social systems' (Oyovbaire, 1985; Odofin, 2003). For them, their incorporation and gradual imposition of Islam as a state religion was externally negotiated into their respective societies and presented them as vassal states and communities at the periphery of the Sokoto Caliphate (Lenshie & Abel, 2012:43-53).

In most parts of the northern Nigeria there was no such thing as Muslims before the arrival of the refugee from Mali into Hausaland, and of course, throughout northern Nigeria. In the same manner there was no Christianity in Nigeria. In this regard, Mazrui (2001) stated that:

... In most parts of Africa and particularly Nigeria, there was no such thing as a Christian identity before the arrival of the white man and his cultural baggage. Christianisation was not only the sharp contrast to, say, African Muslim identity or traditional identity.

This explains that Christianity is a later arrival on African soil, particularly in the Nigerian area after Islam had long arrived the northern Nigeria. It was introduced into the Benin and Warri areas, before spreading into other areas of the southern Nigeria in the 16th century (Edigba, 2012). The presence of Christianity in the region marked the beginning of the rejection and destruction of the traditional religious practices of the people which they considered as the cement of their societies (Adebisi, 1989). It must be stated that in the same manner, Islam was introduced in most parts of northern Nigeria. Although, Islam entered into the region as early as at the 7th century in the Borno area, it entered the Hausaland in the 11th century. In other territories within the region, the people were forced to surrender peacefully or by means of warfare to accept Islam (Adebisi, 1989; Okwori, 2003).

Colonialism reinforced the spread of Christianity into the middle belt areas where Islam was at the stage of development, particularly along the Benue valley. Accordingly, in the northern Nigeria Christian missionaries concentrated in Shonga, Zaria, Wase, Pategi, Lokoja, Bida, Wushishi, and Kuta among other areas, preaching among the Muslim communities rather than the pagan areas. Their expansion into the core Islamic areas of the northern Nigeria, particularly the Kano emirate in the later century, attracted serious concern from within the northern Nigeria and in England, leading to their overt restriction by the colonialist as a measure to keep to their promise of protecting the region from Christianisation (Sa'ad, 1980; Adebisi, 1989; Okwori, 2003; Logams, 2004).

While restricting Christian missionary activities from the core areas of northern Nigeria where Islam has been dominant, the colonialist allowed the missionaries to perpetuate cultural violence in the pagan areas by preaching and attacking the shrines and priests and incarcerating those who refused to accept Christianity. This ensured that two dominant religions existed, seemingly as conscious political design to maintain neo-colonial influence in Nigeria after their departure (Adebisi, 1989; Lenshie & Abel, 2012:48-49). These religious civilisations, Islam and Christianity, have come to exert more influence over and above indigenous norms and value systems of Nigerians. These religions came with different cultural orientations as gamut of their respective civilisations. Islam came with Arab cultural orientation and civilisations, as Christianity with Western cultural orientation and civilisations. The different orientation and civilisations have defied the existence of indigenous social and cultural value systems, leading to serious collision, subsumed as the 'clash of religious civilisations'.

The central Nigeria is the epic centre of the religious collision, with the southern and northern Nigeria fanning its manifestation. The arrival of these foreign religions on the Nigerian soil, first ensured the weakening of the indigenous religion. After a successful collapse of their reservoirs, they instituted hegemony and moved southward and northward respectively, to collide at the central region of Nigeria in search of converts and dominance, leading to 'clash of religious civilisations' (Lenshie & Abel, 2012). Historically, Islam and Christianity are considered as monotheistic, why then the conflict between and among believers of Islam and Christianity? This question finds explanation in Mamdani (2002:768) submission that:

...Islam and Christianity have in common a deeply messianic orientation, a sense of mission to civilize the world. Each is convinced that it possesses the sole truth, that the world beyond is a sea of ignorance that needs to be redeemed. In the modern age, this kind of conviction goes beyond the religious to the secular, beyond the domain of doctrine to that of politics...

From the foregoing, it is factual that each of the religion makes claim to messianic mission of civilizing the world and having the soul truth to achieve salvation. This is at the centre of the conflicting relations between them.

