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The Impact of Religion on Interreligious Peace: Evidence from Zones of Peace in Abuja, Nigeria

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PhD
The University of Edinburgh
2021
This thesis argues that religion impacts peace between members of different religious groups, but it is at times not in the manner that some religious leaders and some of those who favourably comment on religious peacebuilding hold. It makes this argument based on primary data collected in Abuja, north-central Nigeria and evidence collected from the academic literature on religion, peace and conflict in northern Nigeria and other areas. Rather than take the common path of evaluating the role of religious peacebuilding in conflict or post-conflict settings, the research explores lessons that could be derived from “zones of peace.” This term is used in the study to refer to religiously mixed communities where violent interreligious conflicts have not occurred. While conflict-affected parts of northern Nigeria have been studied by several researchers, relatively peaceful areas in the region have received less empirical attention. One such area is Abuja, which has a unique identity as the capital of a heterogeneous Nigeria. Hence, this research aimed to explore the impact of three interrelated religious factors on the relative peace existing in the territory and draw on academic literature to interpret the findings and contribute to the fields of religious peacebuilding, interreligious relations, and Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria. The factors are religious leaders, religious peace norms, and religious peace activism.

Guided by an interpretive paradigm and adopting a case study design, the author conducted fieldwork in Abuja from January to August 2019. The study discovered that religion matters to lay Christians and Muslims in Abuja in a variety of ways, for example, as a source of strength amidst life’s challenges and as a marker of identity that helps to define oneself and the other. Within this context of religiosity, various forms of religious peacebuilding, which are supposedly motivated primarily by religious peace norms, take place. This suggests that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism have helped to sustain the relative peace in Abuja. However, while various kinds of religious peacebuilding take place in the area, and while there is a common perception among religious leaders that religion is a crucial
source of the relative peace in the territory, interviews with lay Christians and Muslims there show that these religious factors (leaders, norms and activism) are rarely at the centre of their choice or decision to have peaceful attitudes towards religious others, despite the interreligious divides existing in the territory. Instead, it was self-protection, concern for family, a desire for survival and progress, and the prevention of the harmful consequences of physical violence. These practical issues often matter strongly to believers, sometimes more than religious differences or the religious peacebuilding that responds to them. The study also discovered that interreligious dialogue between top-level Christian and Muslim religious leaders in Abuja, which is one of the methods of religious peacebuilding being carried out in the territory, seems to have a limited impact on the peace that exists on the ground. Furthermore, the research showed how the interreligious peace in the area partially depends on factors that are primarily nonreligious, even though they are often interwoven with religion. These include Abuja’s demographics, governance, and policing. These findings serve as the major basis of the above-stated argument of the thesis. While showing the relevance of religion in the dynamics of interreligious peace, the study highlights the importance of believers’ practical interests in these dynamics.
LAY SUMMARY

For some persons, following religious traditions is not good for our society. This is partly because, for them, having religious beliefs is not compatible with rational thought. These observers are troubled by how people, who are supposedly motivated by religious beliefs, have harmed adherents of religious traditions that are different from theirs. However, another group of people interested in religion have drawn our attention to the constructive roles that such beliefs and practices have played and can continue to play, even as they might have caused some negative events. Many of their books and articles present accounts of the various ways religious leaders, religious ideas, and religious projects have helped to cultivate peace in various societies.

Although these studies have been very illuminating, there are still questions about how much peace these religious factors provide. This research aimed to understand the situation in a geographical area in Nigeria and then derive lessons from it regarding the issue of religion’s impact on peace between members of different religious groups. Nigeria consists of over 180 million people, including millions of Christians and Muslims. In the northern part of the country, there have been cases of violent conflict between Christians and Muslims. As several studies have been done on these conflicts or the places where they occurred, this research chose to study areas where such conflicts have not taken place. It believes that more lessons can be drawn from those contexts regarding religion and other factors that lead to peace or conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and other countries. This is partly why it focused on understanding the situation in Abuja. Interviews were conducted with religious leaders and lay Christians and Muslims, and the author also observed in several public places, including markets and places of worship.

Through this research in Abuja, the study made useful discoveries regarding the relevance of religious factors in the dynamics of peace between members of different religious groups. It focused on three main religious factors. These are (1) the leaders of religious groups, (2) religious ideas that invite believers to be peaceful, and (3) efforts made by religious persons to
cultivate peace. It called these factors (1) religious leaders, (2) religious peace norms, and (3) religious peace activism. The study discovered that these factors help to build peace in Abuja, but practical issues of getting money, surviving, personal safety, and wellbeing of loved ones are often of paramount importance to members of religious groups in the territory, instead of religious differences, or what the religious books or religious leaders say about peace. The research also discovered that interreligious dialogue between top-level Christian and Muslim religious leaders in the area, which is one of their methods of promoting peace, seems to have a limited impact on relations on the ground. Furthermore, other nonreligious factors that help to make the peace in Abuja possible were discovered. Hence, among other things, the study proposes that religious leaders and organisations that are working to build peace and people writing about interreligious relations and the role of religion in peacebuilding should pay more attention to the practical issues that matter strongly to believers and how they affect their relations with members of other religious groups.
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<td>AMAC:</td>
<td>Abuja Municipal Area Council</td>
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<td>APC:</td>
<td>All Progressives Congress</td>
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<td>CBCN:</td>
<td>Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria</td>
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<td>CAN:</td>
<td>Christian Association of Nigeria</td>
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<td>CNG:</td>
<td>Coalition of the Northern Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>COFP:</td>
<td>Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>CVE:</td>
<td>Countering Violent Extremism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSS:</td>
<td>Department of State Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBO:</td>
<td>Faith-Based Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCDA:</td>
<td>Federal Capital Development Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCT:</td>
<td>Federal Capital Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCTA:</td>
<td>Federal Capital Territory Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOMWAN:</td>
<td>Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP:</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<td>IMC:</td>
<td>Interfaith Mediation Centre</td>
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<td>IMN:</td>
<td>Islamic Movement in Nigeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPCR:</td>
<td>Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution</td>
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<td>IPOB:</td>
<td>Indigenous People of Biafra</td>
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<td>ISIS:</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>JNI:</td>
<td>Jama‘atu Nasrî Islâm</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEND:</td>
<td>Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASFAT:</td>
<td>Nasrul-Lahi-L-Fatih Society</td>
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NCA: Northern Christian Association
NCC: Nigeria Communications Commission
NCEF: National Christian Elders Forum
NIREC: Nigeria Interreligious Council
NPF: Nigeria Police Force
NSCIA: Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs
NTA: Nigeria Television Authority
OIC: Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, formerly Organisation of Islamic Conference
PVC: Permanent Voter’s Card
RfP: Religions for Peace
RfP-M: Religions for Peace Myanmar
RSP: Religion State Policy
UN: United Nations
USA: United States of America
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MAP OF CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

Accessed on 31 October 2020 from

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Structure of the chapter

In this opening chapter, I introduce this study by (a) summarising its background, primary questions, scope, and major argument, (b) presenting a brief overview of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria, (c) explaining why Abuja was selected as a case-study, and (e) describing the methodology that was adopted for the study. Also, in sections 1.2 and 1.3, I clarify how major concepts, especially “zones of peace” and “religion”, are used in the thesis. The chapter closes with a concluding segment that summarises its content and briefly introduces chapter 2.

1.2. Introducing the research

For one group of commentators, religion is primarily bad and has caused a great amount of harm to humanity. Western critics such as Dawkins (2006), Harris (2004, 2006) and Hitchens (2007) would simply prefer a world devoid of religious faith, where “reason” leads. The very title of Hitchens’ (2007) book is “God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything.” While not necessarily rejecting religion, another group of commentators hold that it has been, or can be, a cause of physical violence. In many of their texts, the problem of religion and violence is discussed in detail. For example, holding that religion has been intertwined with violence in human history, Lefebure (2000:13) explains that “violence, clothed in religious garb, has repeatedly cast a spell over religion and culture, luring countless ‘decent’ people – from unlettered peasants to learned priests, preachers, and professors – into its
destructive dance.” Hick (1989:371) has also noted that “the evils of colonialism, the destruction of indigenous civilizations, anti-Semitism, destructive wars of religion and the burnings of heretics and witches” have been partially caused by “the dogma of the deity of Christ – in conjunction with the aggressive and predatory aspect of human nature.” Furthermore, Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” argument has helped to spread the idea that religion is a cause of violence. Concerned with what would be the nature of international politics after the Cold War, the Harvard professor of international relations had argued in 1993 that the main cause of conflicts in the future “will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic,” but rather cultural (Huntington, 1993: 22). According to him,

> the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural…the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (Huntington, 1993: 22).

Importantly marked by religious identity, these civilisations “include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization” (Huntington, 1993: 25). For him, religious difference is “possibly the most profound difference that can exist between people” (Huntington, 2002:254). In his assessment of religion and conflict in Africa, Møller (2006:6) argues that there has been no “significant correlation between conflict propensity or terrorism and religion” in the area, but still asserts that “religious elements have been present in many of Africa’s conflicts ever since pre-colonial times” and “since independence, religion has also played a role in various armed conflicts” that have occurred on the continent.
Many other works on Africa highlight the idea that religion has been a cause of violence in the area (e.g., Abbink, 2020; Basedau and de Juan, 2008; Sulaiman, 2016; Basedau, 2017) and several texts present broader explorations of religion’s role in the causation of violence (e.g., McTernan, 2003; Stern, 2003; Nelson-Pallmeyer, 2003; Juergensmeyer, 2017). While arguments about the concept of religious violence remain (Cavanaugh, 2009; Hodge, et.al. 2017), the idea that religion is a cause of violence is widely present and continues to influence people’s thinking and actions.

In response to the notion that religion causes violence, many researchers have drawn our attention to the constructive side of religion, explaining that whereas there have been harmful uses of religion, religious actors and religious belief can have, and have had, positive impacts in societies. They describe how religion helps in development, the fight against diseases and poverty, and the prevention or resolution of violent conflict. In this group are several researchers that have written about religious peacebuilding, some of whom are identified in chapter 2. They have documented evidence of religious peacebuilding in various divided societies (e.g., Little, 2007; Dubensky, 2016) and show, therefore, that religious peacebuilders have helped, and can help, to promote peace in several conflict and post-conflict areas.

However, as the research highlighting the importance of religion in peacebuilding develops, scholars call for critical studies of religious peacebuilding that transcend various degrees of romanticism. For example, as explained in chapter 2, Omer (2015) has invited researchers to conduct studies
that go beyond what she regards as the exotic, the good, and the theatrical aspects of religious peacebuilding. While previous studies on religious peacebuilding show that religious factors help to cultivate peace, questions remain about how much peace they produce, especially in religiously mixed areas. As the next chapter shows, many researchers on religious peacebuilding have been concerned with these questions. This study aims to contribute to the theory of religious peacebuilding by thinking about the impact of religious leaders, religious peace norms, and religious peace activism on the level of peace that might exist between members of different religious groups. The research is framed by the work on religious peacebuilding, which I review in the next chapter and discuss further in subsequent chapters.

As mentioned above, many studies that explore religious peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict settings suggest that religious factors help, or can help, to promote peace. One other way to understand the impact of religion on peace between religiously different groups is to examine the situation in “zones of peace.” I use the term “zones of peace” to refer to areas which are religiously mixed and where there have been no cases of violent interreligious conflict. We know that “conflict may well be inherently human, but it need not be understood as inherently negative. Conflict is normal, and it occurs regularly in the ordinary negotiation and re-calibration of human relationships” (Hawksley and Mitchell, 2020:2). In fact, “conflict is not just unavoidable, but necessary if communities and individuals desire change, development or growth” (Hawksley and Mitchell, 2020:3). Hence, by interreligious conflict, I mean violent confrontations between members of different religious groups,
mainly due to religious or non-religious reasons. In the context of this study, it refers to cases where the parties are Christians and Muslims. This understanding is taken from the conceptualisation of religious conflict as “one in which the primary issue between the parties is a religious issue” or where “the parties have differing religious identities” (Pearce, 2006:45). Students of religious peacebuilding and interreligious relations, especially in the context of northern Nigeria, have placed too much focus on areas of violence. To assess what factors contribute to peace requires an exploration of areas where conflict is limited. Therefore, as a departure from the large number of studies primarily concerned with conflict or post-conflict areas, I use zones of peace as part of my central foundation in this research, by focusing on what nonviolent interreligious relations in those contexts reveal about the importance of religion in interreligious relations.

Regarding Africa, the concept of “zone of peace” has been used by other researchers, including Kacowicz (1998), Thies (2010), and Brosché and Hognuld (2017). However, many of them do so in terms of national politics or interstate relations within the continent. For example, a project by Johan Brosché and Kristine Hognuld, which commenced in 2014, examines the reasons for the relative peace - specifically marked by the absence of civil wars - in Botswana, Malawi, and Zambia since they gained their independence, despite their being located in a continent that is often called the world’s most conflict-affected region since the mid-20th century and also being surrounded by conflict-plagued neighbours. These countries, according to the project, are “zones of peace” in Southern Africa (Brosché and Hognuld, 2017). Duffy
(1997:199), on the other hand, uses “civic zones of peace” to refer to areas in the US where there are memorials of peace that serve as “distinct sites for proclaiming peace.” And still, other studies use the concept to refer to either “bottom-up” or “outsider-in” constructed peaceful areas during major civil wars. For example, Mitchell and Nan (1997) argue that while the bottom-up areas are made possible by local grassroots efforts and actors, the latter result largely from the work of foreign political actors such as the UN.

In this study, I use the term to refer to parts of northern Nigeria where Christian-Muslim violence has not occurred, especially since May 1999, when Nigeria’s fourth republic commenced. They are religiously diverse, with large numbers of Christians and Muslims residing in them, but violent conflicts involving Christians and Muslims have not taken place within them, even though such conflicts have occurred in some other religiously mixed parts of the north in recent years, as section 1.4 explains. In this sense, zones of peace are defined primarily by the absence of violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims, and not the presence of other aspects of peace. I use Basedau, Pfeiffer and Vullers’s (2016:228) straightforward definition of religious diversity as “a constellation wherein several religious groups are simultaneously present in a given society,” without concern for the “quality of the relationships existing between these groups.” So, zones of peace may have only a “partial peace” (Högnuld and Söderberg, 2010), where the absence of violence between Christians and Muslims coexists with forms of non-peace, for example, as described in chapter 3. Connected to zone of peace, I use “interreligious peace” to refer to a negative type of peace between Christians
and Muslims or members of different religious groups that is primarily marked by the absence of violent interreligious conflict. I also use “partial interreligious peace” and “relative interreligious peace” to refer to this dependent variable. It, therefore, does not include more positive aspects of peace that contain more than simply the absence of physical violence between Christians and Muslims.

Regarding northern Nigeria, which is the primary area of interest in this thesis, studies on zones of peace exist, but they mostly do not involve a detailed consideration of the impact of religion on the relative peace existing between Christians and Muslims in the areas they explore. This is explained in more detail in chapter 2. A large part of the academic literature on Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria includes (a) histories of Christian and Islamic presence in the country, (b) studies of the nature and growth of what could be called Nigerian Islam and Nigerian Christianity, examples being Nigerian Pentecostalism and indigenous Islamic groups and practices, and (c) empirical investigations on conflicts involving Christians and Muslims in the northern area of the country or the places where these conflicts occurred. Furthermore, there has been a strong focus on Christian-Muslim violence in northern Nigeria, and less empirical attention has been given to relatively peaceful areas. Some other studies (a) examine the factors that shape interreligious coexistence in the Yoruba-speaking south-west geopolitical zone, and (b) present theological thoughts in favour of peace between Christians and Muslims in the country. Most of these studies, undoubtedly, have helped to increase our understanding of the conflictual and peaceful relationships between groups and individuals with different religious, ethnic, and cultural
identities in Nigeria. Nonetheless, it is useful to note that largely understudied are religiously mixed parts of northern Nigeria where there seems to have been relative peace between Christians and Muslims.

It seems that these relatively peaceful areas are often perceived by researchers to be “peaceful”, and therefore to not require any major investigation regarding Christian-Muslim relations, conflict, and peace, or perhaps to not require as much attention as those parts of northern Nigeria, such as Kaduna and Plateau, where violent religion-related conflicts have occurred. However, all that should be known about the conflict and the peace that exist between Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria cannot be drawn only from the conflict-affected areas. Due to the higher empirical attention on conflicts, the peace narratives seem to have been overridden by accounts of violence, for example, in the foreign media and in academic studies of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria.

This work holds that zones of peace in northern Nigeria could offer useful insights into Christian-Muslim relations in the region, which have been conflictual in parts of the area. Among other things, they could help to explain the factors that enable Christians and Muslims to share a certain geographical space without violence. With this view about the importance of studying peaceful areas, the study responds to (a) debates about whether the study of peace and the study of violence are identical, and (b) the notion that the discipline studying these issues should be “peace or conflict”, instead of “peace and conflict studies” (Gledhill and Bright, 2019:1-2). Its position is that the study of peace and the study of conflict are complementary. Although both
are interested in the promotion of a peaceful world, physical violence and its absence can be separate targets of inquiry. Whereas we must study violent interreligious conflict or where it occurred to understand its causes, the study of religiously diverse contexts that are relatively peaceful can reveal more about what “peaceful” interreligious relations might mean and how to achieve peace in religiously mixed settings. Through zones of peace, more could be learnt about the extent to which religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism – which are all interrelated – impact interreligious relations. It agrees with Nolte and Ogen (2017a:3) that “while religious conflict in Africa deserves attention, it is equally important to study those contexts where different groups live with each other without resorting to large-scale violence.” Although examining cases of violent Christian-Muslim conflict remains a useful source of knowledge on their causes and how they can be prevented, “only a study of successful Muslim-Christian coexistence can show the limits of existing approaches that understand religious difference as problematic, and thus illustrate the possibilities for further reflection and theorising” (Nolte and Ogen, 2017a:3). For this and other reasons that are explained in the subsequent sections of this chapter, Abuja, which is part of north-central Nigeria, was selected as a case study for this research. Specifically, the research focused on Wuse and Utako districts in the municipal area council. This selection is explained in more detail in sections 1.5 and 1.6. The research will be adding to the few existing studies on relatively peaceful areas in northern Nigeria, most of which are reviewed in the next chapter.
I aim to address one major question in this study: What do zones of peace in Abuja demonstrate about the impact of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism on the level of peace that might exist between members of different religious communities living in an area? By examining this issue, the study will be contributing to the research on interreligious relations, religious peacebuilding, peace studies, Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria, and peace in Nigeria. Also, the research will be useful to religious peacebuilders and other people or organisations interested in peace-promotion in northern Nigeria and other religiously mixed societies. Based on the fieldwork that I conducted in Abuja in 2019, and the academic literature on religious peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict contexts, the thesis argues that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism impact on peace between members of different religious groups, but it is at times not in the way that some religious leaders and some of those who favourably comment on religious peacebuilding claim. The following five paragraphs provide more details about this argument.

The fieldwork in Abuja revealed that religion matters to laypeople there in a variety of ways, for example, as a source of strength amidst life’s challenges and as a marker of identity that helps to define oneself and the other. Mosques and churches were present in many parts of Wuse and Utako districts, and they were well-attended by Abuja residents for worship on Fridays and Sundays. In fact, several churches conducted more than one service on Sundays in order to accommodate the multitude of worshippers.
Therefore, in the sense that the majority of those residing there have an affiliation with Christianity or Islam, they could be regarded as religious.

Partly because of this existing religiosity, there is a perception among the Muslim and Christian religious leaders in Abuja, who were interviewed in this research, that religious leaders strongly influence the actions and decisions of lay Christians and Muslims in the territory. Specifically, they hold that the relative interreligious peace in Abuja strongly emerges from the forms of religious peacebuilding that are described in the third chapter of this thesis. In fact, for some of the interviewed imams, peace cannot be achieved in northern Nigeria without the significant involvement of religious leaders in peacebuilding, and that is why they should be engaged more by Nigerian authorities in the efforts to build peace in the region (e.g., MRL6, 10 June; MRL4, 22 March; MRL5, 10 May). A Christian clergyman strongly attributed the relative peace in Abuja to “Men of Peace”, who, according to him, are religious leaders constantly making efforts to unite Christians and Muslims in Abuja and the entire northern region (Bishop CRL5, 14 March). Although they did not use the term “Men of Peace,” a similar point was made by Archbishop CRL8 on 10 May and Fr Professor CRL9 on 20 May, both of whom could be rightly regarded as religious peacebuilders in the territory. Reflecting the widespread idea that Nigerians are very religious, another participant, who is a director at the IPCR, thought that “Nigeria is a very religious country, and so if you have the religious leaders in your pocket, you are sure that you will have the whole citizenry, because when the leaders cough, the followers listen” (CLP22, 18 May). Furthermore, an imam held that “religious leaders are the
closest to the common man. So, the religious leaders play a very important role by speaking to the people on how to conduct themselves” (MRL4, 22 March). Hence, the common notion was that, because people are very religious, there is a religious divide between Christians and Muslims on the ground, and religious peacebuilding is crucial for the sustenance of interreligious peace. This notion is also ever present in the academic literature on Christian-Muslim relations and religious peacebuilding in northern Nigeria.

Influenced by this understanding, religious leaders promote peace between Christians and Muslims in Abuja in various ways. I have categorised these in chapter 3 as:

(a) Indirect peacebuilding in places of worship.

(b) Symbolic religious peacebuilding, for example, through their language and how they relate with the leaders of other religious groups.

(c) Direct religious peacebuilding, for instance, using interreligious dialogue.

(d) Urgent response amidst danger, for example, by intervening in disputes to prevent escalation.

Furthermore, during the interviews in Abuja, religious leaders mostly held that religious peace norms, which I describe further in section 1.3 and chapters 2 and 4, motivate peaceful attitudes towards religious others in the territory, by motivating religious leaders to build peace and by motivating laypersons to behave peacefully towards the religious other. This idea is equally present in the existing literature on religion, conflict, and peace, such as Cherian (2019:100), Haynes (2009:54) and Hoffmann et al (2019). In sum, the
presence of the above-outlined efforts in the area and the influence of religious peace norms on them suggest that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism have helped, and help, to sustain the relative peace there. In other words, this research on Abuja corroborates accounts of religious contributions to peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict contexts, which are discussed further in subsequent chapters of this work, especially 2 and 7.

However, interviews with lay Christians and Muslims in Abuja show that religious factors are rarely at the centre of their choice or decision to have peaceful attitudes towards religious others, despite the interreligious divides existing in the territory. There is a common perception among religious leaders that there are religious divides on the ground and religious peacebuilding is meant to be a crucial source of peace in Abuja and northern Nigeria. Yet, this study discovered that while these views were present, and while various forms of religious peacebuilding were taking place in Abuja, in a way that suggests that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to cultivate peace there, these religious issues (leaders, norms, and activism) were often not as important to ordinary persons as religious leaders suggested. It was practical issues, including self-protection, concern for family, the desire for survival and progress, and the wish to not experience the harmful consequences of physical violence, that mattered most to people. In other words, it was mainly practical considerations, rather than religious ones, that have motivated the lay Christians and Muslims that were interviewed in this study to reject violence and adopt peaceful attitudes towards religious others.
The research also discovered that interreligious dialogue between top-level Christian and Muslim religious leaders in the area, which is one of the methods of religious peacebuilding taking place there, seems to have a limited impact on Christian-Muslim relations on the ground. Furthermore, the study shows how the interreligious peace in Abuja partially depends on factors that are primarily nonreligious, even though they are often interwoven with religion. These include Abuja’s demographics, governance, and policing. Generally, these findings demonstrate the complexity that characterises interreligious peace in Abuja, which should be recognised by religious peacebuilders in the territory, religious peacebuilders in northern Nigeria, and researchers interested in Christian-Muslim relations in the region. That said, it is important to make the following four clarifications.

(a) This study does not intend to imply that religious leaders in Abuja are simplistic persons who do not recognise that interreligious peace results from multiple factors. Such an argument will be misleading, because the religious leaders that were interviewed in the research did not regard religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism as the only reasons why Abuja is relatively peaceful. Chapter 6 of the thesis shows that they recognised the importance of other factors, such as governance and demographics, in Abuja’s peace dynamics.

(b) Also, the point here is not that researchers who highlight the important contributions of religion to peacebuilding in northern Nigeria and other areas claim that religion produces peace on its own. Among other
sections of this thesis, Chapters 6 and 7 show that scholars have acknowledged the complexity that characterises peace and this work aligns with their studies.

(c) Furthermore, this research is not arguing that religious divides generally do not exist between members of different religious groups in Abuja or other religiously mixed contexts. The third chapter of the thesis shows that differences exist between Christians and Muslims in Abuja, and the work recognises that the divides might even be worse in some other contexts.

(d) Finally, this study does not intend to suggest that religious peacebuilding is not useful. The thesis describes the contributions of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism to the relative peace existing in Abuja and it draws on academic literature to present evidence of religious contributions to peace in other settings. In fact, part of its main arguments is that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism have helped to sustain the relative interreligious peace existing in Abuja. It seems that without the efforts being made by religious leaders to promote peace between Christians and Muslims in the territory, there would be more opportunities for the emergence of violent interreligious conflicts. This is shown by chapter 4, and the study’s argument that religion helps to sustain peace between members of different religious communities is discussed further in chapter 7.
Rather than the above-stated points, the issue in this work is that the impact of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism on ordinary believers and how they relate with religious others is sometimes not as much as is suggested by religious leaders and others who comment on the importance of religious peacebuilding. Abuja suggests that religion is at times overestimated as a problem and a solution in Nigeria. The thesis explains that

(a) interreligious peace results from a complex web of factors, and central components of this complex system are believers themselves and their practical interests, for example, in their own wellbeing and that of their loved ones;

(b) the religious divide between Christians and Muslims is sometimes overestimated;

(c) the views of religious leaders about the importance of religion in interreligious relations at times differ from those of laypersons; and

(d) interreligious dialogue between top-level religious leaders sometimes has little impact on what happens between believers on the ground.

While religious differences exist on the ground, they are sometimes not as divisive as they are perceived or projected to be. Christians and Muslims navigate the differences daily in Abuja without physical violence. Also, while religious leaders draw on their religious traditions to promote peace between members of different religious groups, ordinary believers do not often think about theological justifications for their adoption of peaceful attitudes. Religious leaders who make efforts to build peace at times do not recognise the significance of the above-mentioned practical issues for believers and how
they affect the religious divides that exist on the ground. It is also uncommon to read about the centrality of these issues in works on Christian-Muslim relations and religious peacebuilding in northern Nigeria. The lack of attention on the importance of these factors in northern Nigeria and other religiously diverse areas impairs our understanding of Christian-Muslim and interreligious encounters in those areas.

Apparently, several factors have helped to generate or strengthen the assumption that religion is always strongly important in interreligious relations. Among them are the strong Christian and Islamic presence in Nigeria and Africa, the occurrence of interreligious conflicts in northern Nigeria and other parts of the global South, and the occurrence of religion-related terror attacks in the West, which suggest that there is indeed a clear clash of Christian and Islamic civilisations. However, Abuja shows that the lives of laypersons and interreligious encounters on the ground sometimes do not reflect this assumption or the amount of importance that is often attached to religion, either as a source of divides or a source of peace. Abuja demonstrates the complexity that characterises the peace that might exist between Christians and Muslims or members of different religious groups.

The subsequent chapters of this work, except the next one where the relevant literature is reviewed, are detailed descriptions of these points. First, I use chapter 3 to present fieldwork findings regarding how religion functions as an identity marker in Abuja. As mentioned earlier, the fieldwork showed that residents of Abuja, especially in the communities of the Abuja Municipal Area Council where the study took place, are religious, particularly in the sense that
they mostly have an affiliation with Islam or Christianity and they utilise their religious beliefs as they navigate life’s processes. The study discovered that although there are cases of interreligious cooperation that might suggest that there are no divides between Christians and Muslims in the territory, religious identity is implicated in a variety of suspicions there. Within this context of religiosity, various forms of religious peacebuilding take place in the area. These are discussed in chapter 4 under five categories that are not mutually exclusive, comprising indirect peacebuilding in religious spaces, symbolic religious peacebuilding, direct religious peacebuilding, urgent response amidst danger, and the role of religious peace norms. Given that the existing divides between Christians and Muslims in Abuja have not turned into violent interreligious conflicts, and there are various forms of religious peacebuilding taking place in the territory, it seems that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism have helped to sustain interreligious peace in the area. This idea is consistent with views about religion being a source of peace in Johnston and Sampson (1994), Appleby (2000), Johnstone and Svensson (2013), Haynes (2007), Little (2007), Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009), and Gopin (2000). However, although religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism seem to have some impact on the relative interreligious peace existing in Abuja, the dynamics of interreligious peace in the area are quite broad. In chapter 5, I draw on fieldwork findings to highlight the importance of practical issues in the dynamics of interreligious peace in Abuja. Interviews with lay Christians and Muslims in Abuja showed that, rather than religion, the factors that often
primarily define their peaceful attitudes towards religious others are self-protection, concern for family, the desire for personal survival and progress, and the wish to not experience the harm that accompanies physical violence. Whereas religious leaders did carry out peace activities in various ways, laypeople mostly had not encountered these religious leaders or their peace work, and the reality was that laypeople did not need to be spoken to about the need for interreligious peace before they could abstain from the use of violence. In the same chapter, I also present findings on the limitations of interreligious dialogue in Abuja, which is employed by religious leaders to cultivate peace in the area. These findings challenge the common perception among religious leaders that religion strongly impacts on interreligious peace in the territory. In chapter 6, I highlight the fact that there are other important factors upon which the relative peace in Abuja partially depends. These include (a) the diverse ethnoreligious composition of the territory, which makes it “no person’s land,” unlike some other parts of northern Nigeria where Muslims and Christians often compete for dominance, (b) inclusive policies of the government that arguably have led to the absence of violence-causing religious grievances, (c) policing, aided by good infrastructure, and (d) community leaders. Although these other factors are often intertwined with religious agency, they are not primarily religious factors. Hence, they demonstrate how the relative peace in Abuja partially depends on issues beyond religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism. In sum, chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate the complex processes that sustain the partial interreligious peace in Abuja.
With these major findings presented in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, I use the seventh chapter to discuss the key points of the thesis. The chapter uses fieldwork findings and the academic literature on religion, conflict, and peace to discuss the major arguments of the study and their implications for interreligious peace. In other words, in response to the major question of the research, the chapter identifies and discusses the major lessons that could be drawn from Abuja for interreligious peace in northern Nigeria, and for the study of religious peacebuilding, Christian-Muslim relations and interreligious relations. This is followed by the final chapter, where I do three major things. First, I try to consider how Abuja compares to other areas in Nigeria and then think about how the findings from Abuja should be interpreted in the light of the realities outside Abuja. Through the consideration of relevant academic literature and events in northern Nigeria and other parts of the country, the chapter shows that there are cases where religious leaders and other religious factors seem to have had a stronger impact on peaceful or conflictual relations between Christians and Muslims than they have had in Abuja. However, rather than undermining this study’s findings on Abuja, the chapter argues that the difference between the Abuja case and the other settings demonstrates that there are variations in the impact of religion on interreligious peace. Hence, efforts to understand (a) how much religion matters in interreligious relations, or (b) how it should be dealt with in a religiously diverse setting, should take into consideration the fact that components of what is often regarded as religion matter in different degrees, and therefore may be best managed in different manners. But even at that, the chapter highlights the fact that Abuja’s
unique identity in Nigeria qualifies it as a useful example for the rest of northern Nigeria, the country, and other religiously diverse areas. Hence, while one-size-fits-all models for Christian-Muslim and interreligious relations should not be adopted in peacebuilding, Abuja’s lessons for interreligious peace should be utilised for increased peace in northern Nigeria and other religiously mixed societies. This discussion in chapter 8 is followed by the conclusion of the thesis and suggestions for further research. Before I proceed to the current chapter’s section on Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria, I shall explain how the concept of religion is used in this research.

1.3. The concept of religion

In discourses about religion, it has become common to remark that the debate over what constitutes it remains unresolved and there is no universally accepted definition of the term. Kunin and Miles-Watson (2006:3-7) have categorised existing definitions of religion into three major types. These are essentialist, substantialist, and functionalist definitions. Focusing on the essence of religion, which gives it its “essential nature”, the essentialist approach tends to “focus on religion as arising from some unique and essential aspect of the human being or human experience”, examples being “the experience of some transcendental other” or even “some aspect of human psychology or the biological structure of the brain” (Kunin and Miles-Watson, 2006:3). Substantialist definitions focus on the elements of the object of study as its defining feature, while functionalist approaches are primarily concerned with the role played by the object either for the society or the individual concerned (Kunin and Miles-Watson, 2006:4-6). Some other scholars, who
favour a constructionist approach, argue that a proper understanding of the concept requires a historical method that traces its evolution. For example, Hanegraaff (2016:578) holds that “the problematic nature of ‘religion’ cannot be resolved unless we approach it from a perspective that closely integrates theoretical with historical analysis.” Smith (1978:19ff), Nongbri (2013:26ff) and Cavanaugh (2009, 2011) have discussed how the Latin term religio, from which religion is believed to have originally emerged, was not used as the modern concept of religion centuries ago. According to Nongbri (2013:26), religio “had a variety of meanings in antiquity and…none of those corresponds to the modern notion of religion or delineates ‘religious’ from ‘secular.’” The same thing applies to some terms in other languages that currently may be translated as “religion”, including the Greek word thrēskeía and the Arabic term dīn (Nongbri, 2013:34-45). The idea that religion is a transcultural and transhistorical aspect of human life that is distinct from other spheres of life, including economics, politics, and science, has also been problematised by Cavanaugh (2009) and Nongbri (2013:85ff), among others. They explain that the notion is only a product of modern Europe, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries, and that the meaning of the term religion has undergone changes over the course of history. These studies problematise the divide between religious and secular and show both the broadness within, and interconnection between, the categories. Also, the concept of religion has been approached as “an imaginative formation” that exists only in the human imagination and as a “discursive formation” that is employed in modern discourse (Hanegraaff, 2016:578). Generally, theories describing the origin and nature of religion have
included theological, phenomenological, anthropological, sociological, and psychological descriptions, and Kunin and Miles-Watson (2006) and Verkamp (1995:1-18) are some of the useful presentations on these responses. The presence of this variety of approaches shows that “there is little agreement either between or within disciplines as to how religion can be defined, understood or explained or indeed whether it should be defined, understood or explained” (Kunin and Miles-Watson, 2006:3). Partly for this reason, scholars have proposed that the term should be dropped (Nongbri, 2013:3; Smith, 1978:17 and 121ff). But on the other hand, Jensen (2014:7) and Saler (2000:x) argue that rather than dropping “religion” or associated terms, and rather than trying to give them “narrow” definitions, they could be continually adopted as analytical tools, because dropping them and other such contested terms in the social sciences would simply render social scientists devoid of useful tools for vital discourses. Saler recommends, however, that users of religion and other such Western concepts should employ them carefully when they describe “the cultures of people who have no word and category for religion” (Saler, 2000:xv).

While this study acknowledges these debates about religion, religious and related terms, they are employed here due to certain considerations, the most important of which is the fact that while the debates continue, practices which have often been regarded as religious continue to exist in different parts of the world, sometimes in ways that are less peaceful and that require academic and other responses. Smith (1978:2) had explained that in the analysis of what religion means, it is important to consider the fact that “there
is the multiplicity of religious traditions. In addition to a myriad of lesser groups, there are on earth not one but at least four or five major religious communities each proclaiming a faith with a long and impressive, even brilliant, past and with the continuing creative allegiance of mighty civilizations.” He adds that although “the problems besetting a satisfactory understanding of religion are increasingly evident”, “religion itself continues, and in many parts of the world appears perhaps to be resurgent” (Smith, 1978:3). Besides, when we recognise that there is a difference between the term “religion” and the “thing” it refers to, it will be easier to acknowledge the importance of dealing with the real-life problems associated with the “thing” on the ground, even as debates remain about how best to refer to it. Jensen (2014:7) explains that “the historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith has repeatedly stressed the philosophical point that ‘map is not territory’: an analogy which should be instructive: the concept of religion is a kind of map of the ‘thing’ religion, that is, all those human activities which we classify as having to do with ‘religion’.” Furthermore, the terms are retained here due to the lack of better tools, given that it is still common to use them in academic discourse. To ensure clarity, however, this section explains how they are employed in the thesis. But before then, a brief look at some of the features of religion that might produce conflictual relations between adherents and non-adherents are highlighted below.

While there is not enough space in this work to present the various definitions that have been proposed for religion, it is important to acknowledge that many of them have highlighted the components of religious systems that
help to categorise adherents to them into groups that are separate from others. For example, one of the oft-cited definitions of religion is the one provided by French sociologist Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, which was originally published in French in 1912. He had defined it as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim, 2001:46, in Jensen, 2014:2). Also, while admitting that it is difficult to give a precise definition of religion because of “the intangible and wide-ranging nature of the topic”, the Australian government concluded, for her decennial census, that “generally, a religion is regarded as a set of beliefs and practices, usually involving acknowledgement of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense” (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 1996). The definition provided by Bruce Lincoln has been regarded by Nongbri (2013:16-17) as relatively sophisticated and as having “many commendable qualities.” For Lincoln (2006:5-7) in Nongbri (2013:17), religion involves:

1. A discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal, and contingent and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status, (2) a set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected, (3) a community whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices, and (4) an institution that regulates religious discourse, practices, and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value.

