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RELIGIOUS ACTORS AND PEACEBUILDING IN POST CONFLICT AFRICAN STATES

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ABSTRACT

The importance of peacebuilding effort in reducing hostilities between parties to conflict is rising in a world where security and identity are under increased assault. There is a growing corpus of research on peacebuilding, but there are diverse opinions on activities of religious actors'on peacebuilding in post conflict African States. Therefore, examining how religious actors contribute to peacebuilding is the main aim of the study. The study, which was based on the social capital theory, identified network, trust, and norm in the mobilization of resources. With a case study design, the study adopted purposive sampling of events in Sudan, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya using narrative analysis of literatures to reveal the precise roles played by religious actors. Findings showed that advocacy, dialogue, observation, transitional justice, mediation and education constitutes the major activities of religious actors in peacebuilding. Religious actors have overwhelmingly demonstrated that the aim of their actions was to advance harmony in society. Hence, the need for government across states in Africa to include religious actors in the pre and post conflict peacebuilding processes. Future research should therefore look at the impact assessment of peacebuilding programmes when analyzing the effects of various activities

Introduction

Africa has historically seen a high rate of intra- and inter-state wars and conflicts. This has led to the proposition that conflicts and instability had perennially bedeviled states in Africa (United Nations, 2023). According to Redealli (2023), more than 35 Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIACs) have taking place in Africa. Among the state that have experienced these ugly effects of conflicts are the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, placing Africa second in terms of the number of armed conflicts per region. These wars are being fought by a number of armed factions that are engaged in combat with one another or against government troops (Redealli,2023). It is intrusive that conflict is a key barrier to development in Africa, which have caused a substantial number of resources, including official development aid, to be diverted from development to emergency situations. Even while there are still

disputes that need to be resolved, efforts are daily injected to addressing underlying causes and pursuing preventative measures.

Accordingly, peacebuilding activity is becoming more important in a world where security and identity are under increased threat (Albert, 2001: 130–139; Ayantayo, 2005: 62–63; Jeong, 2005; Wahlsch, 2020; Kapshuk & Detch,2022). However, the advocacy from research studies has necessitated the need to widen peacebuilding strategies and possible synergies. With the rise of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), conflict resolution and its expanding role in development and humanitarian efforts, the prospect of rebuilding peaceful societies from the ashes of war is more promising than it has ever been. (Jacobsen & Brand-Jacobsen in Galtung, 2002: 27; Kapshuk & Detch, 2022). Meanwhile, in 2021 report of United Nations titled "Our Common Agenda," the Secretary-General of the United Nations argued that greater effort should be made to agree on stronger collaborative approaches for dealing with major dangers, as well as establish a new peace agenda that prioritizes prevention and peacebuilding through increased investment (United Nations,2023). As a result, the United Nations' activity, as derived from its action, places a strong emphasis on preventing violent conflict, establishing peace, and maintaining peace.

The link between religion, peace, and violence has historically been contentious, spawning a broad range of discussions and opposing viewpoints that are usually based on popular belief rather than actual evidence. While much of the study may focus on religion's drawbacks, it's also important to highlight how religion may contribute to interfaith unity. As a result, religion is the subject of intense debate, the basis of society, the use of myth and symbol in rites and rituals, and the imposition of particular behaviors on adherents. Despite the notion that it is no longer necessary in the modern world, religion has always had a significant effect on Nigeria's public life (Ayantayo, 2009 Christoph,2018; Steen-Johnsen,2020). Nevertheless, the fact remains that religion addresses some of the most crucial existential issues of human life, such as freedom, inevitableness, fear, security, right and wrong, and the sacred and profane, which have a tremendous influence on how people view peace on both a personal and communal level. (Said & Nathan, 2002; Steen-Johnsen,2020).

To date, traditional peacebuilding strategies have included initiatives that aim to examine the difficulties associated with pre- and post-conflict peacebuilding in order to avoid potentially explosive circumstances from escalating once more into full-fledged wars. Examining the influence of religious actors on peacebuilding is therefore the main aim of the study. Accordingly, purposive sampling of events from Sudan, Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya was used in the study, which also adopted narrative analysis to uncover the specific roles performed by religious individuals in the post-conflict environment.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

Although the concept of peacebuilding first originated in the 16th century, it wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s within the context of peace research that it was given its own field of study (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Schirch,2015 Brusset, Coning, & Hughes 2016;). However, early peace philosophies concentrated on conceptions of nonviolent social and international transformation as well as the investigation and the use of conflict management. The UN's Brahimi report, published in 2000, validated this description of peacebuilding as a more comprehensive and long-term activity than earlier reports on peacekeeping and peacemaking, by declaring that peacebuilding "refers to actions implemented on a long-term basis. " (Brahimi, 2000, Schirch,2015, United Nation,2023). As a result, the academic discourse of peace research was founded as normative and transdisciplinary. Yet, peace research has always examined a wide range of conflict causes, from global, political, and economic concerns to those addressing religious, cultural, and social factors (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Wählisch,2020, Amanda,2017).

