

# **Building Peace in a Divided Society: The Role of Civil Society in Muslim-Christian Relations in Nigeria**

Paper presented by

**Eyene Okpanachi**

Department of Political Science,  
Faculty of the Social Sciences,  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

E-Mail: [eyeneokpanachi@hotmail.com](mailto:eyeneokpanachi@hotmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging aspects of divided societies is that they face particular obstacle in maintaining peace (Horowitz, 1985). Furnivall (1939) more than half a century ago studied the economic aspects of a Dutch colony. He observed that each community possessed a distinct set of values incompatible with those of other cultural groups, hence he characterized the plural society as one lacking consensus or, one without “a common social demand.” Through his observations, he argued that a *public good* in fact created the conflict and division among different cultural groups all of which have different demands and thus fail to cooperate in one single focal point. Furnivall (1939) also indicated two major ways of communication between the majority and minority societies in a nation: First the separate communities are more likely to engage in conflictual behavior, and second, forceful means rather than consensus maintains the order in that nation. From a similar point of view, a plural society is a society divided by what Harry Eckstein (1966) calls “segmental cleavages.” He says: “This exists where political divisions follow very closely, and especially concern lines of objective social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in a society.” Segmental cleavages may be of a religious, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial, or ethnic nature. The groups of the population bounded by such cleavages are referred to as the segments of a plural society. In essence, a divided (i.e., plural) society is defined by the coexistence of incompatible institutional systems and, therefore, force must be used to maintain order.

Democratization is often considered inherently more difficult in plural states than in countries in which the society see themselves as members of the same community. The classic statement of this view is that of John Stuart Mill (1958, 230) who argued “free institutions are impossible in a country made up of different nationalities ... Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist.” In a similar vein, Rabushka and Shepsle (1972: 217) put it directly: “...is the resolution of intense but conflicting preferences in the plural society manageable in a democratic framework? We think not.”

But, contrary to these assertions, others have argued that diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different religious, ethnic, communal, and racial groups does not make division and conflicts inevitable. And for that matter, empirical evidence shows that division and conflict are not dependent on the degree of diversity, as

some of the most diverse countries (for example, Switzerland, Belgium, Malaysia and Tanzania) enjoy relative peace and stability, while some of the least diverse are the most unstable or violent (for example, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and, perhaps, Sri Lanka) (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

Thus, James Fearon and David Laitin (2003:75, 82) have claimed that “a greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity... by itself” is not “a major and direct cause” of violent civil conflict. Rather, they see violent civil conflict as associated with “conditions that favour insurgency,” including “poverty, which marks financially and bureaucratically weak states” (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 75). Other factors that have been identified to intervene between diversity and conflict include the role of formal and informal for conflict resolution, the different sizes of groups relative to the national arena, and the extent to which different identities (ethnic, regional, religious, class, etc) overlap with, or crosscut, each other (see Fearon and Laitin 1996; Horowitz 1985).

What is clear from all this is that while peace is not impossible in divided societies, these countries will always spent more time to engender peace than those that are not divided. Another fact is that even in cases where conflict takes place in least diverse societies such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia, Northern Ireland, Cote d’Ivoire and Rwanda identity mobilization appears to be an important element in many of these conflicts. Given, as Fearon and Laitin (1996) noted, that formal and informal institutions generally work to contain or “cauterize” disputes between the ethnic groups, the quality of these institutions therefore matters in how conflict is resolved.

Nigeria is an exemplar of the success of the use of institutional mechanisms and design in the management of its complex religious and ethno-lingual diversity. These mechanisms include state creation exercises; consociational power sharing arrangements such as the federal character principle that provide for proportional distribution of political and bureaucratic offices; and equity-based revenue allocation system. These institutional designs in a form of pragmatic federalism have been remarkably effective in crosscutting and attenuating sectional identities, prevented a recurrence of secessionist warfare and promoted a broad commitment to the idea of Nigerian unity. It has also helped the country in avoiding the tragedy of state collapse or large-scale internal insurgency that has recently convulsed other African states like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire (Paden , 2008; Suberu, 2009). The relative success of this multi-state structure in sustaining Nigeria’s unity in diversity is underscored by recent surveys suggesting that an

overwhelming majority of Nigerians (75% or more), including a clear majority in the former secessionist Igbo states, profess firm commitments to both national and sub-national ethnic identity, and would not contemplate the dismemberment of the country (Lewis and Bratton 2000; 2001).

Yet, in spite of numerous successes, the constructive management of diversity has often posed significant difficulties in Nigeria. This paper examines the role of civil society in building peaceful Muslim-Christian in Nigeria. The objective of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of the role of civil society in support of peace-building - during and in the aftermath of conflict between Muslim –Christian. The key research questions are: What are the constructive roles/functions of civil society in support of peacebuilding between Muslims and Christians? What are the main supporting factors, and what are the main obstacles that hinder civil society to fulfil these functions?

Until recently, most research and policy has placed a primary emphasis on this conflictual aspect of inter-religious relations, including its recent aspect related to the upsurge in religious fundamentalism, and the conflict generated by the expansion of Shari'a in northern Nigeria. Yet as the history of the country has demonstrated, Muslim –Christian relation in Nigeria is, in fact, a complex one that is not always characterized by conflicts. Given the increasing challenges and opportunities posed by multiculturalism in today's globalized world, and the fact that civic engagement and participation to build harmonious inter-religious relations is now becoming a research and policy consideration in avoiding violence, especially in divided societies, juxtaposed against the wide spectre of intergroup conflict and violence in different parts of Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in May 1999, it is critical that the efforts by the civil society in Nigeria to build peace at the local and national levels now become a research and policy priority. This paper performs this function by examining the strategies, compromises and processes by the civil society that have played important integrative roles to maintain relative stability in Nigeria. Using some empirical examples of some conflicts, especially but not restricted to, the period since the return to democracy in 1999, the paper will also examine the issues related especially to the topic of ethno-religious identity, power, representation, electoral politics, and the politics of state actions that have continued to undermined civil peace and the integrative role of civil societies in fostering universal human rights rather than particularistic group rights.

## **THE NIGERIAN STATE AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION: A HISTORY OF IDENTITY IN A DIVIDED SOCIETY**

Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously and or violently contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country (cf. Smyth and Robinson 2001). As a consequence, the country tend to be fragile and unstable because almost by definition, there are fewer points of convergence and consensus among the constituent groups than are required to effectively mitigate or contain the centrifugal forces that tear the society apart. Conflicts between Ethno-religious groups in Nigeria are not new. However, the transition towards democratization in 1999 has been attended by a resurgent and intensification of these conflicts (Suberu, 2001; Babawale, 2003).

Religious identities in Nigeria are usually classified into three – Christian, Muslim and Traditional. Of the three, traditional religions is the least politically active; numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). The 2006 Nigerian Census did not ask questions about religion because the proportion of Muslims and Christians is a highly sensitive political issue. However, According to a 2003 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey which interviewed a nationally representative sample of 7,620 women (between ages 15 and 59) and 2,346 men (ages 15 and 49), 50.5% of the population is Muslim and 48.2% is Christian. Only 1.4% is associated with other religions (cf. PEW Religious Forum on Religious and Public Affairs, 2006). It is this unique religious divide that prompted Archbishop Onaiyekan to describe the country as “the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world” (Onaiyekan, 2008) by which he meant that Nigeria is the largest country in the world with an evenly split population of Muslims and Christians, and “really the test case of the ‘clash of civilizations,’” (Paden, 2007).

Nigeria’s two major religions, Islam and Christianity, are not monolithic. Within the Christian community one finds a broad range of churches spanning the gamut from the mainstream Roman Catholic and Anglican to many Protestant churches. These latter include many Pentecostal denominations , which by some accounts represent the fundamentalist segment of Christianity in the country and that tend to be quite aggressive in their proselytizing (Udoidem 1997 cf. Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). This diversity is perhaps more complex for Islam. As Paden (2006) notes, one often underappreciated factor is the diversity within Islamic practices and doctrines in Nigeria, due to both

theological schisms within Islam and regional differences. Although most Muslims in Nigeria's North follow orthodox Sunni Islam and the Maliki school of Shari'a jurisprudence, Shiite Islam, in its Iranian variant, has attracted some adepts. These include the Shiite leader, Sheikh El Zakzaky and another Shiite leader, Abubakar Mujahid who promote a thorough Islamic revolution to reclaim society for the Muslim faithful (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). The Sunni group comprises several sects. In Katsina city, for instance, five are represented: Qadriyya, Tijani, Tarika, Shia, and Izala. Some of these have political programs that focus heavily on shari'a at the moment. The Izala attract bright, young, educated individuals who are strongly committed to Islam and to the application of the Shari'a criminal code. As Shia sect members follow Shiite teachings, local indigenous political leaders view them as radical and believe they are committed to the overthrow of existing government (Global Security.org).<sup>1</sup>

