

The Role of Religious Leaders in Fostering Inter-Faith Dialogue Amid Boko Haram Insurgency in Kano, Northern Nigeria¹

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Abstract:

This paper examines the role of religious leaders in forging interfaith dialogue in Kano. It argues that religious leaders have been framed for mobilizing and instigating their followers for collective violence in response to other faiths in Kano over the years. However, the eruption of the Boko Haram onslaughts on Christians in the Northeast region and planned attacks on Christians in Kano created space for local religious leaders to mobilize their followers to forge inter-faith dialogue aimed at de-escalation of insurgency's extremist ideology. The consensual efforts of inter-religious leaders culminated in the formation of the Kano Covenant in 2012. The peace pact cemented the fissures between the two faiths and entrenched the novel harmonious relationship beyond faith in the social, political and economic spheres. The paper explores the pedigree and credentials of the religious leaders, their motivations and convictions for fostering the interfaith dialogue. The pact transformed religious extremism into peacebuilding unprecedented in Kano's history. The paper adopts the ethnographic method of data collection through the distribution of semi-structured interviews to religious leaders and adherents. Focus group discussions and oral interviews were held with community and opinion leaders and stakeholders. Others include close reading of secondary works including media reports.

Keywords:

Boko Haram, interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, Muslims, Christians.

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Introduction

A combination of religion, ethnicity, political, and economic crises are identified as the drivers of violent conflicts in Nigeria. However, religion is unarguably considered a major cause of violent conflicts in the country. Nigeria is divided into two major religious groups, the predominantly Muslim north and Christian south. Relations between the faiths have over the years have oscillated between peace and violent conflicts that had led to many deaths and wanton destruction of property. Available data estimated that 13, 000 people have lost their lives in violent conflicts in Nigeria (United States Institute of Peace, 2011, 38-39) Religion has played an ambivalent role as one of the major causes of violent conflicts, and also a veritable resource for peacebuilding particularly in conflict-prone areas in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere. This ambivalent role of religion as captured by Appleby (2000) has produced mixed feelings about the role of religious leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in many countries (Ehrhardt (2016) in his seminal work narrates the *Janus* voice of the religious leaders in mobilizing their followers for both harmonious relations and instigating violent conflicts in two riotous cities of Jos and Kano (Ehrhardt, 2016). To this end, this paper presents a novel, ground-breaking intervention of Muslim-Christian religious leaders in coming together irrespective of their difference to mobilize their adherents to sign and establish the Kano Covenant interfaith dialogue in the mix of insurgency in Kano and the Northeast region of Nigeria.

Before the Boko Haram insurgency, Kano has been known as a site of ethnic and religious conflicts from 1953 to the post-presidential election violence in 2011. The outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009 in Maiduguri in the Northeast region and its spread to Kano in the Northwest region in 2012 led to the loss of many lives and wanton destruction of property. It was in the wake of the Boko Haram siege on Kano on January 20, 2012, and afterwards that the Muslim and Christian leaders came together to form the inter-faith dialogue tagged the "Kano Covenant" for the promotion of inter-faith cooperation, peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationship between Muslims and Christians in Kano. It was meant to enable Muslims and Christians to have a formidable platform to dislodge Boko Haram in Kano.

Historically, relations between Muslims and Christians in Kano since the colonial period have oscillated between conflicts and peace. Kano's reputation as a hotbed of ethno-religious conflicts over the past six decades is well known and documented in the works of Albert Olawale (1993 & 1999), John Paden (1973), Eghosa Osaghae and Rotimi Suberu (2005), Haruna Wakili (2005 & 2011) and (Ahmed Bako, 1990) among others. The extant literature that dwells on violent conflicts and conflict resolutions in Kano and other parts of Northern Nigeria include the works of David Ehrhardt (2007) work which gives primacy to the concerted roles of informal authorities comprising the traditional rulers, religious authorities, ethnic and community leaders in conflict resolution in Kano.