Meanwhile, the development of the peacebuilding discourse is linked to a fundamental conception of peace. The basic goal of peacebuilding is to establish and maintain the conditions for both "positive peace," which is a more thorough understanding connected to the institutionalization of justice and freedom,

and "negative peace," which is the simple absence of violent conflict (Galtung, 2000, Brusset, Coning, & Hughes; 2016 & Wählisch,2020). As a result, many perspectives on peacebuilding have arisen. These perspectives might either take a narrow or broad interpretation of peacebuilding, and they all represent the contradiction between negative and positive peace. This contrast between "positive peace" and "negative peace," made by the Norwegian sociologist and scholar Johan Galtung, is where the notion of peacebuilding first emerged. Thus, peacebuilding may be seen of as a two-sided idea. It denotes both the absence of violence (a negative form of peace) and the existence of positive, harmonious, and cooperative relationships (a positive form of peace).

The United Nations formally adopted "post-conflict peacebuilding" after the publication of Agenda for Peace. Consequently, U.N. Secretary-General divided the agenda for peace into four main activities: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post conflict peacebuilding (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1992; & United Nations,2022), amid the broad excitement that characterized the period immediately following the end of the cold war. In keeping with this, the phrase "peacebuilding" entered the common language in 1992 when U.N. Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali gave it the following definition in "An Agenda for peace": According to Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992:46), "peacebuilding" is the process of identifying and supporting structures that have the potential to strengthen and solidify peace in order to prevent a reoccurrence into violence. Post-conflict peacebuilding is therefore one of the instruments the UN has at her disposal, along with preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping, when it was first included in the document titled U.N. Agenda for Peace. On the other hand, the definition in its broadest form (preventive peacebuilding) include early warning and response efforts, violence prevention, advocacy work, civilian and military peacekeeping, military intervention, humanitarian aid, ceasefire agreements, normalization**,** and reconciliation (Sambanis,2000; Wählisch,2020, Amanda,2017).

This study therefore employed social capital theory as its guiding theory. Systems like worldviews, trust, reciprocity, informational and economic exchange, as well as informal and formal organizations and associations, are examples of social capital driven actions that either contribute to or arise from social and economic organization (Portes, 1998;Evans,2016,Suseno,2018) There is considerable debate on the interactions and organizational structures that make up social capital, but there is no disagreement regarding the role that social capital plays in promoting collective action, growth, and development through working in conjunction with other kinds of capital (Putnam,2000; Luca Andriani & Asimina Christoforou,2016). By providing a thorough framework that includes four aspects of social capital and describes how they interact, Woolcock's 1998 model of social capital supports examination at several levels. In his approach, "integration" stands for the protective, earliest bonds inside the family or a close-knit community. The terms "organisational trust, network and norm refer to the state's efficiency and capacity for operation as well as its ties to the local community. Additionally, Putnam (1993: 36, Evans,2016, Suseno,2018 Luca Andriani & Asimina Christoforou,2016) believed that coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit are characteristics of social organization which are derived from social capital components (networks, norms, and trust).

Appraisals of Religion and Peacebuilding

Religion is an integration of cultural belief structures and a worldview that produces symbols connecting people to spirituality and morality (Korb,2011; Said & Nathan;2001; Steen-Johnsen,2020; Ossai'2021), Religion incorporates a cult, a code of conduct, and a confessional society which has a significant influence on how individuals think and act (Pouligny, 2005; Steen-Johnsen,2020; Christoph,2018). Religion may therefore provide social, moral, and spiritual resources to the drive for world peace. The transformational approach to peace, in particular, contends that individual transformation, which is frequently reached via spiritual practice, radiates outward and influences peace on all levels, from the

intrapersonal to the global realm of peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020; Christoph,2018).