Religion has always been important in Nigeria and in Nigerian politics. (Enwerem, 1995). "The intensity of religious identity in Nigeria is regarded as one of the highest in the world" (Paden, 2008). This claim is supported by the fact that Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of religion than any other identity. Indeed, according to the authoritative May-June 2006 survey on Religion and Public Life conducted by the Pew Forum on "Religion and Public Life", 76% of Christians say that religion is more important to them than their identity as Africans, Nigerians or members of an ethnic group. Among Muslims, the number naming religion as the most important factor is even higher (91%). This survey finds some correlation with an earlier survey 2000 survey on "Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Nigeria" by Lewis and Bratton which finds out that nearly 80% of Nigerians belongs to a religious institution. In effect, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and conflict, with Nigerian Muslims much more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians (Lewis and Bratton 2000). Underlying this deep religious identity is the deep distrust each group feels toward the other. According to the Pew Survey (2007), most of the country's Christians (62%) say they trust people from other religions only a little or not at all. A similar percentage of Nigeria's Muslims (61%) say they trust people of other religions little or not at all (Ruby and Shah, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup>. [globalsecurity.org](http://globalsecurity.org)

## Importance of Country, Religion, Ethnicity in Your Life

*% saying their nationality, religion, ethnic group or their continent is most important to them*

	<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Ethnic Group</u>	<u>Continent</u>
	%	%	%	%
Christians	9	76	6	8
Muslims	5	91	-	3

Source: Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 2006

In fact, in parts of the North commonly referred to as the ‘core’ or ‘Hausa-Fulani North’ – the site of most of the “religious” conflicts in the country - religious identity is more critical than ethnic identity and in fact serves to activate ethnicity. Thus, among Nigeria’s “two largest ethnic groupings, the (southern) Yoruba were considerably more prone to define themselves ethnically... than were the (northern) Hausa-Fulani ...who rather opted for a religious (Muslim) identity” (Lewis and Bratton, 2000: 25).

This complex religious demography and character is further heightened by ethnic identities. According to Onigu Otite, one of Nigeria’s eminent social anthropologist, there are 374 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Otite 1990) The population of these ethnic groups varies considerably; the three largest groups constitute more than half of Nigeria’s entire population while the eight largest groups are almost a two-third (Nnoli 1995:27). This population disparity coupled with the differences in the political influence of the ethnic groups broadly divides the groups into two – the majority and minority ethnic groups. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani in the north (29%), the Yoruba in the southwest (21%) and Igbo in the southeast (18%) (Paden, 2008). All the other ethnic groups fit into the minority category, with varying degrees of political status, depending on their numerical size and political influence.

The Hausa-Fulani and other communities residing in Northern Nigeria are mainly Muslims while the south-south minority areas and Igbo speaking areas in the southeast are predominantly Christians. The Middle Belt (or north-central zone) is a mixture of Christian and Muslim populations, while the Yoruba-speaking communities in the southwest are about half Muslim and half Christians. This differentiation underlies the North-South cleavage (in terms of the North being predominantly Muslim and the South predominantly Christian) and sharpens ethnic cleavages in the country, especially in the

north where as Paden (2007) noted, the all-consuming nature of Islamic identity does eclipse other identities and religious differences play a major part in ethnic differentiation.

The ethnic, regional and religious cleavages in Nigeria are underline by horizontal inequalities that correspond to the cleavages. While the north is educationally, economically and socially disadvantaged, it has more population and has ruled the country politically for the most part of the country's post independent history. As Ibrahim and Kazah-Toure (2003) noted, precisely because of this political background, the story of Nigerian nationalism has been expressed in the discursive language of ethno-religious contestation. Fears of domination of one region or ethnic group or religion over the others have played a central role in defining the contours and dynamics of politics. According to Kirk-Greene:

Fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the physical fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of attribution, but the psychological fear of discrimination, domination. It is the fear of not getting one's share, one's desert (Kirk-Greene 1975 cf. Mustapha, 2009).

The constant fear of being short-changed is made more problematic by the logic of political mobilisation which has developed along the lines of a zero-sum game. This means that groups are obliged to block the access of others or displace those who already have access if they are to eat from the national cake. That process of a permanent strategy of blockage has amplified the expression of fissiparous tendencies because all those who are not inside are outside. The lived story is one of a widespread perception, real or imagined, of ethno-religious domination. The story is first and foremost one of the control of political power and its instruments such as the armed forces, judiciary, and the bureaucracy. The second is the control of economic power and resources. Both are powerful instruments that are used to influence the authoritative allocation of resources to groups and individuals. The political elite have always sought to manipulate the multifaceted identities (ethnic, regional, minority-majority, and religious divisions) especially during political competition that has given rise to conflicts and instability in Nigeria (Nnoli 1978, Dudley 1973). In the elite's intense struggle for access to power and state resources, "patterns of political domination are constantly being transformed. It is this constantly changing pattern of domination that is producing the fears and anxieties that underlie increasing conflict and intolerance" (Ibrahim and Kazah-Toure, 2003). The high point of the crisis seems to have been the civil war in the late 1960s, in which over 3 million people reportedly lost their lives.

Conflicts have been a recurring decimal in Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999 after nearly 16 years of successive military rule. While some of these conflicts were low intensity contestations and bitter war of words, others erupted into violent communal clashes.

Given this background, one of the greatest challenges facing Muslims and Christians in contemporary Nigeria therefore is how to constructively relate and manage and live with their religious diversity. The challenge is to find a way of rebuilding the society and insulate it from being polluted and overtaken by the wave of religious intolerance that has continued to see citizens living by the law of the jungle which is 'eat or be eaten' (Mbillah, 2008). What is the role of the civil society in this challenge?

### **ON THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Civil society is one of the buzzword of our times. There are many definitions of the term. However this study takes as a guide the definition by the Centre for Civil Society (2006) which refers to civil society as:

The arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated.

Analyses of civil society in Africa have largely focused on the connection between it and democratization, good governance and development. Thus after four decades of what Ake (1996) has aptly described as the failure of the post-colonial state to kick-start development rather than failed development and the dominance of authoritarian rule, both in military and civilian forms on the continent, Western structures of power- governments, international financial institutions (IMF and WB) and liberal Western Africanists- have come to believe strongly in the role of civil society in the transformation of Africa. Most of Western liberal writers have expressed confidence in civil society to play this role through their explications of its supposed attributes, namely, "as a counter-weight to state power, as intrinsically pluralistic...and a sphere for elaboration of transforming notions of fair systems of governance" (see for example Bratton, 1994).

Others such as Chabla and Daloz (1999) have contended that the idea of a civil society in Africa is an illusion and that the idea of a civil society would only apply if it could be shown that there were meaningful separations between a well-organized civil society and a relatively autonomous

bureaucratic state. Because, in their views, this is not the case as what presently obtains is “the constant interpenetration of the other” (P. 17), they argue that there cannot be a functioning civil society in Africa.

Yet, this point of view which restricts the scope of civil society to constituents that are relevant only to the immediate needs of liberalization and democratization, typically those that are formally organized and which have the capacity to challenge the state as in the West however glosses over Ekeh’s (1975) theory of the two publics<sup>2</sup>, which draws attention to the uniqueness of civil society in Africa in terms of its colonial origins, structuration and functions, particularly the light it sheds on why civil society in Africa has functioned more or less as an exit site and shadow state; why, unlike civil society in the West, ethnic forces feature prominently in its structuration; and why civil society is an arena of fundamental contradictions and contestations, and, therefore, why it is far from the cohesive or consensual formation sometimes sketched in the literature (Osaghae, 2003). A more nuanced analysis of civil society in Africa must necessarily take into cognizance its expanded scope, its conflictual character as product of the contradictory pulls of the two publics, and its role beyond the manifest capacity to confront the state (Ekeh, 1992).

A more fine-grained understanding of civil societies must also necessarily come to term with the issue of context that takes into account the implications of statehood, democracy, nationalism, development and international presence on the nature of civil society (Marchetti and Tocci, 2007). For instance, in contradistinction to civil societies within developed and peaceful societies, “the political significance of civil society may be far more prominent in other contexts such as those marked by conflicts.” Marchetti and Tocci elucidates further:

Being characterised by a higher degree of politicisation and a less structured institutional setting, these scenarios generate a more intense mobilisation of civil society that actively shape the nature of politics and policy. Here politicisation is of a qualitatively different nature, as it occurs in view of the existential nature of politics and of the public’s awareness that official levels are not satisfactorily tackling the causes of their deprivation and

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<sup>2</sup>. According to Ekeh, due largely to the disjuncture between state and society –or the public realm and private realm– under colonialism, the public realm unlike that of Western societies developed as two publics rather than one – the “primordial” public and “civic” public. For a detailed exposition of these concepts, and the problems the contradictory pulls and demands of simultaneous membership and operation in the two publics pose for contemporary African politics in the areas of identity, and citizenship, see Peter Ekeh, 1975, “Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 17, No. 1. pp. 91-112. For an engaging assessment of Peter Ekeh’s Two Publics, see Eghosa Osaghae, 2006, “Colonialism and Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective of Ekeh’s Two Publics,” *Voluntas*, 17:233–245. September. DOI 10.1007/s11266-006-9014-4

frustration. Contrary to peaceful contexts, in conflict situations the existential nature of politics and the securitisations that follow generate different societal incentives to mobilise. The cross-sectional nature of existential politics and securitisation thus yields a quantitatively higher degree of public action spanning across different groups in society. The different understandings of the causes of conflict and their adequate responses may in turn lead to the formation of civil society actors and ensuing actions that can either fuel conflict, sustain the status quo, or build peace.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA- A TYPOLOGY**

Civil society in Nigeria has historically been keen to national discourse and also served as an important agency of social transformation, championing the cause of political freedom, civil liberties and popular empowerment of the people both during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period (Adejumobi, 2005).