Shedrack Gaya Best and Carole Rakodi's (2011) work examines the protracted inter-religious conflicts and their aftermaths in Kano and Jos and maintains that cycles of conflicts in Kano were ethno-religious, while the incessant conflicts in Jos were caused by the quest for the control of Jos-North Local Government Area, competition between Muslims and Christians, and the host/settler issues. Thaddeus Umaru (2013) in his study of incessant interreligious conflicts in northern Nigeria contends that neither religion nor politics are comprehensive enough to foster inter-faith dialogue. He advocates the adoption of multi-faceted approaches involving theology for the sustenance of inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria. Apart from David Ehrhardt's work, no comprehensive study of the responses of religious leaders to the violent conflict in Kano has been done. Religious leaders of both faiths have been perceived as sponsors, mobilizers or instigators of violent conflicts in Kano and other cities in Northern Nigeria. Imam Muhammad Ashafa's (1999) work is a narrative of how two religious leaders, Pastor James Wuye and Imam Ashafa, suffered losses in the religious conflicts in Kaduna in the 1990s. It discusses how Imam Ashafa lost family members and a mentor, while Pastor James Wuye lost his right hand and some of his friends and followers. The work also looks at the processes of their transformation, leading them to renounce violence and become enamoured with reconciliation and the subsequent establishment of interfaith dialogue in Kaduna. It looks at how the two hitherto religious enemies began to work to advocate for peace between Christians and Muslims in Kaduna and other parts of Northern Nigeria through the establishment of the Interfaith Mediation Centre, which both of them jointly administered. In his work, Ignatius Kaigama (2012) narrates how religious leaders and the government's interventions led to the restoration of peace and peacebuilding after a decade of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos, Plateau State. It explores how his collaboration with Alhaji Abdullahi Haruna Wase, the Emir of Wase, and the Plateau State chairman of Jamaatu, Nasril Islam, led to the establishment of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State (Kaigama, 2012).

The extant literature has dwelled on the permanence and intractability of violent conflicts in Kano and other parts of Northern Nigeria; however, this paper draws our attention to the roles of local religious leaders in peacebuilding that contribute to inter-faith cooperation, peaceful co-existence, and security in Kano. This paper is predicated on the need to investigate this paradigm shift like the relationship between the two faiths which is markedly different from the earlier inter-faith peace pacts in Kano and other conflict areas such as Kaduna and Jos in Northern and North-central Nigeria respectively. Against this backdrop, this paper examines how the Muslim and Christian religious leaders have responded to the Boko Haram attacks and instigations to cause an inter-religious crisis in Kano. The overarching argument of this paper is that, although religious leaders have been framed for mobilizing and instigating their followers for collective violence in response to other faiths in Kano over the years (Ehrhardt, 2016). It is the view of this sweeping generalization of the casting of religious leaders as instigators of violent conflicts in Kano that this paper seeks to establish the fact that they have been agents and/or promoters of inter-religious co-existence, harmonious relations and peacebuilding particularly in the wake of insurgents' bloody campaigns in the city and the

Northeast region. It is based on this postulation that this paper examines the role of religious leaders in forging interfaith dialogue in Kano from the perspective of mutual collaboration between the religious leaders in the de-escalation of Boko Haram extremist ideology, contracting a new form of inter-religious co-operation between Muslims and Christians in Kano.

The Boko Haram onslaughts on Christians in Maiduguri in Borno State where insurgents originated and later spread to other parts of the Northeast and Northwest regions led to the death of many people and the burning down of churches and mosques. The spectre of Boko Haram's further attacks on Christians caused fear and trepidation among the Christian community which engendered mutual suspicion, distrust and polarized Kano residents along ethno-religious lines. The tense security situation caused the mass exodus of some panic-stricken migrant Christians from Kano to their home states in the North-central and Southern Nigeria which had grave implications for inter-faith relations in Kano. It was in the wake of this scenario that local Muslim and Christian religious leaders met and mobilized their followers to forge inter-faith dialogue. The consensual efforts of the religious leaders culminated in the formation of the Kano Covenant interfaith dialogue on January 15, 2012, aimed at forming a united body to confront Boko Haram's violence and extremist ideology.

