Diversity, religious pluralism, and democracy

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Conclusion
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Introduction

In Chapter 1, this volume began with the admonition that narratives and representations of northern Nigeria's interfaith encounter feed into the real everyday interactions of Muslims, Christians, and other believers and non-believers throughout this region. Breaking through the stylized representation of Christian-Muslim confrontation, the volume's chapters have presented a mosaic of different interfaith encounters: from the constructive accommodation of informal market interactions to the full-blown insurgency of Boko Haram. This concluding chapter highlights three key arguments about northern Nigerian interfaith relations that resonate with the empirical material presented in the preceding analyses. In doing so, it hopes to outline fertile and important avenues for further research, as well as possible entry points for policy approaches.

Firstly, we will reiterate that, since the 1980s, religious confrontations between Muslims and Christians have intensified. The material presented in the various chapters of this volume highlight the religious violence connected to this confrontation, including around the declaration of full Sharia law, Boko Haram, and the series of crises in urban Jos and its hinterland. These developments support the contention by Marshall (2009, 214) that greater religious polarization is resulting from 'competing theocratic projects' in Nigeria. However, the chapters also demonstrate that this polarization, and its recurrent violent confrontations, are not a product of inherent antipathies between the faiths, but of a particular mix of historical, economic, social and, in particular, political processes. These processes can be the target of public policy if there is a will to change the situation.

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Secondly, the argument is made that, despite religious polarization, there may still be common grounds for transcending the zero-sum logic of religious intolerance and engendering traditions of friendly competition, compromise and cooperation. There is nothing inevitable about the violence and fear that have characterized the religious encounter in more recent years and, in fact, most Muslims and Christians live together rather harmoniously. In this vein, Dowd (2015, 96) warns that we should be mindful of the conclusions we draw because while 'religious diversity appears to lead to intense religious competition that results in extremism in Nigeria, it is important to remember that appearances may be deceiving'. He argues that while there is sufficient historical evidence to support the contention that religious diversity in developing and politically unstable settings often gives rise to religious conflict initially, 'there is also evidence to suggest that such diversity eventually leads to the religious compromise and accommodation that are necessary for liberal democracy' (Dowd 2015, 9). This chapter will highlight examples of such accommodation from the preceding chapters and suggest some of the ways in which they may be strengthened.

Finally, we will place northern Nigeria in the wider, global context of interfaith relations. What lessons might we draw from this region's experiences, and what models from outside the region might help to understand, or even improve, its current situation? Specifically, the case of 'Senegalese exceptionalism' is raised as a practical illustration of the type of state-religious and inter-religious dynamics that could serve as a model for Nigeria in the search for a more harmonious relationship between religious groups on the one hand, and between them and the state, on the other.

Confrontation

For decades, northern Nigeria has been a thriving market place for faith and religion. Demand for religion is high, and preachers, scholars, pastors and other leaders compete with each other for a share of the enormous followership this region contains. In a context of state-building, patronage and democratization, this competition has become increasingly confrontational, resulting not only in increasingly polarized rhetoric but also residential segregation and, at times, even interfaith violence. This observation is not new (e.g. Ibrahim 1991); yet at the same time, the dynamics behind the confrontation still require more intensive analysis, particularly as the democratic dispensation appears to be stabilizing. In pursuit of this end, several chapters in this volume have studied cases of interfaith confrontation, from the Sharia riots in the early 2000s (Chapter

5) and Kaduna's religious segregation (Chapter 7) to the more recent violence in Plateau State (Chapters 8, 9 and 10), and the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast (Chapter 6). Taken together, these cases paint a complex and varied picture of Nigeria's religious confrontation.

Throughout this book, it is clear that most of the dynamics, causes and motivations for interfaith violence are highly contingent on local particularities and historical conjunctures. Importantly, this localized character of northern Nigeria's interfaith confrontations belies any single, comprehensive explanation, including one that considers them as part of an alleged global confrontation between the Islamic world and the (Christian) West. Yet, upon closer scrutiny, we may be able to identify subtler, partial explanations that carry across cases. We will use the remainder of this section to highlight three such trends, related to youth and intergenerational dynamics, indigeneship and the looming presence of the state, in the hope that they may suggest avenues for further research and policy interventions.