Also, rituals typically support "healing and reintegration processes that might play crucial roles in the larger psycho-social rehabilitation of local communities (Yoav, Kapshuk & Mora, Deitch, 2023). As a result, it is essential that these parts be included in the materials utilized for the rebuilding phase. As opposed to this, the biblical concept of "Shalom" is predicated on the process of promoting peace between Judaism and Christianity. Islam also acknowledges the concept of "Salaam". All of these connotations are shown by the usage of the English term peace. So, according to Abu-Nimer (2001:2), religion contributes social, moral, and spiritual resources to the effort to promote peace. Because of its high ethical and moral standards and ability to relate to people on a more personal level than other methods of promoting peace that are based on ethnicity or shared interests, religion therefore plays a vital role in mending relationships and establishing peace (Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020; Christoph,2018). Thus, the study of religion's role in establishing peace is referred to as religious peacebuilding (Appleby, 2000, 2006; Gopin, 2000, 2005 Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020; Christoph,2018)). In this spirit, achieving constructive peace via religion calls for far more than just settling differences in viewpoint. Thus, there is a need for interreligious communication.

For conceptualizing faith-based peacebuilding, indicators must consequently be identified. The first sign is the involvement of religious actors in programs for promoting peace such as interfaith and interreligious dialogue, transitional justice, advocacy, education, and early warning systems. The second indication is the organization of their peacebuilding initiatives in religious and nonreligious disputes, so focusing on beneficiaries from a variety of religious communities as well as secular ones, in addition to those who share their own religious beliefs. The third factor is if the actors, or participants and/or organizers, consider their faith when participating in this type of activity (Bouta et al., 2005; Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020; Christoph,2018).

As opposed to this, "faith-based (religious) peacebuilding is the range of tasks carried out by religious actors and institutions with the aim of ending and changing deadly conflict, creating social relations and political institutions that follow a philosophy of tolerance and non-violence" (Smock 2002: 128–129; Coward & Smith, 2004 Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020;). In a similar vein, Appleby (2000:211) defines religious peacebuilding as the procedures and modes of action employed by religious actors and others to symbolize the contribution that religion makes to fostering harmony and peace in society. According to Appleby, religious beliefs and practices may advance the goal of world peace.

Meanwhile, faith-based organization is defined as one that offers social services and is driven by or linked with a particular religion. According to this definition, there are at least four distinct categories of faith-based organizations: 1) religious congregations, 2) organizations or projects sponsored by congregations, 3) incorporated non-profit organizations that are either independent or affiliated with a congregation, and 4) local and international interfaith affiliations (Salam Institute, 2005; ;Steen-Johnsen,2020; Christoph,2018)).In general, faith-based organizations have a permanent staff members, a set process for making decisions, frequent meetings of their representative members, and a reasonable organizational structure (Salam Institute, 2005 & ICCO , 2009). Individuals or private organisations often make up their membership. Non-violence is therefore one of the most highly regarded guiding principles of non-governmental organizations, including faith-based ones.

Moreover, rreligious individuals have long engaged in mediation in an effort to settle disputes, frequently in individual capacity or a representative of faith-based organizations. Religious individuals or representatives of faith-based organizations are therefore known as religious peacemakers because of their work in promoting peace across different groups of the society. Generally, religious actors play the following roles in peacebuilding, (Bouta, 2005:4; Gopin, 2000, 2002; Appleby, 2000; Smock, 2002; Christoph,2018 Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020):

i. Advocacy

Advocacy is one of the main functions of religious players in peacebuilding (Paffenholz, 2003 Christoph,2018). Religious leaders could offer communication channels to raise the public's consciousness and make it simpler for topics to be added to the public agenda, representing the interests of social groups of people, particularly those who are excluded. In other words, religious actors work to increase the representativeness of government, particularly its inclusiveness. (Gopin, 2000, 2002 Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020).

In order to build peace, it is therefore crucial to articulate specific interests, particularly those of groups, bring pertinent issues to the public's attention, establish communication channels, raise public awareness and engage the public in discussion, and participate in formal peace procedures.

For instance, religious leaders in South Sudan following a decade's conflicts, urged parties engaged in hostilities in the country's oil-producing Upper Nile State to implement a cease-fire amid rising hostilities in 2022. According to Father Paolino Deng, the chairman of the interreligious Upper Nile Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, tribal youngsters were utilizing heavier weapons in the current fighting. He noted:

> "We pastors of different churches regret the tragic violent deaths and displacement of so many innocent people, especially women, children, and the elderly, caused by the tension in Upper Nile State, At the same time, we condemn and reject such a senseless and unnecessary war among people of one nation who were supposed to be living in peace and harmony,"

Similarly, between March 20–24, 2023, a group of 10 religious leaders from West Africa—Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana—visited US senators to highlight the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the Sahel area.

ii. Intermediary/Mediation

The goal of mediation proceedings is to bring both parties together to resolve their conflicts and complete the peacemaking process. Smock (2002) , Bercovitch & Robbin (1992) & Christoph,2018 state that such tasks also include more specialized ones like fact-finding, diplomatic initiatives, support for the peace process, facilitation, conciliation, and mediation. Another facet of their accountability is for religious actors to be able to establish connections (through dialogue and compromise) that foster collaboration between interest groups, institutions, and the state. Apart from between the state and its citizens, mediation and facilitation in peacebuilding can take place between conflict parties, organizations, and a number of other societal levels. (Jeong, 2005; Gopin, 2000 Ossai'2021; Steen-Johnsen,2020).