With this, Lincoln was responding to an earlier definition by Clifford Geertz, which he thought was not broad enough to apply to the existing variety of
religious forms. Geertz had regarded religion as “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz, 1966, in Nongbri, 2013:16-17).

While these definitions have been regarded as inadequate, they are part of the descriptions of the nature of religion that identify the features of religious systems that are relevant to this study. For instance, they highlight the idea that religious systems are made up of beliefs and practices that are related to what those who adhere to them regard as holy or sacred, and that these adherents take a uniform identity, which therefore identifies them as different from those who do not adhere to those beliefs and practices that they accept. With largely distinctive views about the divine and how adherents should conduct their lives under the authority of a divine power or beings, religious systems form communities of adherents that are different from those who do not accept those views. This differentiation is then part of what often combines with other factors to lead to interreligious conflicts, which is the problem this research is concerned with, especially as it relates to Christians and Muslims in the Nigerian context.

This study recognises that despite the debates about religion, Islamic and Christian belief systems and practices are a reality in the contemporary world, just as they have been for centuries. Each of these systems has interrelated components which set them apart from other belief systems. They
include (a) scriptures, (b) views about the universe, (c) views about the creator of the universe and how followers of the belief systems should live under the authority of this creator, and (d) views about salvation, among other things. The difference between these belief systems has affected conflicts, and this study is part of the academic efforts aimed at understanding how to promote peace between these belief systems and their adherents. This research is partly an attempt to pursue increased peace between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria by considering how some components of the belief systems they adhere to influence the peace that might exist between them, and then by making recommendations about how peace actors and students of interreligious relations should think about factors that affect interreligious peace. Given the complexity of these belief systems, the study focuses on three of their components, which are interrelated. These are (a) the individuals who serve as leaders of the adherents, and who are generally regarded as religious leaders, (b) the normative contents of their scriptures which invite their adherents to adopt peace or relate peacefully with people who do not share their beliefs, and which are often called religious peace norms, and (c) the activities of religiously-motivated individuals which are aimed at promoting peace between those who belong to different religious groups, and which are usually referred to as religious peace activism. In other words, the study is particularly interested in how religious leaders, religious peace norms, and religious peace activism affect interreligious peace. When I discuss other components of religion in the thesis, I explain how the term is employed in that section. This is the case in chapter 3 where I discuss religious identity, and
chapter 6 where I use nonreligious as a category of factors influencing interreligious peace in Abuja. That said, it is important to clarify that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism are not used here as mutually exclusive terms. They are strongly connected. For example, I use “religious peace activism” to refer to religious activities aimed at promoting Christian-Muslim peace in Abuja, like sermons by religious leaders, formal interreligious dialogue, and theological discussions on the media aiming to promote peace; similarly, Vullers (2019) uses religious peace activism to refer to the peace-promoting activities of religious groups or religious actors. The fact that religious leaders often are part of this, the fact that religious peace norms may be part of what motivates these peace activities, and the fact that religious leaders’ peace activism usually involves the use of religious peace norms, show that the three variables are interconnected.

Furthermore, it is important to add that the adoption of the terms Christian, Muslim and Christian-Muslim in this study does not mean that it regards Christianity and Islam or the categories Christians and Muslims as monolithic wholes. A variety of Christian and Islamic groups exists in Abuja, and that is equally the case in many other communities within and outside Nigeria. Furthermore, one of the points in chapter 5 is that religious peace norms are contested and people with the same religious identity could disagree on the meaning and uses of a particular norm, or even draw on the same religious tradition to support contradictory activities or behaviours. However, the use of those terms in the thesis is based on the understanding that even with these differences among believers, common beliefs about Jesus
as saviour, and about Muhammad as Allah’s prophet, bind Christians and Muslims, respectively. These identifiers – “Christian” and “Muslim” – are also major religious markers used by Nigerians to refer to religious identity. This was further confirmed during the fieldwork in Abuja, as chapter 3 shows. Although this study recognises the increasing research on multiple religious belonging in south-western Nigeria (e.g., Williams, 2015, 2021:241ff), its main interest is not the religious belonging of the residents of Abuja, but rather the influence of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism on the peace that exists in the area.

Because of the above-described reasons, the research adopts the terms religion, Christian, Muslim, Christian-Muslim and related terms and it is interested in how to promote peace between people who identify as Christian and as Muslim in a country where the relations between such persons have not always been peaceful. In the next section, I present background information on Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria, and afterwards, I focus on the methodological aspects of this research, which include how and why Abuja was selected for the study and the methods of data collection and analysis. After these, I conclude the chapter and briefly introduce chapter 2.

1.4. Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most populous African state. According to data accessed on the website of the country’s National Population Commission (http://population.gov.ng/) on 16 April 2018, Nigeria is made up of over 180 million citizens and these include Christians, Muslims, and traditionalists. Making it important in the Muslim world is the fact that a
sizable percentage of the world’s total Muslim population is located within its territory. However, as opposed to some mostly Muslim countries where non-Muslim populations are small, a Muslim majority inhabits Nigeria with a robust Christian presence. Hence, Henri Tiessier, a former Archbishop of Algiers, has referred to the country as “the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world” (Ralston, 2021:1; Akinade, 1996:5). As much as it is important in the Islamic world, Nigeria’s Christian population makes it a crucial component of world Christianity. In fact, the extent to which Islam and Christianity have advanced since the 20th century, and to which they have been reinterpreted and appropriated in the country, makes Nigeria a strong force in the Christian and Muslim world. For example, Nigeria’s Pentecostal movement has expanded beyond Nigeria and Africa. This is demonstrated by the fact that independent churches headquartered in Nigeria have established branches in other African nations and the West (Adogame, 2013).

Vaughan (2016) explains how Christian and Islamic movements in the 19th century helped to define modern Nigeria. On the one hand, Christian missionary movements in the south-western part of the country, including the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), propelled Christian expansion in the south and later to the northern provinces. And, on the other hand, the reformistic jihad of Uthman dan Fodio that took place between 1804-1808 expanded Islamic presence in the Hausa states and the region that became northern Nigeria (Vaughan, 2016). This series of reforms, however, did not introduce Islam to the north, and there had been a failed Christian mission of Portuguese origin in pre-colonial Nigeria in the 15th century (Volder,
2015:101). In the south, the Christian missionary movements of the 19th century and subsequent years succeeded in the conversion of millions of southerners of various ethnic affiliations. The growth of Christianity was enhanced even more by the emergence of indigenous Christian groups in the 20th century and their continuous expansion. In the north, Dan Fodio sought to establish a pure version of Islam in place of the existing system, which he regarded as syncretistic and corrupted. Islam, however, is said to have arrived in the former Kanem-Bornu Kingdom between the 10th and 11th centuries, mainly through commerce and missionaries from North Africa – to which merchants and missionaries from the Arabian region had earlier taken it. The present north-east geopolitical zone in Nigeria was a component of this Bornu Empire or the Kanem-Bornu Kingdom, which included territories that are now part of Cameroon, and the republics of Chad and Niger. In 1903, parts of the empire that belong to contemporary Nigeria were merged with the Fulani-led Sokoto Caliphate to become the British Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Because Islam in the Bornu Kingdom predates Islam in the Sokoto Caliphate, it is believed that it spread to the latter from the Kingdom through commerce and missionary evangelisation. Kano and Katsina are thought to be the first Hausa states where it was introduced before the late 14th century (Iwuchukwu, 2013:5).

With continuous Islamic advancement in the north and a colonial policy which generally did not hinder it (Sodiq, 2009:649-650), Christianity became a minority religion upon its spread to the area from the southern region, where Christianisation was progressing. Partly due to improved cooperation between
the colonial administration and the Christian missionaries in the area of education and healthcare in the north in the 1914-1960 period, Christian presence was considerably advanced through these institutions, accompanied by the establishment of more churches and missions (Iwuchukwu, 2013:31ff).

With the expansion in the population and number of churches, which continued in the post-independence period, and the immigration of Christians from the predominantly Christian southern part of Nigeria, Christianity in the region, comprising several denominations, has advanced from a minor minority religion to a major minority whole whose adherents include both indigenes and non-indigenes and whose total population is second only to that of Muslims in the region. The north, therefore, has become increasingly religiously mixed. Similarly, contemporary Nigeria is not a geographical space sharply divided between a Christian south and a Muslim north. Although the southern region is predominantly Christian, and the north is mainly Muslim, domestic economic migration and intra-regional religious conversions have made it difficult or impossible for there to be a total demographic divide demarcated by religious identity. Cities across the country, including those in Abuja, Lagos, Kaduna, Anambra, Rivers, et cetera, serve as demonstrations of this reality. However, it seems that with this religious diversity has come violent conflicts, especially in the northern part of the country, and many studies on this problem exist.

Nigeria has been faced with major security challenges since it gained independence from Britain in 1960. Its unity was strongly challenged by a civil war that occurred between 1967-1970, and successive military coups have hampered its democratic development. In recent years, communal clashes
and anti-state violence have contributed to instability in the country. Most fatal has been the recent Boko Haram insurgency (Thurston, 2016, 2018). Also, conflicts between herders and farmers in parts of the country have been a major problem (Chukwuma, 2020; Eke, 2020; Ojo, 2020; Akov, 2017). Whereas the latter gained more prominence during the first term of President Muhammadu Buhari, the Boko Haram violence has taken lives in thousands, displaced Nigerians, and destroyed many properties, starting from 2009. In the south-east, a reinvigorated secessionist movement has recently resurfaced, partly represented by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). In the south-south, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and related groups, which are informally called Niger Delta militants, have violently challenged perceived lack of fairness in resource-sharing in the country and poor living conditions in the oil-producing region. Although Nigerian authorities have taken steps to manage the situation (such as creating the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs in September 2008 to promote peace and development in the region and introducing a presidential amnesty programme in June 2009 during the tenure of late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua), the operation of militants have not ceased in the region. This is not a complete list of the nation’s security challenges, but it is enough to illustrate the extent to which efforts to promote peace in the country, including this study, are relevant.

A comprehensive list of violent conflicts involving Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria has been excluded from this section due to limited space. However, it is useful to note that religion-related conflicts in the region have taken the following shapes, according to Boer (2003:37): (a) Muslims’
attacks followed by Christians’ reprisals, (b) sectarian attacks within the Muslim community, (c) Muslims’ attacks against the government, (d) Muslims’ attacks against Christians and their establishments, and (e) riots which begin as anti-government demonstrations but later become Muslims versus Christians conflicts. Similarly, Sanusi (2006:182) categorises the conflicts as being between Muslims, between Muslims and the state, and between Muslims and Christians. Some studies partly blame them on the colonial history of Nigeria or refer to it as the conflicts’ root cause. However, as Williams (2016:8) correctly observes, “the basic problem with this argument is that, while colonialism is an important underlying factor, it is not a principal cause or trigger of contemporary conflicts” in the region. The emphasis on colonialism, he continues, “almost entirely eliminates African agency and responsibility from wars fought predominantly by Africans” (Williams, 2016:8). Although colonial history has helped to shape contemporary conflicts in northern Nigeria and in the wider African continent, the conflicts are often characterised by complexity, and dealing with them requires the recognition of this broadness. Also, it is important to take seriously contemporary issues in the factors. Several texts present different factors influencing the conflicts in northern Nigeria and these include the following:

(a) An Islamic absolutist socio-political philosophy arising from the successful jihad of Dan Fodio, Christian and Islamic fundamentalism and exclusivism, competition for demographic superiority by Christians and Muslims, Islamic revivalism, the mostly Christian ethnic minorities’ resistance to the Muslim Hausa-Fulani oligarchy, inter and intra-
religious differences, and the adoption of the *Shari’a* as the official criminal code of 12 northern states beginning with Zamfara in October 1999 (Iwuchukwu, 2013:62-72).

(b) International influences related to foreign support for domestic religious movements, transnational Christian and Islamic movements, the media, and Nigeria’s porous borders (Van Gorder, 2012: chapter 9).

(c) The manipulation of religion by elites for political favour (Falola, 1998: chapters 2 & 4; Kukah, 1993: chapters 5 & 6).

(d) Grievances, which actors appeal to in order to mobilise supporters (Boer, 2003:36).

(e) Weak state response to tensions, and disputes over the rights of settlers and indigenes in communities (Kwaja, 2011).

(f) Poor governance and weak state presence in some territories (Ojo, 2020).

The studies show that violent conflicts involving Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria are a function of multiple factors, including politics, ethnicity, disagreements over the law, and so on.

On the other hand, it is not difficult to observe peaceful relationships in northern Nigeria and other parts of the country. The notion of a fixed clash of civilisations, which classifies Christianity and Islam as two separate and incompatible realities, may not account for the different forms of Christian-Muslim encounter that take place in Nigeria and other spaces shared by Christians and Muslims (Akinade, 2014:23ff). Such thinking may ignore the peaceful relationships which have existed and still exist between Muslims and
Christians in these areas. Part of what motivated this research is the observation that despite the conflicts that have taken place in northern Nigeria, which have received significant scholarly and media attention, nonviolent Christian-Muslim encounters continue to take place ordinarily in many parts of the country. In the north and the south, many Christians and Muslims encounter each other daily at the grassroots level without violence. This is also recognised by Akinade (2014:60ff) and Nolte, Ogen and Jones (2017). They live as neighbours, sell and make purchases from the same markets, belong to the same market unions, share office spaces, attend the same universities, undergo the same educational training, and share study spaces. Social events such as weddings, funerals, and parties bring them together. During Christian celebrations, like Christmas, Muslim neighbours are not excluded from the list of invitees or the recipients of gifts, and vice versa. They share public transport facilities and exchange pleasantries on pedestrian lanes. These daily encounters are normal and common in many parts of the country. Amid the Boko Haram insurgency in the north, affected Christians and Muslims who recognise that they are faced by a common adversary have cooperated to assist each other. For instance, Christians accommodate displaced Muslims and vice versa. A similar cooperation has been reported about northern Cameroon, which has been affected by the insurgency. There, Muslims and Christians have cooperated to operate vigilante groups that protect everyone (Kpughe, 2017:9). As notable instances of interreligious cooperation amid religion-related violence, these should motivate scholarly investigations on zones of peace or peaceful Christian-Muslim relationships.
The Yoruba-speaking area of south-western Nigeria is an example of where there has been peaceful interreligious coexistence, within families and in public contexts (Akinade, 2014:60-63; Nolte, Ogen and Jones, 2017; Williams, 2021:234ff). That is not to say, however, that there have not been communal or intra-ethnic conflicts there, or that the Yoruba are generally nonviolent. As Akinteye (1999:118) observes, “intra-ethnic conflicts and wars are found throughout the early and contemporary development of the Yoruba of Western Nigeria,” and Albert (1999:143) notes that “there were series of wars in different parts of Yorubaland between 1840 and 1894.” Examples of these conflicts include the Ijaye wars (1860-1865), the Kijiri wars (1877-1893), the Alaafin and Afonja crisis, and the Ife-Modakeke crisis, which Albert (1999:142) regards as “one of the oldest intra-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria; it has been going on for more than a century and is still claiming lives.” The point, instead, is that Yoruba Christians and Muslims seem to coexist in different parts of Nigeria’s south-western region with very few or no cases of violent conflicts emerging from religious disagreements or other religion-related issues. Religiously mixed families are common in the area (e.g., Williams, 2021:234ff). Akintunde E. Akinade, who is a “Christian ecumenical theologian” (Akinade, 1996:4) and well-known researcher on interreligious relations in Yorubaland, was raised in such a Yoruba family. In his PhD thesis, which was completed at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, he explains:

I grew up in a family in which my father was an Anglican, and my mother a practicing Muslim. I cannot remember a single time when this religious difference posed a threat to my parents and their children. We celebrated all the religious festivals together and prayed together. We shared many biblical stories together and my brothers and I always look
forward to hearing the muezzin’s call to prayer from the mosque behind our house (Akinade, 1996:4).

In addition to the practising of “a modernist and enlightened Islam” (Nolte and Ogen, 2017a:16) and other factors, the interreligious cooperation in the region has been attributed to the widely shared indigenous ethos of the Yoruba culture, which promotes tolerance and accommodation of differences and emphasises the importance of social cohesion (Sodiq, 2009:651; Nolte and Ogen, 2017a:10). The academic literature on interreligious cooperation in the region shows the important role of Yoruba cultural institutions in peace dynamics. Like many other traditional systems in Africa, the Yoruba cosmology involves ancestors, deities (òrìṣà), other spiritual forces and ọbas (kings), and these are relevant to members of the ethnic group, whether they are Christians or Muslims. The kings are believed to have spiritual powers deriving from the spirit world, and these powers are

associated with their ability to stand above the many spiritual practices within the town. In historical Yoruba discourse, ọbas are understood as the founders or conquerors of towns. ...Addressing the town both as a collectivity and as a locus of difference, ọbas were (and remain) recognised as the ‘heads’ of all religions. This claim presents both an ideology of power that projects the ọba’s authority over all sections of the community, and a reminder of the need to respect, and even empathise with, all those who share in its making (Nolte and Ogen, 2017a:10).

Nolte and Ogen (2017a:11) also explain that the “openness towards others” and “the emphasis on consent” that the Yoruba culture underscores “helped the establishment of Islam and later Christianity in Yorubaland.” Generally, these studies on the interactions between Islam, Christianity and traditional religious practices among the Yoruba people suggest that there is an important link between (a) the cultural context within which the foreign religions have
expanded and (b) the cooperation between adherents of these religions in parts of south-western Nigeria. In the Yoruba case, this context is said to be “a framework that celebrated diversity” (Nolte and Ogen, 2017a:13; also see Akinade, 1996:58ff).

This cultural attitude to the other among the Yoruba seems to be part of several African indigenous cultures and religions. For example, it is believed to have contributed to the success recorded by early Christian missionaries in the Igbo-speaking south-eastern region. The missionaries were largely accommodated by the indigenes, who typically responded to them with the view that: “You can worship your own god. It is good that a man should worship the gods and the spirits of his fathers” (Achebe, 2008:152). It has been observed that “[t]he African point of view is one in which there is respect for all religious traditions of humankind. While we hold steadfastly to our own beliefs, we respect the right of others to practice their own religions in their own ways, provided they do not infringe on the right of other people” (Akiwowo, 1983 in Olupona, 1992:145; also see Akinade, 2014:61; Sodiq, 2009:648). All these show that Nigeria represents a context of complex Christian-Muslim relations.

The point, therefore, is that zones of peace equally exist in the south-western part of the country, which is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba. However, whereas there are zones of peace in this area and in other parts of southern Nigeria that could be studied as well, the northern region is important because it is where most of the Christian-Muslim conflicts in the country have occurred. Furthermore, interreligious accommodation among the Yoruba in the south-west has received more academic attention than such relationships in
the north. Also, public views about the divisive role of religion and the importance of religious peacebuilding in Nigeria have been largely influenced by the occurrence of religion-related conflicts in northern Nigeria. It is partly for these reasons, and for the other factors I highlight in the following section, that Abuja has been selected for this study. That said, it is worthy of note that this research was partially motivated by the relatively peaceful interreligious relations in the south-west. Hence, it draws on some of the studies on the region to discuss its fieldwork findings and hopes to contribute to the research on peaceful interreligious relations in the country and other religiously mixed contexts.

1.5. Selecting Abuja for the study

The northern part of Nigeria consists of three geopolitical zones. These are north-east, north-west, and north-central. Abuja is one of the areas that make up the north-central geopolitical zone. The other six states in the zone are Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Kwara, and Plateau. The north-west consists of seven states, including Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara, while the north-east is comprised of six states, which are Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe.

Although Abuja is a component of the north-central zone and is surrounded by other states in the zone, it occupies a special location in the country. It was conceived in 1976 and constructed in the 1980s and 1990s to serve as the new capital of the Nigerian federation, and it replaced Lagos as the capital in 1991. It has six area councils, which are Abaji, Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje and Kwali. As of July 2018, it was estimated that up
to 2.8 million people reside within its 8000 km² land area (World Population Review, http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/abuja-population/). Abuja is the centre of a country that is important in the fields of Christian-Muslim relations and interreligious relations. However, it has yet to receive any major empirical attention among researchers on these subjects. To some extent, this has resulted from the fact that it is mostly peaceful, even though there have been Boko Haram attacks in the territory, such as the 2011 attack on the UN office and the 2014 attack on a motor park. It seems that for researchers, this makes it less of a “problem” than other parts of the north where violent interreligious conflicts have occurred. Examples of such areas, which have received much more academic attention, are Kaduna and Plateau states, which are in the north-west and the north-central zones, respectively. However, this study holds that Abuja can yield useful insights into Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria and other contexts. While we might use conflict-affected areas to explore what has caused conflicts in those contexts, Abuja can help us to understand what holds peace.

“Among the factors that make it crucial in the study of peace and Christian-Muslim relations is the fact that it represents one of Africa’s notable attempts to generate and sustain a unifying space and centre for a whole that includes a substantial number of dissimilar cultural, religious, ethnic, and political components” (Ossai, 2020:309). Its official label is “Centre of Unity”, and it demonstrates the unifying role that it is meant to play in the country. Elleh and Edelman (2013:1) explain that “in 1975, the Nigerian military proposed that building a new Federal Capital Territory at Abuja would facilitate
the country’s ‘federal character’, resolve the problem of nepotism, and ease
ethic tensions among the two hundred and fifty cultural groups which
constitute the nation.” Before the 1980s when the construction process
commenced, the Nigerian state, with its capital in Lagos, had gone through
unity-threatening experiences and had experimented with different political
and constitutional structures for more progress. Furthermore, in a constellation
as Nigeria, where colonialism and religious movements had combined with
other indigenous factors to produce a country in which geographical regions
seem to identify and are identified by constituent cultural, religious, ethnic, and
even political groups, the location of the country’s centre of administration is
meant to be as representative of every region as possible. Put simply, in a
country where the north, east, west, and south seem to have dividing
differences, and yet have to live as one, the meeting point between them has
to be as central and uniting as possible. Therefore, among other things, the
movement of the administrative capital from Lagos, which is an area in the
Yoruba-speaking south-western region of the country, to Abuja, which is an
area that is largely at the middle of the Nigerian territory and was not mainly
inhabited by any of Nigeria’s three major ethnic groups, symbolises a political
strategy to further progress the Nigerian project via a kind of geographical,
social, cultural, and political centralisation. “While the road distance from
Maiduguri in Borno State in the north-eastern part of Nigeria to Lagos is about
1609 km (1000 miles), in contrast, the distance from Abuja to all parts of the
country is less than 965 km (600 miles)” (Abubakar, 2014:82). This thesis holds
that a space with a heavy purpose as this deserves scholarly investigation
about how this purpose is being achieved, and this is partly why it has been adopted as a case study for the research.

In addition to this and the observation that parts of it are zones of peace, the territory’s Municipal Area Council offers a vast concentration of factors whose possible impact on peaceful Christian-Muslim relations could be examined. For instance, within it are several religious institutions, including churches, mosques, and faith-based NGOs interested in peacebuilding. Its population includes Christians and Muslims from various ethnic groups in the country, including the Bassa, Gangana, Gbagyi or Gwari, Gade, Gwandara, Egbura, and Koro (Medugu, 2012:3) and the Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba. The population of the territory and its ethnoreligious diversity have also been continually influenced by the constant immigration of Nigerians into the area, sometimes in search of economic opportunities. Although “available data on its religious demographics is relatively scanty and not up to date” (Ossai, 2020:310), 50% of the population are estimated to be Muslims (Medugu, 2012:4), while around the same number are Christians. It is for these reasons and the lack of literature on Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja that the area has been selected as the case study for this research.

1.6. Methodology

1.6.1. Research philosophy and design

In the second chapter of their widely used text on qualitative research, Creswell and Poth (2018:15) rightly observed that:

Whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research. Sometimes, these are deeply ingrained views about the types of problems that we need to study, what research questions to ask, or how we go about gathering
data. These beliefs are instilled in us during our educational training through journal articles and books, through advice dispensed by our advisors, and through the scholarly communities we engage at our conferences and scholarly meetings.

These beliefs or assumptions include, and influence, the researcher’s views about “ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)” (Creswell and Poth, 2018:19-20). It is important for researchers to be aware of and understand the beliefs and assumptions that may affect their inquiry and write about them in their studies (Creswell and Poth, 2018:15). Hence, it is proper for me to explain here that I do not claim to have started my PhD programme at Edinburgh University without views about religion and its role in various contexts. Also, before I started collecting primary data in Abuja in 2019, and therefore began to appreciate the situation “in the field”, I had been influenced by ideas from texts studied in Edinburgh, my supervisors, fellow PhD students, co-attendees at conferences, media publications on religion, and other persons I had encountered. However, as I explain somewhere below, efforts were made to avoid preconceptions from unhelpfully influencing the research process. Specifically, this study followed certain principles in qualitative research in order to achieve quality.

The ontological and epistemological views that have shaped my thinking and approach to the research can be identified as components of the interpretive paradigm in qualitative inquiry (Scotland, 2012:11-13; Stavraki, 2014; Kakkuri-Knuuttila, Lukka and Kuorikoski, 2008; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:9-10; Sandberg 2005). Unlike the scientific and realist view that reality
has an existence that is independent of the knower and the researcher, the interpretive paradigm regards reality as subjective – as mediated by people’s senses and therefore varying among individuals (Scotland, 2012:10-12). Knowledge or “meaning is...constructed through the interaction between consciousness and the world” (Scotland, 2012:11); so, it emerges within a social, cultural, political and/or historical context. Hence, to understand the social world or any given social context, the researcher must understand the views and experiences of those who inhabit it and are “participating in it” (Scotland, 2012: 12). In this process, the researcher also has the responsibility to “interpret” the findings and highlight the meanings that have emerged from the research participants and the context (Kakkuri-Knuuttila, Lukka and Kuorikoski, 2008:268). Consequently, it is vital for the researcher to take steps to manage the impact of his or her personal views on the analysis of the findings. Throughout this thesis, the reader will see how these ontological, epistemological, and related methodological perspectives have shaped the study. It will contribute to our understanding of interreligious peace and religious peacebuilding using primary data, including knowledge collected through interactions with Christians and Muslims “in the field”, who inhabit a context in Nigeria that is relatively peaceful.

Multiple texts on qualitative research exist. At times, it is difficult to find an agreement among them on many issues related to qualitative inquiry. One such issue is the approaches to qualitative research. There are several approaches to qualitative inquiry, and these are also referred to as qualitative research designs. To show this diversity in scholarly views, Merriam and
Tisdell (2016:22) explain that, for instance, 45 approaches were identified by Tesch (1990), while Patton (2015) identifies up to 16 of them. Therefore, for this research, it was important to select guiding texts based on some criteria, such as their recognition and application among qualitative researchers. In terms of determining the approaches that this study would adopt, I was largely guided by Creswell and Poth (2018), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). According to Creswell and Poth, five of the approaches that are widely used by qualitative researchers are case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative research, and phenomenology. Merriam and Tisdell’s “six common qualitative research designs” also include these and one more approach which they call “basic qualitative research” (23ff). This study draws on tenets of grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology and those principles are explained later in the chapter. However, it is mainly a case study research. As case studies do involve qualitative and quantitative methods, Merriam and Tisdell (2016:37) use the term “qualitative case study” in their classification to show that they are interested in qualitative designs. This research did not employ quantitative methods, so it is proper to refer to its primary design as a qualitative case study approach. “A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:37). In a case study, “the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell and Poth, 2018:96-97). The case
is a bounded system in the sense that “it can be defined or described within certain parameters”, such as location or timeframe (Creswell and Poth, 2018:97). The presence and centrality of this case as the “unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:38). Among other things, “the case…could be a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:38). While case studies aim to produce a rich description of the cases, they normally provide lessons for other cases or contexts. Although this study examines Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja, it is equally interested in how Abuja can help us to deal with interreligious conflict in parts of northern Nigeria and other societies where interreligious conflicts have not been absent. While it aims to understand what the Abuja case says about the impact of religious factors on interreligious peace, it is also concerned with how the knowledge from Abuja can be used to improve interreligious relations in Nigeria and other contexts. In other words, its interest is not only to find whether religious factors have an impact in Abuja. Part of its interests is understanding the nature of Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja, and thinking about how we can use the findings to deal with settings where there might be negative impacts of religion or where there might be interreligious conflicts?

1.6.2. Research quality

The question of how a researcher can “persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:290) remains one of the questions that inquirers consider as
they complete studies and report their findings. Unsurprisingly, this was part of the interests of this research. A review of literature on qualitative inquiry during this study showed that there are debates about whether there should be “universal” criteria for determining quality in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010:838; Bochner, 2000) and there are various views on what should be the criteria. For instance, Creswell (2007) offers criteria for various types of qualitative research, including case studies, ethnographical research, grounded theory, narrative research, and phenomenological studies. Creswell and Poth (2018:47-49) identify about nine major “features of a ‘good’ qualitative study.” Other works, like Sousa (2014) and Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) focus on how to achieve “validation” or “qualitative rigor” in given types of qualitative research. Creswell and Miller (2000:124) explain that “writing about validity in qualitative inquiry is challenging on many levels”, partly because “multiple perspectives about it flood the pages of books.” They add that various terms have been used in these texts to refer to validity, “including authenticity, goodness, verisimilitude, adequacy, trustworthiness, plausibility, validity, validation, and credibility” (Creswell and Miller, 2000:124). They explain how validity can be determined by the research paradigm and the lens used by the researcher to establish validity. Although some of these works have helped to shape this research, Tracy’s (2010) model served as a major tool for the study. Her eight “big-tent” measures for ensuring “qualitative quality” were major parts of the standards that were observed during the study. These markers are: “(a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful
coherence” (837). Certainly, these may not completely cover all definers of quality in qualitative research. Besides, “values for quality, like all societal knowledge, are ever changing and situated within local contexts and current conversations” (Tracy, 2010:837). Nonetheless, the model is relatively comprehensive and determines quality based on the research process itself and its results. It was also developed by a teacher of methods in qualitative inquiry. Hence, it is adopted here, but not without the recognition and utilisation of other guidelines on qualitative inquiry.

According to Tracy, the research must have a worthy topic. This is determined by the relevance, timeliness, and significance of the topic. The study must also have a rich vigour, for example, by (a) recognising and using an abundance and varieties of existing knowledge, (b) adopting a useful theoretical and conceptual framework, and (c) collecting and analysing data properly. According to Tracy, “a researcher with a head full of theories, and a case full of abundant data, is best prepared to see nuance and complexity” (841). Also, the research must be completed with proper ethical considerations, for example, in terms of how to relate with research participants or how to use the data that has been obtained from them. During the research, the inquirer must adopt a sincere approach that involves self-reflexivity, which is “considered to be honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (842). The research should be “marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research” (841). Credibility, according to the model, “refers to the
trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (842). Among other ways, this could be achieved through a rich description of findings and the use of triangulation. There should also be coherence in the study, for example, in terms of whether it uses methods that are appropriate for its stated objectives, whether these goals are achieved eventually, and whether there is an agreement between its major components, including questions, findings and interpretations. Tracy also suggests that a major criterion is whether the study makes a significant contribution, for example, in terms of theory, methodology, or practice. The criterion of resonance refers to whether “the research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences” (840), for example, through the way the report is written and the study’s transferability – its “potential to be valuable across a variety of contexts or situations” (845). Tracy (2010:837) explains that “each criterion of quality can be approached via a variety of paths and crafts, the combination of which depends on the specific researcher, context, theoretical affiliation, and project.”

The research process which has led to what is presented in this thesis and the writing-up of the thesis were carried out in a way that is meant to achieve qualitative quality. While the study is not without limitations, the importance of observing qualitative best practices was recognised during the process of completing it. In addition to Tracy’s model and the above-mentioned studies, texts on ethnographic research and qualitative data analysis were studied and applied before, during, and after the fieldwork. These include Millar (2018), Denscombe (2010), Gregg and Scholefield (2015), Bryman (2012), and Mason
Denscombe’s (2010:272-307) detailed description and guide on the collection and analysis of qualitative data was particularly useful.

1.6.3. Data collection and analysis

Guided by an interpretive paradigm and adopting a case study design, the research used in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation to explore whether and how religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism impact on the relative interreligious peace that exists in Abuja. Original data were collected from religious leaders as well as lay Christians and Muslims in the territory during fieldwork that lasted from January to August 2019. Before this commenced, the relevant existing literature on Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria was reviewed. The purposive sampling method was used to select religious leaders who were approached for interviews, but lay participants were mostly randomly selected. Attention was mainly given to the districts of Wuse and Utako, which have been religiously diverse and relatively peaceful. Official population statistics from the Nigerian government that are available to the public do not include details on the religious identity of residents. Consequently, official data on the religious identity of those living in these districts could not be accessed. However, it was observed that they are religiously mixed, with each having churches and mosques that draw members mainly from the areas surrounding the places of worship. This was further confirmed through visits to some of them and questions to stakeholders about membership. In the absence of official demographic statistics, observation and interviews can serve as alternative ways to understand the religious identities in an area. Wuse and Utako have
open markets where Christians and Muslims sell and buy, with each market having at least one mosque within, and both having at least one mosque and one church in the surrounding areas. In terms of the economic status of residents, there was a high level of diversity as well. In Wuse and Utako, just like the other areas, there were rich, middle-class, and poorer residents or areas.

Specifically, primary data were collected through three major methods. One, in-depth interviews were carried out with

(a) seven imams and ten Christian clergy men in the municipal area council, especially Wuse and Utako districts,
(b) one key informant at the headquarters of FOMWAN in Utako district,
(c) the Public Relations Officer of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) at Louis Edet House, which is the headquarters of the Force,
(d) the Deputy Director (Public Relations) at the FCDA, and
(e) the director of Democracy and Development Studies at the IPCR.

Two, not less than 37 Muslims and 37 Christians from different parts of Wuse and Utako were interviewed. Also, group discussions were held in both districts, for example, with a Christian youth fellowship of eight members in Wuse, and a mixed group of five young men in Utako market area. The total number of interviewees, therefore, was over 91, including 17 religious leaders and 74 lay Christians and Muslims, all between the ages of 20 and 65. Some of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the religious leaders and some took place either in the church or the mosque where the religious leaders worship. Similarly, some lay participants were spoken to after Christian service.
on Sunday and after Muslim Jumu‘ah (Friday) prayers, whereas others were met in Wuse and Utako markets, taxis, sports fields in Wuse, private residences and on the streets. In this thesis, pseudonyms have been used where appropriate to refer to these participants, as promised to them during the fieldwork and as recommended by the research ethics committee of the Edinburgh University Divinity School. I use MRL for Muslim Religious Leader, CRL for Christian Religious Leader, MLP for Muslim Lay Participant and CLP for Christian Lay Participant. For each participant in either category, I add numbers to clearly distinguish them, so that participants include MRL1-MRL7, CRL1-CRL10, MLP1-MLP37 and CLP1-CLP37. These pseudonyms are used mainly for all the participants who are quoted directly. The third major source of primary data during the study was the researcher’s observation in public buses and taxis, churches, Wuse and Utako markets, football and basketball pitches in Wuse district, and other public spaces.

The consent letter and major interview questions used during the fieldwork are presented in the thesis as Appendix A. Where electronic recording could not be done, notes were taken during or after the interviews, and observations were equally noted throughout the research. Guided by the qualitative content analysis method, these notes and interview transcripts were subsequently analysed for common themes regarding the role played by religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism in the dynamics of peace in Abuja. The relevant literature in peace studies and Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria was also utilised during the analysis. Subsequently, the identified common themes were organised into a
major argument about the role of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism in peace dynamics. As scholarship on research has shown, qualitative research and data analysis do not just entail the collation of collected qualitative data after the research and the presentation of these data as “research findings” to the reader; it rather involves “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and what to tell others” (Bodgan and Biklen, 1982:145).

This study’s approach was largely inductive, in the sense that it aimed to build up arguments or propositions about religion and peace from the reality on the ground in Abuja. The study was also iterative, in the sense that the analysis of the fieldwork data was taking place even as the data was being collected in the January-August 2019 period, and it continued after the fieldwork, with the points from the data evolving over many months into the arguments now being presented here. Although the transcription of the recorded interviews was laborious, it aided the analysis, as it enabled me to relive the interviews and have more thoughts about their meanings and implications. After the transcriptions, the transcripts were read several times, since “reading and re-reading” them as well as other notes from the fieldwork would help me to become very familiar with the data and be able to understand its meanings (Denscombe, 2010:283). During the fieldwork and after I returned to Edinburgh in September 2019, the transcripts were repeatedly examined, together with the other notes taken in the field, for common themes and
connections between them. This was done under supervision at the Edinburgh University Divinity School.

As this research progressed, I had to be aware of, manage, and try to overcome the prejudices that might have arisen from my experiences as a Christian and a member of the Igbo ethnic group who was born and raised in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. Having this identity makes me not only an insider to the Nigerian context, but also one who may have certain personal feelings, interests, or views about the Nigerian state or the peoples sharing the Nigerian space. In the context of the research, however, I am also an outsider, and this had to be considered while I collected data in Abuja and when I analysed this data after my return to Edinburgh. First, I am not a Muslim. Second, I have not been a long-term resident of Abuja where the field research took place. Third, I am not a religious peace actor in Nigeria and so I do not have any personal interest to protect for religious agency in Abuja or Nigeria. Consequently, in addition to my management of biases during the study, efforts were made to (a) overcome some of the barriers that might have resulted from my outsider-ness, and (b) listen to and interpret the voice of “the other” – the Muslim, the Abuja resident, and the religious leader building peace – with openness, objectiveness, and carefulness.