First, all cases of confrontation underline the importance of youth and intergenerational dynamics. For one, as Higazi (Chapter 9) highlights, youths are often at the forefront of collective violence. This has been true on the Plateau and in Jos, as well as in Boko Haram: violence, in many cases, is predominantly an occupation for the young. Youths are also dominant in vigilante organizations, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force in the north-east or Jos' neighbourhood watch associations. Finally, young people often make up the bulk of religious reform movements, demanding change from the old ways of their parents and grandparents and catalysing interfaith competition. Of course, we do not suggest that young people, or even the youth bulge, are to blame for Nigeria's religious confrontations; rather, our more modest claim is that intergenerational dynamics and the concerns of young Nigerians have to be an integral part of any approach to resolving northern Nigeria's violent confrontations.

Second, all confrontations analysed in this volume are framed in a context of economic decline and increasing competition for access to resources and opportunities. The precise causal connection between economic competition and violent confrontation is varied and complex; yet there is little doubt that the two dynamics interact and feed off each other. Moreover, in all cases economic competition clearly interacts with political concerns over power and domination; it appears that democratization has done little to assuage the perennial intergroup fear of domination that has been a driver of Nigerian politics and state-building ever since independence (Mustapha 2002). In this regard, several chapters refer to Nigeria's Federal Character Principle and the resulting importance of indigeneship as a factor translating economic competition into interfaith, or political, confrontation. It is therefore safe to suggest that throughout

the country, but nowhere more than in Plateau State, indigeneship is intensifying the ethnic or religious nature of the struggle over ownership, control and resources (Chapters 8, 9 and 10; cf. Fourchard 2015; Ehrhardt 2017). Addressing this issue is therefore another access point to further study and possibly to attenuate northern Nigeria's interfaith confrontations.

Third and finally, the importance of the Federal Character and indigeneship suggest the importance of policy and the Nigerian state in understanding interfaith confrontations; and in fact, in all cases of confrontation and violence in this volume, the state looms large. Its role, however, is varied and multifaceted; we highlight three of its roles as a source of formal institutions, as an object of competition, and as an actor in violent confrontations.

First, the state is a source of formal policy and institutions that structure intergroup competition and, at times, intensify confrontation and increase the likelihood of violence. The increasing importance of indigeneship constitutes one example of the impact of state policy on interfaith confrontations; but the most powerful example in this volume is arguably the way in which political and administrative changes shaped conflict in the city of Jos (Chapter 8). Here, institutions and ethnic politicking conspired to fundamentally reshape public perceptions of political and economic opportunities, thus intensifying the 'security dilemma' between Christian 'indigenes' and Muslim 'settlers' and engendering segregation and violence. Formal institutions, written by the state, are thus one aspect of the state's presence in northern Nigeria's interfaith confrontations.

Second, the chapters in this volume have abundantly illustrated the importance of the state as an object of interfaith competition. This is perhaps clearest in the contestation around Sharia implementation in northern Nigeria, as it revolves around the fundamental relationship between religion and the state (Chapter 5). But the state is also at stake in the confrontation in Jos, where ownership over the local government as well as local traditional institutions has become a protracted bone of contention between 'indigenous' Berom and 'settler' Jasawa (Chapter 7).

Third and finally, the state is also an active participant in situations of violent confrontation. Boko Haram is perhaps the most painful example of this role, as the interaction between the Nigerian security forces and Boko Haram has likely been one of the drivers of the particular trajectory of radicalization this movement has experienced (Chapter 6). But the chapters on Plateau State also highlight ways in which the state was implicated in the dynamics of violence, such as the role of Governor Jonah Jang in feeding the interfaith conflicts on the Jos Plateau (Chapter 9).

Beyond direct involvement in violent confrontations, the Nigerian state, whilst not formally declaring itself as secular, generally professes a

neutrality and laissez-faire attitude in religious matters (Soares 2006, 15). This stance has been extremely unsatisfactory from the point of view of securing religious peace. Firstly, it has given wide latitude to religious elites and political entrepreneurs to operate as they wish, with little regard for the rights of others. This is most noticeable by the sheer level of noise pollution coming regularly from mosques and churches, with little effort to regulate them. Secondly, at local government and state levels in religiously homogenous states, it has been possible for the ethos of a particular religion to be imposed as a matter of course, sometimes with little regard for the interests of religious minorities. Thirdly, even at the federal level, the presumed neutrality of the state is frequently compromised by the opportunistic manoeuvring of political elites and the consequent penetration of the state by religious interests. To transcend the religious polarization and violence in Nigeria, it would be necessary, not only to promote inter-religious civic institutions, but also to address the relationship of the Nigerian state to religious forces as a whole.