The clash of religious civilisations manifest in Nigeria at two levels – the first is at the macro level and the second is at the micro level respectively. At the macro level, the clash of religious civilisations occur between two or more religion competing for space and hegemony. The early religious arrival seek to maintain spatial hegemony whereas the latter religious arrival seek to gain the space to penetrate, or alternatively, overthrow the status quo within the geographical boundaries. At the micro level, the clash occur based on sectarian identity between two or more sects of the same religion, contesting for internal religious hegemony.

The contest usually manifest on the basis of early and late arrival as well as ideological or doctrinal differences.

As Mamdani (2004) argued in his essay: *The secular roots of radical political Islam*, the clash of religious belief systems, particularly between Islam and the others, is not a function created by the religious intellectuals such as the *ulama* and the *mullahs*, but by non-religious intellectuals which he identified to include the likes of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, who are journalists and literary critics respectively. It must be stated however that both religious and non-religious intellectuals over the years have been complimentary in inundating religious adherents into social action, provided they share and practice the same religion. Mamdani (2004:108) cited Sayyid Qutb as asserting that ‘you must make a distinction between friends and enemies because with friends you use persuasion and with enemies you use force...’ Sayyid Qutb statement reflect the effort by the non-religious intellectuals to generate religious consciousness among adherents, which the religious intellectuals in the face of globalisation and internal miscarriages of relationship within and across religions are concerned about. This situation fascinated Mamdani to comment thus:

I realized in fact that many of the primary intellectuals of political Islam, contemporary political Islam, and perhaps contemporary political Hinduism, like political Zionism, are not religious intellectuals. I wondered why it was so easy for non-religious intellectuals to come into the religious domain and realized we were dealing with a religion organized differently from Christianity (Mamdani, 2004:108).

This wonder indicates the infallibility of the role of the elites generally, whether they are religious or non-religious elites, hiding under the armpits of religious identities to stir up religious consciousness and violence to complicate intergroup relationship in Nigeria. This manifest through religious manipulation, which is not recent but historical as already pointed out in the preceding arguments that it started earlier during the formative periods of the Nigerian state. The implication for the manifestation of religious manipulation in Nigeria has been fossilized by the media through reportage. In this context, media social responsibility has been crystallised and sacrificed on the altar of sectional interests that tends to mystify the general public on issues of national interests.

There is no gainsaying therefore that religion is capable of being manipulated, because people always feel attached more to it than to their respective utilitarian activities. This explains that religious manipulation and restiveness is not a function construe by mass poverty, corruption and democratic deficits, as some studies on the Boko Haram sect revealed that these problems are central to their insurgent characteristics. Social realities in Nigeria from the historical times have shown that both the poor and rich are highly attached to religion. Durkheim cited in Giddens (1971:10) understood the efficacy of religion, when he stated:

Men feel overpowered by a force greater than themselves, which results from the collective effervesce of the occasion. The individual is conveyed into a world which appear to him to be utterly different to that of the everyday utilitarian activity to which the bulk of his life is devoted.

Because the religious feelings and attachment people have to religion, particularly in Nigeria where it religion is seen as a natural phenomenon or as a way of life, the elites only further enhances it to their advantages. Beside the support religious adherents receive from the non-governing elites, the Nigerian government seriously support and sponsor religious activities, such as performing Hajj and pilgrimage. This is one basic reason where some people have come to feel that Nigeria ought to be a religious state and their religion supposed to be the state religion. This notion is usually framed and filtered by the religious intellectuals to their adherents without any synchronisation to consider the effect it will have on national unity and integration. The non-religious intellectuals who have bought such perception of establishing a theocratic state tailored towards Islam have sponsored and even registered the membership of the country in the supra-religious organisation – the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

It is in this connection that it suffices to state that religious intellectuals have always exploited the opportunities provided by the non-religious intellectuals to create division in Nigeria. This situation is glaringly evident in Nigeria, where religious leaders justify violence, although, most of the time tactically through their preaching to adherents. Even though clash of religious civilisations occur at both macro and micro level, the clash appears to be more violent at the macro level. The civilizational differences and orientation provide the spin-ball for the religious violence, notwithstanding a lot of similarities between Islam and Christianity.