To manage these positionalities, roles, and challenges, I observed, for both the fieldwork and the analytical stage, the principle of reflexivity (Gregg and Scholefield, 2015:105-108) and some tenets of the phenomenological methodology. These major ideas include the avoidance of reductionism, the cultivation of empathy for the persons being studied, and bracketing of the
researcher’s views and preconceptions during the research (Chitando, 2005; Creswell and Poth, 2018:77; Finlay, 2014:122ff). Additionally, I observed some principles of grounded theory, which Glaser and Strauss (1967) define as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research,” especially through interviews and participant observation. As a methodology, it suggests a bottom-up approach to research, which involves the emergence of theories and knowledge from the ground, rather than the imposition of a theoretical framework or structure on a social context. Its application, therefore, requires that the researcher does not study their subjects with preconceived notions (Griffin, 2017). This meant that the knowledge I had acquired before I travelled to Abuja for the fieldwork, for example through the review of literature on Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria, did not have to prevent me from allowing the data from Abuja, and not my views, to speak about Abuja. With the above-described approaches, my dual identity as an insider and outsider became an opportunity for critical scholarship. Besides, it has been argued by many experienced qualitative researchers that rather than being separate and fixed categories, the researcher’s identity and status in qualitative field research as an insider or outsider can shift and vary in degree, according to the research context or situation concerned (Milligan, 2016). This was the case during the fieldwork in Abuja, as these positionalities were hardly fixed and had mixed effects on the research process.

1.7. Conclusion

On the one hand, religious factors have been implicated in divisions and conflicts between people, and on the other hand, they have had a positive
influence in various areas. This latter reality has been highlighted by several studies, including those on religious peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict settings. However, the research on the impact of religion on peace in relatively peaceful zones remains inadequate, as it is more common to explore religious peacebuilding in settings where there have been violent conflicts. This is the case in the research on northern Nigeria, where there have been Christian-Muslim conflicts. This study considers what could be learnt from zones of peace in Abuja about the role of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism in the dynamics of interreligious peace. Three main marks distinguish it from previous studies on religious peacebuilding and Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria. One, it is the first major study, or one of the first major studies, of interreligious peace in northern Nigeria that involves a case study of Abuja. Two, it is a study of zones of peace that shifts focus away from conflict or post-conflict areas. And three, it examines the relationships between Christians and Muslims in relatively peaceful areas to understand the issues that matter in on-the-ground interreligious relations in those areas and critically consider the influence of religious leaders, religious peace norms, and religious peace activism on those relations. It is expected that the study will be useful in (a) the study of Christian-Muslim and interreligious relations, and (b) the theory and practice of religious peacebuilding in Nigeria and other religiously diverse societies.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter explained why Abuja was chosen for the research and raised the point that zones of peace have received less empirical attention when compared to conflict-affected areas and the causes of violent interreligious conflict. This can be seen clearly in the literature on Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria. Although there are studies on peaceful interreligious relations in the Yoruba-speaking south-western Nigeria, the research on Christian-Muslim relations in the northern region has focused more on the conflictual aspect of the relationships, and less on the cases of nonviolent interreligious relationships. Furthermore, the use of the relatively peaceful zones to examine the impact of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism on interreligious peace remains uncommon. Views about the role of religion as a cause of division or peace in the country are largely shaped by events in the conflict-affected areas in the north. In addition to studies on how religion divides or how religious actors help to build peace after or during violent interreligious conflicts, more research is required on how religious variables influence the situation in relatively peaceful contexts. This will help to advance our understanding of the dynamics of peace in religiously diverse settings.

In this chapter, I review the literature on religious peacebuilding and zones of peace in northern Nigeria to further demonstrate the relevance of this research. The chapter provides more details on the literature that has framed
the study. First, I consider the literature on religious peacebuilding that generally argues that religion positively impacts, or can positively impact, peace between people, including members of different religious groups. Afterwards, I consider recent studies on peaceful zones or peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria. This is followed by the concluding section, where I summarise the questions that this research aims to address and briefly describe how the subsequent chapters respond to them.

The review in this chapter shows that a large section of the research on religion and peacebuilding focuses on conflict or post-conflict areas. Also, studies on zones of peace and the causes of interreligious peace in northern Nigeria have emerged recently. However, although these studies have a focus on peace that is similar to that of this research, they mostly are not concerned with critically examining the extent to which religious factors impact on the level of interreligious peace in the areas they explore.

Before describing the research on the role of religion in peacebuilding in the next section, it is necessary to provide a brief description of the concept of peacebuilding and how it evolved to involve what is now called religious peacebuilding. Whereas the term “peacebuilding” was coined by Johan Galtung in the 1970s (Knight, 2003:241), Boutros-Ghali’s Agenda for Peace is usually regarded as the first major articulation of peacebuilding as a distinct area of activity in peace and security practice (Shepherd, 2017:38). Defining post-conflict peace-building as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992:Section II, no 21), the document provides a
background for the subsequent use of peacebuilding in documents of the United Nations (UN), peace scholarship and international politics to primarily refer to “post-conflict” activities, such as the support of political elections and reform, infrastructural development or restoration, disarmament and destruction of weapons used in a conflict, and reintegration of former combatants into civilian society (United Nations, 2000:3). Whereas “preventive diplomacy is to avoid a crisis”, “post-conflict peace-building”, Boutros-Ghali continues, “is to prevent a recurrence”, and it, therefore, deals with “underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems” in the aftermath of civil conflict or international war (Boutros-Ghali, 1992: Section VI, no 57). However, the usage of the term has expanded since 1992, and as an international and intra-country practice, more than one approach to it have been identified in peace scholarship, in terms of issues such as the actors driving the activities, the tools applied, and the models or styles adopted. Whereas the UN seems to have shifted away from externally managed interventionist approaches and is now placing more emphasis on empowering conflict-affected countries to “manage their own ‘sustainable’ solutions” and then providing facilitation for these domestic processes (Chandler, 2017:6-9; United Nations, 2015:47), the concept of peacebuilding has been increasingly used with regards to the civil society sector to refer to the peace works of non-governmental intra-country actors in conflict and post-conflict settings. This represents part of the shifts in the conceptualisation of peacebuilding. As part of academic efforts to develop and increase the effectiveness of interventions for peace in divided societies, different approaches to peacebuilding have been identified to
include liberal and strategic peacebuilding. The latter has been regarded as being more likely to lead to a condition now called just peace (Hawksley and Mitchell, 2020:3-4; Philpott, 2012; Little, 2006b) and it is meant to involve religious peacebuilding in some contexts. Hawksley and Mitchell (2020:7-8) hold that “in a context where violent conflicts are marked by complexity, globalization and a multiplicity of actors, peacebuilding needs to be strategic”, for example, by “acknowledging and engaging constructively” with this complexity according to the contexts concerned, engaging multiple actors at different levels of society, and paying attention to “the local level and human person” not just high-level negotiations and peace agreements among elites, which have been characteristic of liberal peacebuilding. They explain that strategic peacebuilding does not argue “for a single-cause analysis or solution for any given conflict”; instead, it “recognizes the value of multiple analyses and points of engagement, and looks to integrate available resources in order to tackle conflicts as a whole, in their various political, economic, environmental, religious and social aspects” (Hawksley and Mitchell, 2020:8). Peacebuilding is now believed to go beyond “short-term, intense efforts to negotiate the cessation of deadly violence” to also involve “a long-term commitment to transforming the societal structures and relationships in which that deadly violence is rooted, and to which that violence does further damage” (Hawksley and Mitchell, 2020:3). In addition to reducing physical violence and promoting post-conflict healing and recovery, it also aims to transform “inhumane social, political, or economic structures and destructive patterns of relating” (Hawksley, 2020:7). In other words, peacebuilding is meant to pursue
a positive and just peace, rather than a mere absence of direct violence. Lederach and Appleby (2010:23) define just peace as “a dynamic state of affairs in which the reduction and management of violence and the achievement of social and economic justice are undertaken as mutual, reinforcing dimensions of constructive change.” Peacebuilding that aims to achieve it “does not begin with the first rumblings of war and end with the cessation of open hostilities”; instead, it “must involve positive efforts to promote just relationships at all stages of the conflict cycle, and it can take place before, during and after open violent conflict” (Hawksley and Mitchell, 2020:4).

Religious peacebuilding is not restricted to post-conflict work, as in early UN peacebuilding. In addition to conflict transformation and post-conflict structural reform, Appleby (2000:211-212) uses the term to refer to other activities that strengthen the role of religion in the promotion of peace, including the actions of those working outside actual conflict settings, “such as legal advocates of religious human rights, scholars conducting research relevant to cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue, and theologians and ethicists who are probing and strengthening their religious communities’ traditions of nonviolent militance.” The descriptions and uses of the term in Appleby (2000), other books such as Lederach (1997), and journals and academic papers on religion and peace, suggest that the concept has a flexible meaning, in terms of the actors and activities involved, the type and components of peace pursued (positive or negative), the type of conflict (violent or nonviolent) or violence (physical or structural) being addressed, and the phase concerned
(before, during or after conflict or violence). Hence, Owen and King (2019:3) have observed that although it has expanded as a concept and practice recently, religious peacebuilding “remains neither well-defined nor universally accepted.” In any case, however, it seems that two major distinguishing features of religious peacebuilding are the involvement of religious actors as the leaders or key leading participants in the peace activity concerned, and the use of religious resources, such as scriptures and religious peace norms, as tools. The current conceptualisation of religious peacebuilding as involving conflict prevention underpins this study’s use of the term in the context of zones of peace.

This study contributes to the research on religious peacebuilding by focusing on how religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to sustain the peace that exists in religiously mixed settings where interreligious conflict is limited. However, although it studies relatively peaceful areas in Abuja, it also uses the academic literature on religious peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict contexts. While primary data from Abuja serves as the main basis of its arguments, the study utilises evidence regarding conflict-affected settings in northern Nigeria and other areas.

2.2. Religion and the promotion of peace

Religions are believed to have assets that promote peace. These are comprised of (a) tangible ones, such as sacred texts, religious leaders, and peacebuilding bodies, and (b) all their intangible values and peace norms, such as forgiveness, compassion, love, and the sacrosanctity of human life (e.g., Lazarus et al, 2017: chapter 8). Religious leaders and other religiously
motivated actors are often regarded as actors who have the potential to affect, and who have often influenced, the peace-level in their local communities. Furthermore, as citizens of *Peaceland* – that is, the world of transnational actors that work to promote peace in conflict zones around the world (Autesserre, 2014 & 2015) – they contribute to international peacebuilding. Part of the widely held view about the importance of religion in peacebuilding is that “world religions share common values of peace, justice and compassion, that religions and religious leaders possess vast untapped resources to contribute to peaceful solutions to the world’s crises, and that interreligious dialogues and multireligious action promote the reframing of attitudes towards ‘the other’.” (King and Owen, 2020:3). Whereas religious leaders are regarded as “men of God” in many areas, religious ideas are mostly believed, by their practitioners, to have a transcendental origin or to have been revealed by God. Religious leaders are believed to (a) be respected by their communities, who therefore take the views of these leaders seriously, (b) have networks which they could draw on to execute peace works, and therefore (c) occupy influential socio-cultural locations within their communities (Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2010; Appleby, 2000). Brewer, Higgins and Teeney (2010) argue that in conflict cases where religion is part of the problem, the key to religion’s transformation of itself to a site of reconciliation lies in the socially strategic spaces it occupies in civil society, which they identify as intellectual, institutional, market, and political spaces. As intellectual spaces and through the forums which they provide, religious actors conduct conversations and reflections on the ongoing conflict, challenge the narratives
and terms of the conflict, and consider alternative ideas and visions of the
cflict’s ending. In the institutional spaces which they constitute, the actors
themselves lead the way in the practice of the alternative ideas and visions of
peace generated in the intellectual spaces and challenge the improper status
quo, for people to see and imitate at the local and higher levels. Through their
actions, for example, by practising non-sectarianism and shared liturgy, they
transgress “the borders that usually keep people apart” during conflicts and
put peacemaking into practice (Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2010:1024).
Utilising their market spaces, they could draw on their local and global
networks, commit financial, human, and other material resources, and use
campaigning and debates (a) to mobilise support for these alternatives in the
public sphere, nationally and internationally, and (b) to draw people’s attention
to the policy changes required to end conflicts. And finally, in the political
spaces that they occupy in civil society, the religious actors engage with the
political process to bring about settlements and peace, for example, through
mediation or by facilitating negotiations between belligerents. However,
Brewer and his co-authors add that the ability of religious actors to occupy
these spaces could be constrained or facilitated by two factors: (a) whether the
religious actors’ intervention is the official policy of the religious body’s
leadership or not, and (b) the majority-minority status of the actors (Brewer,
Higgins and Teeney, 2010:1030).

With the understanding that “the identity of the mediator affects the
mediator’s influence, trust and legitimacy” (Bercovitch, 2011:84) either
favourably or adversely, it has been argued that due to their identity as
respected and recognised leaders in certain religious communities, religious leaders bring legitimacy and leverage to the mediation process and they even become more influential in contexts where religion is important and “plays a key role in the social life of the parties and in defining their identities” (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009:195). While supporting their argument that religious discrimination is a strong predictor for violent dissent by ethnoreligious groups, Akbaba and Taydas (2011:277) also hold that “the argument that religious legitimacy has the power to influence policies and actions of groups and individuals is not disputed.” It is believed that part of the strengths of the community religious leader and peace actor in a conflict setting arises from the understanding by the community that he or she is an insider, “a committed neighbour who intimately understands the human suffering of the community - sometimes as a witness and, often as someone who has suffered personal loss in the local conflict” (Little, 2007: 5). Because of this, they may be perceived as credible, authentic, or as actually desiring the good of the community, and they may have the trust and respect of the people. However, it should be recognised that outsider-ness may be a source of strength for religious peacebuilders in some cases, as it may suggest that the interveners would be fair. For example, partly due to their identity as outsiders to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war of 1967-70, the Quakers were the major third party in the conflict that won the trust of both the Biafrans and the federal power (Sampson, 1994:111). But although this trust partly stemmed from the fact that they were not part of the conflicting groups, it would be simplistic to not recognise that the pacifism of the Quakers might have played as much role as
their outsider-ness. The military head of Nigeria had thought that their intervention was primarily a result of their “abhorrence for any war or violence” and he regarded them as a special Christian group (Sampson, 1994:106). But that notwithstanding, the point being made here is that if the conflict had involved the Quakers as a party, their identity as an insider in the conflict could have generated a different effect on the attitude of this Nigerian military leader and the peace process. It seems, therefore, that religious peace actors’ insider or outsider identity could either favour or hinder their effectiveness, depending on contextual issues such as

(a) the type of conflict being addressed (like communal, national, or international),

(b) the extent to which religious identity, ideas or objects matter in the conflict,

(c) the type of peace action being carried out (like mediation, workshop, humanitarian action, or rebuilding of damaged infrastructure), and

(d) whether there is a collaboration between the peace actors that bridges the gap between the inside and the outside, an example being a collaboration between foreign organisations and community religious leaders.

Furthermore, in conflict cases where religious identity or religious ideas are part of the problem, religious leaders are believed to have the theological background and knowledge to draw on scriptural teachings to promote forgiveness and reconciliation and help to de-escalate conflicts. Also, this could be boosted by an interfaith or multireligious collaboration between the
concerned religious leaders or actors, as it can heighten the capacity of religious resources to bring change (Bamat et al, 2017; Ossai, 2019; Ossai, 2016:56-79; King and Owen, 2020:7-9 and 15). For example, in cases where two different religious identities are in conflict, efforts to make peace by a religious actor from either of the divides may not yield good results, as this actor may not have any legitimacy or trust in the group to which he or she is an outsider and or an enemy. It seems that in such a situation, it is an interfaith collaborative approach that could make the religious peace interventions useful, as exemplified by the partnership between Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye in northern Nigeria, whose cooperation has enhanced their capacity to intervene in conflicts and enabled them to have access to more groups than they would have had if they operated separately (Little, 2007: Chapter 9; Ashafa and Wuye, 1999).

Working at the grassroots level is said to be an advantage that some religious actors have over other actors who are not members of the concerned conflict or post-conflict setting. As opposed to the mediator’s identity as an outsider-neutral, Mennonite peacebuilders Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach refer to this identity as “insider-partial” and recognise that it inspires trust; this was the case in the Central American region where Lederach was a peacebuilder (Wehr and Lederach, 1991:87). Elsewhere, these advantageous features are called (a) professional expertise or conflict-specific knowledge, (b) credibility, and (c) emotional, personal and/or physical closeness to the conflict or conflict parties (Silvestri and Mayall, 2015:37-38). Discussing peacebuilding in the Muslim World, Kadayifci-Orellana (2015) argues that
instead of regarding religion as an instigator of conflict and/or disregarding it in peacebuilding, peacebuilding strategies in Muslim contexts should apply Islamic principles of peace and justice and engage Muslim religious leaders, mainly because they are respected by their communities as insiders who have a good understanding of their tradition and history, and who have been involved in the community, thereby having more legitimacy than secular actors. Their long-term membership of the community they are working with gives them the knowledge about the context that is needed to address problems there. In sum, the idea is that in contexts (a) where religion is part of the problem, for example in the form of identities of conflicting actors or the object of dispute, or (b) where religious actors and institutions are influential, the involvement of these actors and institutions and not just secular ones could be very helpful.

Furthermore, concerning humanitarian aid and the execution of infrastructural projects in post-conflict societies and during crises, religious leaders and organisations are believed to be able to draw on their membership and networks of volunteers to mobilise workers, thereby reducing the cost of services and then providing a less expensive means to that aspect of peacebuilding than the paid staff of international political organisations and non-faith-based NGOs (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015:449-450; Barnett and Stein, 2012). Appleby (2015) considers how religious actors could help to achieve development in post-conflict settings, and then suggests that an increased partnership between foreign development experts and peacebuilders on the one hand, and local religious and cultural actors on the other, in the
implementation of developmental projects in these settings would yield more success. And where there is collaboration between various religious groups, more personnel, infrastructure, and financial resources become available. Also, as opposed to a liberal peace approach which he assesses as insufficient for the achievement of political reconciliation, Philpott (2015) articulates an ethic of peacebuilding grounded in religious traditions rather than secular tradition, since the notions of reconciliation and forgiveness, among other ones not provided by the liberal peace mechanisms, are deeply rooted in religious traditions. Similarly, Lederach and Appleby (2010) present a strategic approach which involves religious tools and actors, and which could lead to just peace, as an alternative to the liberal peace paradigm. Writing shortly after the end of the Cold War, Lederach (1997) argued that major post-Cold War armed conflicts are mostly “intrastate affairs” and “identity conflicts”(8) and due to these and other common characteristics of these conflicts, positively transforming them requires an innovative approach that

(a) is broader than traditional diplomacy and formal governmental mechanisms,
(b) involves multiple actors and infrastructures of peace across different levels of the conflict or post-conflict society,
(c) takes socio-psychological and spiritual dimensions into account, and
(d) aims to, and could, not just end violence but also achieve and sustain reconciliation between the conflicting actors, both before and after the formal peace accords have been signed.
Lederach’s thesis primarily promotes a significantly religious reconciliation framework as the central component of this alternative approach to peacebuilding that he recommends. All these show that there is a large body of literature which generally argue that religion is important in peace dynamics.

Research on religious peacebuilding shows that apart from the popularisation of a theology of peace using sacred scripture and other religious assets, religious peacebuilders also promote peace by helping to (a) heal internal wounds emerging from or even preceding violent relationships, (b) address fears and renew social trust, (c) promote forgiveness and reconciliation, and (d) restore good relationships among opponents (Murithi, 2008:16). They equally promote peace through

(a) problem-solving and process-promoting workshops (Foltz, 1977),
(b) the promotion of dialogue,
(c) humanitarian work,
(d) peace education or training in conflict prevention and resolution,
(e) election monitoring,
(f) negotiation of agreements or settlements,
(g) raising public awareness about the drivers of conflict,
(h) nonviolent protest and mobilisation of other forms of social action for or against government officials, policies or actions,
(i) acting as “social critics” (Appleby, 2000:213) by calling political actors to account and “withdrawing or providing moral legitimacy for a government in times of crises” (Appleby, 2000:211),
(j) mediation,
(k) preventive diplomacy,
(l) the monitoring of local relationships and events, and
(m) the identification of warning signs.

Most of these are part of Appleby’s (2000:212-221) different stages of religious conflict transformation, which are conflict management, conflict resolution, post-conflict peacebuilding and structural reform. In Africa, “besides their active involvement in the fields of relief services, education, health, human rights, and civic education, religious organizations have been involved in...preventing violence, managing conflict, and transforming conflicts” (Ludovic, 2021:49). Religious leaders also serve as major facilitators of national conferences for peace and other transitional programmes (Ludovic, 2021:50). All these suggest that religion is and could be a major source of peace in divided societies.

2.3. Beyond “the exotic, the good and the theatrical”

However, in response to this notion and the increasing body of literature on the importance of religious peacebuilding, Omer (2015) seeks to promote the development of a more critical field of religious peacebuilding that goes beyond the aspects of religious peacebuilding that she regards as the exotic, the good and the theatrical. Whereas the exotic side refers to the striking qualities of religious peacebuilders as portrayed in works on religious peacebuilding, such as their strong faith and courage, the good refers to the idea in many works in the field that (a) there is a distinction between the good/authentic religion which can only produce peace and the perverted one which can generate violence in God’s name, and that (b) this latter is the
problem not all of religion. The theatrical aspect of religious peacebuilding involves the processes within the practice. She argues that there is need for more criticalness and the inclusion of “discursive critique” in the field, in such a way that, for example, even components of religious traditions can be challenged and not just drawn upon to promote peace.

That said, it is noteworthy that critical studies on religion and peace exist and this work’s approach to the study of religion’s role in peace dynamics has been influenced by them. While showing the relevance of religious peacebuilding, many of the studies do highlight its shortcomings and limitations. For example, while she welcomes religious contributions to peacebuilding, Markiewicz (2018) argues that interfaith initiatives sometimes fail to prevent conflicts and she demonstrates this with two case studies. These are The Amman Message of Jordan’s King Abdullah II which emerged in November 2004 in response to sectarian tensions between Muslims, and A Common Word Between Us And You, which is an open theological letter addressed to the heads of Christian Churches worldwide in 2007, inviting them to dialogue with Muslims. The latter, like the Amman Message, also was born out of the increasing Islamophobia after 9/11. She argues that reasons why the positive impact of these top-down initiatives has been limited, despite their being theologically sound and having the support of hundreds of religious leaders, might include the following: wrong people being invited to the dialogue table, the society lacking the religious literacy required for them to understand their content, the top-down initiatives having a political dimension, the disconnect between the message and the audience, competition between the
initiatives for scarce resources, and the lack of consensual support for the initiatives and their messages (Markiewicz, 2018:97-98).

Muthuraj (2016), on the other hand, examines the problems associated with interreligious dialogue in India. While recognising its usefulness, he notes that some of the problems with interreligious dialogue in the country include the dialogists’ assumption that religious identity is fixed, and their uncritical adoption of the “world religions” category. He claims that as part of the practice of interreligious dialogue in India, the Christian-Muslim, Hindu-Christian or Muslim-Hindu binaries and similar ones are adopted by the top-level actors leading the dialogical processes, without recognition of the multiple religious and communal identities which are held by individuals, the fluidity of these identities, and the possibility that the religious identities adopted in dialogue do not even exist as distinct categories among the masses (Muthuraj, 2016: ix-20). This adversely affects religious peacebuilding in the country.

Also, King and Owen (2020) have evaluated the success and shortcomings of a project of the multireligious and international peace organisation Religions for Peace (RfP), which was meant to cultivate peace in post-military rule Myanmar. Between 2015 and 2019, they conducted an ethnographical study in the country, to understand the achievements of this project, which was titled “Multi-Religious Networks Promoting Religious Diversity and Tolerance”, and which was executed by Religions for Peace Myanmar (RfP-M). RfP-M is the affiliate of RfP in the country that was established in 2012, with members from the four major religious systems
practised in Myanmar, comprising Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. According to King and Owen (2020:3), the project’s aims were:

- to build multireligious capacity to support peacebuilding by training religious leaders on conflict resolution and enhancing the capacity of local women of faith groups for conflict prevention and mediation; to promote social cohesion and reconciliation; to facilitate the conditions for the smooth return/resettlement of IDPs; and to strengthen RfP-M’s national organisation and support the community of practice on multireligious peacebuilding.

King and Owen (2020:7) discovered that the project, which was based on RfP’s multireligious model that recognises the validity of its member religious systems, was helpful in the facilitation of interreligious and interethnic relationships and the empowerment of women, among other things. However, it had several limitations, some of them being its failure to deal with some of the primary economic interests of the communities and its failure to reach “the poorest and those who are at most risk from violence” (King and Owen, 2020:10). This study adopts an approach that is similar to that of Markiewicz (2018), Muthuraj (2016) and King and Owen (2020). This approach seeks to understand the strengths and weaknesses, and the uses and limitations of religious peacebuilding.

Although the above-described studies and other critical and evaluative studies in the field of religious peacebuilding exist, the research on the impact of religious leaders, religious peace norms, and religious peace activism on actual on-the-ground relations in communities is still inadequate. Furthermore, it is still uncommon to examine the impact of religion on interreligious peace through areas where conflict is limited. As a result, the evidence we currently have about the importance of religion in peacebuilding largely relates to
conflict-affected contexts. Research on Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria, which is the primary area of interest in this study, has largely focused on conflict-affected areas. In this thesis, I focus on lessons that could be derived from relatively peaceful zones and I contend that these areas serve as useful alternatives to conflict or post-conflict contexts in our study of religious peacebuilding and interreligious relations.

2.4. Zones of peace in northern Nigeria

Although a sizable amount of literature on religion and peacebuilding exists, studies on how religious factors affect the peace-level in religiously diverse zones of peace remain inadequate. In fact, most of the studies on religious peacebuilding focus on conflict and post-conflict societies. This is the case with the literature on Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria, where there has been more focus on violence. There is, however, a growing body of research on the causes of peace between Christians and Muslims in some communities within the region, but these studies mostly do not involve detailed examinations of how religious leaders, religious peace norms, religious peace activism or other religious factors influence the peace existing in the contexts they are concerned with. In the rest of this section, I discuss some of these studies on northern Nigeria and refer to two other relevant ones on Indonesia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is not meant to be a comprehensive review of literature on zones or causes of peace in religiously diverse settings. It is only meant to demonstrate that more research on those settings is required and northern Nigeria is under-researched in that regard.
Krause (2016) has conducted over 100 interviews in Jos, Nigeria between 2010 and 2015 to understand the reasons for the variation in the spread and intensity of communal violence in the city. Jos is one of the places most affected by communal religion-related violence in northern Nigeria, with over 400 killings occurring there between 2001 and 2010 (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Krause, 2016:261). Specifically, Krause questions why two ethnically and religiously mixed and almost contiguous quarters within the city had different peace-levels between 2001 and 2010. One (Anglo Jos) was violent and hit by riots, while the other (Dadin Kowa) was nonviolent and riot-free, despite being vulnerable to clashes (with a large number of unemployed youths, a sizable poor population and drug-abuse problems as in many other violence-prone quarters) and despite the existing climate of heavy ethnoreligious polarisation (Krause, 2016). Rather than emerging from the intervention of security forces and structural factors such as geography and demography, Krause argues that there was peace in one of the neighbourhoods due to civilian agency through leadership, the dissuasion of youths in the area from embracing violence or joining in fights in other parts of the city, the use of mixed youth patrols, and refusal to join or collaborate with existing external armed groups.

Krause (2016), however, pays little attention to religious agency. She mentions the peace works of a Christian pastor “who many within and around Dadin Kowa considered the most influential leader”, another pastor who had dissuaded Christian youth groups to not fight in response to the surrounding violence against Christians, and one other Christian pastor who prevented an
external Christian armed group from killing internal Muslims (276-279). However, Krause is silent about Muslim religious leaders and her main concern is not to evaluate the impact of religious leaders and other religious factors on the relations on the ground. In her work, the Christian leaders were part of a broader group she calls “community leaders” who helped to prevent killings, but no analysis was done of the general role of the different Christian and Muslim religious leaders within the peaceful neighbourhood.

Similar to her study on communal conflict in Jos, two religiously and ethnically mixed suburban areas in Ambon, which is within the Maluku Province of Indonesia, were researched by Krause to understand why one of them (Poka-Rumahtiga) was violent at the same time of crisis when Wayame, the other community, was peaceful and was in fact “the only religiously, ethnically, and socio-economically mixed neighbourhood in Ambon not devastated during the local war” of 1999 to 2002 (Krause, 2018:3; also see Krause, 2018:129-169 and Goss, 2000). In Poka-Rumahtiga, although the efforts of religious and communal leaders to prevent violence did not prevent killings, they had responded to the violence in the surroundings by issuing statements for peace and discouraging youths from killing. An imam and a protestant pastor had celebrated an oath of peace for the community before the community members and soldiers working there (Krause, 2018:136). Apparently, a major problem with this argument about the “failure of community leaders to prevent the violence” as the reason for the killings in the neighbourhood is that it tends to downplay the role of other factors, such as the failure of the state, in the causation of communal violence, while over-
blaming the community leaders. However, according to Krause (2018:145), some of the religious leaders could be blamed, as they “actively preached war.” She explains that it was in Wayame, where the communal leaders were more active in their preventive efforts, as in Dadin Kowa in Jos, that killings did not take place. They went beyond the issuance of statements for peace and conducting rituals to actively take the following other steps.

(a) They depolarised communal relations, for example, through the encouragement of a common identity as “people of Wayame” and as “Indonesians”, as opposed to religious and polarising ones like “Christians” and “Muslims” (Krause, 2018:152-3).

(b) Also, they coordinated the influx of displaced persons from external communities. For instance, unlike Poka-Rumahtiga where these displaced persons were accommodated in religious buildings, Muslim and Christian victims of violence were not to take refuge in Wayame’s church or mosque in order to avoid the escalation of tensions; they could only stay at Wayame’s military compound (Krause, 2018:150).

(c) Internal mobilisation for killings was also prevented by them and they prevented attacks from external militias. For example, this was done by explaining to external communities that Wayame was neutral and could not be a threat to them, and even meeting groups which have come to Wayame for attacks before they enter the community (Krause, 2018:156-7).

(e) The communal leaders also established systems of conflict management within the neighbourhood. A good example is Wayame’s
Team 20, which is a group of ten Muslims and ten Christians consisting of at least one representative from every settlement in Wayame. It was organised by the community leaders at the beginning of the conflict in January 1999 to deliberate on and pursue Wayame’s protection, for instance by making rules and regulations for the community members, such as for night watches at entry points (Krause, 2018:151).

Furthermore, they tried to prevent cooperation between the internals and armed outsiders (Krause, 2018:145ff).

Krause adds that cooperation between Christian and Muslim religious leaders was a crucial part of why killings were successfully prevented there, as the conflict was essentially between Christians and Muslims. This was shown, according to her, by

(a) the imam preaching in Wayame’s church and the pastor delivering a sermon in the mosque (Krause, 2018:150),

(b) the pastor going to the mosque to guarantee that they will not be attacked by the Christians of Wayame (Krause, 2018:149) in order to prevent killings out of fear of attack, and then subsequent reprisal attacks, and also by

(c) the fact that Christians protected Muslims while they were in the mosque, just as Muslims watched over the church while Christians worshipped (Krause, 2018:150).

This is, therefore, part of the studies highlighting the importance of religious and communal leaders in conflict settings and the religious interventions
described are similar to the kind of religious peacebuilding in Abuja that is identified in the next chapter as “urgent response amidst danger.”

I should highlight two ideas from Krause’s studies at this point. The first is that the communal leaders who prevented killings in the peaceful neighbourhoods had a deep knowledge of conflict dynamics, partly from personal experience in conflict situations, and they could use that knowledge to mobilise for nonviolence. The second point is that her findings suggest that protection of self, family and livelihoods was a major motivation for some communal leaders’ violence-prevention efforts in the peaceful part of Jos (Krause, 2016:280). As I discuss further in chapter 5, this is opposed to the common idea that religious peacebuilders are always centrally motivated by their religion’s teachings about peace and altruism. The idea that self-interest and self-protection are primary motives of civil nonviolence in times of violence is also highlighted in other studies, such as Gray (2012) and Lynch (2014). Vullers (2019), on the other hand, has argued that another determinant is the costs associated with peace activism. For example, the cost could be high for the religious actors (a) if there is little or no religious freedom in the country, and (b) if the religious peace activists have a small number of followers, network or financial support (Vullers, 2019:2-3). This, however, does not entirely invalidate or discredit claims about altruistic motivations. What seems to be the case is that interests vary across individuals and conflict contexts. In the same area where self-protection was the major interest for some people, Krause (2016:280-281) discovered that belief in God and oneness of all humans despite religious differences were major driving factors for some of
the community leaders. In Wayame, Indonesia, one of the most important peace actors because of whom there was no mass violence in the community throughout the Maluku war of 1999-2002 was a Protestant pastor who stood for peace because he believed he was a priest “sent [by God] to speak for peace” (Krause, 2018:162). I shall draw on these innovative insights from Krause’s research to consider the findings of my own study in Abuja.

While Otmacic (2017) is not particularly interested in religious agency in relatively peaceful communities, she briefly discusses religious leadership in her chapter on Tuzla, which is a city of about 130,000 inhabitants in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through her fieldwork, she discovered some of the reasons why Tuzla remained an “oasis of peace” where inter-ethnic coexistence and cooperation between the Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats were maintained during and throughout the violent Yugoslav conflict of 1991-1995, despite the ethnic fracturing which characterised most of the country. She argues that one of them was the efforts made by some of the religious leaders in the community to counter and not promote the narrative and dominant nationalist discourses (a) that the conflict was caused by ethnic differences and antagonisms, and (b) that the violence was inevitable and therefore was one which could only be addressed by the division of the country into ethnically homogeneous states (Otmacic, 2017: chapter 7). It is worthy of note, however, that she identified other significant contributing factors, including the good governance provided by local authorities, the local media, and other nonreligious civil society organisations. This is a pointer to the idea that religious peace actors are normally part of, rather than the only, determinants of the absence of physical
violence in peaceful societies within or not within conflict zones. Arguably, “religious organizations work more effectively [in peacemaking] when in alliance with other civil society groups with whom they share the same strategic spaces” (Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2010:1033). However, whereas religious agency might be part of the causes of peace, it is believed that religious leaders could promote tensions or violent conflict. In the same Tuzla where Otmacic discovers that “Muslim religious leaders were mostly moderate” and did not promote divisive discourses, this was “with the exception of two persons” (Otmacic, 2017:250); and in other parts of Bosnia, religious leaders helped to exacerbate the conflict (Silvestri and Mayall, 2015:67-68). That said, it is important to note that Otmacic’s point about the promotion of divisive discourses shows that even where religious leaders do not actively work to promote peace, they could prevent or reduce violence by not promoting divisive discourses or doing other things that cause divisions and conflict. Hence, further explored in chapter 4 of this thesis are kinds of active and inactive peacebuilding in Abuja.

Additionally, Otmacic’s (2017) and Krause’s (2016 and 2018) studies draw attention to (a) civilian violence-prevention in contexts of existing mass violence as an aspect of civilian peacebuilding, and (b) religious agency for nonviolence within a context of ongoing mass violence as a component of religious peacebuilding. Related to these are the peace-actions which take place in the context of anticipated outbreaks of violence, that is even where there is no ongoing mass violence. These aspects related to the prevention of imminent or anticipated violence, or just the prevention of the spreading of
ongoing violence to certain areas, are different from other peace actions carried out in a relatively peaceful context, for example, workshops for youth where there is no such threat. A participant in Krause’s (2018:137-138) study in Poka-Rumahtiga had argued that “if there is no problem, no conflict, no fighting, no clashes, no war, everyone can talk about peace and how to stop violence. But if people have already been killed, then this is very ineffective.” Whereas it may not be true that this is always “very ineffective”, it is evident that restoring peace during violence and building or sustaining peace in the absence of violence (as in zones of peace) are different tasks which may require different approaches. This reality is recognised in this study, and the recognition has led to the approach it has taken. While its arguments are mainly based on fieldwork findings from Abuja, they are also shaped by realities in conflict-affected contexts. This is demonstrated by the discussion in chapter 7.