Compromise, cooperation, and (nonviolent) competition

The sustained scholarly and public focus on interfaith confrontation would appear to suggest that northern Nigeria is in a constant state of contestation and violence between its various religious denominations. Nothing, however, is further from the truth. Most of the time, and in most places, Nigerians with diverging religious convictions live and work together peacefully, even as these (old) patterns of accommodation and cooperation have increasingly come under pressure. In the informal economy, for example, where most Nigerians are forced by circumstances to pursue livelihood strategies, we find ample signs of interfaith collaboration and economic complementarity – even if stresses are beginning to show as cities like Kaduna become more and more spatially segregated along religious lines (Chapter 7).

The chapters in this volume have given many examples of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Ostien, for example, observes a trend among northern Muslims to identify rather ecumenically as 'just-a-Muslim', rather than as affiliated to any specific sect. Moreover, he suggests that popular support for the freedom of conscience and religion is increasing in the region (Chapter 2). Ehrhardt and Ibrahim suggest that cities like Kano have often long-established and effective systems of economic specialization and cooperation between religious groups. They also highlight the existence of more radical forms of interfaith integration in the various all-encompassing syncretistic sects, such as Lagos' Chrislamherb (Chapter 3). The chapters on the Plateau and Boko Haram describe how

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young people, across religious lines and in the face of recurrent violence, organize self-defence (vigilante) groups in an attempt to directly address the violence (Chapters 6, 8, 9 and 10). Finally, and most optimistically, Meagher describes how trust, economic complementarity and religious occupational associations help to maintain collaborative interfaith relations in the informal markets of Kano and Kaduna, even in the face of recurring religious violence and counterproductive liberalization efforts by the state (Chapter 7).

What then, in general, have the authors of these chapters identified as the conditions under which interfaith cooperation in Nigeria is possible? Again, of course: as each case is different, there is no single set of conditions that we suggest universally facilitates interfaith cooperation. Instead, we want to highlight two mechanisms that may be important parts of the puzzle in many parts of the region: first, the importance of informal, non-state institutions and social resources and, second, the importance of inclusive and conflict-sensitive statecraft.

Historically, northern Nigeria has produced a rich tapestry of local and often informal ways of facilitating cooperation, trust and integration between members of different religious and ethnic communities. This tapestry includes a range of what we could call social resources for cooperation: from the informal rules for assimilating 'settlers' into urban spaces and identities to the occupational associations of traders in the informal market and the religious trading and support networks, all are examples of social resources that Nigerians can tap into in order to work together more easily with their compatriots with different religious affiliations. In the period since independence, some of these resources for cooperation have persisted or transformed in northern Nigeria; take, for example, the resurgence and reinvention of traditional authorities as inclusive 'fathers' of their communities, or the reinforced importance of market associations in the era of state retreat and structural adjustment. Some resources, however, withered away under the postcolonial economic and political pressures, such as the rules for urban assimilation and the fluidity of religious affiliations and boundaries. Finally, new forms of social resources for cooperation also arose, for example in the shape of 'modern' non-government organizations working towards interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution (cf. Chapter 10).

Although the nature of these social resources for cooperation is clearly highly diverse, the chapters in this volume suggest that some version of them is often at the heart of successful interfaith accommodation in northern Nigeria. This resonates with recent work by Dowd (2015), who argues that, perhaps counterintuitively, there is a positive relationship between religious diversity and interfaith tolerance. To support his argument, Dowd conducted a survey on religious observation and political attitudes in

November 2006 in four Nigerian cities. The results of the survey showed a correlation between religious diversity and tolerant political attitudes. In the two settings with little inter-religious diversity, Kano and Enugu, Christian and Islamic religious communities promoted voting and political interest, but not respect for religious liberty. In the moderately diverse settings of Jos, religious communities promoted more demanding forms of political activism, but discouraged support for religious liberty. However, in Ibadan, the highly religiously diverse setting, 'Christian and Islamic religious communities had neither a positive nor a negative impact on the indicators of political participation included in the study, but a very positive effect on support for religious liberty' (Dowd 2015, 123).