Mazrui (2003) has argued that Islam and Christianity have disrupted African ancient relationship with nature, by creating a ‘triple heritage’ that have placed Africa in dilemma of civilisations. He stated thus:

What both types of African society have shared is nearness to nature. For centuries the continent has had abundant animal life and vegetation, and the indigenous religions have fused God, man and nature. Islam and Western Christianity have challenged this fusion. Man alone is supposed to have been created in the image of God – contrary to indigenous African beliefs in which the image of God takes

many forms. Among God's creatures, only man – according to Islam and Western Christianity – is close to sacredness, in possession of a soul, and destined for spiritual immortality. This is contrary to indigenous African religions, which allow other creatures to share in sacredness and sometimes endow mountains and springs with a holiness of their own. The arrival of Islam and especially of Westernism disrupted the African's ancient relationship with nature.

This is one of the major sources of problems associated with the clash of religious civilisations, which characterises interfaith or ethno-religious relations in post-colonial Nigeria, and is caused by people, who have no adequate knowledge about the two dominant religions.

#### **4. The Dynamics of Clash of Religious Civilisations in Post-Colonial Nigeria**

In the post-colonial era, Nigerian elites who emerged from the rubbles of colonisation fed on the far reaching effects of colonial legacies to perpetuate themselves in power (Falola, 1998). Although these divides were inherently colonial creation of both Arabic and Western type. The post-colonial elites, both civil and military regimes have over the years used of religion among others to accentuate onto the leadership rostrum. The problem reflect Mazrui (2003) discourse on the 'triple heritage', which are juxtaposition or interjection of African, Islamic and Western cultures, competing for domination and the attention of 'potential African buyers'. They have provided a variegated backdrop for policies, group actions, and individual decisions, such that different parts of the country have reacted differently to the 'triple heritage' phenomenon.

In Nigeria, the imported religions have alienated man from self, people and nature, and have put a dagger to what in the past held the people together and now things have fallen apart. Nevertheless, remarkable the people in the south-west Nigeria, particularly the Yoruba have had minimal conflicts associated with religion, because they have put their differences to culture (Kukah, 1993). In the south-east Nigeria, religious violence has also been minimal, this is perhaps because virtually all the people in the region professes Christianity. Despite the sectarian divide between Catholic and the Anglican which have majority of followers, has not led to violence as politics have over the years divided them. However, the northern Nigeria, has a history of religious violence dated to the 18th century jihad. This has continued because of the significant population of other religious adherents in the region.

The Northern Nigeria present a society where, particularly among the Muslims, everything including governance and education makes meaning only in the context of Islamic religion. Any contradiction constitute a serious challenge to Islam and its adherents. This is at the core of the rise of fundamentalism among Islamic zealots, who have risen to counter any form of challenges to Islamic dominance in the northern Nigeria. Within this premise can the movement of Boko Haram sect, whose aim is to roll-back Westernisation and its structures, including Christianity in northern Nigeria, and if possible to overrun the Nigerian state to establish Islamic state in order formation be understood. While this may remains the utmost desire of many Islamists, Islam is also faced with series of sectarian conflicts, such as Shiite and Sunni divides, in the face of global challenges.

Also, equally important to state is that in contemporary times, unlike where ethnic identity being decisive in determining intergroup relations among the Yoruba and perhaps, the Igbo and other ethnic groups of the southern Nigeria. In the northern Nigeria, ethnicity does not make any serious meaning, what is very central is religion. Religion for many people in the northern Nigeria is a totality of life. Their attitude and disposition are guided by religion rather than reason. This is why Marx became cynical about religion when he argued that religion create false consciousness. It is a product of man's creation, the product of those in power, who control social means of, and determines social relations of production supported by the elites to justify the oppression of the oppressed creature (Jeckreece & Nsirim, 2009). Above all, 'religion is an opium of the masses' (Lenshie & Abel, 2012:45). The reason is that religion eludes pure reason and motivate passion, and tends to object any form of inquiry into it as a challenge to the existence of the sacred being. This is where people become bundled up with religious dogma that are transcendental myths to direct and channel violent prone attitude. It is therefore alluding that 'all religion are men's creation and all men are victims of their own creation'.