Given the transformation from military to civilian rule, some of the CSOs endured, others atrophied, while some new ones were created to confront the exigencies of the post-military era. What is the picture of the current terrain of civil society in Nigeria?

Marchetti and Tocci (2007) identify eight kinds of civil society. Using this typology, we will briefly give a general outline of CS groups and their actors before analysing, in the next section, those groups which, in our opinion, play an active role in conflict/peace efforts between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, and/or whose identity and actions are significantly influenced by conflict. Suffice to say that there is considerable overlap among the groups, and many civil societies do not fall neatly into just one category.

1. *Professional*: This includes experts (both from the policy and academic sphere), Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and peace study programmes in the Universities that offer consultancy services and technical advice.
2. *Business*: Actors here include businessmen and women, trade unions such as the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC); professional bodies such as Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), Market Women's Association (MWA), National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian universities (ASUU), and the National Association of Nigerian

Students (NANS); and organized networks such as the criminal networks involved in arms smuggling into, and arms trade within, the county.

- 3 *Private Citizens:* This includes individual citizens, Neighbourhood and Community associations, Credit Thrift and Cooperative Societies such as the *Esusu*; *Diaspora* groups such as the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) and the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS) established to work with and facilitate the involvement of Nigerians abroad in the task of nation building. There are also other Diaspora groups established to cater for the interest of their Kith and Kin in Nigeria such as the Council of Igbo Communities, UK, *Ekiti Parapo* in UK, Ibadan Descendants Union, Ijaw Peoples Association, and the Igala Association USA.
4. *Research, Training, and Education:* These are special interest research centres, think tanks, and universities. Examples of this include the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Presidency, Abuja, the Society for Peace Studies and Practice (SPCP), Abuja, The Peace and Conflict Studies Programme of the University of Ibadan, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CEPACS) of the university of Ibadan, the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies (CECOMPS) at the University of Jos, Plateau State, the Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies University of Ilorin, the Centre for Peace Studies Sokoto, Arewa House, Kaduna, Centre for Democratic Research and Training (Mambaya House) House, Kano, and the Institute of Governance and Social Research, Jos.
5. *Activism:* This include international NGOs such Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Action Aid, local NGOs and lobby groups such as Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP), Citizen's Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR), Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW), Association for the Disabled Women, Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Strategic Empowerment Mediation Agency BAOBA for Women Rights, Women Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), and Civil Liberties Organization (CLO); Local communities such as Arewa Peoples Congress (APC), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), The Northern Elders Forum, The Middle Belt Forum, *Ohaneze*, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MASOP),

Afenifere, and Combatant groups such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Martyrs Brigade, e Reformed Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Odua Peoples Congress (OPC), and Bakassi Boys.

6. *Religion*: This include spiritual communities such as the Christian groups –Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and its youth (YOWICAN) and women (WOWICAN) wings, Bible Society of Nigeria, Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS)- and the Muslims groups - Jamatu Nasril Islam (JNI), Ansarudeen Society of Nigeria, Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Professional Muslim Sisters Association (PMSA), National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO); charities such as Catholic Relief Service, and Religious Movements such as Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN), Muslim Rights Concern (MRC), and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN); and bi-religious groups such as Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC) and Interfaith Mediation Centre- Muslim –Christian Dialogue Forum (IMC-MCDF).
7. *Funding*: This includes foundations such as Zakat Commissions created by governments of the Sharia states, the Zakat committees of some Banks, designed to encourage banks to contribute to the Zakat funds of their states of operation in northern Nigeria, Individual philanthropists and business men such as Corporate Nigeria.
8. *Communication*: Including a host of electronic and print media such as the DAAR Communications AIT, FM stations, and newspapers and newsmagazines such as such as *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *ThisDay*, and magazines such as *Tell*, and *Newswatch*. Some of the newspapers are published in indigenous languages and they include, the Yoruba newspapers such as *Iroyin Yoruba*, *Gbohunbohun*, *Isokan*, *Alaroye*, *Ajoro*, and *Alaye*; and the Hausa newspaper such as *Aminiya*. Added to these are the burgeoning “independent” Internet communication which have created avenues not just for the dissemination of news, but also facilitated the creation of an online community, discussion forums, and blog that transcends Nigeria and linking Nigerians at home and those in the Diaspora. These include *Gamji*, *Sahara Reporters*, *Nigerian Village Square*, and *Elendu Reporters*. While this development, “the emergence of multiple axes of information provide new opportunities for citizens to challenge

elite control of political issues” (Williams and Carpinni, 2000), it has also raised unease on the part of government whose gatekeeping role is being eroded. For instance, recently, the States Security Service (SSS) arrested the founder a US-based Nigerian news blogger and accused him of guerrilla journalism and sedition (BBC News, October 23, 2008).

### **CIVIL SOCIETY AND MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN NIGERIA- AN OVERVIEW**

Religious strife between Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria has left thousands dead, wounded, and rendered many homeless over the years.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Ludwig (2008) noted, “besides conflict, there were also new efforts since 1999 towards Muslim–Christian cooperation—both at the grassroots' as well as the states' level. Muslims and Christians are redefining their positions and adapting them in different ways to local circumstances, thereby developing some creative responses to the tensions of religious co-existence”.

Peace studies specialist John Paul Lederach, sees the social dynamics of relationship building and the development of supportive infrastructures for peace as a pre-requisite to preventing violence (Lederach, 1997, 20–21). Lederach distinguishes between “peace-making” and “peace-building.” Peace-making is the role of governmental and other official agencies, while peace-building includes grassroots activities including the work of religious leaders and institutions and the actions of local religious communities. He argues that incidents of violence often are met with diplomatic, state-level solutions. This approach ignores the community processes that result in violence.

People involved in conflicts are driven by human perceptions and emotions such as deep-rooted prejudices, animosities, and fears that state-level approaches tend to ignore. Informed by this reality, Lederach proposes that we move away “from a concern with the resolution of issues ... toward a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships” (24). In this new framework, relationships are the foundation that carries reconciliation work. By reaching for reconciliation via relationships, reconciliation no longer constitutes a lofty, unrealistic goal, but becomes a process of encounter and a social space (29).

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<sup>3</sup>. For a catalogue of conflict and violence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria since 1999, see for example, the 2009 Annual Report of the *US Commission on International Religious Freedom* at <http://www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2009/final%20ar2009%20with%20cover.pdf>. The Commission estimates that at least 12, 000 people have been killed in sectarian and communal attacks and reprisal between Muslims and Christians.

Noteworthy efforts have been by civil society organizations to achieve the above objectives during the period under study. These organizations have implemented activities which encourage social reconciliation, promote dialogue between different groups, and deliver conflict resolution skills training. Based upon a collaborative working approach, these CSOs have attempted to promote the constructive social engagement of citizens (including civil society activists) with one another in relation to divisive social issues and conflict.

There are several mechanisms through which the civil society works to contribute to peace – building between Muslims and Christians during the period under investigation (please see typology above). However, for this part of the study, we shall concentrate on the CSOs that have impact on Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Mediation.

### **MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE/MEDIATION**

According to Smock (2008), religious leaders and institutions can be mediators in conflict situations, serve as a communication link between opposing sides, and provide training in peacemaking methodologies. Interfaith dialogue is another mechanism of building peace among religions. Rather than seeking to resolve a particular conflict, it aims to defuse interfaith tensions that may cause future conflict or derive from previous conflict.

In Nigeria, most religious institutions, and especially churches, now have peace, justice and reconciliation ministries or departments within their structures. For example, the Anglican Church has a well-staffed department dealing with Inter-faith and Ecumenical matters. It also has a Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations whose aim is to “teach the religion of Islam for the sake of knowledge, peaceful co-existence between the adherents of the two religions and assist the Muslim to discover the missing Christ in the Qur'an” (Idowu-Fearon, 2007). The Centre was established by the Anglican Archbishop of Kaduna, Idowu-Fearson, who has a Doctorate degree in Islamic studies, with special interest in Christian-Muslim relations.

#### **Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)**

The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council, (NIREC) is a voluntary association made up of fifty (50) members, (25 Christians and 25 Muslims) formed by the representatives of the two principal religions – that is, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1999. Supported and

encouraged by President Olusegun Obasanjo, who saw the body as a wonderful project emanating from the leadership of both major faiths, NIREC was inaugurated on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1999. NIREC is a permanent and an independent body established to provide religious leaders and traditional rulers with a variable forum to promote greater interaction and understanding among the leadership and their followers as well as lay foundations for sustainable peace and religious harmony in Nigeria.