In an attempt to build peace and ensure harmonious inter-religious relations, Kano Muslims under the aegis of Concerned Citizens of Kano State led by Engineer Bashir Ishaq Bashir signed the Kano Covenant pact with the Christian Association of Nigeria, (CAN), Kano State chapter led by its president, Bishop Ransom Bello (Kano Covenant, 2012, 1). The Muslim group used the peace pact to empathize with the Christians and reassure them of their safety and protection in the face of palpable fear caused by the Boko Haram attacks. The Kano Covenant helped in countering Boko Haram's extremist threats to Christians by appealing to Christians not to harbour deep grievances against Muslims in Kano.

Methodology

This research relied mainly on primary sources derived from oral information, focus group discussion, and ethnography. The research employs ethnography in its data collection in which semi-structured questions were administered to one hundred and twenty informants in three local government areas of Gwale, Fagge and Kano Municipal in Kano metropolis. In-depth oral interviews were held with the key religious leaders and co-founders of the Kano Covenant, Engineer Bashir Ishaq Bashir and Bishop Ransom Bello and selected adherents. Informal discussions were held with selected opinion leaders, community leaders and ordinary people who are knowledgeable on the nature of inter-religious relations in Kano and the formation of the Kano Covenant. This is to provide reliable and valid information on the subject matter. Primary sources constitute a vital source of data collection because of the paucity of written works on the Kano Covenant. Secondary sources comprised articles in academic journals, chapters in collected volumes, dissertations, theses and media reports. The varied sources



scrutinized to obtain metropolitan voices that narrate the new phenomenon of Kano Covenant inter-religious dialogue that is yet to receive academic investigation and documentation. This research is a modest attempt to present new refreshing voices and perspectives of the local people on the novel inter-religious co-operation and harmonious relationship between Muslims and Christians in Kano. The fieldwork spanned a period of three months from August to October 2017.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs conflict transformation theory developed by John Lederach as its theoretical framework in analyzing the inter-religious peacebuilding amidst insurgency in Kano. According to Lederach, Conflict transformation “seeks to create a framework to transform the content, context and the structure of...relationship” (Mutillah, 2016, 135). Conflict transformation is concerned with the deeper matters of building peace and changing the relationships which brought about the violence in the first place. It connotes “fixing the problems, which threaten the core interest of the parties; changing the strategic thinking; and changing the opportunity structure and the ways of interaction” (Lederach, 1997 and 2003). It implies a deep transformation in the institutions and discourses that produced violence, as well as in the conflict parties themselves and their relationships (Albert, 2007, 14).

Lederach adopted an integrative, comprehensive method of conflict transformation and sees leadership as a pyramid with three levels comprising top-level, middle-level and grassroots-level (Miall et al., 1999, 29 as cited in Akaji, 2011, 45). The apex of the pyramid comprises top-level leadership which represents the fewest people who are very visible and influential in society. They are usually the highest representative leaders of the government and opposition movements in conflicts. They may include military, political and religious leaders who are the main voices for their constituencies in both conflict generation and resolution. In peacebuilding, these persons focus on high-level negotiations and at times singlehandedly serve as mediators. They are experts in procuring cease-fires and providing an immediate remedy for conflict situations. The middle level represents the Middle-Range leadership of the society with more people than the top level, but certainly, less than there are at the base of the pyramid. They usually include highly respected individuals such as educationists, religious leaders, and people of prestige in society. They are generally connected to both the top and the grassroots levels. In peacebuilding, they are involved in problem-solving, peace commissions and training in conflict resolution (Albert, 1993, 42).