The rising religious consciousness and activities in the northern Nigeria present indicate that religious clashes between the adherents of Islam and Christianity have become a bazaar. The dominance of Islam in most parts of the northern Nigeria has been a source of concern for the majority of Christians. The Muslims have the notion that Islam preceded Christianity in northern Nigeria, therefore the presence of Christianity is contending its hegemony which transcends all aspect of social, political and economic sectors of the society. Christians have also expressed phobia against Islam (Kukah, 1993). The phobia for Islam in contemporary Nigeria among Christians is informed by the intolerant and violent nature some sect have taken to expand the religion.

As a way of justifying the intolerance associated with Islam across the world in contemporary time, Halliday (1994) posits that the manifestations is '... a response to the perceived weakness and subjugation of the Islamic world...' motivated by what Mamdani (2004) refers to as 'political Christianity, political Hinduism and political Judaism'. From these assertions, it would be deduced that the Muslims in northern Nigeria perceive

Christianity as a rival religion, which is contesting the hegemony of Islam. This perception has given rise to inter-religious conflict that have been very violent. The violent nature of religion in Nigeria is rooted in the post-colonial elite's ideological manipulations of religious tenets for power and primitive accumulation of resources.

This was the situation in the first republic. The religious inclined nature of the Nigerian politics was to be seen in the manner the regions related with one another and beyond the shores of Nigeria. In southern Nigeria, particularly the Eastern Region, by descent are Igbo and Christians dominated, had bilateral relations with Israel, and whereas the Hausa-Fulani Muslims dominated northern Nigeria had bilateral relation with the Saudi Arabia. In each of these regions, religious inscriptions were found written against banks, education institutions, workplaces and so on. In some cases, they were written in Arabic or Latin, making it difficult to be understood by those who are outside these religions. For example, many people have attended and graduated from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, without knowing what the Arabic inscriptions on the logo of the university stands for. In orthodox churches citations are made in Latin which many followers know little or nothing about what meaning they convey.

In southern Nigeria, particularly in the Eastern region, while it was difficult to find Hausa-Fulani Muslims in the public service of the region, in northern Nigeria, the Igbo and Yoruba people were virtually in all the sectors. In order to close the gap or the imbalance in education, economy and the public service, the northern region instituted the 'northernization' policy, although spurred by the attempt to 'Nigerianize' every sector, the northern region led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, also deemed it to implement same for the region (Albert, 1998:57). The policy was geared towards granting the northerners the stage to emerge unto the upper rungs of the public service. Albert (1998) described the policy as saying 'enough is enough: everybody unto its mother's breast'.

Following the implementation, Albert (1998:57) cited Dudley (1968:219-220) to avers that 'by 1958, there were five northerners in the top echelon of the service, sixty-nine in the administrative and professional cadre, and 237 in the executive and higher technical cadre'. Although this policy created a psychological effect '...that nothing is good for the north which is not northern' (Albert, 1998:57), internally it also created social disparity such that the majority of those appointed were Hausa-Fulani Muslims. This policy was also extended into the economic domain to empower the Hausa-Fulani Muslims by displacing the southerner, particularly the Igbo Christian majority as well as the northern minorities controlling the informal sector of the economy (Albert, 1998:57). Okwori (2003) called this tactic 'economic jihad'. This is even more evident in contemporary times, where government resources are used to empower adherents of a particular religion against the common good.

The feeling that assumed the political landscape of northern Nigeria became 'nothing was good for the north which is not Muslim dominated'. Many decades later, this situation has continued to be critical and decisive for religious consciousness in the northern Nigerian public service as well as the political terrain. It is reasonable to point out that, most state policies during the first republic were regionally construed by ethno-religious sentiments. Inter-regional relations at the national level were motivated by elite's economic interest as did British colonialist, but religion was very central for achieving the interest. The several riots in Kano and Kaduna led to the wanton destruction of lives properties. Being Christians, the Igbo people and several other Christian natives suffered the scourge of religious violence. This, therefore, explain some of the reasons why the military severally intervened in Nigerian politics (Ademoyega, 1981; Dudley, 1982; Kurfi, 1985). Several of the military coups were interpreted along religious lines. This problem further compounded and rendered useless the effort of state and nation building in Nigeria. The various military regimes crystallised the Nigerian population into developing religious consciousness while making effort to sustain their hold onto power.