Another recent study on interreligious peace in northern Nigeria highlights the role of political power and representation. Having interviewed communal leaders in 38 districts in the states of Plateau and Kaduna, Bunte and Vinson (2016) argue that violent interreligious conflict is less likely to occur in communities where there are informal power-sharing arrangements or institutions, as these arrangements moderate the motivations of potential perpetrators of violence in two major ways. First, elites use more conciliatory language where such arrangements are in place and they do not use religious identity to mobilise supporters. For example, if a Christian chairmanship candidate in such a community is campaigning for votes with a Muslim running
mate, his or her use of divisive language that condemns the religious other will likely not be helpful to them. And second, these arrangements reduce competition between the different religious groups, as religious diversity becomes less likely to be perceived as threatening by the general population. They argue that this was the case in the Chikun district of Kaduna state where there has been relative peace. By local power-sharing arrangements, they mean those informal rules created and followed by the local elite for inclusiveness in the local government (Bunte and Vinson, 2016:51), which mainly have to do with how holders of political offices in the local government should rotate among the religious and ethnic groups in the area in order to ensure a fair representation of all the groups. For example, in an arrangement they call “rotating positions”, the local executive council are drawn from the different religious groups, with the positions rotating across elections; the chairmanship candidate and his or her running mate are also required to belong to different ethnic groups, just as the secretary, who is appointed by the Chairman. With this inclusion, power-sharing arrangements prevent violent conflict, especially when they “include all groups that can threaten political stability if kept outside the arrangements” (Rothchild and Roeder, 2005:31). As in the previous studies, however, Bunte and Vinson pay little attention to the impact of religious factors on the existing peace. Although this study is mainly interested in the influence of religion, it also considers the importance of political factors in the dynamics of interreligious peace in Abuja, especially in chapter 6, and it contributes to the research on that aspect of Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria.
Dowd’s (2016) recent study on religious diversity and interreligious peace in Nigeria is also noteworthy. He argues that there is a connection between religious diversity and religious tolerance in the country, so that the more religiously diverse areas there have more religious tolerance. “In-depth interviews,” Dowd explains, “indicate that Christian and Muslim religious leaders more openly encouraged religious tolerance in religiously diverse and integrated settings than in religiously homogeneous settings” (617). However, it is not very clear why and how religious diversity has that positive effect. Also, although he partly focuses on religious institutions’ support for religious tolerance in northern areas – Jos and Kano, Dowd (2016) does not explore the location of religion within the broad dynamics of the existing interreligious peace. In fact, part of the major limitations of his analysis is the fact that he seems to position religious diversity as the most powerful determinant of religious institutions’ support for religious tolerance. That said, I should clarify that the point here is not that religious diversity has no relationship with the level of support for religious tolerance or the level of interreligious peace that may exist in an area. In fact, part of the arguments in chapter 6 of this thesis is that Abuja’s relative peace also partly results from its high level of ethnoreligious diversity. Rather, the point here is that Dowd’s failure to properly acknowledge complexity in the dynamics of interreligious peace represents one of the shortcomings of his arguments. Studies also show that religious peace activism is not always motivated by religious factors, like religious observance, which Dowd is concerned with. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, and as I further argue in chapters 5 and 7, other important factors
include concern for one’s family and one’s safety, as well as the costs of the activism (Vullers, 2019; Krause, 2016:280). However, despite these issues in Dowd’s study, his point about religious diversity and interreligious peace is relevant in this research. Similarly, while the previously described studies do not pay significant attention to religion, they have yielded insights into aspects of interreligious peace in northern Nigeria. Hence, this work draws on them and other relevant studies to interpret the findings from Abuja.

2.5. Conclusion

The above-discussed studies reveal useful findings regarding the causes of peaceful interreligious relations in northern Nigeria and other areas, but the research on religious peacebuilding in the region’s zones of peace remains inadequate. More research is needed on the nature of interreligious relations in the peaceful areas and the impact of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism on peace between Christians and Muslims in those settings. With that, we can have more understanding of the factors that shape Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria and other religiously mixed contexts.

In the subsequent chapters, I draw on primary data collected in Abuja and the academic literature on religion, conflict, and peace to present the responses of this study to these issues. First, I show in the next chapter how religion functions in Abuja as an identity marker, and how it affects the ways Abuja’s residents view themselves and others. After that, I use chapter 4 to discuss the forms of religious peacebuilding taking place there. This religious peacebuilding notwithstanding, chapter 5 shows that rather than religious
factors, it was practical issues that seemed to mainly define laypersons’ peaceful attitudes towards religious others, as these issues are often of paramount importance to lay persons. It also presents findings regarding the limited impact of interreligious dialogue in the area. The chapter explains that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism seem not to be having as much impact on the relative peace existing between Christians and Muslims in Abuja as religious leaders suggested during the study. Chapter 6 further demonstrates the complexity in the dynamics of interreligious peace, by describing the nonreligious factors that influence the relative peace in Abuja. All these would show that religious factors impact on the peace that might exist between members of different religious communities, but it is sometimes not in the way that some religious leaders and some of those who favourably comment on religious peacebuilding claim. This and other main points in the study are discussed in chapter 7, which is followed by the concluding chapter of the thesis.
CHAPTER 3
RELIGION AS AN IDENTITY MARKER IN ABUJA

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present original data from Abuja that shows the various ways that religion functions as an identity marker in the territory. The chapter is meant to describe the situation in Abuja, within which the religious peacebuilding described in the next chapter has been taking place. The fieldwork in Abuja showed that religious identity is relevant in the lives of Christians and Muslims in the territory and in relations between them. Many studies have explained that in defiance of the expectation of secularists, religion has remained a major source of identity for millions of people around the world (Haynes, 2009:52; Norris and Inglehart, 2004:3). This chapter uses three main cases to show the various ways religious identity plays a role in Abuja. First, Christians and Muslims in the area draw spiritual and emotional strength from their religious traditions as they carry out their daily activities. Second, they have certain views about religious others that are partly influenced by religious beliefs. Third, religious identity influences political views and voting in the territory. In sum, the chapter aims to highlight the fact that religious identity matters in Abuja in various ways. Among other things, it shows that this study’s argument about the overestimation of religion in peace dynamics is not meant to suggest that residents of Abuja are not religious people, that they do not take their religious identity seriously, that there are no religious divides in Abuja, that religious identity generally does not matter to people in religiously mixed contexts, or that religious peacebuilding that aims
to promote interreligious peace is not useful. As chapters 5 and 7 will show, the point in this work is that even with laypeople’s identification with religious systems, it seems that the level of importance that they attach to religious differences, religious peace norms, or the religious peacebuilding that responds to religious divides, is sometimes not as much as religious leaders and some commentators on religious peacebuilding do suggest.

The literature on religious identity is broad. It includes (a) studies concerned with its relationship with other phenomena – such as nationalism (Omer and Springs, 2013) or identity politics (Haynes, 2009:56-60), (b) those discussing its construction (Erikson, 1962), and (c) studies highlighting issues related to its fluidity and hybridity – such as multiple religious belonging (Cornille, 2002; Nhat Hanh, 1995; Williams, 2015, 2021). It is not the intention of this chapter to discuss all these studies extensively; the concern is to examine how religion serves as an identity marker in Abuja. I use religious identity to refer to how residents of Abuja are categorised according to the religious system they have an affiliation with; so that the word Christian is the identifier of those who are adherents of Christianity, and Muslim refers to those who are affiliated with Islam. Having these identities means that the people accept and live by the teachings of Christianity and Islam, and essentially, as is in the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur’an. This acceptance and related practices distinguish the adherents. For example, believing that the biblical Jesus of Nazareth is Christ, Christians have creeds and prayers that have Jesus at the centre, and they go to church on Sundays and other days to worship. On the other hand, believing that Prophet Muhammad is the last messenger of Allah,
and that Jesus is only one of the prophets who came before Muhammad, and that there is no god but Allah, the Muslims have prayers and practices that have Allah and the prophet at the centre – hence becoming different from the Christians. In short, religious identities are made up of (a) distinguishing identifiers for the people concerned, (b) beliefs, and (c) practices – such as religious holidays, religious festivals, ways of dressing and rites of passage. Importantly, a religious identity is “moulded by a set of carried beliefs: dogmatic principles, moral standings, coded mythologies, highly esteemed parables, social taboos, and understandings of God or divinity, the supernatural and the cosmological universe” (Dietrich, 2012:1080). The identifiers, therefore, are usually accompanied by certain beliefs and practices.

That said, I should explain that this is only a brief overview of the nature of religious identity that enables us to go forward with the argument in this chapter. According to Dietrich (2012:1080), “religious identity correlates to a number of social factors: age, gender, economic status, national and ethnic identities, educational background, social standing, sexual orientation, and personal identifiers.” Furthermore, various accounts of the subject exist, including theological, sociological, philosophical, political, and psychological accounts, but arguably, “there has not yet emerged a unifying theory of religious identity” (Jackson II and Hogg, 2010:632). So, rather than this non-linearity in religious identity, I focus on whether and how difference in religious identity matters in Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja. This will help us to understand the relevance of the religious peacebuilding described in the next chapter.
Abuja demonstrates how individual believers use the religious traditions they follow to navigate life’s processes and how difference in religious identity, in combination with other factors, influences people’s perceptions about the religious other. In the following sections, I shall first describe cases of interreligious relations that may suggest at first glance that religious difference is of little significance in Abuja, in terms of whether and how Christians and Muslims relate positively with each other. After this, I shall describe the opposing reality: that there are indeed interreligious divides in the communities within Abuja Municipal Area Council, even as they are zones of peace. It is within this context that the religious peacebuilding described in the next chapter takes place. The presence of these divides, the presence of religious peacebuilding, and the absence of violent interreligious conflicts in the area suggest that religious peacebuilding has had some impact on the relative peace existing there. According to chapter 7, these realities, and a consideration of religious contributions to peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas, show that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to sustain interreligious peace.

3.2. Where religious difference seems to be of little relevance

As noted previously, religious identity does define people’s views about religious others in Abuja. However, it will be an overstatement to say that difference in religious identity constantly has a negative impact on the way Christians and Muslims relate with each other in public and private areas in the territory. There are several reasons for this. First, the absence of violent interreligious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Wuse, Utako and
other districts of Abuja Municipal Area Council seems to suggest that the difference in religious identity has not been strongly divisive enough to cause conflicts between the two major religious groups existing there. Compared to some other areas in the northern region, such as nearby Kaduna and Plateau where there have been interreligious killings and destruction of properties, this is a negative case where there have been no cases of violent conflicts emerging along religious lines.

Joyfully speaking about the relative peace in parts of Abuja during our conversation on 14 March, one of the participants, the secretary of Abuja’s chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Bishop CRL5, said: “It’s a very peaceful part of the country.” Imam MRL1 of the National Mosque explained on 6 February that in Abuja, Muslims, including imams and others, are invited to churches and they do attend, just as Christians attend mosques freely. He thought that that could only happen in a peaceful place where Christians and Muslims do not allow their differences to divide them. The Chief Imam of NASFAT in Utako, Imam MRL2, who had the same thought, asked me during an interview that took place in his mosque on 12 February: “people say that Christians are not welcome in the mosque, but are you not a Christian and are you not here now?” Most of the religious leaders who participated in this study mentioned that the religious leaders had a good relationship in Abuja and attended interreligious dialogical meetings. Bishop CRL5 even attributed the relative peace in Abuja to “men of peace,” who are Muslim and Christian religious leaders in Abuja that have not only had a cordial relationship between each other but also tried to extend the cordiality to their followers. He described
how Christian and Islamic leaders pay homage to the president during
Christian and Islamic festivals, mostly in the same bus, “sitting beside each
other, chatting and laughing.” When I questioned Reverend Father CRL4 on
12 March about his earlier claim that Muslims are invited to events held in his
church, he explained as follows:

Yes, very well; yes, we do. When I do programmes and it’s an open
programme, we send invitations to them…When they have their various
functions, they invite us. You see the Cardinal (Onaiyekan) sometimes
goes for their breaking of fast in the State House…When we share relief
materials, it will fascinate you that if you come here during Christmas
period…75 or 80 per cent of those who benefit from that are Muslims,
and we do not ask them to go because we also know that poverty is a
general thing. It does not choose who to follow. It does not mind your
religion. Everybody suffers it.

As the next chapter shows, this act of inviting religious others to events or
attending theirs is part of how religious leaders try to build peace in Abuja. The
above-cited views about interreligious peace in Abuja are also reflected in
Imam MRL6’s response on 10 May about Christian-Muslim cooperation in the
territory:

I have a lot of friends that are Christians. In Abuja, we are making a
good relation with them. I visit them and they visit me. Even, there is
one pastor that … come[s] to my house with his children. I … visit them;
we … talk to solve some problems. That means we have a good
understanding here in Abuja.

It seems that these interreligious relations are not characterised by distrust.

Bishop CRL5 says the following on 14 March about his family’s positive
relationship with Muslims:

Where I stay, my immediate neighbour is a Muslim. The other day, there
was a fire incident in her house and it was my children and our
neighbours that went to quench the fire. Other Muslims eventually
came, but the first responders were from my house. It wasn’t an issue
of this person is a Muslim…This family, they sometimes eat from my
own house. They do! Casually, they see us cooking something and they
say: “Ahh, I like this thing.” And sometimes, we even get things from their own house. There is a bit of cordiality.

In these interreligious relations in Abuja, religious difference seems not to be divisive, and as I explain in the next chapter, religious leaders in Abuja help to promote such peaceful relations.

Furthermore, there were other forms of interreligious relations in the area which suggest that interreligious coexistence there is a normal reality – something that happens ordinarily among the residents. In these cases, difference in religious identity is not unrecognised, but the activities involving Christians and Muslims continue as though there was no such difference, or as though this difference has been welcomed by the people. On Sundays, Muslims sell items, such as fruits and yam, in front of churches, and Christians buy from them as they leave the churches after worship. When I spoke to two of the Muslim men selling fruits in front of Wuse’s Holy Rosary Catholic Parish on Sundays, they seemed to not need any special justification to be able to sell to Christians. They had been doing that for months and Christians buy from them on their way home from the church. When Muslims have their Jumu’ah services, their Christian employers remind them to go and pray, as a quantity surveyor at Wuse’s Methodist Cathedral, Mr CLP8, who has Muslim employees, explained on 31 March. In Wuse and Utako markets, Muslims and Christians sell and buy from each other, with the transaction taking place smoothly despite the difference in religious identity. Christians and Muslims have neighbouring shops and they cooperate to serve customers. Sometimes, when a Muslim vendor leaves to pray, it is the Christian neighbour who looks after their shop. In fact, there seemed to be a population of people in the area
who followed messages about “the oneness of religions” in Nigeria, for example, as preached by Anglican priest-turned Muslim evangelist MLP6, who explained during our interview that crowds surround and listen to him whenever he preaches in open spaces and buses and that he has been invited to programmes by a radio station in Abuja’s Galadimawa, the Owerri office of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), at least two major churches in Abuja, and another two in Lagos. Having served as a Christian priest for 25 years before becoming a Muslim in 2015, Mr MLP6 wants to use his experience and theological knowledge about both Islam and Christianity to “distinguish between the tradition of man and God’s intention for his creation, and show that what God intended for man is not different religions and divisions, but love and unity” (Apostle MLP6, 8 February). The people who listen to his message might constitute a population that supports the bridging of gaps between both religions, just as the “missioner of Muslim-Christian peaceful coexistence”, as MLP6 identifies himself, preaches. The point is that there is a significant population of residents in Abuja for whom the religious difference between the Christian and the Muslim means little, and/or should not be an obstacle to relations with the religious other.

Finally, I should add that in Utako, only a wall separates the premises of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries from the mosque within FOMWAN headquarters. As I attended the headquarters around midday on 27 May for an interview, a service was going on in the church with songs and the sermon being loudly heard via speakers, while prayers were also being commenced in the mosque, with calls to prayer being said loudly. It was not entirely clear
whether this causes any conflict between them or the extent to which this could generate problems, as a staff in the reception of FOMWAN’s headquarters confirmed during our conversation on 28 May that the two religious centres have been existing side by side for over a decade without any clash. He explained that “all we have asked for is that they should turn down the volume of their speakers... But I know that this can be a time-bomb in some areas.”

The Muslim-Christian violence in October 1982 in Kano State’s Faggae (near Sabon Gari) was due to a similar reason. As Christians tried to rebuild a dilapidated church, the Muslims around argued that it was too close to an already existing mosque. They advised against the construction and tried to prevent the government from approving the project. However, the project was continued by the Christians under police protection, but before it could be completed, “the Muslims consequently reacted violently and in the disorder that followed three churches were burnt by the Muslims and several other churches were vandalized,” (Ozor, 2009:117) with the federal government eventually compensating the state’s chapter of the CAN financially. The point here is that the fact that the closeness of churches and mosques has not generated Christian-Muslim violence in Abuja’s Utako may suggest, in addition to the other factors described above, that the difference in religious identity has not always had a divisive impact on Christian-Muslim relations in the area.

3.3. Where religious identity matters

However, these cases of interreligious cooperation in Abuja were only part of the situation in the territory. The religious components of people’s identities seemed to have an impact on them, both (a) in their personal lives
as they deal with life’s challenges, and (b) in terms of their views about the religious other. At this stage, it is relevant to highlight the point that identities are complex, and this applies to Christians and Muslims in Abuja. As chapters 5 and 7 explain further, they are constructs of not only Islam and Christianity. However, while their interests go beyond the religious to include many other factors that may be classified as mostly secular, the fieldwork revealed that religious beliefs were important in the lives of the ordinary persons in the area.

While in Abuja, I used public buses and taxis several times and I found out that the drivers often kept sacred objects in them, examples being the Catholic rosary, the statue of Christ on the cross, and emblems produced by churches with contents such as “this is your year of success.” Some buses even had religious statements on their body, a good example being Allahu Akbar. For each of these cases, God cannot be separated from businesses. As the drivers of these public vehicles take-up passengers and acquire money, God is thanked for helping to create the income, and the hope with which the drivers expect more customers and more money strongly depends on the belief that God is involved in their business. In several shops in Wuse market, sacred objects and posters could be seen, and as some vendors explained during interviews, they pray before they begin their marketing and after they have closed, every day. When asked the reason why they said those prayers, the response from a small store owner selling foodstuff was that “if God did not take charge, business will not work. And after selling and you did not thank God, he will not be happy with you. You know that when you thank somebody for the one he did, he will do again later” (Madam Joy, 15 June). Sometimes
when items are sold, statements like “Chineke daalu” – an Igbo statement meaning “God thank you” - and similar ones are made by the sellers. When there are no sales, hope sustains the vendors, and this hope is largely based on the belief that God does not forsake his children. Tithes are paid in churches, with thanks to God for his blessings, and with the expectation of more prosperity. The study discovered that most residents of Wuse, Utako and surrounding areas within Abuja Municipal Area Council are religious, particularly in the sense that they attend worship in mosques on Fridays and churches on Sundays. Throughout the fieldwork, I attended services in some churches and observed that each church had about two or more services on Sundays and attracted large numbers of worshippers in each of the sessions. The holding of multiple services was partly a strategy for accommodating the large numbers of attendees within the available space. While in church, people pray about personal needs: security, success, husbands, children, money, employment and so on. Religious solutions for life’s challenges are also promised by actors outside established churches, and it was discovered that these problem-solvers are patronised by both Christians and Muslims who have yet to receive their desires. In some streets in Wuse district where I lived, posters were seen advertising “miraculous solutions” to poverty, sickness, and barrenness, and promising (a) “love portions” for bewitching desired partners, (b) riches in a matter of days, (c) promotion at work, (d) cars and houses, (e) employment, and (f) any desired form of “success.” One interesting thing about these sources of miracles is that they serve people of all faiths. Some religious leaders, however, do not approve of them. As the secretary of CAN’s FCT
chapter, Bishop CRL5, lamented, “some people...because they want to become rich, they fall into many hurtful losses, derail from their faith, have gone into syncretism, diabolism, because they want to become rich.” For most of the Christian leaders interviewed, the focus on the materialistic rather than the spiritual is in sharp contrast to the life and teachings of Jesus, and is a strong obstacle to genuine Christian living, because it leads to many sins, including diabolism and the acquirement of money and properties through corrupt means. Among some religious leaders, the materialism and quest for riches turns them into prosperity preachers who “sell” miracles, and who sometimes even derive spiritual powers from diabolic sources. That said, the point is that all these practices in Abuja demonstrate how important religion is in individuals' lives in the area. As explained earlier in chapter 1, it is estimated that 50% of residents of the territory are Muslims and a little below 50% are Christians, and more than 90% of Nigeria’s over 180 million citizens identify as either Christian or Muslim (Stonawski et al, 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2010). Partly influenced by personal religious beliefs, and partly by other socio-political factors, Christians and Muslims in Abuja also have fears, suspicions, and other bad feelings about the religious other, and this is another aspect of religious identity’s role in Abuja that I discuss below.

Due to its ability to distinguish or categorise objects, persons or groups based on differences and similarities, identity is often marked by duality (Yamin, 2008), and religious identity helps to define who is “in” and who is not (Geertz, 1993). I/you, we/you, us/them, and self/other, are common dualities which represent or encapsulate identity differences. Apart from these, which
could be regarded as general dualities, more specifically religious ones include saved/unsaved, believer/infidel, Christian/non-Christian, Muslim/non-Muslim, Islamic/non-Islamic, and halal/haram within the identity construction of people in Abuja. The earlier mentioned cases of Christian-Muslim cooperation in Abuja notwithstanding, the difference in religious identity and an attendant divide between Christians and Muslims were demonstrated in the area in several ways during the fieldwork.

One, the categories Christian and Muslim are loaded with meanings and are associated with stereotypes. I shall illustrate this using my experiences during the fieldwork, which demonstrate the meanings that the identifiers, especially Muslim, have for some Christians in the area. As I planned to go to the headquarters of FOMWAN, I sought advice about my visit. Four female Christians who I spoke to thought that it was not safe to go, specifically because I am a man. They advised out of deep concern for my safety that I use alternative sources for my study. A woman from a state in the north, who I met at the Federal Secretariat and spoke to about it as I visited to see Fr Prof. CRL9 of the Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC), advised that I should stay away from Muslim women, because they are strongly guarded by their men, who seem to be very possessive of the women. She explained that I could be easily harmed by men in the surrounding if they feel that I am getting too close to the women. In her words, “you should not go because these Hausa and Fulani Muslim people move with dagger in their trousers. They don’t value people’s life, and they can stab you if you go to their women” (Mrs Musa, 17 May). A piece of additional advice was that I should attend but with a female
research assistant, and another person thought that I could go alone but I should wear and show a wedding ring to everyone I meet there so that they would regard me as a responsible married man rather than a single young man in search of women to befriend. All these would turn out to be part of the problems of fear, misconception, and lack of mutual understanding in Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja and Nigeria, because my experience at the headquarters of FOMWAN did not reflect these people's thoughts.

On 27 May, I went there alone and did not encounter any problem accessing the president. In fact, right from the gate, I met very hospitable persons, including two men at the gate who directed me to the reception, a woman outside the reception who led me to the president, and the president herself who gave me an appointment for our meeting at 1700 on the same day. I left the premises without any harm done to me and without the fears that I had before the visit, as a result of the sincere warnings from non-Muslims. Such views and suspicions for the other from a distant position seem to be present among other Christians and they serve as obstacles to cordial Christian-Muslim relationships. This experience and others demonstrate that although the difference in religious identity has not generated intergroup violence in parts of Abuja, religious identification remains a sensitive issue in the territory.

One of the first meetings for the fieldwork took place on 24 January with a staff at All Saints Anglican Church, Wuse Zone 5. Upon my entry and request to meet with the priest in charge, she asked what my religion was, and when I replied that I am a Catholic but regard myself as a liberal Christian who
accommodates people of other religions, her reply was “that’s not good,” and she encouraged me to “stick to my religion.” The question about my religion might be considered inappropriate in some contexts, mainly because it might signify prejudice. It is probable that if I did not identify as a Christian or even Catholic, her response to my request to meet with the Minister-in-Charge would have been different. Also, on the same day, I called a priest in the Anglican church to arrange for an interview, and he asked whether I was a Christian, and then, after my affirmative reply, he asked: “Which church do you attend?” I eventually met with him for the interview, but it is not clear what would have happened if I had identified as a non-Christian, a Pentecostal, or maybe an Anglican – like the priest asking about my identity. The issue is that difference in religious identity does matter in how people view each other in Abuja.

A similar encounter occurred on 3 June, when a Muslim staff, who was one of the two women with a director and intended participant in her office at the FCDA, was unhappy with me because I chose to identify as a “Christian who is open to the religious other” rather than just “a Christian,” when the director asked me what my religion was. As she angrily said: “I don’t know what is wrong with you people. Just say that you are a Christian. You are either a Christian or you are not.” She was calmed by the director who I came to see, but even as we continued the interview, she would make aggressive interruptions, and I could deduce from her behaviour that she did not support the liberal idea of “being in the middle.” The director herself, who seemed to have a similar view, asked me further about my religious identity and even
specifically asked whether I was a member of “Chrislam,” before she responded to the questions that I had. Questions about my religious identity emerged in many of the interviews that took place in Abuja. The concern of a minister of the Presbyterian church and his family, who I visited in Utako after interviewing Venerable CRL1 on 1 February, was that my association with Muslims during this research could lead to me being converted to Islam. However, another Presbyterian minister, who was present during the visit, added that such a conversion was largely unlikely because I am a Roman Catholic, given that interdenominational and interreligious conversions in Nigeria are more common among Pentecostals.

Furthermore, though some of the religious leaders I wrote to accepted to take part in this research, about five of them were eventually not interviewed despite my attempts to have a conversation with them. In about two of the cases, it was obvious that busy schedules might have been a primary reason for the negative response. But still, it was not clear why they could not have a few minutes for the interview throughout the period that the fieldwork lasted, despite the potential of the study’s findings to be useful for peacebuilding in Nigeria. During one of the interviews, an imam at the National Mosque evaded a few questions that had to do with his religion, and eventually cut the interview short. Also, many of the laypersons simply did not want their names taken for the research. Kappler (2013:131-135) writes about how locals in conflict and post-conflict societies resist researchers to avoid being misrepresented or over-researched, for example, by refusing to participate in a research project, refusing to discuss some topics, presenting only a version of the story, or using
their local language. Whereas it was not the case that Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja had been or was being over-researched - as symbolised by the lack of literature on the subject, it is difficult to rule out “possible misrepresentation” from the list of possible reasons for those responses. But apart from that, the resistance that I encountered could have also resulted from concern for the possible consequences of being identified as the source of a piece of information about the religious other. Perhaps, they did not want to be criticised, harmed, misunderstood, misquoted, or get into trouble. Attached to each letter of interview request was a list of major interview questions, and among others, some of the questions included the following: what are the current issues in Abuja which should be addressed for continuous peace? What issues do you think the Islamic community (for a Muslim participant) or the Christian community (for a Christian participant) in Abuja have to address among themselves for peace to be sustained here? For a communal leader who did not accept to participate despite my three visits to the palace and calls to his secretary for about a month, I asked: (a) what are the issues which have to be addressed for peaceful Christian-Muslim relations in X community? and, (b) What complaints have you received from your subjects about Christians or Muslims? Then, when a Catholic priest was requested to sign the consent form, he said the following as he signed it without being prompted by comments about other (intended) participants’ negative response, suggesting that he did understand that it may be difficult for people to sign that they participated:

It’s because of how bad our country and our world has become. Nobody should be afraid of saying anything. It’s a free world. Nobody should
arrest me. It's if what I said instigate people that it becomes a problem. There is no tax for talking. It's because of the world we find ourselves, because somebody may see this thing and think otherwise and do anything they want to do (Fr CRL4, 12 March).

The point being made in this section is that while there were cases of interreligious cooperation in Abuja that suggest that difference in religious identity does not have any negative impact on people in the area, there were forms of non-peace involving Christians and Muslims there.

I must explain, however, that some of the intended participants did not hesitate to engage with me during the fieldwork. In fact, although some of them preferred not to be electronically recorded, some were happy with being recorded, and one of the imams was the one who asked me to get a recorder after he did not see one as the interview was about to commence. At this point in the research, it seemed that it was normal to not record since none of the previous interviewees permitted it. As this imam said, "get your recorder, I am not afraid because I want to tell you the truth. Anyone who does not want to be recorded lies" (Imam MRL3, 11 March). The point, therefore, is not that all the participants in this study were afraid or hesitant to speak about the situation in Abuja. Besides, apart from fear, there are other possible reasons why some of the contacted persons did not want to participate, including my identity as a Christian, a student from the West, or even a researcher who could divulge some details to a foreign audience. It could also be that if I could use Hausa fluently, the encounters with the Hausa-speaking persons would have been more positive. The point is rather that the response of some of those who were consulted for the research suggests that people were hesitant to discuss
aspects of Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja or Nigeria, and they were also hesitant to be identified as participants in the study.

Some of the existing suspicions were consequences of the past and more current issues or recent happenings in parts of the country. Although some of the suspicions are tied to stereotypes, such as the view that “Muslims speak from the mouth and not the heart” (CRA3, 5 February), others emerge from events outside Abuja, including residents’ thoughts about the experiences of Christians in parts of the north during Muslim-Christian conflicts, such as the Shari’a crises of the early 2000s. They also emerge from, or are strengthened by, more current happenings such as the conflicts between the mostly Muslim Fulani herders and mostly Christian farmers in the north-central and other parts of the country, in which the farmers, their farmlands, relatives, and communities have suffered heavy losses. And, although Boko Haram has targeted Muslims and mosques as well, and although the Qur’an teaches that there is no compulsion in religion (Q2:256), the existence of the militant group and its operations have equally strengthened views among some Christians about Islam favouring forceful conversion, or at least a type of expansionism that justifies the use of force. Related to this is the earlier observation by Mang (2014:96) in her study about Christian perceptions of Islam in northern Nigeria that “relatively few Christians in southern Kaduna and Plateau states distinguish Islam and Muslims from Boko Haram.” Many of the lay Christians and at least two religious leaders who participated in the study in Abuja thought that even as Boko Haram has been rejected by most Muslims, including the leadership of Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Boko
Haram’s intention to establish an Islamic state is based on the religion of Islam and that Muslims are somehow more prone to violence against non-Muslims. Hence, the term Muslim or Islam has come to be largely tied to anti-Christian violence, expansionism, hate, and aggression in the views of some Christians, in both Abuja and other parts of the country. A related study by Mustapha (2018) pays attention to narratives that Christians and Muslims have about each other in the northern region, and a major example is the notion that “northern Muslims are by definition violence prone,” that the Hausa-Fulani Muslims are “extreme and unreasonable in their religious attachment,” and Christians or the Yoruba, on the other hand, are “more reasonable and tolerant” (2018:3). He observes that “narratives of religious tolerance at the community level are usually identified with the Yoruba” (4), but “with the Hausa of northern Nigeria, we see the elaboration of narratives of intolerance” (6). This emerged many times in the fieldwork in Abuja, not only among Christian participants but also among Yoruba Muslims who thought that Hausa and Fulani Muslims were more intolerant than Yoruba Muslims. The veracity of these views is not clear, and Mustapha proposes that instead of categorising ethnoreligious groups as peaceful and not peaceful, we should think more about the processes that determine the peace or conflict levels. That said, the reality is that those perceptions exist on the ground.

During the field study, Christians often suspected decisions and activities of the federal government as being influenced by an existing Islamisation agenda, pursued specifically by president Buhari and the Muslim Fulani and Hausa community in northern Nigeria. This, in their view, was in
furtherance of the jihad of the late Uthman Dan Fodio, which took place between 1804 and 1808. This suspicion about Islamisation in post-colonial Nigeria has a long history. It has been observed that previous political and public speeches, decisions, and actions of Muslim elites from the north many decades ago have shaped almost irreversibly the perceptions of Christians in the north and indeed the south about the Islamisation agenda of Muslims. For example, Ahmadu Bello, in the words of Rasmussen (1993:55), “saw his manifest duty as the continuation of the work of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio. He identified with the Islamic world and promoted Nigeria’s Islamic identity among the comity of the world’s Islamic nations.” Some evidence for this includes his close relationship with predominantly Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Libya, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait and his emergence in 1964 as the Vice President of the World Muslim League (Iwuchukwu, 2013:43f). In 1962, he and Sheikh Mahmud Abubakar Gumi, who was the Grand Khali of the northern region, led the formation of Jama'atu Nasri Islam (JNI) “to be the social, political, and religious mouthpiece for Muslims in Northern Nigeria” (Iwuchukwu, 2013:44; also see Loiemeir, 1997:135-148). He made public pronouncements which demonstrated what he perceived as his ultimate duty as a political, social, and religious leader. For example, on October 16, 1965, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the then Sardauna of Sokoto, said the following at the commissioning of a government hospital in Jalingo, in the present Taraba state: “The father of enlightenment and good in this land was the prophet, Uthman Dan Fodio, and the work of salvation for all which he so nobly undertook has now been handed to me. I dedicate myself totally to its
completion” (Gilliland, 1971:269, in Iwuchukwu, 2013:44). These affected the way Christians viewed the Sardauna, his cohorts and the millions of Muslims in the north who were his supporters. The Northern Christian Association (NCA), which would be followed by Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in 1976, was established in 1964 to counter the wave of Islamisation, first in the north and then the south. It was, in the words of Iwuchukwu (2013: 46), “a deliberate effort by Catholics and Protestants in Northern Nigeria to wedge the zealous efforts of mass conversion campaign undertaken by Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello and his cohorts whose grand agenda was to Islamize the entire country beginning from the north.”

However, although it has this history, the suspicion about Islamisation has been strengthened in recent years by events in the country, such as Nigeria’s registration in the OIC in 1986 under the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida (Sodiq, 2009:670-672). The CAN has explained in May 2019 that “…we have the master papers where the Organisation of Islamic Countries met and discussed how to Islamise the whole of Africa. It is 25 years ago” (Aluko, 2019). The adoption of the Shari’a criminal law by some states in northern Nigeria strengthened the suspicion in the early 2000s. Furthermore, it was boosted by the emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as the president in 2015. Before then, it had been reported that he promised in a speech he delivered in 2000 that he would help to Islamise Nigeria. The following statements are said to have been made by him: “I can die for the cause of Islam if necessary. We are prepared to fight another civil war [after that of 1967-1970],” “We cannot be blackmailed into killing the Shari’a idea. Shari’a
must be spread all over Nigeria,” and, “Muslims should only vote those who will promote Islam. We are more than the Christians if you add our Muslim brothers in the south.” While it has not been confirmed whether he made these statements, they are still being shared by some Christians on the internet, even during the fieldwork. Christians have also often explained that Buhari has excluded non-Muslims from top positions in his cabinet while appointing only Muslims (Opejobi, 2017). And then, with recent murders in parts of the country being attributed to Muslim Fulani herdsmen, and the continued existence of Boko Haram and their desire to establish an Islamic state where the Shari’a is the sole moral and legal guide, some Nigerian Christians, including some Abuja residents and their relatives residing in affected areas outside Abuja, fear that there is indeed an ongoing Islamisation agenda.

This suspicion seems to be strengthened also by the fact that even prominent political and religious leaders have the same belief. For example, in a keynote address he delivered in Delta State in May 2019, a former civilian president of Nigeria and former military head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, stated that the Boko Haram insurgency “is no longer an issue of lack of education and lack of employment for youths in Nigeria, which it began as. It is now West African Fulanisation, African Islamisation and global organised crimes of human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, illegal mining and regime change” (Ogundele, 2019). His view was supported by Femi Fani Kayode, a former minister of Aviation, who said that the former president “understands what is going on, the grave danger that we are in and what lies ahead. He is deeply courageous” (Yakubu, 2019). Kayode added that “it is only
those who subscribe to the Fulanisation and Islamisation agenda that will criticise or oppose Obasanjo’s observation and describe him as a bigot for making them,” and that “what Obasanjo said was timely and necessary and millions are commending him for it. He spoke the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (Yakubu, 2019). Similarly, Professor Wole Soyinka, who is a Nobel Prize winner in literature and who has been referred to as “one of [former] President Obasanjo’s most virulent critiques” (Eyoboka, 2019), did support Obasanjo’s speech and invited more efforts to improve security in Nigeria (Ajayi, 2019), just as a spokesperson of the CAN did (Aluko 2019). People seemed to think that Islamisation is broader than the forceful mass conversion of non-Muslims to the Islamic religion and that it included the gradual establishment of Islam as the state religion or at least the most powerful religion, through the expansion of the number of Islamic political actors in positions of authority, and the predomination of Islamic values and law. With these, mass conversion and/or control of non-Muslim minorities would become easier. However, Muslim participants in this study argued that the presidency was not implementing any Islamisation agenda. They referred to the fact that the current vice president under Buhari’s regime has been a Christian. This was argued, for example, by an imam at Abuja’s National Mosque (MRA1, 6 February). Some of the Christian participants thought that there was no fair treatment of Christians in politics, with Muslims being more privileged, and that this was part of why Christians feared about Islamisation. Although the government rejects this and maintains that it does not have any
preference for any religious or ethnic group, it was discovered that the suspicion remains real among many of Abuja’s residents and Nigerians.

During the fieldwork, some of the proposals of the federal government, which the government said would help to cultivate peace between Christians and Muslims, were mostly interpreted by Christians as being part of the Islamisation agenda. For example, the government proposed to (a) establish settlements for herders in different states in the country, in order to prevent them from roaming with their cattle and therefore clashing with farm owners, and they also planned to (b) set up a radio station that will be used to communicate with and educate the Fulani in Fulfude, the Fulani language. As of May 2019, when I was in Abuja, the latter generated some controversy among Christians. This was interpreted by some Christians as another demonstration of the government’s (a) soft treatment of the alleged Fulani herdsmen’s attacks and (b) support for the activities of the perpetrators of the crimes. CAN explained that:

Ordinarily, the Federal Government should have come out clean but unfortunately, they have been meeting with the Miyetti Allah (the association of Fulani cattle breeders in the country). What about the farmers? Don’t they have their own leaders?...our government wants to have a radio station and to be using Fulani language to reach them. Where is the radio station for the farmers? Where is the radio station for the Niger Delta militants and for the Indigenous People of Biafra? If that is not Fulanisation, then what is it? (Aluko, 2019)

Similarly, the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos Metropolitan See, Anthony Cardinal Olubunmi Okogie held that “well-meaning Nigerians express concerns that herdsmen are treated with kid gloves and allowed to get away with murder while some other agitators are called terrorists, proscribed and
gunned down” (Eyoboka, 2019). However, Nigerian authorities have denied the allegation that the government supports the attacks. Additionally, the government continues to remind Nigerians that Boko Haram has victimised Muslims as well and as a result, it is unfair and misleading to claim that they are Islamic (Gabriel et al, 2019).

Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja were at times characterised by fear – of the religious other. Imam MRL4, who was interviewed on 22 March, defined a peaceful society as one “where the inhabitants go about their daily activities without any fear of being attacked,” and he listed the activities as going to the church or mosque, work, school, or any other place. He also thought that Abuja was peaceful “because there is no such fear.” As opposed to his idea, however, the study discovered that such fears exist. Some of them emerge from killings in parts of the country and some are about crisis reaching Abuja, or Nigeria possibly becoming a failed state. For example, I had mentioned earlier that I encountered resistance in Abuja while recruiting participants for this study and that it could have resulted from intended participants’ fear about what could be the consequence of expressing their views about the religious other. A Christian described to me how she avoids, with her family, areas where there are mosques during Jumu’ah prayers, out of fear of escalation of tensions. What seemed to be no fear, or people going about their daily business without fear, at times appeared to be people’s conscious avoidance of what could cause violence. Another Christian explained how she does not discuss politics in public and how she mostly
keeps quiet while in a public area, primarily because “I don’t know who is there listening to me. It can cause problems” (Miss Tigga, 18 May).

Views about the religious other were importantly shaped by religious beliefs. For example, in a focus group discussion in Wuse with a group of members of the Dunamis International Church - which is a Pentecostal church - the idea that Jesus was the Saviour and that accepting this was necessary for salvation emerged as a definer of the falseness of the Islamic religion. For some Muslim participants, including my tour guide at the National Mosque, Prophet Muhammad has brought Allah’s message to guide the world and save humanity, and Islam is the only true religion. Even the religious leaders who seemed more open to interreligious dialogue regarded their faiths as the true path. For Imam MRL2 of Utako’s NASFAT, Islam is the true religion, but everybody should be free to practise their own chosen religion (12 February).

There were lay participants who seemed to be extreme in their views, such as some Christian taxi drivers who explained how much they disliked Islam because of “its association with militancy and hate for non-Muslims,” as they believed. And the same applied to the Muslims, like Mr MLP4 at the National Mosque and another taxi driver in Utako, who thought that Christians had corrupted the teachings of Jesus by calling Jesus God and blaspheming, or “talking bad about God.” These are views that are largely based on these people’s religious beliefs.

Another example is the “Christian” views about the Islamic concept of Taqiyya in Abuja. Mostly translated as “dissimulation” (Accad, 2017:10; Beben, 2019:83; Stewart, 2013), Taqiyya “refers to the permission in Islam, according
to most Muslim scholars, for a Muslim to dissimulate his or her religious beliefs in certain circumstances in order to avoid bodily harm” (Accad, 2017:10). But Islamic scholars and clerics disagree that it legitimizes the deception of non-Muslims. They hold that it only refers to dissimulation where doing otherwise could lead to the death of the Muslim or their family, such as in times of persecution, and that it is not permitted where doing so will cause harm to the Muslim community or innocent people (Accad, 2017:21). Moreover, like other actions or attributes related to deception, Nifaq (hypocrisy) is regarded as a grave sin in the Qur’an and “it is followed with a promise of eternal hell-fire” in most of its occurrence there (Accad, 2017:15). However, some Christians in Abuja and other parts of Nigeria find the principle problematic.

A Christian clergyman, Venerable CRL1, who was interviewed on 1 February, regarded Muslims as mostly not trustworthy because of it. According to him, it permits “them to lie and mislead Christians and other non-Muslims as far as it is helpful for the advancement of Islam.” When I mentioned the concept to some lay Christian participants, none of them knew the word, but they mostly suspected that there was an Islamisation agenda. Up to two of the Christian leaders thought that the transformation of Istanbul into a mainly Muslim area shows that Muslims have been trying to Islamise the world, even if they are hesitant to admit it publicly (Pastor CRL2 and Venerable CRL1, 1 February). Pastor CRL3 admitted on 5 February that he did not know about the term Taqiyya, but he believed that “there seems to be a problem with Islam in terms of violence, maybe because Prophet Muhammad fought wars”.

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Muslim religious leaders, including the chief imam at Utako’s FOMWAN, who participated in this study, held that these wars of the Prophet were only defensive and not offensive, and are therefore understandable. Regarding the above-mentioned view about *Taqiyya*, three of the imams who participated lamented that they were being misunderstood by Christians. Rejecting the idea that the concept justifies the distrust of Muslims, imam MRL3 explained as follows on 11 March, in a manner that reflects the view of another imam at the National Mosque:

*Taqiyya* is a principle in Shiism. It is the Shia that do that and they do it to Muslims. They hide their Shia tendency, so when we meet and talk, they talk like us because they know other Muslims don’t like them because of their extreme views. So, how can a Christian now say this is what Muslims do? We say the Shia are not trustworthy because of *Taqiyya*. Now, you are using it against all the Muslims? It is unfortunate, Sir. It is unfortunate…There is that principle of *Taqiyya*, but it relates to Shia, and the Shia do not use it against non-Muslims, they use it against Muslims. It is we who complain that we don’t trust them because they behave friendly to us so that we won’t run away from them, [so that] they will penetrate us…*Taqiyya* is a Shia principle, it is not a Muslim principle, Muslims frown at it. We say, this is dishonesty. A Muslim is open, a Muslim should tell the truth, a Muslim should not mince words. I have told you many things that I shouldn’t have told you, but you are doing research, your work should be rich. It should take all sides. If anybody wants to counter it, let them provide evidence. I grew up in Kano and I have lived in the north for so long. I have interacted with all sorts of people and I know what I am talking about. So, it is provocative to hear that Muslims are not trustworthy.

The idea of *Taqiyya* as authorised deception appears to be widely held, as even a major organisation such as the National Christian Elders’ Forum (NCEF) had held in a communique signed and issued in July 2017 that “the real problem with the country is that Jihad has been launched in Nigeria and Islamists that have been interfering in the governance of the country using ‘*Taqiyya*’ (approved deception) as ‘Stealth/Civilisation Jihad’ and Boko Haram
and Fulani herdsmen as violent Jihad, are relentless in their pursuit of eradicating democracy in Nigeria” (Asadu, 2017). In May when I visited an Anglican priest who had spoken about Taqiyya in our interview, I met another priest who advised me to be careful in my research, because “they have Taqiyya” and are not to be trusted.

Though some of the participants’ thoughts seemed to be based on perceptions sometimes and not reality, they still partly symbolised a problem, that of divergent views and misunderstandings, between Christians and Muslims. Furthermore, the fieldwork showed that not all the negative thoughts, fears and suspicions emerge from misconceptions. Some of the real-life problems in parts of the country that have caused anger include killings, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and unfair economic inequalities. In Abuja, I discovered that personal traumatic experiences of residents also caused divisive thinking. Some residents, including three of the participants in this study, have lost relatives or friends in violent interreligious conflicts in the far north. Some of them even experienced conflicts directly. For example, before she moved to Abuja to work, a lay participant who is a Christian in her 30s lived with her parents, two brothers and a sister in Kaduna state for years, and the family was directly affected by the Shari’a riots in the state in the year 2000. The family survived because of a Muslim man who hid them and some others in his house until they could join the military rescue team when they arrived to take them to the barracks. Afterwards, they left their home and business in northern Kaduna to move to their uncle’s house in southern Kaduna, where they were accommodated for six months before they could rent an apartment
in the same area, which seemed safer. When I asked her how she currently feels about Islam and Muslims, she explained how difficult it was for her to trust Muslims, and added:

While we were inside, we could hear the man talking with the [armed] boys and the boys were accusing him of not cooperating. People say that Islam is a religion of peace, but I don't believe that. I haven't read the Qur'an but I feel the religion makes people to be violent. I also think that Muslims are good people, but the religion makes them to be violent and do to people what they could not have done ordinarily (Miss CLP16, 14 April).

Even though not every Muslim was involved in the Shari'a riots that occurred in the early 2000s, and even as most Muslims condemn killings done in the name of Islam, residents of Abuja like this young woman have unfavourable views about Islam and Muslims, which have emerged from their personal experiences and are hardly eradicable. A pastor and participant, CRL3, calmly asked me on 5 February, when he spoke about the experiences of people like this woman that he knew in Abuja: “Do you expect these people to believe that Islam is a religion of peace? It’s hard, my brother.”

The impact of theological differences in Abuja could also be seen in intrareligious relations. There were divisions among Christians and among Muslims which were largely defined by theological differences. Questions to imams about how united the Muslims are in Abuja, or to Christian religious leaders about relationships among Christians, mostly produced lamentations about the divisions among Christians and Muslims, based on different understandings of their religions. When I asked Rev CRL7 of the Methodist Cathedral of Unity on 7 April whether there were issues that Christians in Abuja
had to address among themselves, he replied as follows, in a manner that reflects the responses of the other Christian leaders to the same question:

Sure! The issue of unity. I am talking to you as an insider and also a religious leader. One of the problems we have within ourselves here is this issue of disunity: I am a Methodist, the other person is Anglican, the other person is Baptist, the other person is a Lutheran, and that is among us that we call ourselves mainline churches. Then it is even more when you now talk of these new generation churches, they call themselves Pentecostal churches…They look at us as we are backward, we are a dead church, we are that. So, there are so many areas we do not really agree, like theologically. It is a problem within us as Christians. As I am talking to you now, if I go to Catholic church…even though we attend the same programme together and everything, a Catholic minister will never take communion with me; he will never take my own and he will never give me his own. Even though I am ready to take his own, he will not give me, and whatever I bless as being communion, he will tell you it is rubbish. So, we have that internal problem within us.

The concept of “born again” emerged a number of times among some Pentecostals as the identifier of what they often called a “true” Christian. For example, this was the view of the Dunamis Christian Fellowship that I attended in Wuse. The idea was that even among those who regard themselves as Christians, there had to be a total acceptance of Jesus Christ and complete rejection of what is not of Christ before one could be an actual Christian. This is the reason why a Pentecostal evangelist in Wuse, CRL10, thought on 31 July that the religious leaders who “associate with the Muslims too much” in the name of peace do not possess a true Christian identity. A Catholic priest responded to the same issues and provided more details about this problem in Abuja:

We have always extended our invitations to communion. But I must say that if you go to various offices and secretariats in Abuja and ask them where we have many Catholics and other denominations, the Catholics will tell you that they are being segregated because our form of worship is different from the conventional worship of the
Protestants or Pentecostals. So, you will see them and they will always complain; and some places we have access to have mass, we always see the struggle between us and other Christian denominations. It is a shameful thing, I must say, where Christians are always thinking of who is more authentic than the other...So, if you find yourself in a meeting where you are a Catholic and you have different protestant bodies who are plenty, they are more likely to align themselves against you...And this is the other way round: A Catholic will say we are more superior, and a Protestant will say no, we are more superior. But again, at the end of the day, Christ is for all. It is something that the ecumenical council have to work on. It has been a problem for a long time, especially here in Abuja. For Catholics, we are always open...because we understand in a God who sends rain on everybody. When it rains, it does not choose whose house it will fall on. It falls on everybody’s house (Fr CRL4, 12 March).

This priest even thought that “Catholic-Muslim relations in Abuja seem to be better than the relationship between the Catholic church and other Christian bodies.” He added that protestants and Pentecostals accuse them of inauthenticity and highlighted that apart from fundamentalism among Muslims, which seems to receive a lot of attention in the media, “there are extreme Christians here who think that they are more authentic than the Pope himself,” and they can be found in the Catholic church, other mainline churches, and among Pentecostals. It is these people who could be a source of problems on the Christian side. For them, encounters with other Christians and Muslims are not and should not just be for each person to learn about the other, but for conversion to the “right path.” It is for these reasons that he thought that “Christians should first put their hearts in order before thinking about others. We should convert ourselves first” (Fr CRL4, 12 March).

Among Muslims, different religious societies exist, each of which, according to Imam MRL2 (12 February) desires to have a large membership, economic resources, and prominence. As he put it, "everyone wants the best
for themselves and it is now causing disunity.” Each group, he continues, wants to protect its interest and not that of Islam or the Qur’an. They compete for members and some require their members to worship only in their mosques wherever they are, instead of promoting love and oneness. In Abuja, examples of the Islamic societies include Derika, NASFAT, Ansaruldeen, Ansarul Islam, and An Noor, each of which has its separate mosque. While some are well established and even have primary and secondary schools, such as An Noor in Wuse and NASFAT in Utako, others are smaller and have only mosques in their different locations. Imam MRL2 explained on 12 February that when the leader of a Muslim society has the opportunity to be a part of, or be a powerful actor in, a given government, perhaps due to certain political appointments, they sometimes try to exclude other societies or at least those the leader is not happy with. He also lamented that intragroup rituals involving the Islamic groups are rare for all these reasons.

Having said these, it is important to note that divides between Christians and Muslims were shaped by a mix of political events and views about them, religious identity, and ethnicity. For example, because he thought that Nigeria would have been with fewer or no conflicts if it were a mostly Muslim country, Mr MLP37 (30 May), who is a Muslim taxi driver, thought that Christians were the country’s major problem and favoured the division of Nigeria along religious lines, for example, as in the case of Pakistan and India. For some of the Muslims who were unhappy with Christians, their anger stemmed from the millions of Christian votes against Muhammadu Buhari’s candidacy in 2015,
and what a participant called “continuous insults against Buhari and Muslims” (Imam MRL3, 11 March).

Although we were discussing Christian-Muslim relations, ethnicity and religious identity were often intertwined in the responses of participants. In fact, it did seem that some of the religious leaders who participated in the study spoke with anger about certain issues related to ethnicity. For example, while discussing the possible causes of violent interreligious conflict in Abuja with an Islamic cleric, he made the following statements – at times suggesting that he also had negative personal feelings about the issues:

If there is a way religious groups can persuade the Igbos to slow down, not to encroach on everybody, nobody will be angry enough to cause trouble... Go to any market now, any market in the FCT...we have been living here for 16 years now, go to any market in FCT, the Igbos are doing everything that everybody is doing. Ordinary Ugu (pumpkin leaves) you can’t sell, ordinary stockfish - the dry one - you can’t sell in any market because it is dominated by Igbos. Go to Zuba, ordinary spare parts you can’t sell if you’re not Igbo. You can’t get a shop in Aba or Onitsha (in south eastern Nigeria), because it is only for Igbos. You can’t have a petroleum industry in the South East. But Igbos are buying up every property everywhere, owning property. You are doing what you won’t allow anybody to do in your place in other people’s places and you are still crying marginalisation...So...I’m sorry to say, the trouble makers are the Igbos, and they are the Christians (Imam MRL3, 11 March).

There was a tendency to use the words Igbo and Christian interchangeably, even though there is growing religious diversity among the Igbo, and Christians exist among ethnic groups in the north. This reflects the situation in other parts of the country, where ethnic identity is often used interchangeably with religious identifiers. In another statement by the participant, this connection between ethnicity and religion emerged:

I wouldn’t know why the Hausa-Fulani Muslims would not tolerate Christians; I wouldn’t know. But, I am beginning to see economic
factors; I’m beginning to read economic factors into it. I grew up in Kano, 90 per cent of Sabon Gari is owned by Igbos. There is Igbo road, there is Yoruba road... All these roads are 90 per cent owned by Igbos. Now, when crisis starts in Kano, the politicians will tell their boys that these katir, these unbelievers from the south, have taken over everywhere... It is they who are responsible for your poverty, because they have taken over all our businesses in our land, so we have no access to business to take care of you. So, they enrage these boys... by calling every non-Hausa-Fulani an unbeliever (Imam MRL3, 11 March).

Christians, especially the lay participants, mostly equated Islam with northern Nigeria and with the Hausa and Fulani, even as not all Muslims in the region are Hausa or Fulani and the South has a growing Muslim population.

Before proceeding, I should add briefly that ethnic identity is strongly linked with religion in the northern region. Over a long period, markedly beginning from the expansion of Islamic presence in the Sokoto Caliphate through Uthman Dan Fodio’s jihad, Islam has been an essential part of identity formation for the Hausa, Fulani and other ethnic groups within which Islamic presence was predominant. The Fulani-Muslim reformation of Uthman Dan Fodio established a socio-political structure which largely drew on Islam. During the existence of this caliphate, therefore, a Hausa-Fulani ethnoreligious identity was being consolidated. Whereas this identity could be said to have emerged incrementally with the spread of Islam in the Hausa region even before the Jihad, it was the reformation and the extent of its success that consolidated a Hausa-Fulani Muslim identity that is distinct from other non-Muslim identities, especially those which occupied the southern part of the Caliphate. The adoption of an indirect rule strategy by the British, which allowed most of the components of the former Caliphate to continue, even promoted the continuity and further strengthening of this identity, alongside
other forces such as political competition with other Nigerian geopolitical regions. As a result, ethnic identity and religious identity have always reinforced each other, and have become hardly separable or distinguishable even in such a way that makes it difficult at times to draw a line between ethnic and interreligious animosity or conflict (Iwuchukwu, 2013). This also applies to the situation in the south eastern part of the country where, stemming from the missionary activities in the colonial period, a huge percentage of the Igbo ethnic group are Christians. Only a small segment of Nigerian Igbos residing in the south eastern states of Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra and Abia are openly Muslims and traditionalists. Recognising this reality, Falola (1998:13) also says that, in Nigeria, “in many cases, trying to differentiate between a religious identity and an ethnic one can either be difficult, impossible, or misleading.” Similarly, Akinade (2014:35) observes that “Nigerians identify themselves by religious, ethnic, regional, and most recently by political parties. It is often difficult to untangle the Gordian knot of multiple identities for many Nigerian Christians and Muslims.”

Politics has been a major influencer of interreligious relations in northern Nigeria (Kukah, 1993), and consequently, Falola (1998:1) has averred that “religion and politics have been bedfellows throughout Nigerian history.” As Father CRL4, observed on 12 March: “in truth, as far as I want to hide that, in the north, you cannot separate a political view from a religious view. That’s…why you see people say that the political view of the president is an Islamic view.” Whereas there are Muslims who disagree with this, political participation in the region has indeed been influenced by religious views, both
among the masses and the elites. In Abuja, as in many other parts of the country, there seems to be a connection between religious identity and voting, so that Christians are more likely to vote for Christians, just as Muslims are more likely to vote for Muslims, during general elections. In other words, voting patterns are being affected by the religious identity of voters and contestants, and this was strongly demonstrated in the 2015 general elections when the two presidential candidates were a Christian and a Muslim; Archbishop CRL8, Pastor CRL2 and Imam MRL3 were among the participants who confirmed that this happened in Abuja. Part of the reasons why many Christians did not vote for the Muslim candidate was the idea that he would promote the course of Islamisation. However, I should note that there has been political support across religious divides. One of the participants in this study, Pastor CRL3, explained on 5 February that he supported and campaigned for Muslim Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 mainly because “I thought he was a man of integrity who will fight corruption and use national wealth properly.” Some imams who participated in this study explained that it is difficult to campaign in the mosques based on candidates’ religious affiliation because there are Muslims who support Christian candidates. As Imam MRL3 explained on 11 March, “you [could] find a Muslim fanatically supporting a Christian in politics” in Nigeria. But even with this, participants confirmed that during the 2015 elections, some imams encouraged Muslims to vote only for the Muslim candidate, just as some church leaders openly favoured the Christian candidate. Before the 2015 elections, fear and suspicion about Muhammadu Buhari’s alleged Islamisation agenda were already present among many
Christians, largely deriving from statements credited to him where he claimed that he would continue to work to achieve complete Islamisation of the country. Whereas the quotations were widely shared on social media platforms, it was never confirmed that they were actually made by the president, just as he never accepted that he made them. Partly due to the difference in the religious identity of the major contestants, “the 2015 general elections generated so much tension and anxiety that many informed analysts predicted the complete disintegration of Nigeria” (Aidoghie, 2019:28). Referring to this connection between religious affiliation and political practice, Archbishop CRL8 explained on 10 May that “I have observed that wherever a Christian is in authority at whatever level, he seems to favour more Christians, and where a Muslim is in authority, he seems to favour more Muslims. And, it is not helping matters, because it divides us more and more.” Identifying the consequences of this political behaviour, he adds that “in some few elections past, Muslims have promoted the fact that no Muslim should vote for a Christian, and some Christians have also said that no Christian should vote for a Muslim. And, it has made it such that whoever wins sees the other adherents as an enemy.” While the 2015 presidential election was polarised between Christians and Muslims because the two major presidential aspirants were a Muslim and a Christian, that of 2019 did not generate as much tension partly because two Muslims from the same Fulani ethnic group were the major contestants. In sum, the point here is that around the 2015 general elections, Muslim religious leaders did ask Muslims to vote for only Muslim political candidates, Christian clergymen did encourage Christians to vote for Christians, and voters also
voted based on the ethnoreligious identity of the candidates. This demonstrates how religious identity shapes political views and actions in Abuja and other parts of the country.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter offers a backdrop for the rest of the thesis by describing the ways Christians and Muslims relate with and see each other in Abuja and how religious affiliation affects these views. It shows that religious identity plays a role in Abuja in various ways: (a) it is important to individual believers as they navigate life’s challenges, (b) it affects how Christians and Muslims view each other, including how they view and relate with fellow Christians and fellow Muslims, and (c) it has an impact on electoral decisions and actions. In Wuse, Utako and some other parts of Abuja, cooperation between Christians and Muslims continues to exist. However, even with their relative peace, there are interreligious divides in the areas, and they are shown by the presence of fears and suspicions, among other things. For this reason, this study’s argument about the overestimation of religion in peace dynamics is not meant to imply that Abuja is a part of northern Nigeria where Christians and Muslims coexist peacefully without any problems. The current chapter has shown that such an argument would be an overstatement and it would be impossible to defend.

Within the context of complex Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja, various forms of religious peacebuilding that involve religious leaders and religious peace norms take place. This thesis holds that they are important for the sustenance of interreligious peace in the territory, given what seems to be
the fragility of the existing peace. This is described further in the next chapter and will be given more attention in chapter 7. The relevance of religious peacebuilding in Abuja, northern Nigeria and other religiously mixed societies is underscored by this study. However, it also highlights, among other things, (a) the importance of believers’ practical interests in the dynamics of interreligious peace, and (b) the divide between the views of religious leaders and those of ordinary persons about the importance of religion in interreligious relations.
CHAPTER 4

RELIGION AS A SOURCE OF INTERRELIGIOUS PEACE IN ABUJA

4.1. Introduction

In the second chapter, I reviewed the existing literature on zones of peace and the causes of interreligious peace in northern Nigeria. The chapter showed that the literature largely does not involve a detailed assessment of the impact of religious factors on the peace-levels in the studied areas and it explained that this study aims to respond to this gap by exploring the situation in Abuja. Using chapters 3-7, this thesis will show that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism influence the level of peace that might exist between members of different religious groups living in an area, but sometimes not as much as religious leaders and some commentators on religion and peace often suggest.

Drawing on primary data, chapter 3 described the various ways Christians and Muslims view and relate with each other in Abuja. Among other things, it showed that Christians and Muslims in the area are conscious of, and utilise, their religious identity in a variety of ways. As religious people, they apply their religious beliefs as they deal with life’s challenges, and their views about religious others are influenced by these beliefs. Interreligious divides also exist in the territory, even as there has been relative peace there. It is within this context that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism have helped to cultivate interreligious peace in the territory. In this fourth chapter, I discuss how these religious factors have been contributing to the relative peace in Abuja. The chapter shows that various forms of
religious peacebuilding have been taking place in the area, and they have helped to sustain the partial interreligious peace existing there. The chapter, therefore, corroborates the idea in the academic literature that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism are helpful for the promotion of interreligious peace. This point is also given more attention in chapter 7.

4.2. Forms of religious peacebuilding in Abuja

Religious leaders, religious peace norms, and religious peace activism are interrelated factors which are part of the components of religious peacebuilding. Religious peacebuilding is, in turn, marked by the involvement of religious actors and tools. These and other religious components which could cultivate peace have been called tangible and intangible religious assets for peace (Lazarus et al, 2017). There are indications that the relative peace in Abuja has been partly sustained by religious peace norms and the peace-actions of the Christian and Muslim religious leaders living there. The idea that religious leaders are important contributors to the peace in Abuja emerged in all the interviews with religious leaders. Although most of Abuja qualifies as a zone of peace, this finding about the contributions to peace-promotion by its religious leaders is consistent with the common notion in the academic literature on religious peacebuilding that religious leaders have promoted, and are usually capable of promoting, peace in conflict and post-conflict settings (Appleby, 2000; Little, 2007; Gopin, 2000; Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2010; Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Grenfell-Muir, 2014). Aiding their contributions to peacebuilding is the important socio-cultural location that they
usually occupy, which is marked by the respect or legitimacy they have within and even beyond their communities, and the networks they could draw upon to carry out peace plans, among other things (Appleby, 2000; Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2010). Little (2007) reports on significant roles played by religious leaders as peace actors in various divided societies around the world, including El Salvador, Indonesia, Israel-Palestine, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Sudan, the Balkans, and West Papua, and more of such presentations are made by Dubensky (2016), regarding Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria. Studies show that these religious actors perform peacebuilding roles in various ways: by leading or participating in interreligious dialogue, encouraging their followers to be peaceful with the religious other, mediating or assisting with negotiations during conflicts, helping to organise interfaith workshops for peace, looking out for warning signs, and so on. In the following sections, I shall describe the various forms of religious peacebuilding that were discovered to be taking place in Abuja, but before then, it is important to make the following clarification. Even though I use the adjectives direct, symbolic, and indirect to categorise the types of religious peacebuilding that take place in Abuja, they are not mutually exclusive categories. For example, as can be seen below, what I place under symbolic peacebuilding equally constitutes an indirect form of peacebuilding.

4.2.1. Indirect peacebuilding in religious spaces

Indirect peacebuilding refers to religious leaders’ practice of trying to promote a Christian or Muslim attitude that involves love for the religious other,
even when they do not directly preach about peace with the Christian or the Muslim. This is different from other more direct forms that involve activities directly aimed at peace promotion, such as training in conflict resolution, interreligious dialogue, and peacemaking between conflicting parties.

Through their sermons, especially during worship, religious leaders attempt to promote behaviours that reflect the teachings of Jesus or the Prophet Muhammad. Religious leaders in Wuse, Utako and surrounding areas within Abuja Municipal Area Council have access to large numbers of people in churches and mosques, as most residents of Abuja attend worship in mosques on Fridays and churches on Sundays. Throughout the fieldwork, I attended several churches and observed that each church had about two or more services on Sundays and attracted large numbers of worshippers in each of the sessions. The holding of multiple services also reflects the largeness of the attending population, as the practice is partly a strategy for accommodating the attendees within the available space. Religious leaders therefore are heard by many residents of these areas.

As I observed in churches, Christian religious leaders did not speak about Islam and Muslims every Sunday. Although love, peace and unity among Christians and between Christians and non-Christians were discussed sometimes, priests mostly aimed to encourage Christians to live out the teachings of Christ, in their offices, in the markets, as they relate with people on the street, in their families, and wherever they are. Christian religious leaders believe that lives that reflect Christian ideals are pro-peace and are not anti-Muslims. Connected to this is what may be called Lived Evangelism,
which refers to an idea that emerged in the course of the fieldwork as some participants emphasised the importance of living out the teachings of one’s religion in a way that speaks rightly about it to the outsider, as opposed to vocal attempts to convert people. It refers to the act of practising the good teachings of one’s religion, so that those being encountered can see the beauty of the belief system through their lives. As Father CRL4 explained on 12 March:

What we have always talked about evangelism in the church is that our lives should lead the way. Our lives speak better...So, if I am a Christian, I live a very authentic life, and a Muslim who happens to be my business associate who is the same class with me sees that I am living a very wonderful life, is that not homily enough for the person to get converted to say: Ha, this man, this sister, the way she is living her life...which church are you attending? This is evangelism, not the issue of me walking to a Muslim neighbourhood and telling them that Allah is a lie.

This thinking, of course, has its problems. For example, it may be argued that we should not live good lives because we want to convert others, but rather mostly because it is good in and of itself and it is helpful for the progress of God’s creation to love, to not commit crimes, to not take lives, to be law-abiding citizens, to not cheat our neighbours, to forgive, and to do all those other things that make our environments conducive for our collective existence. But in any case, the idea of lived evangelism as an addition to vocal evangelism requires that both Christians and Muslims look inwards and focus more on their lives rather than just aim to convert outsiders. The encouragement of good Christian and Muslim lives that reflect the teachings of Christianity and Islam about love and other values was an indirect form of interreligious peacebuilding in Abuja.

Abuja’s religious leaders also believed that they influence political leaders to lead both Christians and Muslims inclusively, especially through
their meetings with them as well as their sermons during worship. As Bishop CRL5 explained, during religious festive periods, Christian and Islamic leaders pay courtesy visits to the president and his cabinet and they remind each other of the need for concerted efforts to promote peace between the religious groups in the FCT and the country. Furthermore, the politicians attend the churches and the mosques and are therefore receivers of the sermons of the religious leaders.

Another indirect form of religious peacebuilding in Abuja is religious leaders’ conscious act of not condemning other religions or their adherents. The point is that if the leader of a Muslim community does not speak to Muslims about how “ill-guided” Christians are, his use of language that encourages Muslims to live good lives and not discriminate against others is a commendable act of peacebuilding, or rather conflict prevention. This was the case in all the Sunday services that I attended where no discriminatory language was used by priests and members’ reflection of Christian ideals in their lives was a recurring theme. Fr CRL4 said on 12 March that this consciousness about utterances has been present among religious leaders in the territory, and he explained that “mentioning of religions other than Christianity…and our inferences should not be that that will sow a seed of discord in our parishioners because…people hear from the pulpit and they go outside and say: Oh, even Father has this view, therefore peace cannot be met.” This is different from the divisive sermon which a priest from the far north observed was being preached by some religious leaders in his state –
Adamawa – and other parts of the north (Fr Dr CRL6, 18 March). Similarly, Basedau, Vüllers and Körner (2013:869) explain that:

In focus group discussions and interviews conducted in Kaduna, it came to the fore that some clerics held a pronounced ingroup bias. Some clerics tended to denigrate people of the other religion as being faithless, unreliable, and even malicious while at the same time overemphasizing their own religion as the one and only true belief system - and while portraying people of their own faith as deeply religious, absolutely sincere, and entirely trustworthy.

In the parts of Abuja that were covered in this study, there seemed to be a conscious avoidance of that attitude among religious leaders and the sermons in religious centres that were observed reflected this avoidance. Supporting the notion that the lack of divisive preaching in Abuja has impacted the peace in the territory, Bishop CRL5 recognised “men of peace in Abuja” as a major cause of interreligious peace in the territory and he observed on 14 March that “when we have spiritual leaders that are not advocates of violence, it goes a long way in promoting peace in the land.” The Chief Imam of NASFAT mosque in Utako district, MRL2, thought on 12 February that “we [the religious leaders] are the closest to the people, and what we tell them goes a long way in determining how they think about or how they treat Christians.” He explained that a member of his mosque once called him on his way to the mosque for Jumu’ah prayers to ask whether he had to do more ablutions after exchanging handshakes with a Christian while attending the mosque. “I told him that Christians are human beings and that a handshake with them does not make a Muslim unclean,” he explained during our interview. “And this is only one example of how I influence my members’ thinking and relationship with Christians. Going forward, this person will not regard Christians as a source of
uncleanliness,” he continued. Similarly, an imam who has been approached by Muslims in Abuja with complaints about the Igbo, who they regard as “greedy...aggressive people,” explained that part of how he deals with it is to not condemn the Igbos, who are mostly Christians:

The way we try to stem it is to say that the Igbos are hardworking...We just tell them, no, these people are very hardworking. Don't you see that that's why I wear red [cap]? So I always wear their Igbo cap, I always dress almost like them, in order to generate friendship. I always prefer them, so that if I am your leader and I prefer Igbo, you can't fight Igbo...we are trying our best (Imam MRL3, 11 March).

Related to this is the refusal to blame the religious others for the socio-economic problems in the country. As a departure from the practice of blaming Christians, Muslims or ethnic groups for the developmental problems of the country, some participants explained how they try to make their followers understand that the problems emerge from individuals of different religious and ethnic backgrounds and that everyone should unite to address them. For example, a Catholic priest explained:

we have brothers who are frowning seriously about poor governance...people seem and try to tie a particular performance with the person’s religion. It could be true...but again, you have Christians who are not doing so well...I think the individual is a problem. I like talking about the individual, even though we can’t take away the fact that religion also forms a person. Just as we think that the Muslim politicians have not been doing so well, even Christian politicians have not been doing so well. You cannot take away that fact...Some are doing so well too, just as some Muslims are doing so well. You cannot take away that fact too. So, if we have a Muslim who is doing so well, and we have a Muslim who is not doing so well in politics, and we have a Christian who is doing so well, and a Christian who is not doing so well, then the problem is not religion; the problem is the individual who is not doing so well. So, it’s high time that we put aside this religiosity syndrome and begin to talk about the individual (Fr CRL4, 12 March).

So, during worship, religious leaders discussed national issues such as the problem of poor governance, and mostly highlighted the importance of national
progress for everyone, while hesitating to blame one religious group or another for the country’s problems. In every Sunday service in the catholic church in the territory and in some other cases in weekdays, the following structured prayer for Nigeria’s peace, unity and progress is said:

All-powerful and merciful Father, you are the God of justice, love and peace. You rule over all the Nations of the earth. Power and might are in your hands and no one can withstand you. We present our country Nigeria before you. We praise and thank you, for you are the source of all we have and are. We are sorry for the sins we have committed and for the good deeds we have failed to do. In your loving forgiveness, keep us safe from the punishment we deserve. Lord, we are weighed down, not only by uncertainties but also by moral, economic and political problems. Listen to the cries of your people, who confidently turn to you. God of infinite goodness, our strength in adversity, our health in weakness, our comfort in sorrow. Be merciful to us your people, spare this Nation Nigeria from chaos, anarchy and doom. Bless us with your kingdom of justice, love and peace. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (St Patrick’s Catholic Cathedral, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: https://stpatrickscathedralado.org/index.php/catholic-prayers/prayer-for-nigeria-in-distress).

This prayer, which is called “Prayer for Nigeria in Distress,” demonstrates the church’s deep concern about the problems in the country, and symbolises the invitation of Catholics, Christians and all Nigerians to commit the situation in the country into God’s hands and not respond to any of the problems in the country in an antisocial manner as they go about their daily businesses after saying the prayers.

The importance of “not condemning the outgroup” in peacebuilding in northern Nigeria has been highlighted in studies on Christian-Muslim relations in the region. For example, Ehrhardt (2016) explores how religious leaders have influenced violent and nonviolent collective action in Kano. He argues that it was how Christian and Islamic preachers framed the Plateau riots in
2004 that accounted for the violent riots in Kano that followed the interreligious conflict in Plateau State’s Yelwa. Also, how they framed the cartoon row in 2006 influenced the absence of violence that followed the publication of the Danish cartoon that Muslims around the world believed to have blasphemed against the Prophet (BBC News, 2006). He argues that on the one hand, the violence in Kano in 2004 largely arose from the fact that the preachers interpreted the violent conflicts occurring in Plateau state through the “Christians-versus-Muslims” frame, making the Christian and Muslim communities in the state to regard it as such and then define the religious other in Kano as enemies (Ehrhardt, 2016:333). On the other hand, the Danish cartoons were “actively framed as part of the global struggle between faithful Nigerians and nonreligious Westerners, facilitating non-violent mobilisation across Christian-Muslim boundaries” (Ehrhardt, 2016:333). This suggests that religious leaders’ framing of social issues or problems and their sources could shape believers’ perceptions about who is at fault or not.

These notwithstanding, there were indications in Abuja that the relationship between moderate preaching and peace-attitudes on the ground is more complex, as lay Christians and Muslims in the territory did not seem to have adopted peaceful attitudes mainly due to the preaching of their religious leaders. In fact, it was discovered that there are practical considerations which seem to have more value for the believers, in such a way that even in the presence of divisive preaching, the believers would not become non-peaceful if the personal interests would be endangered by them following the divisive views of the religious leader. This is discussed further in the next chapter. But
nonetheless, indirect peacebuilding in Abuja by religious actors remains one of the major ways by which they contribute to the relative peace in the territory. Its value is shown by the fact that an increase in condemnation of religious others could lead to more divisions and maybe to violence, considering that there are already existing intergroup divides in the area. Pastor CRL3 had explained during our meeting on 5 February that “we aren’t killing each other in Abuja, but we bear grudges that could be sparked.” This shows the importance of indirect peacebuilding.

4.2.2. **Symbolic religious peacebuilding**

Furthermore, there is a symbolic and indirect kind of peacebuilding that emerges from the attitudes of religious leaders towards each other. For example, the leader of the Islamic community in Nigeria and head of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Alhaji Sa’ad Abubakar, has a good relationship with the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan. The religious leaders invite each other and their followers to their major religious ceremonies. These forms of spiritual dialogue and intervisitation, which King (2010:102) identifies as types of interreligious dialogue, are believed to help to promote peace between Christians and Muslims in Abuja. During these festivals, the Christian and Islamic leaders pay homage to the country’s president, usually together in one or more buses. The idea behind this, according to the secretary of Abuja’s chapter of CAN, is not only to unite the leaders but also to extend this cordiality and message of unity to the leaders’ followers through newspapers, television, social media, radio programmes and even directly through the religious leaders in mosques and
churches, for example, when an imam explains in the mosque that he went with fellow Christian leaders to see the president, thank God for life, and pray for Nigeria’s progress. It is expected that Muslims and Christians who are aware of the good relationship between the leaders could imitate their peaceful interreligious attitudes. It is, however, difficult to measure the extent to which this contributes to peace, but this study discovered that these cordial relationships among the leaders exist in the area. Religious leaders who participated in this study believe that these relationships are helpful, and some of them even explained that while they meet with the leader of another religious group, they are conscious of the impact publicised pictures and videos of the positive encounters could have on their followers. The religious peace organisations and some of the religious leaders have social media accounts and they share pictures and posts about their positive interreligious encounters, which their followers see and possibly get influenced by.