The base of the pyramid encompasses the largest number of people from the grassroots of the population. The leaders here include people involved in local communities on face-to-face and day-to-day levels. Each of these three levels of actors is expected to be concerned with peacebuilding functions at its level and across the levels from the top to the bottom. However, Lederach emphasizes the unique significance of mid-level leadership which integrates both the top and grassroots levels of leadership in peacebuilding. The fact that the mid-level leaders

have links to parties across the conflict, they are said to have the greatest potential for taking immediate actions and serving in long-term transformation programmes. Religious leaders belong to this category. (Ehrhardt, 5) Lederach's conflict transformation theory aligns with the thrust of this paper, and therefore, is best suited for our understanding of the role of both Muslim and Christian leaders in forging the Kano Covenant pact in the wake of insurgency in Kano.

Interfaith Dialogue in Kaduna and Jos in Northern Nigeria

The aim of interfaith mediation, dialogue, and cooperation according to (Omosho, 2013) is to "create harmony (not unity) among religious and spiritual communities, with the goal of creating a more just, peaceful and sustainable world". The focus of most of the interfaith bodies in Nigeria is on how to facilitate understanding and maintain peaceful co-existence among the adherents of the various faiths in the country (Isola, 2014)

Relations between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have been conflictual and turbulent, but there have been some elements of interreligious dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding between the two faiths. The history of the formation of interfaith dialogue by civil non-state actors (Bah, 2013, 313–36) and state authorities began in the 1990s when the Nigerian government took some measures to manage both intra- and interreligious conflicts (Iweze, 2021, 39). These measures included the promotion of interfaith cooperation and dialogue through the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in September 1999 by Christian and Muslim leaders aimed at dialogue to understand the true teachings of Christianity and Islam; create a permanent and sustainable channel of communication and interaction, thereby promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims; provide a forum for cooperation between Muslims and Christians and to address issues of conflict violence; and serve as a platform to express cordial relationships among various religious groups and the government (Constitution of the Nigeria Interreligious Council 2001, quoted in Umaru 2013, 396). NIREC serves as a strong advocate for dialogue and peacebuilding, and it promotes regular interfaith and inter-communal meetings. It also collaborates with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and *Jamalat-ul-Nasril* Islam to check recurring ethno-religious conflicts. It collaborates with government and security agencies to intervene in crises to restore peace and order in conflict areas in northern Nigeria (Umaru, 2003, 396).

Another non-state institution is the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) in Kaduna, established by Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa in 1995. The IMC aims to "create a peaceful society in Nigeria and beyond through non-violence and strategic engagement" (IMC Pamphlet). The two religious leaders had instigated, mobilized, and executed interreligious conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Kaduna and Jos in the 1990s. However, the centre is aimed to promote interfaith dialogue, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence between the two faiths (Iweze, 2021, 39-40). The establishment of the



organization was inspired by their losses. Imam Muhammed Ashafa, a Muslim cleric lost members of his family, while Pastor James Wuye lost his right arm during the religious conflict in Kaduna State in 1995.

Bishop Ignatius Kaigama the Archbishop of Jos had been involved in inter-religious peacebuilding, especially after the outbreak of inter-ethnic conflicts in the area since the 2000s. He engaged religious, traditional leaders, politicians and other stakeholders in peacebuilding in Plateau State (Kaigama, 2012, 172-173). He was a former chairman of the Plateau State Christian Association of Nigeria and co-chairman of Plateau State Inter-Religious Council. Drawing from his experiences in forging the interfaith dialogue in the aftermath of the crises in Plateau State, Bishop Ignatius Kaigama succinctly notes that:

This form of dialogue demands an attitude of honesty, mutual respect, esteem and acceptance. It requires prudence, forgiveness, truthfulness, meekness, openness on the part of those involved. (Kaigama, 2012, 126).