Currently, NIREC is Co-Chaired by His Eminence Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, the Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of NSCIA, and His Grace Dr. John Onaiyekan, Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and President, CAN. Professor Is-haq Oloyede, the present Vice Chancellor of University of Ilorin, is the National Coordinator/Executive Secretary of NIREC.

NIREC has 9 standing committees out of which 2 are dedicated to Inter-Religious Dialogue & Public Enlightenment and Peace Building/Conflict Resolution. NIREC quarterly meetings are rotated within six geo-political zones of the Country with a view to affording the Council the opportunity to get direct feel of things in different parts of Nigeria, impact positively among our faithful, enhance and sustain religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence and promote ethical values, and good governance. Also, some states of the federation such as Ekiti, Niger, Ondo, and Lagos have established chapters on NIREC.

The objectives and functions of the council are:

1. To honestly and sincerely endeavour by themselves and through them, their followership, to understand the true teachings of the two religions – Christianity and Islam – including their peculiarities and personal mannerisms through dialogue discussions, work-shops, seminars, conferences, pamphleteering, etc.
2. To create a permanent and sustainable channel of communication and interaction thereby promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.
3. To promote and include moral, ethical, social and cultural values of the two faiths for the rebirth and rebuilding of a better society.
4. To provide a forum for mutual co-operation and promotion of the welfare of all citizens in the nation;
5. To create channels for the peaceful resolution of any friction or misunderstanding that may arise from time to time.

6. To serve as an avenue for articulating cordial relationship amongst the various religious groups and between them and the Government.
7. To assist the Federal, State and Local Governments of Nigeria and the Populace by emphasizing and accentuating the positive roles religion should play in nation building and development;
8. To serve as a forum to achieve national goals, economic growth, national unity and promotion of political stability;
9. To consider and make recommendations to the Federal and other levels of Government on matters that may assist in fostering integral and spiritual development of Nigerians;
10. To make recommendations on such other matters as the Federal and other levels of Government may from time to time refer to the Council
11. To network with organizations of similar aims at home and internationally, for the furtherance of the objectives of the Council (NIREC, 2001).

NIREC is becoming increasingly relevant in championing the course of peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance between and among adherents of the two principal religions, that is, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Some of the activities of the Council include visitation to the scene of conflict violence. For instance, the Co-chairmen visited the Jos, Plateau state in the aftermath of the November conflict and donated money for the rehabilitation of the victims and expressed displeasure that Christians and Muslims, who were seen mingling together few weeks ago, have become polarized along religious lines that their leaders were sitting separately at the meeting. "This should be the last of this madness in this town when innocent people are being killed under the guise of religion. The Almighty we worship will not forgive anyone of us responsible for the death of those innocent souls," (Vanguard, December 18, 2008).

Secondly, addresses of the Co-chairmen, and communiqués released at the end of the quarterly zonal meetings of the Council have always contained messages that contribute not just to religious issues, but also to fundamental issues bordering on governance, development, equity and justice which the Council believes are at the root of conflict in Nigeria. For instance at the end of it's the meeting held in Maiduguri in June 2008, NIREC issued a communiqué supporting a peace advancement mechanism and calling on governments at all levels, civil society groups and all Nigerians, "particularly the faith-based organisations to build a systematic platform for peace and religious harmony in Nigeria through

the promotion of socio-economic justice, transparency and good governance." (Dambatta, 2008). The communiqué also highlights the perverse effects of corruption, poverty, feelings of marginalization, youth unemployment, injustice and inequity as triggers of conflict and asked government to increase the tempo of sustainable measures to eradicating them. In order to enhance national security and further reduce inter-communal conflicts in Nigeria, NIREC suggested the taking of urgent measures by government aimed at curbing the proliferation of small arms in our society which tends to create a culture of violence and is a major source of rising violent crimes in our society. NIREC also recognised "reckless religious preachers" as a danger to peace in the society and resolved to "caution reckless preachers who conduct inciting sermons without regard for the feelings of others and therefore fan the embers of religious misunderstanding and disturbances." It went beyond cautioning them and "called for capacity building for religious organisations to enable them embark on peace and confidence building measures through constant inter-faith dialogues that emphasise the common values of our beliefs and create understanding and respect for our differences" (Dambatta, *ibid*). NIREC also added its voice to international issues which it believes affects Muslim - Christian's relations in Nigeria. For instance, during the Israeli attack on Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009, NIREC called on the United Nations Security Council to order for a cease-fire saying, "NIREC in the name of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria expresses its horror at the tragedy of Gaza. We cannot forget that the bombs falling on Gaza are hitting all Palestinians Arabs, Muslims and Christians, our fellow human beings and brothers and sisters in faith. Mosques and Churches are in danger. We cannot be silent" (Jimoh, 2009).

### **The Interfaith Mediation Center and Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum (IMC-MCDF)**

Perhaps the most dramatic of Muslim-Christian collaborative efforts for peace is that of former sworn enemies- Bishop James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashaf who themselves were active in the inter-religious conflict of Nigeria and suffered personal losses due to the violence of the conflict. In one particularly violent clash in the northern town of Zangon-Kataf in Kaduna in 1992 where the mostly Muslim Hausa and the predominantly Christian Kataf ethnic group fought pitched battles in a dispute over the relocation of the community's main market, and from where killings spread to other parts of Kaduna State, Muslims fighters killed Rev. Wuye's bodyguard and cut off the reverend's right arm, leaving him for dead. At the same time, Christian fighters murdered a man known as Ashafa's mentor and spiritual leader, and two of his cousins (Wuye and Ashafa, 1999)

Since meeting in 1995 at the urging of a civil leader, they agreed to work out some sort of dialogue promoting mutual understanding and respect. The Interfaith Mediation Centre and Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum (IMC-MCDF) that they co-founded and coordinate from Kaduna has organized a series of interventions and workshops advocating peace and reconciliation by targeting extremist youths and ethnic isolationists and teaching them to accept religious differences through dialogue and open communication. Since joining forces they have conducted workshops on conflict transformation for religious youth leaders, student groups, and traditional and local government officials. The peacemaking methodology draws from Western conflict-resolution techniques as well as traditional Nigerian approaches, but religious components were also central. These included using scripture, with both pastor and imam quoting both the Bible and the Quran, along with exhortation based on religious principles (Smock, 2008). For instance, they include a verse from the book of Matthew in the Bible “In everything, do unto others what you would have them do to you.” And for Muslims, the fortieth Hadith (an-Nawahi, 13), or sayings of the Prophet from the Koran: “Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” They've also produced a weekly series on local television, quoting passages of the Koran and the Bible that show common ground between Islam and Christianity (Ahmed, 2007).

In August 2002, Wuye and Ashafa convinced a "who's who" of 20 Islamic and Christian leaders to sign a "Peace Declaration," condemning "all forms of violence" as well as "incitement and demonizations." Modelled on the Alexandria Declaration of January 2002, the Kaduna Peace Declaration (KPD) was also signed by His Excellency Alhaji Ahmed Mohammed Makarfi the then-Executive Governor of Kaduna State. To demonstrate publicly their agreement to renounce violence, these leaders together unveiled a centrally located plaque of their agreement for all community members to read and celebrate (The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding Program on Religion and Conflict Resolution, 2007).

The IMC-MCDF aims to prevent the recurrence of violent conflict and to contribute to an increase in the level of trust and tolerance between Christians and Muslim in Kaduna that has been the sight of perhaps the ugliest violence between Muslims and Christians in the country. The rationale is that with trust, tolerance, and an absence of violence, reconciliation can begin through the development over time of collaborative relationships and cohesive peace constituencies in both communities. At the same time, as such reconciliation takes root, the communities' capacity to resolve conflicts will also be

enhanced.

Five specific objectives have been identified:

- 1.To re-establish relationships that have been damaged due to recurring violence over the last five years.
- 2.To minimize the reoccurrence of violence amongst various groups in the community.
- 3.To initiate programs and projects that require and encourage the involvement of Christians and Muslims (including dialogues, workshops, cultural events, and the establishment of a resource center).
- 4.To enhance interreligious relationships and cooperation within the state.
- 5.To support and build the capacity of local partners who are involved in peacemaking

The inclusion of women is especially important because of the critical role women play in fostering sustainable peace ( International Alert / Women Waging Peace, 2007) Engaging youth is also vital because it is youth, in fact, who are often the perpetrators of violence. As the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding (2007) noted, “today’s students will undoubtedly be confronted by tension, and disputes in which they will be asked, or will want, to intervene, all will benefit when religious peace making and conflict resolution skills are understood as necessary components of the religious life. And when tomorrow religious leaders acquire these skills, they will be better able to address conflicts- whether they occur in a congregation, an inner-city neighbourhood, or a rural area” One of such was the training, in collaboration with United State Institute of Peace (USIP), for young Nigerian religious leaders in peacemaking techniques (Smock, 2008). Another was the Interfaith workshops it organized in collaboration with the International Peace League(IPL), based at the University of Jos, and the Canadian Embassy (Nigeria) for Nigerian student and community leader in March 2009. This was after at least 400 people were killed, in November in disputes over local elections in Jos, the capital of Plateau State. About 60 student and community leaders from Muslim and Christian areas directly affected by the violence participated in the workshop and the event led to the establishment of an early warning network that will allow youth and community leaders to communicate by cell phone in the event of another crisis in the event of an interreligious crisis (Eyes Abroad, 2009). Also significant is that the peacemaking techniques of IMC-MCDF involve active efforts to tackle societal preconditions for achieving a sustainable peace. To this end, it has established joint ventures between Muslim and Christian communities. Some of the projects include rice milling,

groundnut oil processing, strawberry farming, and potential economic ventures that would bring women together (Ahmed, 2007).