These results suggest that religious segregation, rather than religious diversity, has inhibited religious tolerance in Nigeria. Furthermore, the survey suggests that in Nigeria, despite the inter-religious violence, religious observance tend to have a positive effect on support for religious liberty among members of all three religious groupings: Muslims, mainline Christians and Pentecostals (Dowd 2015, 119). Finally, Dowd argues that two factors are crucial for explaining the positive effects of religious observance and religious diversity on attitudes of tolerance: '(1) the length of time a setting has been religiously diverse, and (2) the degree to which a setting is religiously integrated' (2015, 125). On this basis, Dowd suggests that how religious diversity is managed, the role of religious institutions and leaders, and the involvement of the populace and civic organizations, are important in halting polarization and promoting integration – an argument that strongly resonates with the findings in this volume.

In addition to informal social resources, however, the management of religious diversity also relies on inclusive and conflict-sensitive forms of governance and statecraft. Religious competition will, for the foreseeable future, remain a fact of life in northern Nigeria. Two of the key things that matter for preventing (violent) confrontation are, on the one hand, the way in which this competition is allowed to interact with other forms of political and economic competition and, on the other, the extent to which religious competition comes to encompass and 'colour' (non-religious) everyday interactions between members of religious groups. Social resources such as informal associations, rules and networks can fulfil part of this task, but all chapters in this volume underline that the state is also an indispensable party to any lasting method of facilitating interfaith accommodation. We have already seen ways in which the Nigerian state has engendered confrontation between religions in the north; but what insights do the chapters give us about the 'best practices' of the Nigerian state in fostering religious cooperation?

Trends in response to this question are still difficult to discern. But the chapters do give evocative examples that hopefully stimulate further

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research in this area. Mustapha et al. (Chapter 10), for example, describe what they call inclusive statecraft in Jos: after years of political partisanship in favour of the 'native' Berom under Governor Jang, his successor Lalong decided to give important several political appointments to 'settler' Jasawa. The Jasawa community, in turn, also moderated their grievance claims against the state and the Berom. Another example, at least in part, may be found in the northern experiments with Sharia implementation (Chapter 5). On the one hand, of course, Sharia has been a bone of interfaith contention and source of political contestation and even violence. But on the other hand, and particularly in the longer run, it might be that this decentralized version of religious law within the context of a federal, multireligious constitution provides an innovative and lasting solution to the competing political claims of Nigeria's various religious groups. While it is too early to evaluate this claim comprehensively, early results from recent field studies[1] suggest that at least in some parts of the north, Sharia institutions are providing relatively good public services to Muslims and Christians alike. If this trend expands and continues, it suggests that Sharia implementation constitutes an institutionalized example of inclusive statecraft that relies on the mechanics of decentralized law-making under the protective umbrella of a strong, multireligious constitution.

Although different in appearance, the examples of Governor Lalong and (tentatively) Sharia implementation are both attempts to channel the political dimension of religious competition peacefully and in a way that is sensitive to the interests of both majority and minority groups in a particular locality. This is what inclusive statecraft means, and while the chapters of this volume give hints about the best practices currently in operation in Nigeria and the conditions under which they are possible, more systematic research in this field would be a welcome addition.

Indigenizing democracy, tolerance and pluralism

While interfaith relations in northern Nigeria are in many ways unique, they have also long been deeply connected to the rest of the world. Christians and Muslims alike are highly aware of the global dynamics between their religions, and issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict, the civil war in Syria, or the migration policies of the United States and Europe are frequent topics of conversation and intense debate throughout the region. Events abroad thus have an impact on interfaith relations within Nigeria, while Nigerian religious dynamics also spread outside its borders.

[1] Papers presented at the validation meeting of the study on 15 years of Sharia implementation in northern Nigeria, held in Abuja on 5-6 September 2016 and organized by the development Research and Project Centre and the Nigeria Research Network.