Alhaji Haruna Abdullahi, the Emir of Wase was the chairman of Jama`tu Nasril Islam, the mainstream Muslim organization in Plateau and also the Vice-President in Nigeria. The Emir of Wase being the Chairman of Jamaatu Nasril Islam (JNI) in Plateau shared common values of peace, reconciliation and harmonious co-existence. Alhaji Dr Haruna Abdullahi had worked together in the task of fostering peace among people of diverse identities and religions in conflict areas of Northern Nigeria. He partnered with Archbishop Kaigama in the search for sustainable peace between Muslims and Christians in the state, especially in the aftermath of the Yelwa conflicts in 2004. Both religious leaders had collaborated in several peace initiatives and programmes using the media-television and radio to preach peace to their adherents and wider audience. They exchanged visits and were often seen together preaching at mosques and churches because of their closeness and bonds of friendship; they were referred to as brothers or twins. In recognition of their unalloyed commitment to peacebuilding in the state, the Plateau State Government appointed both religious leaders as co-chairmen of the Plateau State Inter-Religious Council for Peace and Harmony (Kaigama, 2012, 174). Despite their efforts in peacebuilding, some of their adherents who believed in perpetual enmity and inter-religious conflicts between the two faiths were sceptical about their propagation of the message of peace. Kaigama captured the scepticism of followers of both religious divides this way:

...some of my priests thought I was wasting my time, energy and resources by working with a Muslim. The Emir too was doubted and suspected by his Muslim brothers as a sell-out (Kaigama, 2012, 136).

The obstacles and seeming reservations of some of their followers did not deter the two religious leaders from forging ahead in ensuring peaceful co-existence among the faith communities in Jos and other conflict areas in Plateau State.

The Formation of the Kano Covenant Interfaith Dialogue Amid Boko Haram Insurgency

The earlier interfaith dialogue initiatives in Kano began in 1996 when the Catholic Diocese of Kano established a Centre for Comparative Religions, later renamed Centre for Religious Coexistence in 2004. It was aimed at fostering better understanding through Christian-Muslim dialogue. Between 1996 and 1997, the centre held many seminars, workshops and conferences. It achieved little and its operation was short-lived. It was marred by misunderstanding and mistrusts between some fanatical Christians and Muslims which almost resulted in violent riots and later became moribund (McGarvey, 2009, 258). From then on, inter-religious relations between Christians and Muslims were not cordial but oscillated intermittently between peace and conflicts before the insurgents' siege on Kano in 2012.

The processes that led to the formation of the Kano Covenant began in 2011 when Boko Haram attacked Borno, Yobe, Bauchi and other states in the Northeast region. The extension of insurgents' attacks in Kano on January 20, 2012, left over 250 people dead and wanton properties destroyed. The sect's leader, Abubakar Shekau gave Christians a three-day ultimatum from 3rd to 5th January 2012 to leave Northern Nigeria. The expiration of the deadline on January 6, 2012, was followed by waves of attacks on Christians in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi and Niger States. Boko Haram's coordinated attacks were specifically targeted at Nigeria's ethno-religious fault-lines in a bid to destabilize the country. The insurgents' spate of attacks on churches and businesses of Christians in Kano and other parts of Northern Nigeria, it seems, suggests "a strategy of provocation" through which the sect seeks to "spark a large-scale inter-faith conflict that will destabilize the country" (Center for Justice and Peacebuilding Eastern Mennonite University, 2012, 16)

This period of heightened threats in Kano also coincided with the ultimatum given to Christians by the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau to leave Northern Nigeria. The bombing of churches and killing of Christians by the sect was its push to Islamize the country and this generated strong condemnation from both Christians and Muslims. Christians perceived the insurgents' attacks as a Muslim jihad against the non-Muslims. The threats, hate speeches and pronouncements instilled fear and made panic-stricken Christians flee Kano en masse to their home states in Southern and North-central Nigeria. The situation in Kano was too serious for both the Federal and Kano State authorities to handle. The state government was helpless given the Boko Haram's claims that it attacked Kano because the state government reneged to pay "the money for (the) peace deal" it had with the state authorities.³

³ Boko Haram claimed that the major reason it attacked Kano was that some of its members were detained in prison in Kano, in addition to the Kano State government under Musa Rabiu Kwakwanso's refusal to pay the money for the peace deal it signed with Malam Ibrahim Shekerau's administration.