Interestingly, religious leaders themselves use narratives about their superiors’ peaceful attitude towards religious others and they try to imitate them. For example, the catholic priests who participated in this study explained that their archbishop in Abuja has a welcoming attitude towards the Muslims and that they are happy to follow his footsteps. Father CRL4, for instance, explained as we discussed the obstacles to sincerity in Christian-Muslim dialogue sessions on 12 March: “I have an archbishop who believes so much in dialogue, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, and his footsteps are the one I follow.” An imam at the national mosque also believes that the Sultan of Sokoto, who is regarded as the head of Nigeria’s Islamic community, has set the pace for
the Muslims in the country, through his good relationship with Christian leaders such as John Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto and others (MRL1, 6 February). So, the activities and attitudes of some religious leaders towards Christians or Muslims are believed to influence those of other religious leaders and of followers.

Regarding religious festivities, it is important to add that it is not only the religious leaders that converge for the ceremonies. Apart from official invitations and the religious leaders who attend churches or mosques in response, charitable activities carried out by religious bodies as part of the festivities also make lay Muslims and Christians come together in churches, especially those who need the help being offered. This could be classified also as a form of indirect peacebuilding. As Father CRL4 confirmed on 12 March, “we invite them [the Muslims] to a large number of programmes, and they send us invitation letters too, and there is a good relationship between our youth wing and theirs. During Christmas, relief materials are shared here in church and sometimes up to 70% of receivers are Muslims.” This type of sharing of gifts is believed to have effects that go beyond the aids. It makes the giver to be classified as a friend by the receiver. For this reason, it is believed that such acts of charity could prevent acts of violence. Furthermore, Imam MRL4 thought on 22 March that religious leaders contribute to peace by doing charity, because: “When you empower people, it will be very difficult for them to go on rampage.”
4.2.3. Direct religious peacebuilding

Perhaps, more direct is the role of the peacebuilding bodies in Abuja that were established and are being managed by religious leaders, including The Kukah Centre and the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace. For example, “interfaith dialogue is at the core of the [Kukah] centre’s work and [it] involves actively promoting conversations among Nigeria’s faith communities, as well as between leaders in faith and public policy” (The Kukah Centre, 2017:5). The organisations conduct interfaith training and other programmes for both locals and other participants drawn from different parts of the country, mostly the north. The interfaith dialogical meetings they organise draw together Christian and Muslim religious leaders from Abuja and other parts of Nigeria. This study discovered that they serve both the local Abuja community and other parts of the country, although, in their peace-trainings, they pay significant attention to the parts of the north which have been affected by religion-related conflicts. Being in the capital city, a relatively peaceful part of the country, and a place where interreligious meetings could be held with some degree of assured safety, helps the religious peace organisations to draw religious actors from parts of the country together in Abuja for interreligious meetings. Additionally, as the capital, interreligious or religious peacebuilding bodies such as the Kukah Centre, the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, and the Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC) have their headquarters in Abuja. Through them, religious leaders extend their peace-roles and positions beyond places of worship. When asked whether he combines his ritualistic roles as a Catholic priest and his directorial activities in the Kukah
Centre, which is an NGO that performs largely political functions and involves or works with political and religious leaders such as those making up the National Peace Committee, Fr Atta Barkindo responded in the affirmative and observed that “in the last 30 to 50 years, we are used only to the culture of seeing Catholic priests in Nigeria domesticated to the pulpit and church environment”, but “that culture is changing very fast. We live in a generation where beyond the pulpit, many priests and nuns are making immense contributions to society as medical doctors, engineers, architects,” among others (Aidoghie, 2019:28ff). This is the case in Abuja, as symbolised partly by the NGOs being run by the religious leaders.

These religious NGOs contribute to peaceful Christian-Muslim relations in the area and other parts of northern Nigeria, including the conflict-affected ones. The Kukah Centre, for example, has worked with Tony Blair Foundation to train Christian and Islamic leaders drawn from different parts of the north on issues of violence, extremism and interfaith dialogue, and how they can provide not just counternarratives but also alternative narratives. Counternarratives, explained the Centre’s Director, Father CRL6, on 18 March:

is when you wait for the extremists to provide a narrative and then you argue against it, and so you allow him to take lead and your own is reactive. But alternative narratives is that you are aware of these existing extremist narratives and you are providing the moderate alternative view, whether there is an extremist or no extremist existing.

In these training sessions, says Fr CRL6, Islamic and Christian attendees confess that before the interreligious encounters made possible by the training, “we have never sat in the same class with my colleague from the other religion.
This is the first time.” To reach more people and reduce the logistical and other problems that might accompany the invitation of a large number of trainees to Abuja at the same time, the Centre also has a strategy called ToT: Training of Trainers, which involves the Centre’s direct training of people on interreligious issues, who then go into local communities to train more persons and groups, usually not without supervision.

Interreligious dialogue between religious leaders is organised by some of the religious organisations from time to time. A participant and Anglican priest, who is also an executive member of the Anglican diocese in Abuja, confirmed that he had attended dialogical meetings in Abuja, organised by NIREC, and also those jointly organised by Sultan Sa’ad Abubakar and Cardinal John Onaiyekan (Venerable CRL1, 1 February). Another participant and Christian priest, Rev. CRL7, described on 7 April that:

I and my archbishop used to attend interfaith dialogue while I was working with him as chaplain. The way we meet, this interfaith dialogue, the Christians and Muslims in Abuja, from time to time we meet, we discuss and majority is for us that if there is understanding between us the religious leaders, then there will be understanding between our followers. Because one, if you go deep, you find out that one of the things that is always causing this religious conflict is some of the pronouncements, some of the preaching, the instigation of the leaders, the way we instigate our followers. But if there is understanding among us the religious leaders and our preaching concerning people of other faiths is peace not violence, it will go a long way.

Also, Imam MRL1 confirmed on 6 February that “in 2016, we had imams and pastors conference organised by Cardinal Onaiyekan himself.”

Furthermore, the religious leaders utilise technological tools to reach many Christians and Muslims, including television, radio, websites, and social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and this is part of how they
help to promote peace. Mitchell (2012) has done an extensive examination of how media forms could be and have been used for peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict settings, even as he recognises that they could promote divisions or incite violence, for example, by memorialising injuries left behind by a conflict, and by encouraging fear of the other. These media forms include the print and the electronic media, as well as what he categorises as the new media, which includes social media applications like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Whereas Abuja is not part of the settings that Mitchell was concerned with in his text, this application of media forms takes place there as well. For example, both the Kukah Centre and the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace have functional websites as well as social media accounts. On the country’s National Television Authority (NTA) station, an imam anchors a programme called the Abrahamic Mission every Friday night, where he brings together an Islamic and a Christian cleric in Abuja for theological conversations to promote interreligious peace. Having followed this programme for most of the fieldwork period, I observed that both Christians and Muslims in Abuja and other parts of the country tune onto the programme, and there were people who called in to ask questions. Issues such as the importance of personal struggle against one’s own internal flaws, and the humanness of both Muslims and Christians have been emphasised by imams and Christian clergy on the programme. Misconceptions are also addressed, and questions from laypersons are responded to. Religious leaders do these as well at other times on television. For example, on 23 June 2019, John Cardinal Onaiyekan was discussing “peace and attitudinal change” with a Muslim religious leader on
NTA’s Moment of Truth programme, and such events bringing Christian and Muslim religious leaders together do take place at other times on television programmes broadcasting from Abuja to other parts of the country. Under the leadership of John Cardinal Onaiyekan, the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja has established the Catholic Television of Nigeria, and in a gathering meant to mobilise support for the establishment of the station as broadcast by NTA, which Muslims attended, the cardinal explained that “there are some messages out there that we need to either balance or counteract, messages of hatred, fanaticism. We need to counteract them with messages of peace and moderation.” Holding that a television programme he participates in in Abuja has been a cause of peace there, Bishop CRL5 explained: “I have been involved in a TV programme about Abrahamic faiths that an imam anchors here in the FCT, on NTA international. He brings in a Christian clergy and an Islamic cleric, and he brings us together to promote peace, and it’s a live programme where people call in.”

Apart from the media, religious leaders also use sports to promote peace. For example, in the premises of “House of Worship” in the zone three area of Wuse district, a basketball pitch was established about six years before 2019 to gather young men and women, teach them morals, and take them off the streets and drugs, without preference for any religion or category of believers (Pastor CRL3, 5 February). As of when I visited the church in February, users included young male and female Christian and Muslim players, most of whom were not members of the church. They are given opportunities to discuss their problems with counsellors from the church and
are assisted with job search or applications for educational programmes. CRL3, the resident pastor, was confident that the basketball pitch was a unifying factor in the neighbourhood since it has attracted a number of Muslims and Christians within the years that it has existed. For example, on 30 January while I was there, he identified three Muslims and other Christians among the eight or more players in the pitch and added that it has attracted a number of Muslims and Christians who are not members of the church. It is believed that part of how interreligious sports bridge religious gaps is through their deemphasising of religious identity: When Christians and Muslims form a team and play against other teams, they all must collaborate to win. The goals scored with the teammates, rather than the religious identity of the teammates, is what matters most to the players. Interreligious collaboration is, therefore, necessary for good performance in religiously mixed teams. But also, it is believed that through the individual players in the team, this interreligious cooperation could extend to more persons, including those who the players encounter away from the field.

Religious leaders also make efforts to prevent electoral violence during election periods, especially between Christians and Muslims. Rather than openly declare their political choices, many religious leaders in Abuja, including all those who participated in this study, encouraged their followers around the 2015 and 2019 general elections to fulfil their civic responsibilities by (a) collecting their voter’s card, (b) voting for the candidate of their choice who they think would lead the country as competently as possible, whether Christian or Muslim, (c) conducting themselves properly as they await the final
results from the electoral body and (d) accepting the outcome of the elections, rather than participating in post-election violence, if their preferred candidate loses. For example, Fr CRL6 explained on 18 March that “for us, first of all, it was about praying for peaceful elections. And we encouraged people to collect their Permanent Voter’s Cards (PVCs) and encouraged them to vote for who they thought and strongly believed could help bring peace and unity to the country.” It is not clear the number of people who these messages influenced and drew away from the religious identity-determined voting, but it could be assumed that they were more helpful than harmful in those election periods. Apart from the voters, religious actors also tried to curtail candidates’ divisive activity. For example, in both 2015 and 2019, religious leaders contributed to efforts to bring candidates together to commit to accepting the outcome of the elections, avoid making inflammatory statements throughout and after the process, and challenge results democratically if they must. A major example of this role which, although national, seems to have helped to prevent electoral violence in Abuja and the rest of the country, is that of the National Peace Committee, which in 2015 consisted of John Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja Catholic Archdiocese, Sultan Sa’ad Abubakar III of Sokoto who is the head of the NSCIA, Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto who is the convener of the Committee, Fr Atta Barkindo of the Kukah Centre, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor of CAN, and Archbishop Nicholas Okoh who is the Primate of the Anglican Church of Nigeria, among others (The Kukah Centre, 2018:29).
On the aspect of crime and violence prevention, religious leaders in Abuja collaborate with communal leaders and security agents to collect and share intelligence. Participants suggested that the relationship between crime and interreligious relations in Nigeria lies in the fact that events could be given religious interpretations. As a key police staff in Abuja explained, “attacks on either the church or the mosque could trigger religious crises, depending on the devotees or the perception of the worshippers on who is behind the attack. So, it is important we prevent crime in the churches and the mosques; it is also important that we prevent those places from being attacked” (Mr CLP10, 5 April). Participants explained that some of the religious leaders are partners in security meetings in the FCT. Alongside the police, other security agents and communal leaders, they meet from time to time to discuss the situation in their churches, mosques, and neighbourhoods. Through this collaboration, early warning signs are identified, and threats to interreligious peace are addressed before they escalate. Regarding one of these meetings, a participant and priest said:

I should appreciate the government for the security council in the FCT. In the council, there are the security chiefs in the FCT, the CAN chairman, the chief imam of the national mosque, traditional rulers…So, when they begin to hear of possible hotspots, they bring it to the meeting and discuss it. So, action is taken pre-emptively in the meeting, and crises are prevented by the leaders before there is any outbreak of violence (Bishop CRL5, 14 March).

Also, referring to the security committees, Imam MRL1 said on 6 February that “they meet to make sure that there is peace. They don’t wait to see crises. They meet regularly to prevent crises.” Some of the religious leaders explained that there have been times when violent interreligious conflicts could have
occurred in Abuja, but religious leaders, in collaboration with security agents, addressed the issues before they could escalate. These successful cases of conflict prevention are mostly not announced to the public. Also, the religious leaders reach out to the police through certain emergency mobile numbers whenever there is information the latter should know or act upon. A pastor and participant explained how he contacted the police at a time when there were suspicious youth activities around the church and the police deployed personnel to the scene rapidly (Rev. CRL7, 7 April). This role of religious leaders is generally meant to be private and is therefore not always publicly discussed.

4.2.4. **Urgent response amidst danger**

In this section, I discuss another form of religious peacebuilding in Abuja that may also be identified as direct. The research discovered that there have been times when there would have been outbreaks of violent interreligious conflict, but religious leaders stepped in to deescalate the situation. For example, when a 42-year-old mother of seven and pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Kubwa area, Eunice Olawale, was allegedly killed in July 2016 by Muslims worshipping in the mosque around where she preached (Adepegba, 2016), the secretary of Abuja’s chapter of the CAN, Bishop CRL5, explained during our meeting on 14 March that tensions were high in most of Abuja, and there were Christian youths who wanted to retaliate against the Muslims. Similarly, IPCR (2017:94) recognises that “the murder of Mrs Eunice Oyewale, a Christian who was on early morning neighbourhood evangelism could have degenerated into an inter-faith and inter-ethnic crisis
for which the women’s (sic) ethnic and religious identities could have been mobilised to set the city on fire.” It is important to add that such retaliatory attacks have occurred in parts of the country, and it is believed that retaliation is one of the obstacles to interreligious peace in some communities in the north. In response to the event in Kubwa, religious leaders intervened and encouraged angry Christian youths to not take the law into their hands and allow the police to handle the situation. Another major intervention took place when a church was burnt down in Abuja’s Dede community, allegedly by Muslims. Christian youths, who were angered by that event and similar damages in the far north where Christian-Muslim conflicts have occurred, were going to mobilise for retaliation on mosques. According to Bishop CRL5, who has been an insider as far as religious leaders’ peace work in Abuja is concerned, the intervention of Christian religious leaders helped to prevent more destruction in that community. In sum, it seems that religious leaders and religious peace activism have been relevant in Abuja’s peace dynamics, as these various forms of religious peacebuilding in the territory seem to have had some impact on the existing relative peace. The same applies to religious peace norms, which I comment on below.

4.3. The role of religious peace norms

In all the interviews with religious leaders, religious ideas were mentioned as being major reasons (a) for their welcoming attitudes towards the other believers and (b) for how they moderately speak about the other religion to their followers in mosques or churches. The Christian religious leaders believe that Christianity is a religion of peace and that it is the
responsibility of the Christian religious leader to preach peace without hesitation, for Christians and for all persons. Similarly, the Muslim religious leaders regarded peace as a cardinal component of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim. Imam MRL1, for example, explained on 6 February that “Islam is a religion of peace. Islam recognises Christianity. In the Holy Quran, we have [a] chapter for Mary. So, there is no point for me to have quarrels. All prophets of God are from the same source.” Another imam, MRL2, explained on 12 February:

I always want to be realistic with my followers. I don’t misinform them. I can’t be a party to riot because it’s against the principles of my faith. Islam has encouraged peace. So, for any imam to incite troubles, God will punish them…God made some Muslims and some non-Muslims. The prophet lived with non-Muslims for years.

The imams, therefore, described all those who carry out violence against non-Muslims and other Muslims in the name of God as non-genuine and misguided “Muslims” who fail to adopt the prophet’s teachings about love and peace. Besides, the imams explained, the prophet had a good relationship with Christians and the prophet did ask his followers to hide in the house of a Christian when they were being persecuted (Sheikh MRL5, 10 May and Sheikh MRL7, 30 May). Some of the imams found strength in the understanding that the Prophet even covenanted with minority Christian communities under his rule in the first Islamic state, in which the Christians’ freedom of religion was protected and which shows that “the prophet adopted a religiously pluralistic framework for governance” (Considine, 2016:42). Even Christian clerics did seem to derive strength from the understanding that the Prophet Muhammad
had positive encounters with Christians. For example, reflecting this idea, Archbishop CRL8 said on 10 May:

the prophet of Islam speaks so well about that Christian monarch and could entrust his followers in the hands of the Christian so that [they will be saved from] those pagans who were persecuting them...the prophet knew that the only place that his followers will be safe is in the hands of that Christian monarch, and they were saved until he came. So...if the founders of the religion were promoting peace, then why should we the followers be promoting hate and violence?

Imams were confident that peace between Christians and Muslims should be pursued by Christian and Muslim religious leaders, because of the above-mentioned reasons and for the fact that Jesus, Mary, Joseph and other components of the Christian religion are recognised in the Holy Qur'an (Imam MRL1, 6 February and Imam MRL2, 12 February). This reality in Abuja agrees with some existing works on religious peacebuilding. For example, consistent with his earlier published *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, Appleby (2001:835) explains that “religious militants for peace see their work in conciliation and mediation as a natural and even an obligatory expression of their faith.” It would seem, therefore, that for these religious leaders, the pursuit of interreligious peace is a responsibility, not just an action being carried out to avoid violent interreligious conflict; it is being done as “a fruit of Christian living rather than for the purpose of averting conflict” (Cherian, 2019:103).

Another recurring theme in the interviews was the “almightiness of God.” According to the religious leaders, most of whom highlighted that we are different because God wills it, this reality makes it unnecessary for human beings to fight for God or kill nonbelievers in the name of conversion for God. The idea was that “God is too mighty and powerful” and could make all human
beings have only one religious confession if God wills. As Sheikh MRL5 said on 10 May, “rather than fight for a being who is powerful enough to be your source and creator and the creator of all things, why not use your strength to live a good life for your own small self?” This is connected to one of the Christian participants’ idea about spiritual warfare, by which he meant that “when we [Christians] talk about fighting the enemy, it is not just about the physical but more about the spiritual” and as a result, “I believe that nobody should make himself a judge to say whether it is Christianity that is the right one or it is Islam” (Archbishop CRL8, 10 May). For the Muslims, it is strongly important that Muslims submit themselves to the will of almighty Allah, while they also struggle against their own internal flaws. These have more value than the use of violence. They are also compatible with peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims, and they combine with other Qur’anic teachings to justify activities or attitudes that promote interreligious peace. The idea that Christians and Muslims should live lives that reflect the teachings of their religions was important to religious leaders. This meant that they understood that part of how to promote peace was to draw Muslims and Christians closer to God, for if they followed the scriptures’ ethical guides on love, forgiveness, kindness, truth, fairness, abstinence from sin, and other values, the tendencies to be violent would have been reduced. The importance of “internal jihad” was mentioned during the interviews. The idea was that even the Prophet explained that internal spiritual struggle against one’s own flaws and imperfection was more important than the use of physical aggression even for the religion. For Sheikh MRL5 (10 May), “the Prophet has taught us that if
you defeat your mind, you win the world.” This view is a counter-position against the group of Muslims who seem to have a view about Jihad that centralises the use of violence against the (perceived) enemy of Islam. For Sheikh MRL5 (10 May), “If you know God, you can’t take lives”, and “God say(sic) know me before you pray for me.”

Finally, “the oneness of humanity” emerged as a propellant of religious peacebuilding in conversations with both Christian and Muslim religious leaders. The idea was that all of humanity is from God. For a Christian priest and participant, the realisation that “everyone in life has been created by God, and that I should live and let live” has contributed to peaceful attitudes among religious leaders in Abuja (Bishop CRL5, 14 March). “God has created us all humans and we should be more tolerant of each other irrespective of our religious beliefs,” he explained.

4.4. Conclusion

This study’s main aim has been to explore the importance of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism in the dynamics of interreligious peace, using Abuja as its case study. The point in this chapter is that various forms of religious peacebuilding exist in the area, and religious peace norms seem to impact on the motivation of religious leaders to build peace. These suggest that the factors help to sustain the relative interreligious peace existing in Wuse, Utako, and other parts of Abuja Municipal Area Council. Given the fragility of the peace in Abuja, as described in the previous chapter, we cannot doubt that the religious peacebuilding described in this chapter is important for the sustenance of interreligious peace in the territory.
Having made this point, I shall use the next chapter to present the discovery that (a) the peaceful attitudes of lay persons towards religious others in the area seem to not emerge mainly from these religious factors, and (b) the interreligious dialogue between religious leaders seems to have a limited impact on interreligious relations among ordinary persons.
CHAPTER 5
LIMITS OF RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING IN ABUJA

5.1. Introduction

To what extent is the relative peace existing between Christians and Muslims in Abuja impacted by religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism? The preceding chapter has shown that various kinds of religious peacebuilding are being carried out in the area, and it can be held that these religious factors do have a positive impact on the relative interreligious peace existing there. However, the reality is that the extent to which these determine the Christian-Muslim peace in the territory is not clear. Although various forms of religious peacebuilding take place in the area, and there is a common perception among religious leaders that religion is a crucial source of the relative peace in the territory, interviews with lay Christians and Muslims there suggest that religious factors are rarely at the centre of their choice or decision to have peaceful attitudes towards religious others, despite the interreligious divides existing in the territory. The study shows that it was self-protection, concern for family, desire for survival and progress, and the prevention of the harmful consequences of physical violence that mattered most to people. In other words, it seems that it was mainly practical issues, rather than religious considerations, that have motivated the lay Christians and Muslims to reject violence and adopt peaceful attitudes towards religious others. The relevance that religious leaders often attached to religion during the study, as a cause of divides and a source of peace, was not reflected in the lives of ordinary persons. Differences were discovered between religious
leaders’ representation of religion’s importance and the views of ordinary persons about the same issue, and between the reality on the ground and the views of religious leaders about the significance of religion. The research also discovered that interreligious dialogue in Abuja has some limitations that affect its impact on interreligious peace on the ground. So, while religious leaders hold that they promote peace through this method, its positive effect on daily relations between ordinary believers appears to be limited. These findings indicate that religion impacts on the peace in Abuja, but not in the way that religious leaders in the area did hold during the research.

5.2. Believers’ peaceful attitudes are importantly motivated by practical issues

The study showed that lay Christians and Muslims in Abuja choose to be peaceful with religious others for many other reasons apart from religious factors. It was discovered that there is a difference between (a) religious leaders’ representation of religion’s importance to lay Muslims and Christians in Abuja, and (b) the actual reality among believers. During the interviews, there was more support for the “the role of religious leaders in the sustenance of peace” in Abuja among the religious leaders, than there was among the lay participants. On the one hand, religious leaders recognised Christian and Muslim religious leaders in Abuja as being significant for the promotion of peace in the territory and in northern Nigeria. This has been shown in chapter 4. For Bishop CRL5 (14 March), peace in Abuja had to be importantly attributed to “Men of Peace.” He used this term to refer to religious leaders who speak about peace in Abuja. Among them are Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Alhaji Sa’ad
Abubakar and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, who, according to him, “has a peace foundation in Abuja and was usually in Abuja promoting peace”. CLP22, who helps to organise interreligious dialogue for religious leaders in Abuja, explained on 21 May that “if you see Nigeria today, Nigeria is a very religious country, and so if you have the religious leaders in your pocket, you are sure that you will have the whole citizenry, because when the leaders cough, the followers listen”. The idea, therefore, is that religious leaders normally have a strong impact on the peaceful attitudes of their followers. In fact, that seems to be part of what commentators mean when they refer to Nigeria as very religious. Another imam said that “religious leaders are the closest to the common man. So, the religious leaders play a very important role by speaking to the people on how to conduct themselves” (Imam MRL1, 6 February). It is with this understanding that religious leaders carry out theological conversations for peace on television and other media platforms and invite support for increased religious peacebuilding.

However, the views of interviewed lay Christians and Muslims and the situation on the ground in Abuja differ from this perspective. They do not suggest that religion has as much relevance in the relations between members of different religious communities. Lay Christians and Muslims do not attribute as much importance to religion as religious leaders. Issues of religious difference and the religious peacebuilding that responds to it were rarely at the forefront of ordinary persons’ concerns. People were more interested in fundamental needs of survival, while religious peacebuilding, as in through religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism, seemed
not to matter as much in ordinary persons’ lives and their attitudes towards religious others. When “big” names such as Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Alhaji Sa’ad Abubakar and Matthew Hassan Kukah were mentioned, most of the interviewed laypersons did not know who they were and could not recall listening to their peace-talks. This was the case with all the participants in Wuse and Utako markets, as well as the members of a Pentecostal Fellowship in Wuse and other individual participants. Messages of the topmost religious leaders probably reach lay believers through their priests, imams, mullahs, and pastors, who endeavour to project peace through their attitude and speeches within and outside religious spaces. Nonetheless, the point is that these top-level religious leaders seem to not have as much significance to the ordinary person in many cases, especially to those in denominations other than that of the concerned religious leader. It is noteworthy that although the media is a major means through which religious leaders promote peace, this medium has its own major limits. For the interreligious encounters on television, it is only those who have access to a television set and the required stations that could watch the programmes. Televisions are owned by those who can afford them, and these usually may not include poor believers. Many of the participants in Wuse and Utako markets who did not know the religious leaders speaking about interreligious peace did not have this access. Also, the participants in Wuse and Utako markets mostly spoke to me in colloquial English, which was not their first language. Whereas I could not ask questions about their educational background due to lack of opportunity, since they managed to squeeze out time for the brief interviews in their business hours, it could be
assumed that they might not have the degree of expertise in the use of English that may be required to follow theological conversations on television if they had access to the stations. Dialogues done on the radio may reach more locals, but it seemed that the television was among the most used tools by the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and other Islamic and Christian religious leaders that are interested in peacebuilding. These realities, therefore, challenge the idea that theological conversations for peace on television – which is a form of religious peace activism – does always have a strong impact on the relationships between Christians and Muslims on the ground.

Lay participants often identified practical considerations, such as concern for family, the desire to stay alive and pursue one’s dreams, the desire to prevent the destruction that accompanies violent conflicts, and the avoidance of arrest and prosecution for criminal activity, as reasons why they reject violence. Concern for family members and one’s safety were the most important issues in the interviews, followed by the point that Abuja is strongly policed and that it is difficult to “cause trouble and get away with it.” There was the recognition that Abuja was the capital and that any form of misbehaviour would lead to immediate intervention by the police. It was common for participants to say that they could not get involved in violent interreligious conflict or any such activity because it would harm their families or prevent them from pursuing their dreams, for example when they are arrested and prosecuted. A Muslim participant and taxi driver became angry when he felt I had suggested he could be a peaceful citizen only if his religious leader encouraged him to be peaceful. He explained on 23 January that “I respect my
imam, but I can't fight even if he tells me to fight. I am peaceful for myself and my family." He added that "I have a son and a wife. What will happen to them if I die fighting? What about my mother?" Throughout my conversation with him which lasted for over 30 minutes, he did not mention a religious belief or ideal as his reason for avoiding violence towards Christians, even though he had proudly identified himself as a Muslim who worships at NASFAT Utako. As he explained, he had important things to achieve in life and people to take care of, and involvement in violent activity could damage these, and that was what mattered most to him. This was echoed by many other participants, including the butchers and barrow pushers in Wuse and Utako markets, who may be called poor, and who seem to have adopted peaceful attitudes mainly because it is what enables them to live and pursue their desires in a relatively safe environment. Another participant, CRL3, explained on 5 February that even if members of his church were encouraged by the pastor to fight Muslims, they would not do so because they understand the disadvantages of such action. Self-defence was also highlighted as a condition for fighting against the religious other. Where participants mentioned that Islam is a religion of peace or that Christianity is a peaceful religion, it was mostly because I highlighted that issue whenever their initial responses did not involve religion. These findings demonstrate that religious tolerance is not always mainly a product of interreligious understanding, or even the willingness to share a space with a religious other. Religious tolerance could strongly result from the preference for the benefits of peace for oneself and one’s family over the consequences
of violence, and as well from thoughts about the possible serious consequences of taking certain actions against the religious other.

Religious peace norms are commonly believed to impact peace between members of different religious communities through at least two major ways. One, by motivating religious leaders and other religious actors to pursue peace, and two, by motivating lay believers to not be violent. This idea that religious peace norms are significant is commonly held by religious leaders and commentators alike. For example, Cherian (2019:100) has drawn on the biblical books of Leviticus, Isaiah, and Luke to promote interreligious dialogue in India as a potent path to peace in the country, because he holds that people hold on to their religious beliefs even within irreligious political systems. This clearly demonstrates the potency of religion. Therefore, this spiritual energy and power could be purposefully harnessed to bring about the conditions necessary for world peace, not just through the creation of structures that would allow religious communities to end differences, but by creating conditions in which different accounts of the world and human experience could co-exist.

Also, as an example of the religious peace norms in Christianity, which he explains “can help develop a peaceful, multicultural world,” Haynes (2009:54) observes that Christianity features the notion of non-violence. The faith’s founder, Jesus, insisted that all people are children of God, and that the test of one’s relationship with God is whether one loves one’s enemies and brings good news to the poor. As St. Paul said, ‘There is no Jew or Greek, servant or free, male or female: because you are all one in Jesus Christ’ (Galatians 3:28).

Furthermore, when evaluating the impact of the prominent religious ideas of “universal love” on altruism and “one true religion” on discrimination against religious others using data from Accra and Dar es Salaam, Hoffmann et al (2019) argue that since (a) the idea of universal love promotes the equal
treatment of religious others, and (b) the notion of one true religion causes discrimination instead, “promoting tolerant religious ideas seems crucial to avoiding conflict.” Accounts of religion being a source of interreligious peace, or accounts based on the idea that theological conversations between people of different religions are a necessary or at least a very important source of peace in religiously diverse settings, are multiple and cannot all be presented here. The notion that peaceful religious ideas foster interreligious peace is largely accepted to be true and this study does not disagree with it as well. It does not argue that peaceful religious ideas are not potent, or that they do not have any potential to promote interreligious peace, or that this potential is weak, or that the relatively peaceful Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja have not benefitted from them. However, the Abuja case study shows that peaceful attitudes towards religious others sometimes do not primarily stem from these religious peace norms, and it is vital to recognise the important place of practical considerations in believers’ decisions regarding peace or violence. Those practical issues (a) are of central importance to ordinary persons, (b) motivate and guide their daily thinking and actions, and (c) shape their encounters with others, including people with different religious identities. This reality is discussed further in chapter 7.

Furthermore, the fact that religious norms are interpreted differently by believers is often side-lined by commentators who identify religious peace norms as being important for interreligious peace. It is not entirely true that religious leaders always have universal acceptance within their religious communities. This is partly because religious norms are contested. Kadayifci-
Orellana (2015) highlights how competing Islamic narratives about issues of war, peace, and justice in certain communities, or multiple understandings of Islam among Muslims, could be a problem for Islamic peacebuilders in Muslim contexts. For example, this is seen in conservative or extremist insider-groups criticising other co-religionist peace groups or actors and arguing that they serve the interest of the West, that they condone evil in the name of interreligious peace, or even that they practise a corrupted version of the religion. Also, Juergensmeyer (2005) and Sajoo (2004) provide more details about religion in civil society and the ambivalence of the civil society. Such peace-resisting non-governmental groups fall into Chambers’ and Kopstein’s (2001) “bad civil society,” in addition to other regressive organisations and associations. As Kadayifci-Orellana (2015:442) observes, “what it means to be a Muslim, what Islam is, who is a Muslim, and who has the authority to define who a Muslim is, are highly contested issues among Muslims.” This applies to contemporary Christianity as well.

Among some Christians in Abuja, the religious leaders using religious peace norms to support or justify their association with Muslims and Islam are not Christian enough and do not represent Christianity. In the view of a Pentecostal participant in Wuse (CRL10), who was interviewed on 31 July, “this is because Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one can attain paradise except through him. Any person who calls himself man of God but does not teach this and live it is not a follower of Christ.” In a gathering of Pentecostals in Wuse, where I discussed the issue of religious leaders’ association with Islam, an idea that the eight members mostly agreed with was
that any person who does not accept Christ as his Lord and personal saviour will not get into heaven, and Christian leaders should try to convert Muslims instead of telling them that they worship the true God too (Dunamis Christian Fellowship Wuse, 15 June). When I asked Ms CLP17 on 14 April what she thought about Muslims, she simply said that “you must give your life to Christ to enter the kingdom of God,” and did not agree that those who have not done so can be saved. For such persons, Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, and some people who identify as Christians may not attain salvation because they have become syncretistic in the name of keeping peace with Muslims, recognising Allah and Muhammad instead of proudly pronouncing their submission to Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life. Such views exist among Muslims who participated in the study, an example being Mr MLP4 who was interviewed on 6 February at the National Mosque, where he works as a guard, and who did not welcome “weak” practice of Islam. It is not in the purview of this research to discuss theologies of salvation or the veracity of these believers’ views about it. The point here is that theological invitations to peace by religious leaders are sometimes not welcomed by many members of their religious community and this is partly because religious norms are contested by believers. This represents part of the limits of religious peace norms.

It is worthy of note that Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja’s Catholic Archdiocese, who makes public appearances frequently to promote Christian-Muslim peace in Abuja and the country, failed in his attempt to become CAN’s president for the second time, partly because he was believed to have become
too friendly with the Sultan of Sokoto and Muslims, to the extent that he could hardly defend Christianity and the interests of Christians in the northern part of the country. This was in CAN’s 2010 presidential elections, which produced Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor of the Word of Life Bible Church as the new president (Eyoboka, 2010; Kukah, 2013:18). Krause (2016:279) had discovered that in a part of Jos where communal leaders were able to prevent violence despite the presence of ethnoreligious polarisation and other violence-causing factors, some Christians in the neighbourhood disliked a pastor and his peace works “because he confides in the Muslims, asks them for advice, for their opinions, and goes the extra mile to help them when there is need in the community”. Similarly, a protestant pastor from Wayame in Indonesia who had cooperated with the Muslim community in the neighbourhood to avoid attacks from Christians against Muslims and vice versa during the Maluku war was regarded by some Christians in the community as having “accepted bribes from Muslims” (Krause, 2018:149). All these show that although religious leaders do speak for peace, there are several believers for whom their words have only little or no relevance or legitimacy. Attempts to promote interreligious peace based on religious norms may, therefore, not be as effective for these people, and if they are adopting nonviolent attitudes toward the religious other, it would be largely because of other factors, apparently including practical considerations.

As mentioned earlier in chapters 2 and 4, religious peace norms are also said to motivate religious leaders to build peace. Although the religious leaders interviewed in Abuja mostly pointed to theological convictions as the
major motivators of their conciliatory attitudes, other issues emerged during the interviews. For instance, while explaining the importance of peace in Abuja, they sometimes suggested that their promotion of a nonviolent attitude towards religious others partly derives from the idea that violent interreligious conflict leaves pain and sorrow behind it and that it delays the progress of the country. This is implied in the response that “violence is not good for anybody.” As Imam MRL1 asked during our meeting on 6 February: “does conflict not affect everyone finally? Even us will lose, nobody is free from the destruction it brings.” Another imam whose followers speak to about “these Igbo…these greedy people, these aggressive people” explained that: “We just tell them: no, these people are hardworking…we are trying to moderate…if the crisis starts, it won’t be only Igbo [that will be affected], it will be all southerners” (Imam MRL3, 11 March). Connected to this was a kind of nationalism that involved the desire to support the Nigerian project. For example, Pastor CRL3 explained on 5 February that “we are all Nigerians. If everyone kills each other, there will be no Nigeria. We should first of all see ourselves as human beings and then as Nigerians, before any other thing.” The desire to prevent the failure of Nigeria emerged during some of the other interviews. Furthermore, the efforts of the government to promote good relations among the religious leaders in Abuja might have a positive impact on the leaders’ positive attitudes towards the other groups. For example, Bishop CRL5 described on 14 March how religious leaders in Abuja, under the invitation and guide of the FCT minister, pay homage to the president to mark Christian and Islamic festivities: “whenever there is a religious festival, like Salah or Christmas, the FCT
minister leads leaders of the Christian and Islamic faith, communal leaders, security chiefs, and all go to pay homage to the president. Usually, I have seen, there is a bus to carry everyone, although some people move in their private cars.” This shows how political actors help to bring religious leaders in Abuja together, and I discuss other positive political impacts on the peace in Abuja in the next chapter. In sum, all these show that the factors motivating religious leaders’ peaceful attitudes include religious and nonreligious issues.