While emasculating religious contestations in the country, various military regimes tinkered with the federal structure, especially the secularity of the Nigerian state. Notwithstanding the existence of the religious cold war between adherents of Islam and Christianity since independence, from 1973 onward religious bigotry continued to dominate intergroup relations. For example, the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) demanded the inclusion of Islamic law into the Nigerian Constitution, and to establish institutions of Islamic legal system. This demand received peak attention when General Ibrahim Babangida came to power in a counter coup in 1985. To secure a niche for himself among the northern aristocrats, against the secular status of the country went ahead to register Nigeria membership to the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) (Onapajo, 2012:47). Since then Nigeria has continued to be seen as one of the major centres of Islam in Africa.

The contending atmosphere between Christianity and Islam became intensified. While Muslims celebrated Ibrahim Babangida as a national hero and champion of the faith, Christians saw him as a villain, an anti-Christ, and an antagonist of peaceful interfaith relations. However, they could not do otherwise, because brute force characterised the regime. Worse still was the Gen. Sani Abacha's regime. Various religious dynamics played out promote Islam in Nigeria.

The character showcasing religious differences were also witnessed in the various appointments made during their stay in power. Measuring the debit and credit of the various military regimes on the parlance of inter-religious representation, it is critical that all failed to unite the country. They rather have crystallised Nigerian population along religious polarisation, creating horizontal inequalities and generating violent civil



conflicts (Østby, 2008). From the 1980s religious violence intensified, especially with the wave of Christian-Pentecostalism into the core areas of Northern Nigeria (Kukah, 1993; Elaigwu, 2005). According to Raji (n.d):

...Christian religious fundamentalism, which emerged as Pentecostal Christianity in the 80s, peaked in the 90s and began to find anchor in the social and political consciousness of adherents of that version of Christianity who were mostly youths. Pentecostal Christianity targeted mainly youths as instrument for the socio-economic and political reconstruction. It was therefore not a surprise that the church became very vocal in the political process in the 90s.

The Christian religious revivalism in most parts of northern Nigeria was considered to be unfriendly to Islamic dominance in the region. This led to several waves of religious violence against Christians. Notwithstanding, Muslims also suffered reprisals in Christian dominated areas. It suffices to note that it was during this period, that the northern Nigeria witnessed the Maitatsine uprising in Kano in 1982, and in Gombe and Yola in 1984 (Isichei, 1987; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011). In March 1987 and May 1988, there was also religious violence in Kafanchan, Kaduna State over the Sharia question. This was followed by religious riot at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, between Christian and Muslim students. In the 1990s there were series of ethno-religious riots across the northern Nigeria (Ibrahim, 1987; Maier, 2000; Elaigwu, 2005; Danjibo, 2011; Onapajo, 2012; Adamolekun, 2012). Since then religious violence has increased beyond measure (Ibrahim, 1991; Danjibo, 2011).

These religious conflicts did not occur in a vacuum. There were motivations, which were essentially though political, it became religious. Raji (n.d) in this connection pointed that:

Islam and Christianity, while not only proselytizing religions, both seek to expand their support base, hence conversion and poaching of followers of other religions through stereotypes, hate preaching, distortion, misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the various religious texts in such manners that promoted prejudice in both camps. The aim was either to exclude or include, usually demonizing either religion as “satanic”. Religiously “good” became misrepresented by the teachings of either religions.

Usman (1987) forewarned against religious manipulations as an instrument to capture state power by all means. For him, ‘...the manipulation of religion in Nigeria today is essentially a means of creating the context for this fancy-dress ball, for this charade of disguises.’ His caution was timely as the danger was fast looming from every facet of the social, economic and political sectors of the country. Unfortunately, the population of the various religious adherents could not understand the context of his caution. This gullibility has continued to produce the vicious circle of religious violence in Nigeria.