Whether Boko Haram's claim is true or not, the fact remains that Kano State did not refute and/or deny or affirm the claim.

The immediate impulse for the formation of the Kano Covenant arose when text messages sent by persons suspected to be members of Boko Haram insurgents circulated in Kano and subsequently went viral on Facebook and other social media outlets threatening Christians in Kano to leave Kano because of the imminent "*jihad*", that is, holy war (Kano Covenant, 2012, 1). Faced with threats of attacks and religious extremism, the forging of interfaith dialogue by the Muslim and Christians religious leaders became imperative. In a swift response to the Boko Haram imminent attacks on Christians in Kano, the Muslim group under the auspices of the Concerned Citizens of Kano motivated by the spirit of proactive solidarity, empathized with the minority Christians in Kano and felt that they should be protected from insurgents' attacks.

The Kano Covenant was formed on January 15, 2012, between the Muslim group under the auspices of Concerned Citizens of Kano, (CCK) led by Engineer Bashir Ishaq Bashir and Bishop Ransom Bello, the president of the Kano branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria, (CAN) aimed at promoting inter-faith co-operation, mutual tolerance, understanding and harmonious relations. The two religious leaders jointly issued a press statement when they declared:

In the last several months, the peace and tranquillity of Kano State has under severe strain occasioned by the threat as well as the actual eruption and escalation of ethnic and religious tension and violence in parts of Nigeria, especially in the Northeast. Some of this violence has been claimed by fringe groups that masquerade as defenders or promoters of religion to terrorize and harm innocent Nigerians, Muslims and Christians alike (Kano Covenant, 2012, 1).

The two religious groups exchanged solidarity visits by visiting some churches and providing security to the congregation during Sunday service in the neighbourhoods of Sabon-Gari and No-Man's Land where churches are located in Kano. Similarly, Christians reciprocated the visits by providing security to Muslims at the mosques during Friday prayers. The demonstration of solidarity by both faiths tended to strengthen the resolve of the religious leaders and followers in de-escalating extremism in Kano. The Muslim group used the interfaith pact to assure Christians of their security as well as stem the tide of their mass exodus from Kano to their home states. The Muslim group perceived Boko Haram terrorism as a desecration of Islam and formally declared their rejection of Boko Haram's ideology and violent mode of operation. The two religious leaders' primary aim was to secure Kano from Boko Haram attacks and prevent the Muslim adherents from embracing the Boko Haram's radical and extremist ideology. Five days after the signing and formation of the Kano Covenant pact, Boko Haram struck on Kano in highly coordinated attacks targeting eight security formations and paramilitary institutions on January 20, 2012, leading to the death of over 250 people, most of them wounded and property destroyed. Although the Boko Haram incessant violent campaigns in Kano from 2012 onward disrupted the activities of the religious leaders

for some time as the two religious leaders and the top members came under constant threats of being killed by Boko Haram sect members but failed to upset the nascent and fragile inter-faith dialogue.



Muslim-Christian Religious Leaders and their adherents after Signing the Kano Covenant (Source: Picture obtained from Bashir Ishaq, 28 October 2017).

Pedigree and Credentials of the Two Religious Leaders

The pedigree of co-founders of the Kano Covenant was significant in the forging of the interfaith peace pact. Bashir Ishaq, the initiator and co-founder of the Kano Covenant was born to a Kano Shari'a Court judge, Justice Ishaq Bashir. He received both Islamic and western types of education. He studied Engineering at Kaduna Polytechnic and a Post-graduate study in the United Kingdom. He also studied Comparative Religion which imbued him with a vast knowledge of the Quran, Bible and the Jewish Torah (Bashir Interviewed, 2017). His education, exposure and cosmopolitanism shaped his liberal religious convictions. Despite being a scion of a Sharia judge, his extensive networks of friends, business partners, neighbours of different ethnic and religious backgrounds and well-established social networks clearly define his worldview which is an uncommon trait in the predominantly Muslim North to initiate and pursue inter-religious cooperation and peacebuilding during the insurgency in a city that has over the years experienced waves of ethno-religious violence.