The importance of nonreligious factors in the motivation of religious peacebuilding has been highlighted in other studies. Previous studies on peace actions, like Krause (2016:280), Gray (2012) and Lynch (2014) demonstrate that economic interests, concern for one’s family’s safety, and protection of self, could make people not carry arms against others or promote nonviolence in their neighbourhood. Vullers (2019) on the other hand, posits that the costs of peace activism, for example as determined by (a) the size of the activist’s religious group and the support the group could give, and (b) whether religious freedom is guaranteed in the concerned area, is the major determinant of religious actors’ involvement in peace activism. In other words, apart from religious ideas and ideals, there might be other fundamental issues that motivate violence-prevention efforts.

Part of the assumptions about the positive role of religion in the dynamics of interreligious peace is the idea that even when a religious leader does not actively promote peace, the person could be strongly impacting on the peace-level in a given community by simply adopting moderate language and not using divisive rhetoric. By doing so, the religious leader would not build
up tensions that may lead to violent interreligious conflict. For example, this point is made by Otmacic (2017: Chapter 7), as explained in chapter 2, and it was also raised by religious leaders during the fieldwork in Abuja, which is why it was classified in chapter 4 as a component of religious peacebuilding in the area. It is quite difficult to successfully argue that religious leaders cannot increase tensions and divides using their language. In fact, it is also difficult to dismiss the argument by others that such divisive language could lead to the emergence of violence. But this notwithstanding, it is proper to highlight that it is not the case that ordinary believers cannot resist the divisiveness of their religious leader, who they respect. As mentioned above, lay participants in the research in Abuja did make this point.

5.3. Limits of interreligious dialogue

Another aspect of religious peace activism that is believed to strongly impact interreligious peace is interreligious dialogue, mainly because it promotes interreligious understanding. Before I present the fieldwork findings on the limits of interreligious dialogue in Abuja, I shall clarify how the term is used in the chapter. My interest here is in the dialogue that involves the gathering of Christian and Muslim religious leaders to discuss their beliefs with the hope of promoting understanding and peace between Christians and Muslims. However, it is useful to note that dialogue has other connotations. Essentially, the term dialogue refers to a conversation or discussion between two or more persons, sometimes intended to solve a problem or produce an agreement, so that interreligious dialogue may simply mean that this conversation or discussion is one occurring between parties from different
religions, or as King (2010:101) puts it, “intentional encounter and interaction among members of different religions as members of different religions.” But there are various types of interreligious dialogue, “with no overall agreement about what these types are - that is, how the many phenomena that fit into the category of interreligious dialogue should be divided and ordered” (King, 2010:101.). For Akinade (2014:2), “the term dialogue seems to convey a wide range of meanings from conversation to basic lifestyle, dispositions, sensibilities, and attitudes in relationships” and he pays attention to the dialogue of life that exists between Muslims and Christians in the south-western as well as other parts of Nigeria. He refers to this dialogue of life as a “form of interreligious dialogue that is engendered from the grassroots” (2014:60). Apart from the dialogue of life and of action, other types of interreligious dialogue are identified by King (2010:101-2) as “official or institutional dialogue between or among elites chosen by their religions as official representatives, parliamentary-style dialogue, verbal dialogue, intervisitation, spiritual dialogue, practical dialogue, and internal dialogue.” Whereas the first one above is similar to the parliamentary-style and is usually held in times of danger to avoid physical conflicts between groups, the parliamentary-style dialogue takes place in open fora where religious leaders make presentations and make their views known, taking questions after the presentations (King, 2010:102). The verbal dialogue, which King (2010:102) observes is “the prototypical form of dialogue in most people’s minds,” involves the coming together of members of different religions to discuss the worldviews and other components of the religions, mainly in order to have a better
understanding of the other religion. Intervisitation refers to the visit of another religious community by members of a religious community, sometimes involving participation in rituals in the visited community, which on the other hand, is part of what King (2010:102) identifies as spiritual dialogue – that is, one’s engagement in the spiritual practices of another religious community. Practical dialogue is like what some people have called dialogue of action and it refers to the coming together of religiously different people to carry out projects in the community. Finally, internal dialogue, which King (2010:102) admits may not be generally accepted as “truly dialogue,” refers to an individual’s personal conversation about two religions which they have encountered. However, as mentioned above, I focus on the dialogue that involves Christian and Muslim religious leaders coming together to discuss their belief systems with the hope of promoting peace between Christians and Muslims in Abuja.

This study discovered that the extent to which this interreligious dialogue impacts the level of interreligious peace in Abuja is not clear. Although these meetings for theological conversations take place between some religious leaders, a lot of the religious leaders in Abuja have not been participants in such meetings, examples being Pastor CRL3 and Imam MRL6. Reverend CRL7, on the other hand, confirmed that although he has not been invited, the archbishop of Abuja’s Methodist congregation attends and was accompanied by him when he was his assistant. The major dialogues mainly involve top-level religious leaders, including bishops, archbishops, imams of major mosques, and sometimes political and communal leaders. Similarly,
Mustapha et al (2018:312) have observed that although there were high-level interreligious meetings held in response to violent interreligious conflict in Jos, especially after 2001, and while “they have improved relations for some, inter-faith meetings do not encompass all (or even a majority) of the religious leaders in Jos. Elite-level interactions have not necessarily percolated down into their respective communities.” In fact, with the exception of Mr CLP22 at the IPCR who himself helps to organise these events, and possibly FOMWAN’s Mrs MLP14 and Mrs MLP17 at the FCDA, who are both leaders in their institutions and might have taken part in such events, none of the lay Christians and Muslims who participated in this study stated that they had attended a peace workshop or interreligious dialogue session. For a priest in the Anglican church who was interviewed in this study, whereas the dialogical meetings are useful, they are sometimes “diversionary”, and it is the top-level religious leaders who attend that benefit most, for example, in terms of entertainment and publicity (Venerable CRL1, 1 February).

In Abuja, two religious peace-institutions are well-known by religious peacebuilders, partly because they were established by prominent religious leaders and they have been actively involved in peace-activities. These are the Kukah Centre in Wuse and the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation in Boromi. With their prominence, however, they seem to place more emphasis on peacebuilding in parts of the north that have been most affected by conflict. Their participants, therefore, are mostly not from Abuja. As a result, although Mr CLP22 of the governmental IPCR thought on 18 May that “peace from these peacebuilding organisations in Abuja will affect Abuja even before the rest
because they are located in Abuja,” the reality is that their primary influence
seems to be on external northern areas. Besides, even if these peacebuilding
bodies draw participants from Abuja, who they teach about conflict resolution
and related issues, only a tiny percentage of residents benefit from them. The
lay participants in this study who did not know Cardinal John Onaiyekan and
Matthew Hassan Kukah also did not know that there were foundations named
after them which aimed to promote peace. A lay Muslim participant who knew
about the Cardinal and the Bishop knew that they spoke about interreligious
peace, but knew nothing about their foundations (Mr MLP9, 8 April).

For the Swiss theologian, Hans Küng, “there will be no peace between
the religions without dialogue between the religions” (Küng, 1998:92; also see
Morgan, 2011). This is part of his message to the 1993 Parliament of World
Religions, a foundational idea for his global ethic for world peace, and a
popular one among many commentators on religion and global peace.
However, Abuja suggests that there can be zones of peace where
interreligious understanding is only partially present. The idea that the absence
of violent interreligious conflict results from theological understanding about
the outsider religion, partly made possible through interreligious dialogue, is
questionable. There are different forms of interreligious misconceptions and
limited theological knowledge about the outsider religion in Wuse and Utako,
but communal conflicts have not emerged there between the religious groups.
The barrow pushers, butchers and traders in Wuse and Utako markets had
little or no knowledge about the theological issues in other religions and what
unites Christianity and Islam. And yet, they avoid violence, mainly because it
will prevent them from living and pursuing survival. These include six wheelbarrow pushers and six butchers who were interviewed in the two markets. It is realistic to assume that the limited theological knowledge is widespread at the grassroots level. So, even if it is important, interreligious understanding, and maybe the interreligious dialogue that promotes it, is only one of the variables that make interreligious peace possible.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter describes the discoveries in Abuja that point to the limited relevance of religious factors as sources of the interreligious peace existing in the area. Specifically, it shows how the peaceful attitudes of Christians and Muslims there towards religious others are largely shaped by practical issues of self-protection, family, and survival, rather than religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism. It seems that in the hierarchy of what believers in the area consider in order to be peaceful or not peaceful with the religious other, these fundamental interests are paramount. The chapter also discussed the limits of interreligious dialogue in Abuja. These findings are part of the reasons why this work argues that religious factors impact on interreligious peace, but at times not in the way that some religious leaders and some of those who favourably comment on religious peacebuilding hold.

The next chapter further demonstrates the broadness within the dynamics of interreligious peace in Abuja. It does this by discussing some of the nonreligious factors that play important roles in the dynamics. Even as these factors are often intertwined with religion, their vital roles in Abuja demonstrate that sustaining interreligious peace in northern Nigeria and other
A religiously diverse societies requires, even very importantly, factors that are not primarily religious. This position agrees with arguments of scholars in the field of religious peacebuilding.
CHAPTER 6
OTHER FACTORS IN THE DYNAMICS OF PEACE IN ABUJA

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapters show that although there is a widely held view that religion has, and can have, a strong impact on peace in religiously mixed areas, it is not very clear the extent to which it affects peace-levels on the ground. In Abuja, for example, whereas religious leaders identify religious factors as being very important for the existing peace, there are reasons to believe that the extent to which the existing relative peace is influenced by religious factors is not as much as religious leaders suggest, even as the residents of Abuja are religious. To further show the complexity that characterises interreligious peace in the territory, the current chapter will consider the mainly nonreligious societal or environmental factors that have helped to determine the relative peace there.

As chapter 7 will explain in detail, although this study highlights the idea that religion does not cause peace on its own, the notion is not new in peace research. For example, while Appleby (2000) argues strongly that religious “militants for peace” who make important contributions to peacebuilding in divided societies have existed and continue to exist, he did not fail to recognise that religion is only part of a broader collection of factors required in peacebuilding. This recognition is also made by Brewer, Higgins and Teeney (2010) and Gopin (2000), among others. Appleby (2000:122) argues that “nonviolent religious militancy becomes politically effective over the long term only when it spans a spectrum of actors at different levels of society, all of
whom are working in collaboration for the nonviolent resolution of conflict and the building of stable political structures and social relations." He goes ahead to add that “indeed, 'religious peacebuilding’ is a misnomer if it leads one to believe that religious actors were able to transform dimensions of modern conflict by functioning independently of government and other secular and religious actors” (Appleby, 2000:212). His case for collaboration between religious and other actors is well made. As the current chapter and the next one show, this research supports this view with data from Abuja. Although the reality is that religion helps to promote peace in religiously diverse settings, religion is often a player among players, or as Damon Lynch puts it in his summary of Appleby’s *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, “a player with other players” ([https://www.beyondintractability.org/bksum/appleby-ambivalence](https://www.beyondintractability.org/bksum/appleby-ambivalence)).

On the one hand, it is not realistic to argue that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism do not have any important influence on the interreligious peace in Abuja. And, on the other hand, it is even more unrealistic to position these factors as the most central or as very important, without recognising the complex issues at play on the ground.

That said, it is important to clarify that the main point here is not merely that interreligious peace is a complex phenomenon. As the above paragraph mentioned, that is not a new idea. Most researchers on religion and peace recognise this, and so do religious peacebuilders. In fact, as this chapter will show, the religious leaders that were interviewed in Abuja understood that the relative peace in the area has been sustained by other factors apart from religion. Therefore, it will be misleading to suggest that religious leaders in
Abuja or researchers on religion and peace in northern Nigeria and other areas believe religious leaders, religious peace norms, and religious peace activism to be the only or the major causes of peace between Christians and Muslims in the territory. The issue, instead, is that even with this recognition of complexity, the role of religion as a source of divides between people or as a cause of peace is sometimes overestimated. Religious leaders recognise the broadness within peace dynamics, but it seems that while they believe that religion importantly influences how ordinary people live and relate with each other, people’s complex concerns and how these concerns shape relations on the ground are sometimes not well-recognised by them and some of those who attribute a lot of importance to religion in religiously diverse contexts. Chapters 5-7 of this thesis show that there is a web of factors that sustain interreligious peace, and important components of this complex system are believers themselves, their practical interests, and other societal issues, some of which are described in the following sections. Among other things, this study holds that the usefulness of religious peacebuilding would be optimised if religious leaders and other peace actors recognise this complexity, locate themselves properly within it, and pay more attention to the practical interests of ordinary persons and how they can be protected.

What Dowd (2016) calls “culture of religious tolerance” exists in parts of Abuja, but this study discovered that it is not principally or even strongly due to what Vullers (2019) refers to as “religious peace activism” or because of what Dowd calls “religious institutions.” For several reasons which are not limited to religion, religious tolerance in parts of Abuja has been “normalised,”
specifically in the sense that Christians and Muslims live side by side and encounter each other daily without confrontations, despite the existing intergroup divides. In Wuse and Utako markets, in public buses, workplaces and many public areas, interreligious cooperation takes place regularly. Many Christians and Muslims, at least those interviewed for this research, respect the freedom of the religious outsider to practice and teach their beliefs. Although religious factors have contributed to this reality, the picture is much broader. Holding the situation in Abuja is a collection of religious and nonreligious variables. At times, the nonreligious factors operate with the religious ones to promote peace between Christians and Muslims in the territory, but in some cases, they even appear to be more important than the religious factors. I discuss some of these other important factors in this chapter, but before then, I shall make the following clarification about the scope of the chapter and the concepts it uses.

I use the term nonreligious here only to aid clarity, and not because I take for granted the debate about how problematic the category religion is and how difficult it is to separate it from the secular (Cavanaugh, 2009; Fitzgerald, 1995). In the first chapter of the thesis, I acknowledged the debates about the concept of religion and related terms, and explained why the terms are retained in the study and how they are employed. In addition to that explanation, it is important to note that this chapter does not ignore those debates, especially in terms of the divide between the religious and the secular. Cush (2013:121), for example, holds that “contemporary societies are both ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ in complex and diverse ways, and sometimes the distinction does not
even make sense.” Similarly, the problematic nature of the category “secular” has been discussed by scholars (e.g., Woodhead and Catto, 2012) and even the contested term “post-secular” has been used to refer to “a changing, complicating religious diversity and plurality, where new religious movements, new traditional-religious, and contemporary secular sensibilities mix” (Bowie, Petersen and Revell, 2012:140; also see Cush, 2012:121). In this chapter and the rest of the thesis, I use nonreligious mainly as an analytical category, to reduce ambiguities and show the complexity that characterises interreligious peace in Abuja. And, as the chapter demonstrates, there is interconnectivity among the causal factors identified. Even as the variables described in the chapter are primarily not religious, they often operate with the help of religious factors. A good example of this relationship is the cooperation between the police, religious leaders, and communal leaders to collect and act on intelligence. And finally, I should add that the variables I have identified below might not be the only major nonreligious causes of Christian-Muslim peace in Abuja. Studying all the causes will require a long-term research that also engages multiple facilitators with different kinds of disciplinary expertise. But that notwithstanding, this chapter yields insights into the complex network that sustains interreligious peace in Abuja and presents lessons for other religiously diverse contexts. These lessons are discussed in chapter 7.

6.2. Ethno-religious demographics

Arguably, some of the causes of the relative interreligious peace in Abuja are structural, and one of them is the ethnoreligious composition of the territory. It is important to restate that Abuja is a created capital city. It was
designed to serve as the capital of a federation that unites the federating units geographically, politically, culturally and in all other possible manners. This has contributed to the production of a type of demographic feature that has made it relatively easy for the Christians and Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds in the territory to live side by side without violent contests over power and dominance. This feature is the ethnoreligious composition of the territory, which makes it “no person’s land”, unlike other parts of northern Nigeria where Muslims or Christians claim or compete for dominance. Also, it seems that since many parts of Wuse and Utako are inhabited by migrants from various parts of the country, they lack the kind of strong attachment to space that might be present in some other parts of the north.

Abuja is “no person’s land”, not in the sense that it did not have original inhabitants before it was made the FCT, but rather in the sense that it is now a multicultural and multireligious federal territory where neither Christians nor Muslims can claim that the territory rightfully belongs to them and that the other religious groups are therefore settlers or outsiders. As a participant put it, “Abuja is no man’s land. I don’t think there is any tribe in Nigeria that is not represented in the FCT. No particular religion or ethnic group dominates Abuja” (Imam MRL4, 22 March). “It is the capital city, it belongs to nobody, it belongs to everybody…it belongs to all” (Mrs MLP14, 30 May). For another participant, “Abuja is virtually a no man’s land. Since it became a Federal Capital Territory, it seized to be owned by people, and the people that used to own it have been compensated largely” (Imam MRL3, 11 March). For several reasons, the area has become a major receiver of immigrants from different
parts of the country. For example, it is believed to be among the safest parts of the country where one could live. Also, as a capital city which is believed by many to have a concentration of employers, it draws a good number of job-seeking youths from many sections of the country. As Abubakar (2014:81) observes, “Abuja is…the destination of innumerable unemployed people who migrate to the city in search of perceived opportunities and of those who see the city as much safer than other parts of the country.” Pierri and Barkindo (2016) also observe that “diminishing farm lands, threats from widespread gully erosion, environmental degradation, and the search for greater economic prosperity attracted massive outward migration from all round the country toward the new capital Abuja.” Violence in the north-east has equally produced Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), some of whom now reside in Abuja and other parts of the north.

Although Nigeria’s census results do not include details on religious affiliation, a priest and participant confirmed, based on his evangelistic missions in the territory, that the original indigenes of Abuja themselves include both Christians and Muslims, and that they mostly do not have cases of violent interreligious conflict (Rev. CRL7, 7 April). In fact, whereas some of the communal leaders are Muslims, such as the Chief of Garki – Chief Nga-Kupi, some others are Christians. For example, Rev CRL7 explained on 7 April: “if you go to their villages…I know a chief in Karo…I was so surprised that he is a Christian, we even have a church in his compound, Methodist church. So, I found out that many of these Gbagyis, if you interact with them you find out that many of them are Christians.” The point is that since the original
inhabitants themselves are religiously mixed but generally not violent, and do not have a predominant religion that has been in conflict with other religious groups over dominance, it arguably would be unlikely for the Christian and Muslim immigrants who have made Abuja their home to have such problems related to religious dominance with the already religiously mixed indigenous people who have a history of interreligious nonviolence.

The debate about multiculturalism and peace has not ceased, especially as cities across the world become more multicultural and multireligious due to globalisation, economic migration, and violence-induced emigration from the third world to “safer” countries in the West. Whereas some regard multiculturalism as a source of conflict, Abuja is arguably a case where it has been a source of demographic balance, a preventer of conflicts that are caused by majority-minority status-related issues, and therefore a cause of relative peace. This observation is partly consistent with Dowd’s (2016) earlier discovery about the positive relationship between religious diversity and religious tolerance in other parts of northern Nigeria. He argues that the most diverse area among the four settings he studied – Kano, Ibadan, Enugu and Jos – had the highest level of religious tolerance, but he does not explain in detail what the connection between religious diversity and religious tolerance or peace is. In Abuja, the link lies in the fact that the disagreements over dominance are mostly absent as no single religious group can claim superiority based on its population or historical ownership of the territory. But it is important to recognise that this is not without its problems. Settler-indigene conflicts could still emerge there in years to come, as the region gets more
populated, as certain ethnoreligious groups outnumber others, as competition over political representation in local councils increases between ethnoreligious groups, and as indigenes feel more threatened and dispossessed. Imam MRL3 even explained on 11 March, based on the comments he has received from his followers and friends, that presently, there is “bottled-up anger” against a certain nonindigenous ethnic group in Abuja, which is perceived to be dominating the territory economically, but this claim was dismissed by a Christian religious leader who argued that Abuja is a federal territory that belongs to the government and where any person or group could thrive economically without discrimination from another group that may feel it is less successful (Bishop CRL5, 14 March).

That said, it is important to note that such a situation about bottled-up anger against “settlers” who are perceived to be overpowering the “indigenes” has manifested in the south’s Lagos, where some indigenous Yoruba political actors have vocally expressed their anger and frustration about the large population of Igbos in parts of the state and how their large population has made them very influential during elections within the state. This was the case in 2015 and 2019, when there were allegations that Igbos were asked to either leave Lagos before the general elections or not participate in voting there to avoid any harm (e.g., Nwachukwu, 2019; Fadipe, 2019; Egbujo, 2019). Arguably, this could arise in other settings, including Abuja, if indigenes feel that they are being dispossessed by “settlers” or immigrants. Highlighting a related idea about the indigene-settler conflict in Nigeria, the IPCR (2017:62) in its 2016 annual report on conflicts in Nigeria stated that its critical analysis
of the indigene-settler conflicts in Nigeria demonstrates that “such divisive consciousness gets promoted whenever a group feels marginalised in having access to power, state resources and patronage.” It is worthy of note, therefore, that it is not sermons about interreligious peace or religious peace norms that will prevent these conflicts, which will be economic, ethnic as well as religious – in the sense that it may occur along religious lines as well. It is the responsibility of the government and the FCTA to ensure that such a situation does not arise, for example, by constantly providing an inclusive environment and conditions within which everyone could thrive. It should be added that the Nigerian constitution does not privilege “indigenes” over “settlers” and it enshrines freedom of movement, residence and ownership anywhere in the country for Nigerians. But unfortunately, the indigene-settler dichotomy is mostly highlighted in contexts of political representation and acquisition of property such as land, sometimes with the use of divisive narratives.

6.3. The government and inclusion

This study discovered that the federal government has made efforts to sustain a policy of inclusion of both Muslims and Christians residing in Abuja, and positive encounters between the religious adherents have been highly encouraged. For example, in terms of infrastructure, (a) there is non-discriminatory allocation of land to Christians and Muslims, (b) the two religious communities have a government-allocated cemetery in Gwarinpa, (c) there is a national mosque and a national Christian centre separated by only a few kilometres, and (d) there is a Christian pilgrims board and a Muslim pilgrims
board receiving financial and logistical support from the government. It seems that these help to “strike a sense of balance in the psyche of the Christians and Muslims” (Mr CLP10, 5 April). The government organises interreligious dialogical meetings that bring the Christian and Muslim religious leaders together. During religious festive periods, the government provides spaces for them to broadcast on state media for free (Bishop CRL5, 14 March), and programmes bringing Muslim and Christian religious leaders together are common on the NTA station. This tradition is a departure from the situation in some other mostly Muslim states in the north where Christians are sometimes denied access to state media, even as “it is not uncommon to see offensive programmes that caricature Christianity on State Television” (Kukah, 2014:9).

Importantly also, the religious freedom and state-religion policy (Fox, 2019) in Abuja, which has been sustained mainly by the federal government, has helped to make absent the issues that have contributed to Muslim-Christian violence in other parts of the north. One such matter is the issue of Shari‘a. Unlike the situation in some of the northern states where expanded Shari‘a has been adopted, Abuja’s religious diversity is respected and there has not been a time when the government attempted to introduce the Islamic law in the territory. The point here, however, is not that the adoption of Islamic law in Nigeria is improper, or that doing so necessarily discriminates against non-Muslims. It is not in the purview of this study to discuss the rightness or wrongness of that. The point is that part of how Nigerian authorities are sustaining interreligious peace in Abuja is by not enabling the suspicions that have surrounded the implementation of Islamic law in the country. The
government aims to keep Abuja as welcoming as possible to members of all faiths and cultural backgrounds (Ms MLP17, FCDA, 30 June). As a result, many Christians in Wuse, Utako and other parts of Abuja, as Pastor CRL3 observed during our meeting on 5 February, feel that “our religious freedom has not been threatened or restricted in Abuja.” A similar point was made by Rev. CRL7 on 7 April. There was unity among the Christian and Muslim religious leaders that were interviewed, about the need to not adopt a religious law in Abuja, just as there seemed to be a level of frustration among the Muslim religious leaders at the adoption of expanded Shari’a in most of the northern states and how that led to Muslim-Christian violence. Venerable CRL1 of CAN and the Anglican Church, for example, explained on 1 February that “Abuja will boil if the implementation of Shari’a in the territory is even mentioned.” It is not improper to assume that there are different views about the Shari’a in Abuja, as Iwuchukwu (2013) identifies at least three schools of thought in the north on what should be the nature of the relationship between the state and religion. The first group, being fundamentalist and ultra-conservative Muslims, reject the concept of separation of state and religion, and secularity (Iwuchukwu, 2013:81-82). This group does not differentiate between Allah, his law, and the society, in such a way that they believe societal laws cannot differ or be incompatible with Allah’s ethical requirements. Most Christians and moderate or progressive Muslims in the north, according to Iwuchukwu, make up the second group. “They accept the principle of the separation of church and state or secularity with certain modifications” (Iwuchukwu, 2013:82). The third group, which is tantamount to the opposite of the first group, completely
rejects the involvement or interference of the state in any religious tradition, belief system or religious activity in the region. This group would not justify the sponsorship of religious pilgrimages by the Nigerian government, as has been going on for decades since General Yakubu Gowon approved the establishment of the pilgrimage board for Muslims in 1975. With these differences, the introduction of the Shari’a in Abuja, as in other northern states, could generate mixed reactions, possibly including protests and riots. In parts of northern Nigeria, perceptions of religious non-freedom have influenced violent interreligious conflict, as in the Shari’a riots in 2000. Among other things, the adoption of expanded Shari’a in the region implied to a section of the population that Islam was being recognised as the state religion and that Christians were to be disadvantaged in several ways. Consequently, there were crises in which thousands of lives were lost. For example, in Kaduna alone, over 2000 lives and properties worth millions of naira were lost, just as many were displaced, in early 2000 (Little, 2007:258). Additionally, works on discrimination and intergroup conflicts, religious freedom, as well as RSP (religion-state policy) demonstrate that perceived inhibitions of religious freedom in religiously diverse settings could generate violence, especially from the affected group.

Ted Robert Gurr’s theory on deprivation and discrimination as causes of grievances and of violence (Gurr, 1970; 1993; 2015) has received a variety of academic responses. Although some of them claim that there is no direct link between grievances and the causation of intergroup violence (like Basedau et al, 2015), most of the studies agree that discrimination causes
grievances among the discriminated minority groups. The fact that grievances emerge, and they can be strengthened by stakeholders in the affected groups, suggests that discrimination can lead to violence. Perceived religious “discriminatory policies can act as the triggering mechanism” for intergroup violence (Akbaba and Taydas, 2011:274-275). According to Gurr (2000:xvi), the discrimination of minorities “provide strong incentives for ethnopolitical mobilization, protest and rebellion” by the group being discriminated against and could “lead to group-level grievances that begin a process that can cause conflict” (Basedau et al, 2015:219). Akbaba and Taydas (2011:271) also argue that religious discrimination is a “strong predictor of violent dissent” by ethnoreligious groups, as their empirical findings show that “as the level of religious discrimination against ethnoreligious groups increases, the probability of rebellion and civil war heightens.” Concerned with the extent to which religion influences the onset of armed conflict between rebels or non-state actors against state-security forces, Basedau, Pfeiffer and Vullers (2016) also use a data set that includes up to 130 countries for the 1990-2010 period to do a quantitative analysis of how specific religious variables fuel intrastate armed conflict. They argue that religious groups’ grievances over discrimination provide motives with which the rebels could mobilise people for collective action, and therefore serve as an influential causal factor in intrastate armed conflict (Basedau, Pfeiffer and Vullers, 2016:230ff). Other religious factors which they hold to be determinants include religious leaders’ call for violence, the overlap of religious identity with other identity markers, and religious diversity.
There is relative calm felt in parts of Abuja partly due to the absence of the feeling that a religious group is unjustly dominating the rest, or that one’s group is being denied its rightful place. Conversations with participants revealed their recognition of relative religious freedom as a major difference between Abuja and some parts of the north. In fact, for lay Muslim MLP14, Imam MRL2, Imam MRL4 and a number of the lay participants, part of why Abuja is “peaceful” and receives a large number of immigrants from the north is the relatively high level of religious freedom enjoyed by its residents. For Christian participants in Wuse, including the Dunamis Christian fellowship and a young man that I met in a football field in Wuse, any attempt to introduce the Shari’a there will be strongly resisted by Christians. Conscious efforts are being made by the government to sustain a RSP that accommodates Muslims and Christians alike. It is not surprising that there are still perceptions of imbalance, especially with regards to the country generally, but within the studied areas, there was no evidence of internal discrimination against religious groups, and this seemingly reduces or at least does not generate discrimination-related and conflict-inciting grievances among the groups.

As mentioned above, the situation in Abuja is markedly different from what seems to be the case in some other parts of the north, where forms of religious discrimination are present. For example, while explaining that they have helped to cause and influence violent interreligious conflict in parts of the region, Kukah (2014:1-20) has identified various kinds of discrimination against Christians there. Based on his observation, study and interactions with
residents of states in the north, he identifies the following “examples of issues Christians suffer” in the mainly Muslim states in the region:

(1) denial of access to land for the building of churches, as Christians constitute the minority and state actors see them as strangers/settlers. (2) denial of freedom to embrace Christianity, in such a way that (i) Muslim women are usually prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men, although Muslim men are allowed to marry non-Muslim women, who then convert, and (ii) Muslims wanting to convert to Christianity are sometimes threatened with death as a punishment for apostasy, despite the fact that religious freedom is provided for in the Nigerian constitution. (3) denial of the right of inheritance to Christian women who marry Muslims and remain Christians. (4) denial of access to the state media, even though ‘it is not uncommon to see offensive programmes that caricature Christianity on State Television’ and the heads of the media institutions – both federal and state – are mostly Muslims. (5) denial of access to state employment on the grounds that the states are Muslim. (6) denial of access to state patronage, for example in the awarding of contracts or other forms of governmental patronage. (7) non-payment of compensation for the destruction of churches and institutions, which then ‘justify’ Christian reprisal attacks. (8) skewed location of federal presence, in terms of infrastructure, in the northern states in such a way that Muslim-dominated areas are generally favoured more than the mainly Christian ones. (9) kidnapping and forced marriage of non-Muslim girls, sometimes at an early age. (10) lack of access to Christian religious education in public schools in parts of the northern states, and restrictions on the construction of chaplaincies in many of the region’s tertiary institutions, including universities, colleges of education and polytechnics (Kukah, 2014:1-12; also see Ossai, 2020:315-316).

A similar revelation was made by a catholic priest and head of a major peace organisation in Abuja, who explained that in parts of northern Nigeria, “there is massive discrimination, Christians cannot even buy land to build church, to get admission into the university, they are discriminated against on the basis of their faith, they are excluded from political appointments” (Fr CRL6, 18 March).

In the interviews conducted in Abuja, none of these issues was identified as a problem for Christians in Abuja; Christians and Muslims received allocations
of land for religious purposes upon request, and both groups are mostly treated equally by the government.

As far as Christian-Muslim relations are concerned in Nigeria, the use of land remains a sensitive issue. Disputes have occurred at the communal level and as mentioned in chapter 1, one of them is the recent problem of farmer-herder conflicts. The federal government and the state governments in the mostly Christian southern region have had disagreements over the former’s attempt to construct settlements for the mainly Muslim and Fulani herdsmen within the states, as part of its solution to the farmer-herder conflicts, which have cost many lives and reduced the country’s agricultural strength (Akinrefon et al, 2019; Channels Television, 2019). Whereas land has been a major issue in some interreligious and interethnic conflicts in the north and other parts of the country, the case of Abuja, or rather parts of it such as the districts that make up the municipal area council, remains significantly different.

As the FCT, the federal government owns the land and allocates or does not allocate portions to people after the consideration of their applications for land. The land, therefore, does not belong to any group. As the territory was being adopted as the FCT, the government took over the land and compensated the original owners, who have moved to inner parts of the territory, although there are still unresolved issues about the compensation (Omonobi and Erunke, 2019). As Mrs MLP17, who is a deputy director at the FCDA, confirmed on 30 June, the government is supposed to be the sole assignor of land to prospective users, and it has been doing so as much as
possible in a way that accommodates the two religious groups and without any preference for any religious or ethnic group. However, the challenge they have had, as she explained, is that some users, whose land has been legally assigned by the government, resell the land informally. But still, “only the government legally owns all the land within the territory and can demolish any erected structures on lands purchased informally” (Abubakar, 2014:85). However, it is important to note that a Christian religious leader and participant thought that the government was still not totally as fair as it claims, because on the cemetery at Gwarinpa, the Muslims were given a “good” portion whereas the Christians were allocated a “poor and swampy” side, and Islamic structures are positioned in central areas in the territory whereas the Christian ones are in more hidden sections (Venerable CRL1, 1 February). This view was challenged by another Christian religious leader and member of CAN, who explained that rather than the assigning of two separate lands - one good and one bad, it is the same piece of land that was divided into two parts - one being for Christians and the other for Muslims. He added that the problem raised by the other participant had already been addressed by the government, which was already preparing another cemetery for Christians at the time of the study (Bishop CRL5, 14 March). Highlighting the government’s inclusiveness, he clarified:

In fairness to the government, I know that the Gwarinpa cemetery is one parcel of land. The Christians have a side and the Muslims have a side. The problem with it is that it is swampy. So, the Muslims were given the drier portion, and the Christian side does become bad when it rains. But we complained and another cemetery is being prepared. In the Gudu cemetery, there is portion for both Christians and for Muslims, in the same land. And CAN is working
with Abuja Environmental Protection Board to make sure that Christians have befitting cemeteries.

That said, it is important to note that this difference of opinions suggest that not all Christians in Abuja are satisfied by the state policy. Hence, it would be misleading for this study to not recognise that the state policy in Abuja is not without flaws or limitations. The issue, nonetheless, is that government efforts have played an important role in sustaining the relative peace that exists in the area. To verify some of the claims of the above-cited religious leader that Christian buildings are generally in less central areas in the territory than the Muslim ones, an observation was carried out on the location of churches and mosques in Wuse. It was discovered that in some areas, churches were in less central locations than mosques, but it was the same for the mosques in other places, as there were mosques in less central sections as well. Hence, it seemed there were no deliberate governmental attempts to favour mosques over churches, and generally, there was overwhelming support among participants for how much the land management is inclusive, especially when compared to some other parts of the north. As the Secretary of Abuja’s CAN explained:

Churches can walk to the FCT Minister and apply for land, and you are given land...in other states in the north, Christians are denied these rights and freedoms to acquire land and build churches or other religious institutions, and that causes strife. The government here in Abuja allocates land to both Christian and Muslim organisations, and Christian universities and secondary schools can be found in the FCT, just as Islamic ones. Also, hospitals. The government accommodates the faiths...Many conflicts in different parts of the world is because of land, and when land is made available as in the FCT, it reduces the strife and the feeling of marginalisation (Bishop CRL5, 14 March).
This practice is markedly different from what obtains in some other parts of the region, where there is “denial of access to land for the building of churches” which has made it that “in places like Kano and Kaduna, it is not uncommon to find over 20 churches of different denominations on one street because of the restriction” (Kukah, 2014:7-8). More comparison was made by CRL5 on 14 March:

In some states, there is nothing like Christian half hour. This is a programme especially on Sundays in which the Christian community can talk to the vast audience of the FCT and even beyond using the NTA, and Muslims have their own slot even on Fridays. In other states, this is not allowed, even if you ask to buy your own airtime. Here in Abuja, it is even free of charge. You are not charged for airing your Christian views. In this lent, NTA channel 5 gives the Christian community time to reach out to Christians everyday throughout the season.

“We have the Christian Pilgrims Commission, and also the Muslim Pilgrims Commission,” CRL5 continues; “Whereas the government does not fund everything, they support the organisation, provide logistics and make sure that it goes on successfully.” All these show that there is a conscious governmental effort to promote physical and psychological balance among Christians and Muslims in the territory, and this has helped to reduce the problems that could serve as a breeding ground for violent interreligious conflict.

6.4. Policing

As mentioned above, Abuja is a federal capital territory, which houses national infrastructures and even those serving foreign interests, such as embassies and high commissions. The headquarters of most of the country’s institutions are located there, including those of the security agencies. Moreover, it symbolises the country, in such a way that its continuity or its
collapse represents the continuity or collapse of the Nigerian state. For these and other reasons, it is highly policed by official security agencies, and in parts of the territory, there is even more policing from private guards securing individual houses and entire neighbourhoods. According to a participant and a member of the police in Abuja:

Because it’s the FCT, they also probably receive extra budgetary allocation. So, you have more vehicles...Because this is the seat of power, there are a lot of foreign dignitaries here. Abuja is a hub of consular activities. So, every foreign country has got an embassy or a high commission here. There are also critical national infrastructures, like the headquarters of the NCC for example, the energy regulatory bodies, the police headquarters, DSS, the statehouse itself, the army, the navy headquarters, the international airport. For all these sensitive offices, you need to provide round-the-clock security for them, and in trying to secure them and provide round-the-clock security for them, you are also consciously or unconsciously providing security for the adjoining communities...So, this singular advantage places Abuja in a very special status, and so, it enjoys prominence and high visibility policing, and that also has counted greatly in strengthening the security around Abuja (Mr CLP10, 5 April).

As he observed, “the military is all over the place, the number of police stations and military barracks here is more than there is in any other place [in the country].”