## 5. Challenges of the Clash of Religious Civilisations in Contemporary Nigeria

In every society people seek freedom but more often, have seen bondage arising from different social forces. As a measure to manage these forces human ingenuity led to the evolution of democracy. Democracy is synonymous with the much desired human freedom, because it permit intergroup relations within the armpit of the rule of law. It is well known that the rebirth of democracy in Nigeria was as a result of the rekindled desire, toiling and suffering of men and women, young and old for human rights and freedom expressed and exercised in accordance with the democratic principles (Nnoli, 1998). With Chief Olusegun Obasanjo coming to power in May 29, 1999, Nigeria was thrown up into a dusty atmosphere of religious violence. Several religious eruption were witnessed in the central states of Plateau and Kaduna, with many civilians and non-combatant people becoming casualties (Best, 2007; Igwe, 2009).

Before the end of the administration in 2006, there were over twenty-five recorded ethno-religious violence in Nigeria (Korieh, 2005). Of all these violence, there were remote causes. With specific reference to the religious dimension of ethnic conflicts between the Christian natives and the Hausa-Fulani Muslims in Jos, Plateau state, Danfulani (n.d) pointed among other problems that:

The [Hausa-Fulani] community being Muslim does not tolerate marriage between their daughters and Christian but they do marry Christian girls. Most Jos Plateau Christian communities detest this lopsided mode of social interaction. This has given birth to what the Christians refer to as Hausa-Fulani *raini* ‘culture of belittling’ and arrogance since they look down with open contempt and lack of respect upon their host community, using such intemperate language and stereotypes as *arna*, infidels, *Sarkin arna*, the chief of infidels, *kafirai* (*kafir*) to describe them. They exhibit total disregard for the culture, religion and traditional institutions of their host communities. This is a fundamental reason that has birthed deep seated bitterness, with far reaching social consequences, that has continued to fan conflict on the Jos Plateau.

This same situation also obtains throughout the areas where Christians are a majority. The rise of religious consciousness and the prone nature of various ethnic populations to religious violence were configured by the 'sharia question' – the desire and commitment by the northern Muslim elites to institute Islamic laws across the northern states. With the basis that democracy is about human choices, the former Zamfara state governor (now, a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria), Alhaji Ahmad Yerima, decided to implement the sharia law. Other 16 northern state governors later cued and adopted same for their respective states (Agbo & Lenshie, 2010). This situation aggravated the fears of the non-Muslims, both indigenes and residents in those states. The sharia law was considered hostile and impeaching on the human rights of other religious adherents, particularly the Christians, even though it was not meant for them. Where the sharia law was implemented in the northern states of the federation, their governors were held in high esteem and celebrated widely among Muslims, even beyond the country's national boundaries, particularly among the Arab countries.

Consequently, other zealots under different umbrellas cashed in on the religious consciousness as a platform to sermonise Islam, whereas other people, the non-Muslims agitated against such experiences, harping on the secular status of Nigeria. This situation created serious dichotomy along religious identities. Reminiscent of their experiences with the northern Nigeria, as an expression of *Islamaphobia*, the Igbo elites asked their natives to return to their country home. They threatened to take to violence if the situation was not reversed. President Obasanjo adopted the 'sit-down-look' perspective to wait for the collapse of the sharia system, knowing it was politically motivated (Onapajo, 2012). It was actually politically construed because its aftermath was violence and repression against non-Islamic population.

The implication of the sharia question went beyond the Obasanjo era. In 2009 an Islamic sect labelled by the media as Boko Haram, which mean 'Western education or orientation is a sin', but addresses itself as *Jama'atu Ahlus Sunnah Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) emerged and became an uncommon force to reckon with. The message of jihad by the group against the secular nature of Nigeria has been vibrant and mystifying (Mu'azu, 2011). The sect drew membership and followership from across the country, and international supports and sponsorships, particularly given its wider link with the al-Qaeda network and other related Islamic ideological driven groups across the world (Bamgbose, 2013). Based on their networks, the Boko Haram sect since their emergence has sought continuously to overthrow the state and establish Islamic state formation.