While it is difficult to say with certainty, it can be argued that the workshops and interventions have helped to build peace between the two religious communities. To start with, a permanent joint committee christened the Kaduna Peace Committee (KPC) was established to implement the recommendation of the Kaduna Peace declaration. The committee now partners with government to prevent conflict and crimes and to put in place effective machinery appropriate for building and sustaining long-term peaceful coexistence between the Christian and Muslim communities (Wuye, 2008). Also, in 2002 when protests connected with the Miss World Beauty contest erupted in Kaduna, both Pastor James and Imam Ashafa, in union with other religious leaders, drove around affected neighbourhoods on a bus appealing for tolerance and calm. The intervention was only made possible because of the commitments made in the Kaduna Peace Declaration, which was an important factor in containing a volatile situation (Wuye and Ashafa, 2005). Even though the existence of the KPD could not stop the conflict from erupting, according to some observers, the protest did not escalate into more violence because the declaration had real influence in the community and bound it to peace. As Judith Asuni of the AAPW noted, "If the peace declaration had not been done before, it would have been a lot worse" (Crawley, 2003). Also, when rioting began over the publication of Danish cartoons that were seen as mocking Islam by equating it with terrorism, Rev. Wuye asked Christian leaders to go on radio to condemn the drawings. He also asked Muslim leaders to accept the condemnation and to call for calm in their towns. As a result, the violence did not spread to Kaduna state. Also, "when the Regensburg controversy broke in September 2006, there were protests from Muslims in Nigeria but no real violence, a result attributed by locals in part to the work of the Interfaith Mediation Centre" (Allen Jr., 2007; Firmin, 2008). In addition, the IMC-MCDF has, on numerous occasions, intervened in conflicts in the schools, when minor arguments threatened to turn into major incidents. In fact, the IFC-MCDF in collaboration with signers of the KPD has embarked on a program to provide conflict resolution training to religious instructors and secondary-school officials (Wuye and Ashafa, 2005).

The IFC-MCDF has expanded its work to other areas in the country. Recently, in the aftermath of the crisis in Jos in November 2008, the IMC-MCDF conducted a nationwide dialogue workshops in the six geographical zones in the country, decrying religious violence and mobilising grassroots communities

to promote peace. The IMC-MCDF has established offices in Kaduna, Jos, Oweri and Lagos (Ahmed, 2007). Regular meetings have been held in Kano to foster dialogue e between local youths and religious and community leaders. Similar efforts are carried out in Bauchi state, between the Christian Sayawa and the Muslim Fulani of Tafawa Balewa, and Bogoro local government areas (Wuye and Ashafa, 2007). Their work brought peace mediations to two different parts of Plateau State, where thousands have died in fighting between Christians and Muslims. In Yelwa-Nshar, in the Shendam local government of Plateau state where over 1,000 villagers were slaughtered in May 2004. The killings in Yelwa-Nshar provoked reprisals in both Kano State and Southeastern States. To subdue the unrest in Plateau State, 25,000 soldiers and security personnel were deployed and a state of Emergency was declared by the federal government. The appointed sole administrator of the state convened a peace conference that resulted in recommendations for resolving the conflicts, but the Muslim community rejected them. Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa were then called in and they successfully mediated a peace agreement that ended violence and resulted in a compact to promote reconciliation and the resolution of contentious issues between Christians and Muslims (Smock, 2006; Smock, 2008). Smock (2005) describes the event leading to the Shendam Peace Affirmation<sup>4</sup> thus

At the invitation of the administrator of Plateau State, in November 2004 Wuye and Ashafa carried their message and skills to Yelwa-Nshar. They gathered key leaders for five days of sharing and negotiation. This event was the first time the two communities were brought together for a face-to-face encounter. As facilitators, Wuye and Ashafa used a combination of preaching and conflict resolution techniques. The most remarkable feature of the process was the pastor's frequent quotes of the Koran and imam's references to the Bible. The atmosphere at the outset was tense and confrontational. By the end of the third day, however, the two sides agreed on the core issues that provoked the killing. On the fourth day, they addressed each of these issues. The first issue was the Christian complaint that Muslims, who migrated to the area from Northern Nigeria, failed to respect local traditions and leaders. To buttress their claim, the Christians leveled specific charges. The principal Muslim leader responded to these charges by agreeing that all of them were valid, and that the behavior of the Muslims was unacceptable. The Muslims then apologized to the Christians and sought their forgiveness. This unexpected response stunned the Christians. In turn, they asked the Muslims to forgive their unacceptable behavior. Tears flowed on both sides. On the final day, the two sides worked through all the remaining issues, either agreeing on a resolution or on a process to find a resolution ultimately acceptable to both sides. They drafted a peace affirmation, which was subsequently shared with the two communities.

One important lesson form the IMC-MCDF is that CSOs can play not just secondary, but also primary role in conflict management. In other words, because of their trusted grassroots tie, their insights into

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<sup>4</sup>. The SFA was followed with a Peace Festival in February 2005 in which several thousand people celebrated the peace agreement, including many of those who had fled their homes the previous May and now felt sufficiently safe to return and resettle.

the religious, cultural and political situations, they not only have impact on track two (citizens diplomacy) but they have a critical impact on the peace activities of government officials i.e. track one (official) diplomacy and conflict resolution. According to Marchetti and Tocci (2007) at best, CSOs or what they call Conflict Society Organizations (CoSOs) “tend to play secondary roles in conflict management. Only rarely do conflict parties turn to and accept the official mediation by a CoSO rather than by third party states or international organisations. As such, CoSOs are often not directly involved in peacemaking activities (conceptualised primarily as the process leading to a peace agreement).” The example of the IMC-MCDF therefore is a refreshing deviant case to this rule. Rather than government, the IMC-MCDF led the way to successfully convince and convene the religious leaders that signed the Kaduna Peace Declaration and the setting up of the Kaduna Peace Committee. However, this event was witnessed by the Kaduna state government and this imbued the declaration with some state legitimacy. The Kaduna state government also partners with the KPC, which has extensive knowledge of the conflict dynamics and issues at stake in Kaduna and the greater north, and familiarity with parties to the conflicts, to address the fundamental structural causes of the conflicts.

### **MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS AND (UN) CIVIL SOCIETY: THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE.**

In spite of the positive efforts of civil society in building peaceful Muslim – Christian relations, the impact is still tenuous and peace still fragile. In the country today, there is a profile of CSOs as peace blockers rather than peace builders or vanguards for ethno-religious militancy and of violence in the conduct of claims with other groups and the state. While they can and have played positive roles in peace building as shown earlier, they can also thwart the peace process or contribute to conflict escalation or violence through the exclusive actions and discourses which raises the stakes of politics or worsens the incompatibility of subject position, by embracing ethnic and religious divisive passions and loyalties, and by direct act of violence. How can we explain this situation? The next session explains the obstacles to peace, the role of the CSOs in these and how they have responded to them.

The optimal choice for civil society peacefully managing conflict depends on several identifiable factors specific to the country, including the way and degree to which identity is politicized, the intensity of conflict, the question of social justice, the degree of democratization, and the efficacy of governance structures. In short, while civil societies can be powerful levers for shaping the content and

practice of politics in divided societies, their design is highly sensitive to context and political opportunity structure (Marchetti and Tocci, 2007). During the period under investigation Muslim-Christian conflict was provoked by the following factors:

The first is the **opposite religious Identity** (including value and practices) which sometimes is irreconcilable and creates little ground for compromise. In other words, sometimes conflicts grow out of genuinely different values and visions of how a good society is ordered. As Reychler (1997) noted, “when conflicts are couched in religious terms, they become transformed in value conflicts. Unlike other issues, such as resource conflicts which can be resolved by pragmatic and distributive means, value conflicts have a tendency to become mutually conclusive or zero-sum issues. They entail strong judgments of what is right and wrong, and parties believe that there cannot be a common ground to resolve their differences.” The controversy over implementing criminal aspects of the Islamic Shari’a code fits this pattern. Particularly in the 12 northern states that introduced Shari’a this dispute pits indigenous Muslim populations, who believe that it is the pure law revealed by God and hence humans cannot tamper with it, against southern, Middle Belt, and even northern Christians who fear that the Shari’a movement will violate their rights and reduce them to second-class citizens. The contentions led to bitter war of words and litigation<sup>5</sup> between Christians and Muslims. CSOs were at the forefront of these contentions as defenders of group rights, churning out press statements, religious sermons, for or against Sharia in ways that sometimes soiled the relations between them and polarized the civil society, also along these lines. The high point of this seemingly irreconcilable differences was violent conflict as was the case in Kaduna state in 2000 state where attempts to introduce the Shari’a legal code precipitated riots which reduced many parts of Kaduna and environs to rubble and left at least 3000 persons dead and later led to reprisal killings against Muslims in the predominant southern states of Aba, Umuahia, Owerri, Uyo and Calabar (Ndiribe, 2000).