There are historical examples of religious institutions and leaders mediating in conflicts and fostering peace. For instance, the All Africa Conferences on Churches and the World Council of Churches worked together to negotiate the shaky peace accord with Sudan in 1972. Similarly, 2014 saw the Church Leaders Mediation Initiative (CLMI), led by Bishop Patide Taban Kenya, negotiating a cease-fire between the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Defense Army and the Government of the Republic of South Sudan.

Also, the tremendous accomplishment of the Catholic congregation movement of Sant'Egidio in Mozambique is one of the most obvious instances of this commitment to religious harmony. They were able to achieve a peace agreement in October 1992 that ended decades of civil war between FRELIMO and RENAMO through diplomacy, which involved several rounds of discussions between opposing organizations. For instance, in countries like Benin, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the early 1990s, religious leaders were invited to preside over sovereign national conferences and generally speaking, they were quite effective in facilitating peaceful transitions from one-party systems to multi parties' system.

iii. Observation/Monitoring

Religious observers offer a watchful and powerful physical presence in crisis situations. This is meant to deter violence, corruption, human rights abuses, or other actions and judged frightening, for example, observers might actively watch and confirm the validity of elections, or they can create "peace teams" or "living walls" between opposing sides in violent conflicts (Bouta, 2005; Appleby, 2000 Christoph,2018; Steen-Johnsen,2020). Human rights and corruption are among the many issues that may be monitored, especially those that are central for conflict triggers and early warning systems (Ossai'2021). International and local organizations can keep an eye on the conflict situation, offer advice to decision-makers, inform advocacy groups, and contribute to early warning systems.

Meanwhile, the Church Leaders Mediation Initiative (CLMI), which served as the overall body for monitoring, supervising, and resolving any potential conflict that may arise or occur in the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, was a party to the agreement on the cessation of hostilities between the Government of the Republic of South Sudan and the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Defense Army. In order to discuss the observation and monitoring of the country's voting procedures, the INEC, Nigeria's electoral administration, also scheduled a series of meetings with religious stakeholders, including faith-based organizations. Organizations like Justice Development and Peace Commission participated in the election monitoring process as observers.

Education

Education for peacebuilding, as defined by Abu-Nimmer (2005) and Paffenholz (2005), is a dedication to peace with the goals of teaching people about the destructive effects of war and social injustice, teaching people about the importance of peace and just social structures, teaching people how to work to maintain or develop such social structures, and teaching people to love the world, imagine a peaceful future, and show compassion for others (Christoph,2018).

Peace education programs that focus on conflict resolution often include the social-behavioral markers of conflict and teach participants negotiation and (peer) mediation skills. Participants are also encouraged to accept responsibility for their behaviors and strive toward compromises as part of peace education programs, which emphasize the need of learning to manage anger and improving communication via techniques including listening, taking turns, recognizing needs, and separating facts from emotions. Paffenholz(2005 Christoph,2018 Ossai'2021;Steen-Johnsen,2020)

Steen-Johnsen ((2020) was of the opinion that religious organizations prioritize religious instruction in public and private educational institutions. For instance, the religiously affiliated Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace (SWVP), founded in March 1994, has helped to peacebuilding in Sudan via its initiatives and campaigns that promote peace education and the reduction of violence in local communities.In a similar vein, churches (along with local peace activists, civil society organizations, international organizations, and politicians) actively participated in electoral peace campaigns prior to the 2013 Kenyan general elections, holding peace rallies and sticking stickers with messages of tolerance on Kibera trains and homes.

Similarly, a prior effort is represented by a civic education program in Kibera, a huge and densely inhabited slum in Kenya. A Catholic parish's human rights ministry did just that between 2002 and 2005 by funding a civics education program in the town of Kibera. Christian morality and ideals were discussed alongside nation-building, constitution-making, democracy, and good government. Participating parishioners were found to exhibit more democratic ideals and actions on a micro-level, inside their particular parish communities.

iv. **Transitional Justice:**

Transitional justice refers to the official or informal procedures used by a group or an organization with established legitimacy to administer justice to offenders, their collaborators, and the victims of their crimes after periods of repressive social order. Transitional justice systems are created to handle crimes committed

during a time of conflict when a society is about to shift from one of war to one of peace (Yoav, Kapshuk & Mora, Deitch,2023).