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Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the Boko Haram insurgency, in which not only the insurgency movement had important foreign links of support and refuge, but Nigeria also relied strongly on the military support of its neighbours (Niger, Chad and Cameroon) in defeating the movement at its peak in 2015 (Chapter 6). This section looks beyond this case of direct military support from abroad and considers some of the lessons on interfaith accommodation that have come out of other countries and regions, to see if there are lessons to be learnt from comparison with the Nigerian situation. We will consider, first, the literature on civic associations and interethnic relations and, second, the remarkable example of religious tolerance and pluralism in the Senegalese state.

Earlier in this chapter, we have argued that local social resources (institutions, networks, organizations) are often crucial to successful interfaith accommodation. These findings resonate with studies on India by Varshney (2001) which suggest that religious pluralism can be associated with peace rather than conflict, provided there are civic (and preferably inter-religious) organizations in civil society to manage tensions. In the related context of contentious politics in Bosnia, Armakolas (2011) makes a similar point about the importance of inter-ethnic and inter-religious networks in mitigating extremist religious mobilization in the city of Tuzla. He also highlights the role of formal institutions such as the police force and local government in supporting inter-ethnic organizations in the face of extremist pressures. At the same time, however, he argues that

> associational civic links are significant for opposing extremism: yet, the sustainability and success of the opposition depends crucially on the ability of the political system to 'distance' itself from the extremist influence. Grassroots activism may prove futile if the 'battle' for the political system is lost. (Armakolas 2011, 29)

This last point raises the important question of the nature of state institutions in Nigeria at the local, state and federal levels. More specifically, it raises the question of whether local non-state resources are sufficient to facilitate religious accommodation in the absence of the other crucial ingredient: inclusive statecraft.

In many ways unlike Nigeria, Senegal represents a successful case of the indigenization and vernacularization of democracy, religious tolerance, and pluralism within the state. This has ensured social harmony and political stability in an African environment, usually identified with military coups, civil wars and ethnic conflicts (Diouf 2013, 4). Since the colonial period, the history of state-Islam relations in Senegal was characterized by tensions, confrontations and cooperation within the Muslim groups and between the Muslim groups and the state. Yet, despite these,

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the system of peaceful collaboration between the religious groups and the state not only emerged, but has also been durable. At the core of this system of exchange between religious groups and between them and the state, is an implicit 'social contract' binding all the elements of the system together. The reciprocal interactions between the state, religious elites, and religious society has resulted in a socio-political system 'in which Islamic institutions have been central but have coexisted with a nominally secular state and have made no significant challenge for the control of the state' (Diouf 2013, 7).

Though the Senegalese state has not been able to develop a transformative agenda for its society, politically, the state 'at least was not a political artefact, working in a void, without effective links with society at large' (Diouf 2013, 6). Senegal has managed not only to root its state in society, but also to inculcate mutual respect between Sufi groups, and between Muslims and Christians. The level of social tolerance has become so entrenched that in city of Popenguine, Catholics and Sufi disciples help build one another's mosques and churches (Diouf 2013, 2). While Babou (2013) point out some of the limits of the Senegalese 'social contract', there is no doubt that Senegalese 'exceptionalism' has managed to root the state in society, and in the process, generate the basis for tolerance, democracy and respect for pluralism. This engagement between the state, religious leaders and religious civil society has resulted in the coproduction of a state characterized by

> the respect of the autonomy of discursive space of each of the partners – a space in which they act jointly or separately in the execution of administrative tasks; the guidelines regulating their interactions; and the public display of their signs, images, language, and identity. (Diouf 2013, 10)

How Nigeria can transform from its nominal but illusory religious 'neutrality', to an embedded but autonomous actor able to tap into the religious sentiments and organizations in the country to create a respect for diversity and pluralism, remains a critical challenge. At the heart of that challenge is the fractious nature of elite politics in Nigeria and the huge temptation of resorting to ethnic and religious mobilization for political advantage. This book has aimed to make a humble contribution to addressing this challenge by bringing together detailed empirical studies of the workings of interfaith relations in northern Nigeria, in the hope that this will bring new insights and direct popular, scholarly and policy interest in the direction of Nigeria's key challenges. But more work remains to be done.

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