The Second is the **politicization of identities**. The contest for political power in Nigeria is driven by the contrasting imperatives of competitive identities which, by implications, is devoid of any sustaining unifying theme or ideology (Natufe, 2001). Take religion for instance. Ideally, under the Nigerian constitution, governments should be neutral in religious matters. They should be impartial arbiters and guarantors of the rights of all individuals no matter the religion or belief. But in Nigeria, it is not the

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<sup>5</sup>. CAN instituted the litigation following the failure of the federal government to challenge Sharia in court. The suit was however later withdrawn soon after its introduction (see Guardian July 10, 2000)

case. In theory, Nigeria is defined as a secular and multi-religious state. Section 10 of the constitution affirms the essential secularity of the Nigerian federation. What takes place rather is the mixing of religion with politics. As Amadi (2003) noted, Nigerian politics is built on the *appeasement* of religion. Religion is a deity that proves difficult to be overpowered and equally incapable of decisively breaking out of the constraints of liberal legality. According to Moyser (1991), ‘the religious order has a pre-eminent claim over the believer and the social order of everyday life, thus extending its influence over the political domain when collective decisions concerning that social order are being made.’ Hence, the way the individual relates to the state and acts in the public arena are also determined by the religious order. ‘Politics [...] is made relative to, and is validated by, religion’ (ibid: 10).

Both the Muslims and the Christians have used religion as a tool to serve their political interests and the civil society were also at the vanguard of this. During the period under study, President Obasanjo seems to lead the way of politicizing religion when he described himself as a "born again" Christian and organized a big evangelistic meeting as part of his inaugural ceremonies. He then went farther to build a Christian chapel in the presidential villa and appointed a Baptist chaplain for the chapel. Also as soon as Obasanjo became President, Pentecostal Christians, in contrast to the ideology of the separation of religion from the state which CAN promotes, made it clear that they would play important roles in guiding the Presidency. The emergence of President Obasanjo in the polls and his swearing-in ceremony on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999, was therefore heavily immersed in the traditions of Christian Pentecostalist symbols (Obadare 2006: 669). As Ojo (2004) confirms, Christian Pentecostal leaders collectively “adopted Olusegun Obasanjo as a symbol of Christian control of the political sphere, believing that he was an answer to prayers about the ending of oppression and mis-governance, and the ending of a Muslim political dominance.”

President Obasanjo further blurred the boundaries between state and church when he involved himself in the building of the Christians, National Ecumenical Centre. He was invited to serve as treasurer of the building Completion Committee, he mobilised donors to contribute to the building project, visited the building sites several times to ensure its completion, and guaranteed a N614 million loan when the building project was about to be stalled.<sup>6</sup> The perception of the overbearing influences of Christianity

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<sup>6</sup>. See, The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). 2005. National Ecumenical Centre dedicated in Abuja. <http://www.anglican-nig.org/ecum%20centre.htm>

on Obasanjo's Presidency, elicited fears of domination from Muslim leaders in Northern<sup>7</sup> The nepotistic nature of politics in Nigeria made such fear reasonable.

President Obasanjo's example is reflected in most states of the federation where state governors build mosques and churches in government house, sponsor pilgrimages to Mecca and Israel, and publish religious sermons in the newspapers that are offensive to the other religion, and make comments that are intolerant. In doing this, they not only control the religious civil society organizations whose leaders and members are subtly coerced with the pilgrimage sponsorship, but they also deepened suspicion between Muslims and Christians, aggravates conflicts and promote hatred and violence between the two religious communities (Bianchi, 2004). A good example of how government can provoke interreligious intolerance was what happened during the 2006 *Ramadan* month of fasting. As Oluniyi (2008) noted, the Kano State Government sponsored daily "Ramadan Message" consisting of averagely four to five verses of the Koran, on the front page of *Daily Trust* newspaper. Similarly, the Zamfara State Government sponsored daily messages under the theme, "Ramadan Guide". The lead verse of Kano State message on 27 September 2006 is as follows, "*O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is (one) of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk. Quran 5:51.*" The very fact of having to operate in an environment characterized by intense politicization of identities shapes the aims, character, means and modus operandi of CSOs. For instance, politicization of identities can provoke conflictual or violent counter-mobilization by the "loosing" group.

Related to the above is the **question of social justice**. Civic society cannot benefit the cause of peace if its members do not bring trust, public spiritedness and self-sacrifice into their relations with non-members. That they will do depends on the severity of issues of social justice. The role the state can play here is to be responsive and not allow such issues to simmer and stew into widespread discontent. If it fails, the people will be pliant to mobilization for un-civic behaviour (Chambers and Kopstein, 2001).

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<sup>7</sup>. President Obasanjo later got involved in the building of the National Mosque, but this move was seen by many as an afterthought. In any case, as Ogbonna (2008) noted, his involvement in this act turned the arena of governance into a theatre of competition between religions.

In Nigeria, for instance, social injustice was sown by the colonial government as a device to continue the “divide and rule” policy based on preferences given to particular ethnic and religious groups. This made civil society organizations, especially the ones that represent various ethnic and religious cleavages to be inward looking rather than outward looking. Thus right from the beginning, colonialism and its residual-ethnic and religious divisiveness-sullied political activities, including civil society organizations’ activism and focused it more towards particularistic group ends instead of the broader civic ends. Today, in many states of the federation, governments have entrenched various forms of discrimination against some other groups and this has provoked a violent backlash from the “loosing” group. In other words, violent conflicts are by broken or unfavourable “social contract” that privilege one group over the other. This means that people feel that institutions such as central and local governments behave in discriminatory or at best unpredictable ways and no longer trust them to come with fair and balanced policies. People then resort to violence to ensure justice. Civil society organisations, necessarily, lead these struggles for social justice for their members. However, in doing this, CSOs may themselves also adopt narrow ideals that pitches them in battle with other groups. This is at the root of the conflict in the Middle belt state of Plateau, for example where ethnic and religious CSOs have championed the struggle to resist domination and oppression in majority –minority relations and control of the public space and its attendant benefits even when this leads to violence.

Thus, when states government discriminate to minority groups, or where local civil society organizations, in conjunction with the government led by their co-religionists oppress some citizens in the process of affirming their own freedom, conflict cannot but arise. The question therefore arises as to how civil society organizations representing ethno-religious groups can be at the vanguard of the quest for social justice for their members without being exclusionary. This question is very appropriate in the Nigerian case especially given the conscripted notion of citizenship that polarizes Nigerians into indigenes and non indigenes and which provides a ground for exclusionary politics. At the heart of the conflict in Plateau state for example is the distinction between “indigenes” — people who consider themselves as the original inhabitants of an area — and those whom they view as “settlers.” The concept of “indigeneship” has been exploited and used to discriminate against those termed as “settlers and this has fuelled conflicts in many cases (Human Rights Watch, 2005). As Human Rights Watch (2006) noted,

In a country plagued by increasing economic scarcity and the rampant looting of government resources that are inadequate to begin with, being a non-indigene can mean exclusion from any real prospect of socio-economic

advancement. This makes seemingly esoteric disagreements over who should and should not be able to claim indigene status into an issue worth fighting over, and such disputes have lain near the heart of some of Nigeria's bloodiest episodes of intercommunal violence in recent years.

Worsening this is the restricted the country's **socio-economic underdevelopment** reflected in the economic space and obscene poverty that has continued despite soaring oil and unprecedented oil receipts especially during the preceding eight years. Nigeria is estimated to have one of the largest populations of the poor in the world, ranking 158<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries in the world in the Human Development Index in 2007/2008 (UNDP, 2007), and with 70.8 of its population having a purchasing power parity, PPP, of \$1 per day (UNDP MDG Monitor, 2008), with State level prevalence rate varying from 20 % in Bayelsa State to as high as 95% in Jigawa State (Soludo, 2007). Unfortunately, the contracted economic space persists even as the population continues to grow rapidly at 3.2% per annum, and open unemployment of youth aged between 15 and 29 is estimated to be as high as about 60 per cent (Kwakwa, et al, 2008). The logical outcome of this is the availability of a mass of frustrated and angry youths for recruitment for violent identity politics and the phenomenon of ethnic militias and inter-group conflicts in the country in general (Babawale, 2003; Program on Ethnic and Federal Studies, 2005). As the secretary general of Nigeria's Catholic Secretariat put it, this "Poverty in Nigeria has assumed the moral character of war, and this is what you see reflected in much of the violence in this country" (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

The deteriorating economic situation could also partly explain the rise of fundamentalist religious groups that are now playing the role of care givers and promoters of peace as well as aggressive defenders of group rights. For instance, Ojo (2001) writes that the pentecostal organisations reflect socio-economic changes taking place in their respective contexts. Thus, he concludes that the leaders of this movement exhibit creativity, protest and non-conformism as they adapt to changing situations (Ojo *ibid*). The resurgence of Islamism in northern Nigeria could also partly be explained by the failure of politics in Nigeria to produce good enough social goods, maintain security and welfare, and ensure justice. Given this situation, people then looked up to the rule of piety rather than policy for solution to social anomie (Amadi, 2003). While they have played positive roles in upholding peace, democracy and development in the face of increasing governance failure, they have also fuelled conflicts through their inflammatory or militant statements.