Bashir Ishaq Bashir had a great collaborator and partner in Bishop Ransom Bello, the General Overseer of Calvary Life Assembly in Kano. He is the current President of the Christian



Association of Nigeria, (CAN) Kano branch and a co-founder of the Kano Covenant. Bishop (Dr.) Born into a royal family in Ondo State, Ransom Bello attended the Ansar-u-Deen College, Isolo-Lagos and studied Accounting at the University of Lagos. He also holds a Bachelor degree in Biblical Studies and Master and Doctorate degrees in Theology from Slidell Baptist Seminary, Louisiana in the United States of America. He is one of the revered bishops in the Pentecostal denomination whose humility, simplicity and unassuming personality have endeared him to many people of various ethnic and religious divides. He was formerly the National Vice President of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), overseeing the Pentecostal churches in the North-west region of Nigeria. Bishop Bello has occupied many leadership positions with several international Christian organizations, among them were the International Communion of Charismatic Churches, International Ministerial Council of Great Britain and United Council of Christian churches. He shared common values of peace and reconciliation and harmonious co-existence of Muslims and Christians (Bello Interviewed: 2017). He has been a strong advocate of peace and inter-religious cooperation in Kano and Northern Nigeria for several years.

It should be noted that the religious leaders share the same uncommon traits of religious liberalism, forthrightness and accommodating and sterling credentials that made the peace pact possible. The display of honesty, forthrightness, non-partisanship and unalloyed commitment to the peacebuilding project by the religious leaders were veritable traits that made the peace pact to work. The pedigrees of the religious leaders align with Lederach's Middle-range leadership model that comprises highly respected individuals including religious leaders who are interestingly related with prominent individuals in the society and grassroots made up of ordinary people and their adherents. Lederach's theory is relevant in analysing the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding efforts as they acted as intermediaries, who used their positions to reach out to local traditional, religious and community leaders, community, stakeholders and state authorities in facilitating peaceful co-existence among the religious communities. Religions are a rich source of peace services. Thus, religious leaders have proven to be key actors in many efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace,

The success of the Kano Covenant hinged on the cooperation and support it garnered from the Kano traditional institutions, prominent politicians, Islamic clerics, community leaders, Kano State authorities and the Christian community. It also worked because the pact was initiated by liberal Muslim religious leaders (who were mainly Kano professionals and businessmen) rather than the mainstream Muslim body, *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI). The Kano Covenant interfaith dialogue had wider acceptability and goodwill from the wider spectrum of Kano society and its emergence was celebrated in the local, national and international media (Interview with Bashir, 2017). Despite its wider acceptability and popularity, it was opposed by a few Muslim and Christian extremists. Its formation was also opposed by Boko Haram members who threatened co-founders of the Kano Covenant, Bashir Ishaq and Bishop Ransom Bello (Bello and Bashir Interviewed, 2017). The threats notwithstanding, both religious leaders were unscathed and in collaboration with security agencies, state

government, traditional institutions and other stakeholders resolved to reject Boko Haram religious extremism and violent attacks on Kano residents.

The Outcome of Kano Covenant Interfaith Dialogue

The Kano Covenant inter-religious peace pact was unique because it marked a significant shift from conflictual to harmonious Muslims-Christians relations in Kano. Its relevance lies in its transformative approach in transforming the insurgents' instigation of inter-religious conflicts into a cooperative and peaceful co-existence unprecedented in Kano's history. It established a new form of collaboration between the two religious faiths, Kano State authorities and security agencies and Kano emirate council in matters relating to peace and security in Kano. Unlike the inter-religious dialogue in Kaduna, Jos and even previous interfaith dialogues in Kano that yielded little result in the promotion of peaceful co-existence between the faiths, the Kano Covenant was successful because of the application of genuine inter-faith peace pact by resolving the structurally inter-religious tensions that engulfed Kano and entrenchment of concrete collaboration beyond faith in the post-insurgency era. The pact led to the revival of the Centre for Inter-Religious Co-Existence which was established in 1994 (Isah Interviewed: 2017). The religious leader in collaboration with the Kano State government, civil society groups and non-government organizations used the centre for sensitizing and educating the public on the imperative of inter-faith cooperation and mutual co-existence in Kano and other conflicted zones in Nigeria.