The state and its agencies were brought under attack. Christians and their worship centres have also been attacked. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) have this statistics of attacked mated on Christians by the Boko Haram sect:

Out of the 137 religious-motivated violent incidents we tracked, 88.3% were attacks on Christians, 2.9% were attacks on Muslims, attacks on security agents 4.4%, sectarian clashes 2.2% and extra-judicial killings were 2.1%. The US Terrorism report 2011 indicates a total of 136 terrorist attacks in Nigeria. It is inconceivable therefore that Muslims were the primary victims of a jihadist group whose intent is to Islamize Nigeria. This year 2012 alone, there have been 49 security incidences of which 80% have targeted Christians (<http://news.naij.com/5117.html>, 9 August, 2012).

In fact, there is no gainsaying that the activities of the Boko Haram Islamists have been harmful to the collective existence of the country (Ahokeygh, n.d). The recent kidnapped of over 250 secondary school girls, majority Christians, writing their final examinations in Chibok, Borno State, by the Boko Haram Islamists and several other attacks on the Christian worship centres in the northern Nigeria are self-evident. According to Forest (2012:2) the attacks were geared towards sparking widespread religious violence in order to destabilise the government. In line with this submission, Forest cited the Boko Haram's founding leader, late Sheik Yusuf Mohammed stating thus: 'Our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a *kafir* land. The current system is contrary to true Islamic beliefs.' This assertion is in contest of 'how white European colonial powers drew lines on a map in a somewhat arbitrary and capricious plan to carve up the African continent, and in many cases empowered local tribes – frequently, many of which had embraced Christianity—to rule as proxy landlords until the end of WW II ...' (Forest 2012:14).

The central message of the sect therefore is not covert, they want to terminate the Nigeria because it was a European creation and to establish its place an Islamic State. To actualise this objective the sect resorted to the use of instrument of violence against the government and its institutions and civilians. Abimbola, & Adesote (2012:20-22) chronicled over forty major attacks by the sect between July 26, 2009 and April 30, 2012 in the northern Nigeria in which many Christians and moderate Muslims were killed.

Reacting to the insurgency in the northern Nigeria, one of the most popular militant group in southern Nigeria, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) also threatened to 'attack and kill all Muslims and bomb their Mosques in the region as a counter attack to the insurgencies of the Boko Haram Islamists' in northern Nigeria (Amaize & Oyadogha, 2013). This was aggravated by fear of the uncertainty of

ending the religious restiveness, given the conspiracy of silence played out by northern elites over the Boko Haram and other related issues.

Beyond the desire and struggle between these religions, political elitism have also played out in the manipulation of religion for political interests. The pattern of voting given the presidential election results indicated that Nigerians voted based on their religious identities. Muslims in the northern Nigeria reacted and took to violence contesting the election results. The reason which informed the violence was the feeling that northern Nigeria being Muslim dominated ought to have produced Gen. Mohammedu Buhari (rtd.), as the president-elect. From the map of the presidential election results indicated that Buhari won in parts of northern states dominated by Muslims, such as Kano, Jigawa, Niger, Yobe, Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto, Gombe, Katsina, Bauchi, and Kaduna, whereas Goodluck Jonathan won in all other states of the federation except Osun state dominated by Christians. Angered by this results the Boko Haram Islamists cashed in on the post-election violence to unleash terror on citizens and non-combatant population, mostly Christians across the northern Nigeria. Several attempt by the sect has been made to extend its terror beyond the northern Nigeria.

The political violence taking religious form further exacerbated religious consciousness in Nigeria. What is happening in most states of the federation in the contemporary times reflects Osaghae (1995) submission thus:

Most actions, policies and appointments of government at every level were seen through the lens of religion. The lens also extended to dress, food, and the balance of religious propagation in educational institutions, allocation of airtime on radio and television, a fair balance between Muslims and Christians public holidays, and the religious composition of the armed forces.

This has varied accordingly in different states, depending on the religion that is more dominant. While adequately the core northern and southern states have enjoyed relative stability, the central Nigeria have become religiously divided and violent due to the unhealthy prevalence of Islam and Christianity in the region. Because religion has been moved into the secular domain, the ethnic Christian natives have become more religiously conscious to disallow non-Christians rights and privileges in their own communities. The manifestations of the resistance by Christians in northern Nigeria finds expression in 'political Christianity', a phenomenon which developed lately in Nigeria after the Hausa-Fulani Muslims have established strong footings in the northern Nigeria area by means of 'political Islam'.