Muslim-Christian relationship is also affected by **international environment**. This is more so because globalisation represents a compression of the world and a corresponding consciousness of the world as a whole. The density of interaction and interpenetration which “compression of the world” represents has made the whole world a significant category of making sense of local occurrences, practices and actions. “World images” play a crucial role in framing the directions in which (ideals as well as material interests) are pursued (Robertson,1992).

For instance, one of the effects of the “war on terror” in the aftermath of the Sept 11 2001 attack has a renewed polarization between Christianity and Islam, at least a deepening of mutual suspicion and mistrust. These developments, telecast regularly on Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, two free Arabic cable news channels popular among Muslims and relived by Islamic preachers in their daily sermons, accentuated the “us” versus “they” binary concept and the hardening of attitudes that is so fundamental to Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria (Mohammed, 2005). Global perceptions that the U.S. is anti-Islam and hostile to Muslim nations are echoed in Africa. For example, in the recently published Pew Global Attitudes Survey only 32% of Nigerian Muslims, (down from 38% in 2003), have a favorable view of the U.S., compared with 89% of Christians (Ruby and Shah, 2007).

The post-9/11 US war on terrorism and corresponding increase in Israel onslaught against Palestinians, were therefore all perceived as part of Western, and therefore Christian agenda of de-Islamising the world. Also, President George Bush’s initial reference to the war on terror as a “crusade” seems to vindicate this position. The anti-Americanism that this provoked was evident by the development of a personality cult around Osama bin Laden, who was suddenly propelled to a hero status, especially among the youths in major urban centres of the North who conspicuously display his posters and stickers and wear his T-shirts (Mohammed, 2005), and the 2001 demonstration against US invasion of Afghanistan which was hijacked by hoodlums leading to the death of Christians, and the burning of Churches and Mosques (Ado-Kurawa, 2006).

The Muslim perception that there is a grand design by America and its Israeli allies to humiliate and check the resurgence of Islam is easy to justify in a context of Muslim-Christian divide. This was the case with the polio vaccine controversy of 2003 whose impact on the health rights of children still lingers in the north up till today.

The polio vaccination controversy was sparked when in July 2003, the routine polio vaccination program was attacked by Datti Ahmed, the President of Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN) who announced in Kano that the polio immunization campaign was part of a Western conspiracy. He said the United States had deliberately contaminated the vaccines to reduce the Muslim population. He also said that the vaccines contained the HIV virus. His statement was echoed by the SCSN and the State Council of Imams and Ulamas in Kaduna state who said in a joint statement that they found the Nigerian governments motives for polio vaccination suspicious. These comments led to the government of Kano state to stop immunization programs, an action soon followed by Kaduna and Zamfara states. During the national immunisation days, vaccination teams moving from house to house to immunise children below 5 years of age with oral polio vaccine were chased away by many parents in these states based on the advise of the Islamic clerics. This suspension led to the re-emergence of poliomyelitis not just in Kano state, but also through northern Nigeria to many neighbouring states and countries, setting back the entire global eradication programme (Samba, Nkrumah and Leke, 2004)

While admittedly the concern raised by Muslim CSOs about vaccination in Nigeria was connected to the tragic deaths of 11 Nigerian children in 1996 in Kano during tests of an experimental meningitis drug by the US pharmaceutical company Pfizer (Olusanya, 2004), the resentment towards top-down decision making around international health and development issues in this case, resentment focused on the prioritisation of polio over and above other diseases such as malaria, which distrust and dissatisfaction with the federal government in addressing health care provision within broader poverty reduction objectives, partly evidenced in the collapse of the national Primary Health Care System (Yahya, 2006), the resistance also had its meaning in the international and internal dynamics of political power and resistance politics.

According to Ahmed Datti, President of SCSN who first raised the opposition, “Just look at the Internet. There's strong proof that the US government, dating back to 35 years ago, with Kissinger and Nixon, believed that population is the most important factor for US hegemony in the world. Since they cannot rapidly increase the US population, the only way for them to dominate is to depopulate the Third World. This is the motive, as far as we are concerned (Donnelly, 2004). Datti was also reported to have stated:

We believe that modern-day Hitlers have deliberately adulterated the oral polio vaccines with anti-fertility drugs and contaminated it with certain viruses which are known to cause HIV and AIDS.<sup>8</sup>

This was compounded by the high-level of mistrust in the Nigerian federation reflected in the north-south political dynamics associated with ethnicity and religion. As Yahya (2006) noted, these allegations acquired strength because the wild poliovirus is endemic in parts of Nigeria (northern) that happen to be inhabited by a predominantly Muslim population. Thus to target these northern states through the administration of the polio vaccine would carry a certain logic. Obadare (2005) explains further that Northern Nigerians' sense that their interests were being ignored by President Olusegun Obasanjo (who is Yoruba, Christian, and from Southwestern Nigeria) contributed to their belief that Northern Hausa- Fulani politicians and Muslim religious leaders who criticized Western medicine were genuinely trying to protect them. The statements of some of the key proponents of the Polio boycott seem to support this view. For instance, Datti Ahmed, suggests that he is not happy with the government because of President Obasanjo's "woeful failure", his pandering to the dictates of his Yoruba kinsmen, and his "Christian fanaticism" (cf. Ibrahim, 2005). The government of the "born again" Christian- Olusegun Obasanjo, was therefore the conduit through which America sought to reduce the population of Muslims in Nigeria. Influenced by resentment amongst Muslim civil society leaders over US foreign policy towards the Islamic world, the 16-month controversy that unfolded in Nigeria demonstrated an interesting play of political might between the international community and the federal government on the one hand and the northern Muslim states on the other. Nigeria's nascent and fragile democratic institutions were fiercely challenged to resolve this volatile situation peacefully (Yahya, 2006).

To reiterate, the SCSN played a dominant role in the polio vaccine conflict. While to many, the organization and its leaders were simply demonstrating ignorance and religious extremism that impinged negatively on the rights of children in the north, the organization on the other hand was able to project itself as a conscience of the state as well as demonstrating a benign role of a caring and compassionate substitute to a distant Nigerian state controlled by a Christian President and his Western (American) collaborators who detested Nigerian Muslims and all the stand for.

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<sup>8</sup>. Vaccine Boycott Spreads Polio, News 24.com , South Africa – 11 February 2004.

Finally, the role of the **media** is also important in our understanding of the relationship between Muslims and Christians and the role of the civil society in it. As Marchetti and Tocci (2007) noted, more often than not, the media focuses on short-term and sensational incidents and events, which far from fostering reconciliation can radicalise and entrench public opinions reducing the scope for official compromise.

A good example was the events surrounding the Miss World contest in November 2002. The conflict was sparked by a comment by a fashion columnist for the Southern newspaper *This Day* suggesting that Muslims who were opposed to the hosting of the Beauty Contest in Nigeria were only being hypocritical and that the Prophet Mohammad “would probably have chosen a wife” from among the contestants. This comment ignited a new wave of violence between Christians and Muslims in the city of Kaduna, where the contest was supposed to take place, and Abuja, the federal capital, with the loss of more than 200 lives. These events were followed by the declaration of Fatwa by Muslim civil society organizations in Zamfara state- an action backed by the State government- against the journalist.

Another example was the cartoon by the Danish newspapers *Jyllands-Posten*, and subsequently reprinted by Norwegian, German, France, Italian and Spanish newspapers, which depicted prophet Mohammed as a Terrorist. The cartoon by these international media not only led to protests in Nigeria, but also sullied Muslim Christian Relations. Even though the CAN condemned the publication of the cartoons, this did not help much as it led to rioting in which Christians and churches were targeted in the northern state of Muslim –dominated northern cities of Maiduguri and Katsina leading to reprisal attacks on Muslims in the southern city of Onitsha. As the *New York Times* documents, the cycle of tit-for-tat sectarian violence pushed the death toll well beyond 100, making Nigeria the hardest-hit country so far in the caricature controversy (Polgreen, 2006). Reacting to the death of Christians after the violence, Archbishop Peter Akinola, then-President of CAN offered a harsh warning which some considered as incendiary and a call for Christian militancy, but which in essence revealed the fragility of Muslim-Christian Relations in the country:

It is very clear now that the sacrifices of the Christians in this country for peaceful co-existence with people of other faiths has been sadly misunderstood to be weakness. We have for a long time now watched helplessly the killing, maiming and destruction of Christians and their property by Muslim fanatics and fundamentalists at the slightest or no provocation at all.. That an incident in far away Denmark which does not claim to be representing Christianity could elicit such an unfortunate reaction here in Nigeria, leading to the destruction of

Christian Churches, is not only embarrassing but also disturbing and unfortunate..." May we at this stage remind our Muslim brothers that they do not have the monopoly of violence in this nation. CAN may no longer be able to contain our restive youths should this ugly trend continue.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the midst of the deterioration of Muslim-Christian relations since the return to democratic rule in 1999, civil society actors have shown a mix of responses. Some groups have sought to promote peace between the two religious communities, as well as exploring ways of addressing the governance gap left by the state at the local, regional, and federal levels. Working at both the local and national levels, different civil society groups have undertaken initiatives that seek to bring together former militants, the government, and the communities under a variety of circumstances and utilizing a variety of conflict resolution methods. Yet at the same time, civil society is implicated in the growing pattern of exclusion and intolerance, and the general collapse of bridges between the two religion communities, seen through increased tensions, the rising potential for strife – and the disruption of governance and the smooth running of civil society itself. Through the use of rhetoric in speeches and sermons, as well as other media within the religious institutions, debates over identity, ethnicity and the role of religion in the states are being intensified. In ascendance are notions that inhibit plurality of ideas while justifying exclusion, hatred and violence.