The interfaith pact ushered in form interactions beyond faith in the economic, social and political spheres in the post-insurgency era. In this regard, leaders of both faiths attend seminars and conferences together organized by the state, non-government organizations, civil society groups, advocacy groups and they used the fora to create awareness on the need for interfaith cooperation. The leaders of both faiths working under the platform of Kano Covenant collaborated with the Kano State government, security agencies, Kano traditional institutions, politicians, and community and opinion leaders in resolving critical national security issues. Two major instances that illustrate this are the "Operation Python Dance" military exercise to quell the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) separatist agitation for a Biafran state in Igboland, Southeast Nigeria led to the killing of some agitators. The killing was perceived by Igbos as a "Hausa-Fulani" military occupation and in retaliation, Igbo youths attacked persons of Hausa-Fulani ethnic stock.

The planned reprisal attack by Northern youths on Igbos and other Christians coupled with the orchestrated "Quit Notice" issued to Igbos to leave Northern Nigeria by October 1, 2017, caused great tension across the country (Mosch, 2012; *Vanguard* 2017; Researchers eye witness account: 2017).⁴ The Kano Covenant succeeded in addressing the underlying difference between the two faiths by establishing trust, honesty and commitment of the

⁴ Eyewitness account by the researcher during fieldwork in Kano in October 2017.



religious leaders to build peace in a fractured Kano society that has suffered cycles of ethno-religious conflicts for many years. The intervention of the religious leaders in collaboration with the emirate council, security agencies and other stakeholders forestalled the imminent violent conflict that would have erupted in Kano and other cities in Northern Nigeria. This paper has demonstrated that the peacebuilding strategies of the Kano Covenant were appropriate, effective in the management of violent religious conflicts and contribute to security in Kano.

Conclusion

This study has examined the role of religious leaders towards inter-religious peacebuilding in Kano in the wake of insurgency. Despite the fundamental differences of both faiths, the role of their leaders has a considerable impact on the behaviour of their adherents. The resilience of the religious leaders manifestly stands out in their responses to the challenges of the Boko Haram insurgency. The Kano Covenant interfaith pact was successful in the de-escalation of extremism. It cemented the fissures between the followers of the two faiths and transformed religious extremism into peacebuilding unprecedented in Kano's history. The Boko Haram siege on Kano five days after its formation, although disrupted its activities, failed to upset the nascent inter-faith dialogue. A new form of relationship was established beyond faith in the economic, social and political spheres in the post-insurgency era. The Kano Covenant is a rare phenomenon of inter-faith dialogue and the peacebuilding strategy. Its formation was an appropriate, effective and timely intervention in the management of violent conflicts in Kano. On this note, governments at all levels should integrate the local religious leaders in peacebuilding projects and adopt the peace pact as a template in conflict management especially in Kaduna Jos where previous interfaith dialogues were established, but later failed as well as other conflict-affected areas in Nigeria.

Suggested Policy Recommendations

- I. While religion has the power to be a force for both peace and war, many religious leaders and religious institutions seek to be part of the solutions to conflict.
- II. Peacebuilders must understand the benefits and risks of religious engagements and act promptly to resolve them before escalation into full-blown conflicts.
- III. This novel Kano interfaith peacebuilding should be encouraged by the government at all levels of governance-federal, state and local and the Kano interfaith dialogue should serve as a model for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria and other conflicted regions in Africa.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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