In communities emerging from violence and persecution, pushing for truth-telling, restitution, and reconciliation has been one of the most prominent and successful roles for South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It may be recalled that the South African Parliament appointed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in July 1995 on the advice of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), giving it a broad scope. A religious leader, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was chosen to oversee the TRC process as part of the commission's duties at President Mandela's express request. Under his mandates, the committee established by the TRC Act started to carry out their mandate objectives, among which was the awareness of the need for Ubuntu- 'humanity to others' but not for victimization, for restitution but not for retribution, and for understanding but not for vengeance.

v. **Intra-faith and Inter-faith dialogues**:

Inter- and intra-faith dialogue, respectively, refers to cooperation, discussion, constructive, and positive communication between and among members of the same and different religious traditions(Bouta et al. ,2005; Smock,2002; Appleby,2000 Christoph,2018 ;Steen-Johnsen,2020). It illustrates how spiritual and/or religious principles may be used to advance peace on both a personal and a social level (McGarvey, 2009; Christoph,2018). It typically means raising understanding inside and beyond religions to enhance acceptance of others, as opposed to introducing new beliefs. The promotion of peace is the aim of the religious participants in conflict management discussions.

Dialogue, according to the Catholic Church (N.D.), is the sharing of one's religion for the sake of mutual enlightenment and understanding.For instance, as part of attempts to end their country's 20-year civil war in 2003, the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) hailed efforts by Muslim and Christian leaders to encourage peace and discussion. Additionally, Muhammad Ahmad Dirdeiry, a former deputy ambassador from Sudan to Kenya, said that Christians and Muslims might engage in interreligious dialogue. His statement came after that of Rev. Mvume Dandala, who at the time served as the general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and asked church leaders in Sudan to get ready for the task of "profiling and marketing peace" in their country.

Also, Hasan Abdullah al-Turabi, a well-known Muslim personality in Sudan, promoted the idea of creating greater religious tolerance there. Turabi, who was in charge of the opposition Popular National Congress (PNC) at the time, led a group to Khartoum to visit and congratulate newly appointed Sudanese Catholic Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako. Correspondingly, one of the most significant and successful Muslim peacebuilding actors in Africa is the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC), located in the Wajir region of northeastern Kenya. One of its successes was the formation of a Joint Committee of Clans to keep an eye on tensions and avoid violent confrontation in the Wajir area. A change in the perceptions of the local police chiefs, the inclusion of peace education in schools, and the growing acknowledgement of women's role to fostering peace in their communities are few others.

Among the most notable on a continental level are the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), Religions for Peace, the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA), the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), and the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL). Multifaith groups that promote harmony have the ability to withstand attempts to separate communities along religious lines. Despite accusations of bias, religious leaders and institutions in Kaduna state, Nigeria, have traditionally participated in prior election cycles in a positive and neutral manner, cooperating to engage in interreligious initiatives to minimize violent conflict. As an example, take the statements made in support of peaceful coexistence and the reduction of tensions by Archbishop John Onaiyekan and Mohammad Sa'ad Abubakar, the Sultan of Sokoto and co-chair of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, 2010). Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, co-

directors of the Muslim-Christian Interfaith Mediation Centre (and erstwhile rivals), have also frequently advised communities to uphold peace during elections.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Religious actors have overwhelmingly demonstrated that the aim of their actions was to advance harmony in society. In this way, faith-based organizations have effectively used the elements of social capital theory—trust, norms, and networks for mobilization to contribute to the peace. Hence, social capital enables individual to act collectively for the aim of mass mobilization.

Faith-based organizations from many religious traditions have become more engaged in many regions of the world to help put an end to hostilities and promote post-conflict reconciliation among combatants. By educating individuals about the social and behavioral warning signs of conflict and encouraging attitude adjustment and reconciliation, faith-based organizations help foster religious education and tolerance skills among groups.

It is imperative that government across states in Africa should include the synergy of religious actors with other actors in the pre and post conflict peacebuilding processes. Hence, the need for a defined role for religious actors in governance system. Future study should therefore take a look at the effect of the evaluation of peacebuilding initiatives. It is essential to conduct thorough investigations and effect assessments in this area. In general, scientific research should be conducted to determine how faith-based groups contribute to peacebuilding outside of its preventative aspects.

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