Robert Putnam (1993) elaborated the positive effect of civil society on democracy through his research paradigm on social capital, a concept based upon the premise that social networks have values that benefit society's overall development. The theory on social capital endorsed the idea that all institutions within civil society operate "in ways that reinforce positive social norms such as tolerance, non-discrimination, trust, and cooperation," all of which are important elements of democratic consolidation (Edwards, 2004:76). Yet the opposite is also possible.

Experience reveals that civil society presents a double edged sword capable of generating violence as well as peace. As the research on the Weimar Republic conducted by Berman (1997) indicated, a vibrant and well-organized civil society gave birth to and nurtured the Nazi movement. Since the transition, there has been the rise of grassroots organizations, which have mobilized around chauvinistic nationalism and xenophobic agendas in Russia and Eastern Europe (Francis and Ropers,

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<sup>9</sup>. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/41/00/acns4113.cfm>

1999). In Zimbabwe, notes Stewart (1997), “there has always been a strong civil society whose impact has been anything but democratic, largely because it has historically been dominated by organizations seeking to promote the interests of the white minority.” As Chambers and Kopstein (2001) rightly point out, a problem with the presence of illiberal civil society in new democracies is its potential to affect the mainstream political discourse.

In Nigeria, spite of their positive contributions to peace building, the disappointing aspects of civil society were also revealed during the period under study. As noted earlier, dedicated civil society activists mobilized the public around peace building efforts and led direct action to restore a public space which respects open discussions and dialogue. Yet, the authoritarian legacy of previous military regimes that hindered people’s ability to constructively engage in conflict situations has not only impeded ordinary citizens’ ability to handle conflictual social issues in a constructive manner, but has also affected civil society activists’ engagement in public discourse (Ikelegbe, 2001). Like ordinary citizens, civil society elites were not equipped to utilize the appropriate skills in fostering constructive dialogue concerning highly divisive social issues. In several cases, instead of effectively facilitating multiple perspectives on public interest issues through negotiation, civil society actors adopted into political radicalism, militancy, and intransigence in their engagement with other civil society groups who hold opposite perspectives. This, in turn, creates, a polarised civil society, having the effect of marginalizing problem solving approaches, dialogue, and negotiation within civil society space. In other words, civil society activists’ unfamiliarity with collaborative problem-solving processes has turned public policy debates into fierce social conflicts which divide people into two sides. A good example of this was the polio vaccine controversy, whereby grandstanding and the securitization of discourses by the SCSN created a conspiratorial theory of a federal government who was acting in collaboration with its western allies to decimate the population of northern Muslims and infect them with HIV /AIDs through the polio vaccines.

Furthermore, in a context of ethno-religious diversity flowing through a political system that is dominated by neopatrimonial elites, so-called “Big Men” or “godfathers”, who manipulate these identities into power over a deeply impoverished public, as well as the intense competition that defines political power as the prize of a zero-sum contest, civil society initiatives to foster peaceful Muslim-Christian relations face an uphill battle. There is very little space for dialogue on equal terms acceptable to all the stakeholders as the interest in controlling state power and the ensuing resources

remains the only game in town. Civil society groups are thus faced with the difficult task of seeking to build peace and advance democracy in a context where they also have to work hard to avoid state capture through cooptation, clientelism, partrimonialism and mass coercion. This competition between state and society has resulted further in the weakening of both.

Given this context, it is tempting to conclude as Ikelegbe (2001) of the “perverse manifestation of civil society”. The negative impression given by the civil society of rivalry and irreconcilable conflicts would seem to support this view. Yet the fact should also be noted that CSOs are a product of their societies and their activities and actions are structured by the incentive system of that society. Seen from this perspective, the “uncivil” role of civil society in Muslim-Christian relations are also an extension of the fundamentals inherent in Nigeria’s divided society. As Olukoshi and Agbu(1996) notes:

As a multi-ethnic society characterised by deep-seated social inequality, uneven territorial development, and a varied of other forms of potentially destabilizing popular identity, including, especially, religious identities...it should not be surprising that the national question occupies so central a place in the national political process

Given this context, CSOs in Nigerian cannot but reflect the complexities, complications, of the National Question in the country. In other words, civil society is constrained by the institutional norm of particular political and economic system (Bradley, 2005). For instance, the pervasive mutual suspicion that characterized the relationship between state and society is also reflected between CSOs organizations themselves. This has made for little regular cooperation.

The Nigerian experience also shows that civil society organizations can also impact negatively on human rights. Besides the fuelling of conflict, civil society organizations can also stall the process of justice and create impunity which then tend to encourage other circles of violence. Seen from this context, conflicts persist because culprits go unpunished. Impunity therefore leads to another violence and then another in an unending circle. Whenever religious riots occur, arrests are made but later most of those arrested are released. In a few cases some of those arrested were brought to court but were later acquitted for want of evidence. While this can be attributed to failure of government to impose sanctions on perpetrators of violence in accordance with the country law (The Guardian, March 15, 2009), there is

a sense also in which this failure to punish those who have committed violence lies in the significant political pressure from civil society organizations who are quick to defend their kith and kin arrested as innocent. This was the case in the November riots 2002 riots in Kaduna. According to Human Rights Watch (2003), “It would appear that the matter of the arrest of suspects became politicized by both Christian and Muslim groups. Sources in Kaduna who monitored this and previous crises in Kaduna State believe that as on earlier occasions (notably following the 2000 riots), the state government, in a bid to appear neutral, gave in to pressure exerted by Christian and Muslim leaders and assented to the release of most suspects; most believe that the cases of those released on bail are unlikely to result in prosecutions.” A similar trend was noticed by Human Rights Watch with relations to the Plateau state conflict, “both Muslims and Christians have complained about the low level of arrests of people who organized or participated in the violence. However, when a few people were arrested, each side was quick to complain that its own members were being targeted disproportionately and that the police and government's approach was one-sided” (Human Rights Watch, 2005). This was also the case when the State Security Service (SSS) arrested some youths which it suspected were members of Muslim militant called Al-Qaeda operating in Kaduna, Borno, Kano and Yobe states. The SCSN quickly came to their defense, asking the federal government to call the SSS to order and asking for the release of all those arrested, claiming that the arrest was part of several other “jaundiced expressions... gaining ground in Nigeria, in our government agencies, through some key public functionaries who are pursuing parallel agenda, clearly aimed at employing the machinery of state to victimize and terrorize Muslim organizations and individuals, a typical case of giving a dog a bad name to justify hanging it” (Buhari, 2007). Yet, as we are reminded by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, “impunity further strengthens the fears of those who have been affected by previous instances of violence and inherently limits the enjoyment of their right to freely manifest their religion or belief...impunity therefore only escalates religious intolerance” (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2009).

Finally, all these do not necessarily lead to the rejection of civil society’s potential to contribute to peace-building. It only raises the question of the type of civil society that promotes peace. That CSOs have not all acted to thwart peace or fuel conflict is a sign that we can be positive about our assessment of their potential in engendering peace. Thus while some CSOs have promoted exclusion and divisiveness, others have moderated this tendency. During the period under study, this positive ambivalence can be gleaned from the reversal of the *fatwa* imposed by religious CSOs in Zamfara state

(in collaboration with the Zamfara state government) on the *ThisDay* reporter by the Jamaatul Nasril Islam (JNI) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) the umbrella organization of Muslims in Nigeria and headed by the Sultan of Sokoto; the declaration, even though belated, by the JNI and NSCIA that the polio vaccine is safe after the stalemate provoked by the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN); the reprimand of the Kano state governor by another northern Muslim and former governor of Kaduna state, Col. Dangiwa Umar for sponsoring the *Ramadan* message “that has the curious effect of escalating religious intolerance” (Umar, 2006 cf. Oluniyi, 2008); and the internal criticism of Muslim civil society organizations including women organizations such as BAOBAB, WRAPA, and other liberal Muslims such as Sanusi Lamido and Shehu Sani who in spite of being labelled as “unbelievers” by conservative Muslims dared to reveal the shortcomings of the implementation of Sharia and engaged it in intellectual discourses aimed at building a synergic relationship between religion, secularism, human rights (including the rights of women) and democratic politics.

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