Raji (n.d) has argued in this connection that the effort motivated by political Christianity and its antics have been to redefine the political space through the "salvation politics" in which access to socio-political and economic redemption became synonymous with "salvation". Though is the truism of the contemporary political realities, it is a response to the centuries of political Islam in northern Nigeria. Political Islam reached the zenith with the emergence of the philosophy of 'never to allow non-Muslims, *Kafir* or *Arne* to rule them except they profess Islam. This particularly indicates that the religious attachment to state power and the control of virtually every means of livelihood is very central to Islam.

In this context, the ethnic Christian population in the northern Nigeria who have considered themselves over the years subjugated by the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, considering the religious intolerance have through Pentecostalism pushed for political change in the status quo. The Pentecostalism like Islamism became a source of protest and resistance to Islamic domination. Pentecostalism is synonymous with saying 'to your tents oh Israel', indicating that Christians were not going to tolerate social, economic and political injustices suffered under the northern controlled federal government.

Most often Christians have questioned the reason why Muslim should be permitted to be governors in the states like Benue, Taraba and Plateau where they are dominant, when in states like Bauchi, Zamfara, Kano, Yobe, Jigawa, Kebbi, Katsina and Sokoto states, Christians cannot hold any meaning position no matter how hard they agitate for inclusion. Boko Haram insurgency, for many Christians is an Islamic agenda to reclaim Usman Danfodio's territorial area by whatever means. This relentlessness can be referred to as 'political jihad'. The political jihad is geared towards ensuring that Muslims control the top hierarchies of every sector in the country.

It suffices to state that Islam and Christianity and those that drive them, have lent themselves as instruments of political manipulation. As agents of these mega religions, they have manipulated their adherents for political gains by transforming them into religious expendables, a xenophobic phenomenon that can be regarded as 'mental colonialism' in Nigeria. The role of the colonialist in creating this situation in Nigeria cannot be undermined. Since British colonial policies were geared towards economic interest, the effort to encourage harmonious intergroup relations was not given any attention. They rather tactically encouraged and sustained the north-south divides. According to Malachy (2013) 'the predominance of Muslims in the north and Christians in the south orchestrated the unending north-south struggles that have come to define public policies, development programmes, the rules of political process and regime change in Nigeria'. This situation is also evident within the north itself, between the core north dominated by Muslims and the central belt, dominated by Christian

natives. This is at the core of the violent clashes of religious civilisations in Nigeria.

## 5. Conclusion

The interplay of religious identity and its transformation to violence prove clearly that Nigeria is a very complex country. Religion in Nigeria has brought into contest the unity and conflict of opposite motivated by the clash of religious civilisations – Islam and Christianity – in a domain, which was hitherto dominated by adherents of African Traditional Religion. The traditional belief systems were the truth that cemented the people and the society and nature. Of all the numerous traditional religious practices Nigeria had, there were no wars recorded between one truth and another. The penetration of Islam and Christianity in mutual contest for converts, conjugated and crystallised the Nigerian population with their orientations into becoming religious warriors divided along these two dominant religions, leading to what Mazrui (2001) called the ‘triple heritage’. The way religion has been used to manipulate adherents of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria indicates that the country is in great dilemma of religious civilisations. The country has not been able to manage the contraption of these religious civilisations, which ‘much unite them than what separate them’ into profiting the development of the country, but the profit of the local elites and their international collaborators, while recruiting religious foot soldiers to fight and die for religion by promising them the life-here-after. It is clear that religious is truly an ‘opium of the masses’. Nigerians must loose ties of these religions to resort to the African truths and consociation, which defines the African brotherhood as a philosophy while practicing Islam or Christianity as the case may be, because the moral values of the African brotherhood is universal to both Islam and Christianity which claim commonplace mission of civilisations, have become one of the major contending social forces in the contemporary Nigeria.

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