For the police in the area, there is an action-guiding idea that “once you are able to achieve stability and peace generally in a neighbourhood, you are halfway or almost at the point of achieving interreligious harmony” (Mr CLP10, 5 April). They, therefore, regard the regular crime-prevention activities that they carry out as part of their efforts to boost Christian-Muslim peace in Abuja. As the Force Public Relations Officer rightly highlighted, in a religiously and ethnically diverse area such as Abuja and parts of Nigeria where differences in religious identity have been part of the causes of conflicts, crimes against
some religious establishments or a category of believers could generate reprisal attacks by the victims or their sympathisers against the perceived perpetrators and/or those believed to be their allies or sympathisers, and this is why the police need to prevent crimes in the churches and the mosques. Among others, their strategies include:

(a) street patrols,

(b) deployment around churches and mosques,

(c) putting barricades around the churches mostly during worship on Sundays, and around the mosques mainly during Jumu‘ah prayers, in order to aid the screening of those accessing the buildings and their surroundings,

(d) cooperation with the security committees of the churches and the mosques, for example, to guide them on security measures to be taken and to train them on how to frisk those accessing the mosques and churches on designated days or periods,

(e) the distribution of emergency mobile numbers to religious leaders and places of worship for rapid response where needed, and

(f) the provision of as many police units or posts as possible in the neighbourhoods within the territory.

There are several factors which aid policing in Abuja and these are described in the following response from Mr CLP10 on 5 April:

When you have a city that the roads are good, that have streetlights, where there are good road signs, the streets are well marked out and well numbered. These are little factors; some of them have to do with urban and town planning, some have to do with infrastructural development and the control of those facilities. They help in either impacting the police positively or negatively. So, if you are policing a
city where the roads are bad, there are no streetlights and even the names of the streets are not known or the streets are not properly numbered; when there are distress calls, the police struggle to access the place. Someone makes a call and you ask the person where they are calling from, and he or she says, “when you get to Transcorp Hilton Hotel [in central Abuja], take your right, count four streets on your left, enter the next street, and you will see the tall yellow building.” And you may be surprised that in the night, the yellow building will look like a white one. But when the streets are properly numbered, there is signage, and the roads are good, these things help us, to be honest.

That said, it is proper to recognise that extent to which policing affects the relative Christian-Muslim peace in Abuja may not be very clear. However, there are reasons to believe that it is one of the important contributing factors without which the existing relative peace could be lost. Apart from the physical presence which could be easily observed, for example as demonstrated by the police units on most streets in Wuse, Utako and other parts of the municipal area, there have been interventions from them which prevented possible Christian-Muslim problems.

For example, Imam MRL6 described on 10 May how rapid police response at the central mosque in Gwarinpa did prevent a Christian-Muslim crisis when a Christian extremist came to the mosque, and during our conversation on 7 April, Rev CRL7, who is a priest at the Methodist cathedral in Wuse, recalled when the quick intervention of the police upon his distress call helped to address what he observed to be a suspicious gathering of youths in the area where he was serving in Abuja. Protests have also been monitored by the police, and where some of them turned into riots, the police have recorded losses, as it was in the anti-state Shiites protest in Wuse in which a police vehicle got burnt in October 2018 (Omonobi et al, 2018). Another pastor of a church in Wuse district explained that if not for the intervention of the
police, the beauty pageant protests within Abuja in November 2002 would have turned violent and could have caused a religious crisis, as “there were already rampaging groups wanting to attack Christians” (CRL3, 5 February). The same applies to the jubilatory road walks which followed the announcement of President Muhammadu Buhari’s success in the 2019 presidential elections. Besides, a strongly significant peace-role of the police has been their collaboration with communal and religious leaders to collect and act on intelligence. Through this cooperation, early warning signs are identified and threats to interreligious peace are addressed even before they evolve into bigger problems. These show the importance of state security agencies in Abuja.

It is important to add that Krause (2016:281-282), in her study on interreligious peace in Jos, holds that the prevention of violent interreligious conflict requires more than state policing and may not depend primarily on the will and capacity of the government to keep peace, because without the efforts of civilians to prevent violence and their will to not carry arms, the state security forces might be ineffective due to limited personnel, late deployment to troubled areas, and/or the lack of intelligence needed to track and foil possible attacks. However, the deployment of security forces for peace remains an important approach, as Krause (2018:135) discovers in her other study on Ambon, Indonesia. For example, military forces did stop a Muslim mob from a part of Indonesia called Leihitu from attacking Christians in Ambon, during the 1999-2002 violent conflict, which was strongly defined by religious identity. The findings from Abuja and Krause’s studies show that state security forces are
important, but they are certainly not all that is required for interreligious peace to exist in a religiously diverse area. The relative peace in Abuja has benefitted from state policing and other societal factors described in this chapter, but even at that, the agency of the ordinary Christians and Muslims living there remains one of the key issues.

6.5. Communal leaders

Finally, this study discovered that Abuja’s communal leaders cooperate with religious leaders and security agents to collect, share and promptly respond to intelligence on tensions in their communities. This is a very useful function. The communal leaders collect information on their communities regularly, and issues are addressed as they emerge. In many cases, these are not known to the public. Additionally, they act as peacemakers. The research in Abuja led to my participation in activities at the palace of the Chief of Garki, Alhaji Dr Usman Nga-Kupi, who is a Muslim. On many occasions, the chief invited disputing families and clans to the palace, some of whom included Christians, and in most of the cases where I participated, the problems were resolved. Whereas at least one representative from the police attended some of the meetings, the conflicts were often resolved without any need for further activities at the police station or law courts. Furthermore, in cases of imminent danger, the communal leaders step in to deescalate tensions. This mediating role of communal leaders in Abuja is similar to what obtains in many other African settings. For instance, in the Yoruba-speaking south-western part of Nigeria, the kings (or ọbas), who are respected and often “recognised as
‘heads’ of all religions” practised in their communities (Nolte and Ogen, 2017a:10) also play major mediating roles.

6.6. Conclusion

Although religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to sustain peace between Christians and Muslims in Abuja, this chapter and the previous one show the complexity that characterises interreligious peace in the area. While the variables discussed here are often inseparable from religious factors, they are not primarily religious. They include structural issues as well as human factors, and they revolve around the management of land and political power, among other things. In other religiously diverse settings in northern Nigeria and other areas, land may not be owned by the government as in Abuja, and there may as well be a different set of governmental configuration and influence over the areas. But that notwithstanding, it seems that issues of how land and political power are managed amidst diversity, and how the diversity itself is managed by political actors, should be taken seriously. Hence, as the next chapter explains, this study holds that a good management of those issues could enhance interreligious peace in northern Nigeria and other religiously diverse contexts.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1. Introduction

This research has been focused on the impact of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism on peace between members of different religious groups. Most of what we know about this issue in the context of Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria has come from research on conflict or post-conflict areas. To improve our understanding of religion and peace in the region and other religiously diverse settings, this study has explored the situation in zones of peace within Abuja. It focused on Wuse and Utako districts in the municipal area council. Although this is not a common approach in the study of religious peacebuilding and interreligious relations, it has offered additional insights into peace and Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria. This will be demonstrated by the following sections and the discussion in the next chapter.

This chapter articulates the major arguments of the study in response to its main question about lessons that zones of peace offer for religious peacebuilding, interreligious relations, and Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria. While the major findings of the fieldwork have been presented in chapters 3-6, this chapter brings these findings together and draws on the academic literature on religion, conflict, and peace in northern Nigeria and beyond to interpret them and show that:

(a) religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to sustain interreligious peace,
(b) practical issues are often of central importance to laypersons,
(c) interreligious peace results from a complex web of factors that importantly involves lay believers and their practical interests,
(d) the religious divide between believers is sometimes overestimated,
(e) the views of religious leaders at times differ from those of laypersons, and
(f) interreligious dialogue between top-level religious leaders sometimes has little impact on the ground

These points are discussed in detail in the following sections.

**7.2. Religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to sustain interreligious peace**

Before I discuss the study’s argument about the centrality of practical issues for believers in section 7.3, it is important to underscore the fact that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to sustain peace between members of different religious groups. As discussed earlier in chapters 2 and 4, religious institutions have assets which enable peace (Lazarus et al, 2017). The tangible ones include (a) places of worship where adherents converge, (b) those individuals who are regarded as religious leaders and who command the respect of adherents, (c) the sacred texts which include pro-peace ethical guides for believers, and (d) the organisations operating under the management of the religious groups, for example, peacebuilding bodies. The intangible ones, on the other hand, include all the values and norms which they offer for the living and which in one way or another could promote a peaceful and secure world if adopted, such as love,
The fourth chapter of this thesis has described how these assets help to prevent violent interreligious conflict in Abuja.

The fieldwork conducted for the study shows that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism have helped to sustain the relative peace existing in Abuja. According to chapter 4, various forms of religious peacebuilding take place in the area, and they have helped to prevent violent interreligious conflict there. Religious leaders promote interreligious peace in Abuja using sermons presented in places of worship. They also refuse to condemn other religions or their adherents, as is sometimes done in some areas in northern Nigeria (e.g., see Basedau, Vüllers and Körner, 2013:869 on Kaduna). Christian and Muslim religious leaders in Abuja have good relationships between themselves. This is the case with Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Rev. Dr. Samson O.A. Ayokunle, Rev. Dr Israel Akanji, Rev. Fr. Dr Atta Barkindo, Bishop Michael Akpami, Rev. Fr. Prof. Cornelius Omonokhua, Venerable Joshua Lambert, Pastor John Matthew, Rev. Fr Thomas-Ave Omiunu, Rev Simon J. Oyigwu, Archbishop Prof. Leonard B. Kawas, Imam Dr Muhammad Kabir Adam, Imam Sharafudeen A. Aliagan, Imam Professor Taofiq Azeez, Imam Dr Musa Olaofe, Sheikh Al Hassani, Imam Muhammad Murtala Mahmoud, and Sheikh Hadiyatullahi Abdul Ganiyi, who generally expect the cordial relationships to encourage a similar cooperation among their followers. Additionally, religious leaders make more direct contributions to peacebuilding. For example, they have or function in NGOs that help to organise interreligious dialogue. Some of such
organisations are the Kukah Centre, the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace and NIREC. Religious leaders also utilise the media in peacebuilding, for example, by holding theological conversations for peace on television. The study showed how a basketball pitch within the premises of a Pentecostal church in Wuse is being used to bring Muslim and Christian youths together. Religious leaders make efforts to prevent violent electoral conflicts between Christians and Muslims during election periods, by not openly declaring their political choices and by encouraging their followers to conduct themselves peacefully. They also intervene in disagreements between Christians and Muslims in Abuja to prevent their escalation into large-scale conflicts and they collaborate with communal leaders and security agents to collect and share intelligence. The interviews show that these contributions to peacebuilding in Abuja are partly motivated by religious peace norms. For religious leaders who participated in the study, Christianity and Islam are religions of peace, and it is proper for them to work to sustain peace between Christians and Muslims. God, they hold, is the almighty creator, and it is abnormal for mortal human beings created by God to fight to “protect” God’s religion. God created Christians, Muslims, and all humanity, and it is right for them to coexist peacefully as one big family under one Creator. These realities in Abuja show the important contributions of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism to the relative peace existing there. And, when the situation in Abuja is considered with the evidence in the academic literature on religious peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict settings, it becomes clear that these religious factors have impacted, and can continue to impact, peace
between members of different religious groups in several religiously diverse contexts.

In northern Nigeria, religious peace organisations have intervened in times of Christian-Muslim violence in order to achieve peace. One such body is the Interfaith Mediation Centre of Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye in Kaduna state, which has carried out workshops for Christian and Muslim youths, among other activities (Little, 2007; Haynes, 2009:65-68). Krause (2016; 2018), Mustapha et al (2018), Enyiaka (2019) and Ettang and Ogunnubi (2018) highlight the role of religious peacebuilders in Jos, where there have been cases of Christian-Muslim conflicts. As mentioned in chapter 2, Krause (2016; 2018) observes that religious and communal leaders’ peace activism was the primary reason why religious riots did not arise in parts of the city during the riots that occurred between 2001 and 2010. Ettang and Ogunnubi (2018:198) also hold that “it is clear...that non-state actors like religious leaders play a pivotal role in bridging relationships across religious divides” and as a result, “their inclusion, particularly at the state, local and district government levels needs to be encouraged.” Nweke (2018) also highlights the role of religious leaders and FBOs (a) in response to the Shari’a riots that broke out in Kaduna in 2000 and (b) following the cycles of conflicts that occurred in Jos between 2001 and 2012. He concludes that:

From the foregoing, it is evident that FBOs and individual religious leaders play a huge role in peacebuilding in Nigeria...religious peacebuilding in Nigeria has achieved much success, including opening lines of communication between religious groups, creating platforms for interaction between religious groups, enhancing interreligious understanding, building and sustaining trust between people of different faith traditions, and conflict mediation, among others (Nweke, 2018:446).
He avers too that “without the efforts of religious peace-builders, the level of violent conflicts and socio-political instability in Nigeria would have been much higher” (Nweke, 2018:447). It has also been argued that religious leaders and other faith-based actors could play important roles in countering violent extremism (CVE), as “law enforcement and military approaches alone cannot break the cycle of violence” (Selim, 2016:94). Together with other local leaders, they can help to identify people or areas in communities that are susceptible to radicalisation and they could counter the narratives being used by terrorist groups to recruit and mobilise followers (Mirahmadi, 2016; Olojo, 2020; Kruse, 2016:202). Regarding Bauchi and Gombe States in north-eastern Nigeria, which have not experienced the level of violent extremism that has taken place in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States, Olojo (2020) holds that religious leaders and traditional institutions have helped to de-escalate Boko Haram’s presence and influence in those states, partly by countering narratives that help to radicalise youth, and he observes that “Islamic clerics are of particular concern because of the nature of doctrinal messaging exploited by Boko Haram’s factions” (Olojo, 2020:2). Illustrating the importance of religious leaders’ preaching in CVE, Olojo (2020:9-10) explains that majority of Muslims in Bauchi and Gombe states did not accept Boko Haram’s teachings in the early years of the movement when its late leader, Muhammad Yusuf, travelled around the region to expand the group’s presence. He holds that “this mass rejection was inspired by various Islamic clerics who spoke out against Boko haram in mosques, and the dissemination of messages criticising the group” (Olojo, 2020:10).
Furthermore, research on religious peacebuilding outside Nigeria shows the importance of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism. Some studies on African contexts are Langas (2019) on The Joint Committee of Religious Leaders in Zanzibar, Tanzania, from 2005 - 2013, Haynes (2009) on Mozambique, Nigeria, and Cambodia, and Ludovic (2020) on Côte d’Ivoire and the Central African Republic (CAR). Haynes (2009:62) concludes that religious actors can “make a difference” in conflict resolution when they intervene, because “left to their own devices, it is very likely that conflicting groups would have failed to reach a modus vivendi and perhaps lapse back into conflict – with potentially destabilising effects on regional and international stability and peace.” In his assessment of the importance of religious peacebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially using Côte d’Ivoire and the Central African Republic (CAR) as case studies, Ludovic (2020) asserts that “in a number of significant cases, religious diplomacy has succeeded where state actors and international organizations had failed to bring back peace in communities torn by conflicts.” Commenting on the significance of religious diplomacy in Africa, he explains that:

Over the past 30 years, religious leaders in a number of African countries have been called upon to act as mediators, especially in times of political transition and conflicts. For example, religious leaders were solicited in the early 1990s to preside over sovereign national conferences in countries such as Benin, Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and on the whole, they were quite effective in facilitating peaceful transitions from one-party systems to political pluralism…Even in countries, such as Zambia, where there was no national conference, churches played a critical role to ensure a relatively peaceful transition to multiparty politics in the early 1990s…Religious leaders have also been called upon to head national truth and reconciliation commissions. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was in charge of the first commission of this kind in Africa, leading the reconciliation process in post-Apartheid South Africa. Since then, a
number of clerics have been appointed to such commissions on other countries, including Togo and Côte d’Ivoire (Ludovic 2021:50). These studies show the importance of religious peacebuilding in Nigeria and other areas in Africa. In addition, other studies have described religious contributions to peace in contexts outside Africa. Some examples are:

(a) Little (2007) on Father Alex Reid and the Reverend Dr Roy Magee in Northern Ireland (53ff), and Friar Ivo Markovic in Bosnia and Herzegovina (97ff);

(b) Kadayifci-Orellana (2015) on Muslim peacebuilders in the middle east; and

(c) Appleby (2000:121ff) on “religious militants for peace,” as in Buddhist Maha Ghosananda and his supporters in Cambodia (123ff), the Mennonites in Central America and other areas (143ff), and the religious peacemakers in Northern Ireland (167ff).

Recognising the importance of religious peacebuilding, some scholars have been concerned with how to enhance its efficacy and others have attempted to develop specific guidelines for religious peace actors themselves (for example, Frazer and Owen 2018; Owen and King 2019; Hawksley, 2020). These realities within and outside Abuja show the importance of religious contributions to peace. Hence, this thesis supports the encouragement of religious peacebuilding within and beyond northern Nigeria. Chapter 3 also shows that even in zones of peace in the region, there are interreligious suspicions which serve as obstacles to positive peace. This study holds that religious peacebuilding could help to address these suspicions in Abuja and other areas in the north. It also encourages the important contributions of
religious leaders to other areas of the Nigerian society. A former Ambassador of the United States of America (USA) to Nigeria, John Campbell, has recognised the important role religious leaders play in the country and recommended that the USA should utilise their important locations in its engagement with Nigeria (Campbell, 2021; Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). The significance of religious leaders in the promotion of reproductive health in Nigeria has been empirically considered by Adedini et al. (2018) and others. Their contributions to the management of the recent COVID-19 disease in Nigeria and other African countries have also demonstrated their importance (e.g., Wild-Wood et al., 2021; Ossai, 2021; Ayandele, Okafor and Oyedele, 2021). This thesis proposes that these roles should be promoted, given their usefulness in a country where the state often fails to provide adequate health facilities. As Nigerians deal with the challenges of existence in a developing country, religious institutions serve as sources of strength for them and religious leaders help their followers to navigate these challenges. However, while religious contributions to peace are useful, Abuja shows that religion is only a part of the complexity that characterises interreligious peace, and believers’ practical interests, which are often not recognised as hugely important in the dynamics, are indeed central components of the complex system. This point is discussed below.

7.3. Practical issues are often of central importance to laypersons

One of the major contributions of this research is that while religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism are useful, they are rarely at the centre of ordinary believers’ choice or decision to reject
violence or choose peace. According to chapter 5, practical issues of personal and family safety and wellbeing, and desire for survival and progress seem to be of paramount importance to believers. Rather than peace norms in the Bible or the Qur’an, the sermons of religious leaders about peace, or other forms of peacebuilding that invite believers to follow the teachings of Jesus or Prophet Muhammad in their relations with religious others, ordinary believers’ lives and attitudes towards religious others are often largely influenced by (a) concern for oneself and one’s family, (b) desire to access the resources required for survival, (c) fear of arrest and prosecution for criminal activity, (d) desire to avoid obstacles to the realisation of one’s dreams, such as incarceration, and (e) desire to avoid the destructive consequences of violent conflicts. The centrality of these issues for laypersons is sometimes not properly recognised by religious leaders and some commentators on religion and peacebuilding, who seem to position religious difference and religious responses to it over those issues. Although they are religious in the sense that they mostly have an affiliation with Christianity or Islam, lay Christians and Muslims in Abuja place much more emphasis on these issues than on religious difference or the religious peacebuilding that aims to bridge religious divides.

The importance of these practical interests for believers have also been highlighted in other studies. For example, while recognising that people join and leave extremist groups for multiple reasons, several empirical studies on extremism highlight the centrality of practical issues in many cases of engagement or disengagement from it. Some of such studies, which use interviews with former extremists in Africa, Australia, and Asia, are UNDP
(2017), Barrelle (2015), and Chernov Hwang (2017). Issues of leadership, poverty and deprivation, burnout, family, and employment were of major concerns to the interviewees in these studies, even those who joined or left jihadi groups. Summarising the findings from her interviews with 22 former extremists in Australia, Barrelle (2015:132) explains that:

Disillusionment with the behaviour of group leaders was the most commonly cited reason for leaving, followed closely by disillusionment with the behaviour of group members and then physical/psychological burnout. Closely related but separately referenced was the detrimental impact of using violence. Once disillusioned by in-group behaviour, burn-out, repelled by violence or frustrated with the lack of impact from radical method, other activities and roles became relevant and attractive. Examples include employment, returning to a career, having a relationship or family and/or pursuing other interests.

The point here, however, is not that religious factors do not or cannot motivate people to join or leave extremist groups. Studies have shown that they do, and debates continue about the extent to which that happens. For example, Scull, Alkhadher and Alawadi’s (2020) study on members of ISIS and Al-Qaeda in Kuwait demonstrate how religious identity was a major issue for the interviewees. The point of this paragraph, instead, is that this study’s argument about the importance of practical issues for ordinary believers agrees with the academic literature on various aspects of interreligious relations.

Indeed, as the third chapter of this work clearly shows, there are suspicions that Christians and Muslims in Wuse and Utako have about each other. Given that these areas are relatively peaceful, it is expected that such divides will even be more present in communities where interreligious conflicts have occurred and consequently impaired intergroup and interpersonal trust. They are forms of non-peace that do not enhance actual peaceful
relationships. The presence of fears, suspicions, unresolved grievances, and misconceptions about the religious other could as well help to fertilise the ground for interreligious conflicts. Therefore, religious leaders need to help to address these divides in favour of increased peace, and as chapter 4 shows, religious leaders in Abuja continue to make efforts to sustain interreligious peace in the area. However, although these divides should not be welcome and religious peacebuilding should be promoted to deal with them, the reality in Abuja is that even as residents held divisive views about the religious other, their decision to embrace peace was often not primarily a result of the teachings of the Holy Prophet or Jesus about peace with the religious other, or the preaching of their priest or imam that they should tolerate differences. In fact, the Abuja case study suggests that the presence of interreligious suspicions and misconceptions do not in themselves lead to interreligious conflict. As chapter 3 explained, laypeople in Abuja recognise the divides existing between them and religious others, but they also consciously avoid what could lead to violence, largely due to the other practical issues that mattered strongly to them. Hence, this study presents a lesson regarding the value that should be attached to laypeople’s agency. Even as religious people, laypersons are mostly not simply individuals who must be spoken to about religious justifications for interreligious peace before they can reject violence against religious others. This reality contrasts with the view that such theological invitations to peace by religious leaders and other religious actors are regularly required for interreligious peace to exist in northern Nigeria and other religiously diverse contexts.
The idea that ethnoreligious differences could be, and have been, manipulated by political and religious elites to mobilise support for their interests is one of the interpretations of ethnoreligious violence. The notion is that these elites, who might have political opponents with a different religious or ethnic identity, could draw on aspects of religious systems, their identity or shared grievances, to unite supporters behind themselves and their movements, and against their opponent. This is commonly referred to as the instrumentalist theory of violence, or instrumentalism. One of the major tools with which these elites influence their co-religionists is said to be “speech”, in the form of political speeches in rallies or on the media, or in the form of sermons. For example, referring to Sells’ (1996) description of how politicians like Slobadan Milosevic manipulated the nationalistic elements of the Serbian Orthodox Church before the Bosnian war of 1992 to 1995, Appleby (2015:45) states that “ethnonationalist leaders can and do exploit a religion’s identification with ‘the people,’ especially at times when a heightened perception of threat destabilizes society.” While explaining how religion gets implicated in conflict, Haynes (2009:53) identifies various ways this happens and suggests that religious leaders could also play “identity politics” that “may seek to harness real or perceived ‘ethnic-cultural’ and ‘cultural-religious’ differences.” Similarly, it is believed that part of the causes of the conflicts in northern Nigeria is religious and political leaders’ manipulation of the different ethnoreligious identities among people for personal and political gains. For example, Falola (1998: chapters 2 and 4) and Kukah (1993: chapters 5 and 6) have described the manipulation of religion in the north by elites in the region.
In his speech on 12 June 2019 to mark the country’s Democracy Day, Nigeria’s president, Muhammadu Buhari, claimed that “most of the instances of intercommunal and interreligious strife and violence [in Nigeria] were and are still as a result of sponsorship or incitements by ethnic, political or religious leaders hoping to benefit by exploiting our divisions and fault lines, thereby weakening our country” (Agbakwuru, Elebeke and Yakubu, 2019). These leaders, he continues, “incite ordinary, innocent people to violence and unrest.”

Part of the foundation of these instrumentalist views is that religious leaders are strongly respected by their followers. The idea that religious leaders are respected in their communities, and that they could have a strong influence on their followers, has been underscored by many studies in the field of religious peacebuilding (e.g., Omer, 2015:4), and it is a component of the notion of the ambivalence of the sacred (Appleby, 2000). However, this study suggests that the presence of this “respect” does not always mean that the followers accept all that their religious leaders say, as many of the religious leaders who participated in this study claimed. For example, during our conversation, an imam said that “it is what your pastor tells you that you believe, you don’t query them” (Imam MRL3, 11 March), and the common understanding among the religious leaders that were interviewed was that religious leaders’ words are generally taken seriously. While this study is not disputing the reality of religious leaders’ influence on their followers, it shows that it is important to recognise the agency of the followers themselves. Data from Abuja demonstrates (a) that followers do not necessarily follow all that their religious leaders say, (b) that they make their own decisions about how
to act towards religious others, and (c) that these decisions are defined by not only what the religious leaders say - even as respected as they are - but also largely by their personal interests and needs.

In some cases of conflict, what the instrumentalist viewpoint does or could do is place most of, or a huge portion of, the responsibility for violence on the leaders, who are believed to have instrumentalised religion. The implication is that the actual actors - the violent lay persons - have become violent because of the leaders, and their central agency is then subsumed under the agency of the leaders, which should have been secondary. A similar notion exists with regards to peace. There is the common understanding, for example among some religious leaders, that they have to “preach peace” before their followers can have peaceful attitudes. Like the case of conflict above, this places the responsibility for the followers’ peaceful behaviour on the religious leaders and depicts the followers as secondary actors where they should be the central agents. It equally attributes to the religious leaders more impact than they really have. When responding to Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilisations thesis and discussing the danger of adopting singular identifications, Sen (2006) has argued that over-concentrating on the religious identity of believers could have “the effect of generally magnifying the voice of religious authority,” among other consequences (para. 10). For example, with the view that Islamic identity is the primary determinant of Muslims’ behaviour, “the Muslim clerics…are then treated as the ex officio spokesmen for the so-called Islamic world, even though a great many people who happen to be Muslim by religion have profound differences with what is proposed by one
mullah or another” (para. 10). Emphasis on the influence of religion on believers’ peaceful attitudes towards religious others carries the problematic tendency of diverting attention from the significance of believers’ personal agency, whose proper recognition, on the other hand, could be a rationale to further develop their ability to decide more positively - for example, through economic empowerment and education. The problem is not simply that religion gets accorded more power or credit. The major issue is that doing so might lead to the treatment of the important nonreligious issues as secondary. An important part of those issues is believers’ practical interests. The study shows that believers are not just being used by certain leaders. They are agents shaping their own lives and their environment through their decisions to act or not act in certain ways, from time to time, as they go about their daily businesses and encounter the religious other. They may be followers of religious leaders - as they are often called, but they are also followers of their independent thoughts, desires, goals, and decisions.

Although this study recognises the relevance of religious peacebuilding, it cautions against the overestimation of religion in the dynamics of interreligious peace, because doing so could have detrimental consequences. For example, it could lead to the undervaluing of individual believers’ agency in the dynamics - the fact that laypeople are normally the primary drivers of their decisions and actions regarding the religious other. The overestimation of religion could also prevent us from properly recognising the nonreligious issues that strongly matter in intergroup relations in religiously mixed settings. While religious factors are important in Christian-Muslim relations in northern
Nigeria, it might be detrimental to peace if those factors are perceived or managed in a manner that removes attention from the other crucial issues. The overestimation can also be useful to political actors, for example by helping them to remove attention from the state’s failures. For example, if it is the case that poor governance has a major impact on the causation of religion-related violence in Nigeria, then it follows that Nigerian authorities stand to benefit from popularising an instrumentalist interpretation of religion-related violence in the country, especially in the northern region. As explained above, the Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, had said in his Democracy Day speech on 12 June 2019 that “most of the instances of intercommunal and interreligious strife and violence [in Nigeria] were and are still as a result of sponsorship or incitements by ethnic, political or religious leaders hoping to benefit by exploiting our divisions and fault lines, thereby weakening our country” (Agbakwuru, Elebeke and Yakubu, 2019). By projecting the idea that it is “ethnic, political or religious leaders” that “incite” innocent people to violence, the government tries to shift the blame away from the state to individual leaders who supposedly use their speech to cause violence. By doing so, weak state presence and state failure are implicitly projected as immaterial factors in the causation of the violence in the north. And, by inviting ethnoreligious leaders to become more peaceful, the state becomes the peacemaker, rather than a primary cause of the problem. This political use of the instrumentalist interpretation of violence in Nigeria is akin to how Western powers use the “myth of religious violence”, according to Cavanaugh (2009). Cavanaugh’s interest was on the notion, which he observed was predominant
in the West, that “religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from ‘secular’ features such as politics and economics, which has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence” (Cavanaugh, 2009: 3), and that the influence of religion on public power should be regulated or restricted in order to prevent the dangers of religion. Without doubting “that, under certain circumstances, particular construals of Islam and Christianity contribute to violence” (Cavanaugh, 2009: 54), he argues that the widespread notion is a myth, and the myth is employed by Western societies in at least three main ways. One, to legitimise their secularism and liberal democracy, which they attempt to peddle to the rest of the world, including areas where other systems are in place, as in the predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East, where political structures are highly linked to Islam. Two, to legitimate their use of military action against those societies. And three, to shield their use of violence, which is then classified as secular, more rational, necessary, and appropriate, from public criticism. Similarly, the political use of the instrumentalist interpretation of violence in Nigeria seems to help the state to shield itself from public criticism of its failure to protect the practical interests of Nigerian Christians and Muslims, which then contribute to the cases of religion-related violence that occur in the country. In the next section, I shall pay attention to the study’s points about the causes of interreligious peace.

7.4. **Interreligious peace results from a complex web of factors that importantly involves lay believers and their practical interests**

This research adds to studies that argue that religion is something but not everything in interreligious relations. A good example of these works is
Numrich (2019). Numrich used case studies of interreligious relationships in Michigan and Columbia, USA, to demonstrate how nonreligious considerations, rather than religious beliefs and ideals, motivate and shape interreligious relationships within interreligious spaces. Economic interests were major issues in the interreligious cooperation that Numrich explored. The relative peace in Abuja depends on a complex web of factors, including religion (chapter 4), believers’ personal agency and practical considerations (chapter 5), and the other important variables discussed in chapter 6. These are Abuja’s demographics, the way Abuja is governed and how the different religious groups are accommodated by the state, policing, and communal leaders. These factors sometimes work in collaboration with religious leaders, and in other cases they do not. In fact, in some cases, the practical considerations and these other structural and human factors influence the peace-level in Abuja more than the religious issues. Abuja shows the complexity that characterises interreligious peace and that should be recognised by religious peacebuilders and students of interreligious relations, religion, and peace.

Some of Abuja’s structural features that enhance its relative peace raise major lessons for the rest of northern Nigeria and other religiously mixed societies. For example, the point in chapter 6 about religious demographic balance in Abuja - or about Abuja being “no person’s land” - certainly should not imply that there has not been or that there cannot be interreligious peace in parts of northern Nigeria where there is a religious majority and a minority or minorities. Zones of peace exist in other parts of the region, and many of them might have demographic features that are different from those of Wuse.
and Utako districts in Abuja. Nonetheless, together with the point about the
government’s inclusive management of land in Abuja, the idea of religious
demographic balance in the area suggests that (a) inclusion, (b) feelings of not
being discriminated against by the majority or a more powerful neighbour, and
(c) degrees of equality or at least fairness, are important contributors to
interreligious peace. When a religious majority treats a less powerful religious
minority with fairness, the majority-minority statuses are not meant to generate
violence or issues that prepare the ground for violence, such as grievances
and bitterness.

Abuja also demonstrates the importance of policing for interreligious
peace. While it is not in the purview of this study to discuss police research, it
is noteworthy that the presence of good security arrangements, which enables
adequate state response to tensions in religiously mixed societies, could help
to prevent the outbreak of violence and or their recurrence. However, this study
shows that policing does not independently prevent violent interreligious
conflict. As explained in chapter 2, part of the main arguments of Krause (2016)
is that interreligious nonviolence in Dadin Kowa, Jos between 2001 and 2010,
when there were riots in other parts of the city, could be explained better by
the peace agency of local actors, rather than the intervention of security forces.
This study shows the importance of collaboration between religious and
nonreligious actors in conflict prevention. According to chapters 4 and 6, Abuja
demonstrates how local religious and traditional leaders could work with
security forces to effectively identify and deal with threats to peace. The lesson,
therefore, is that strong security systems are vital for interreligious peace, but
part of how to strengthen their effectiveness is through their collaboration with local civil actors. The Abuja case study shows the relevance of Kwaja’s (2011:7) recommendation for mitigating ethnoreligious violence in Jos, that “strengthening security forces’ capacity to proactively detect early warning signs and respond to intercommunal tensions can help better contain outbreaks of violence.” He had argued that, in addition to the notion of indigene-ship (2-5), one of the key causes of ethnoreligious violence in Jos is poor state responses to intergroup tensions and conflicts there (5-6). Jos, in north-central Nigeria, is one of the areas in the country where several clashes involving Christians and Muslims have taken place over the past two decades. Describing the poor state response to conflicts in the city, Kwaja (2011:5) observes that:

To deter attacks and protect the people in Jos, an already extensive national police presence has regularly been augmented by military deployments. Yet on multiple occasions, security agencies have failed to prevent and respond to known threats and early signs of pending attacks. The worst outbreaks of communal clashes in 1994, 2001, 2004, 2008, and 2010...were typically preceded by days of simmering tensions and conspicuous mobilization.

This relates to the broader problem of poor governance and its impact on intergroup and anti-state violence in northern Nigeria. For example, Ojo (2020) has argued that poor governance and weak state presence in parts of the region have contributed strongly to terrorism and militancy there, which the Nigerian state still struggles to address. Hence, he suggests that one of the key paths to winning the fight against terrorism and militancy in Nigeria is for Nigerian authorities to pay more attention to poorly governed areas.
On a general level, this study adds to the research that highlights the idea that intergroup relations, including those taking place between religiously different people, are often shaped by multiple factors. Iwuchukwu (2013), Van Gorder (2012) Vaughan (2016), Falola (1998), Boer (2003), Kukah (1993), Akinade (2014), Kwaja (2011) and other studies on Christian-Muslim conflict in northern Nigeria, all show that although the communal conflicts that have taken place in the region are sometimes regarded in public discourse as religious, Christian-Muslim or religiously-motivated, their occurrence is rather determined by a variety of factors, which include but are not limited to religious identity, competition for land, competition for political power, revenge and grievances, the attitude of political leadership, and pre-colonial socio-religious developments in the region. In the words of Van Gorder (2012:156), “some of the incidents [of violence] have roots in tribal, political, and economic problems that also happen to coincide with Muslim and Christian distinctions.”

Peace research shows that violent conflicts involving religious issues could be caused by various factors and that even in cases where religious factors are the central cause of a conflict, nonreligious issues could help to define it in various degrees. In addition to primarily religious variables, other casual factors may include ethnic attachments and hatreds (Blimes, 2006; Fujii, 2009), grievances, perceptions, preferences and opportunities (Hirshleifer, 1995, 2001); ethnic power struggles (Horowitz 2014), discrimination (Crawford, 1998:11-12; Gurr, 1970, 1993, 2000), poverty, natural resources and greed (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), the instrumentalisation of identities (Mueller, 2000), the presence of conditions that
favour insurgency, such as rough terrain, political instability, large populations, the availability of foreign support and cross-border base camps, and poverty, which produces a weak central government (Fearon and Laitin, 2003); regime type and repression, nationalism, historical legacies, access to contrabands, and conflict contagion (Ossai, 2019). Stein (2011) also presents an overview of primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, which are some of the major perspectives on religion’s role in conflict. Peace research also indicates that the relevance of the above-mentioned and other factors varies with context and is affected by the type of conflict concerned. Similarly, it shows that the peace-level in any setting, including religiously homogeneous and religiously diverse ones, could be shaped by several factors, depending on the context concerned. Among other things, the process of peace causation, even among religiously different groups, involves “curative and preventive” therapies for peace (Galtung, 1996:2). In these processes, religious and nonreligious factors are required for significant impacts to be made. These illustrate the complexity of the dynamics of interreligious peace.

This thesis holds that positioning religion properly in this complex system would be a useful approach to the application of religion’s potentials for peace. While religious leaders are to collaborate with secular actors, including governmental and non-governmental actors, the government should, in turn, utilise the important socio-cultural positions of religious leaders. And, having recognised the significant role played by governance in sustaining interreligious peace, religious leaders could also direct some of their activities at addressing governance-related issues that help to shape interreligious
relations, for example, by mobilising against divisive government policies and corruption, and by enlightening the masses on electoral participation.

Furthermore, the study argues that the practical concerns of lay persons are significant elements of the complex system that produces interreligious peace, and it recommends that the reality should be recognised by religious leaders who build peace and researchers on religion and peacebuilding. The proper recognition of this reality by religious leaders would aid the significance of religion in peacebuilding. Having described the variety of factors that affect peace in the paragraphs above, it is important to restate that this thesis does not intend to suggest that religious leaders do not understand that both religious and nonreligious factors are required for peace to exist between members of different religious groups. Such an argument would be very simplistic. As chapter 6 has shown, religious leaders in Abuja, who were interviewed for the study, recognise that the relative peace in the area has been influenced by both religion and other factors, such as Abuja’s identity as a Federal Capital Territory. Similarly, the work is not suggesting that those who have studied religious peacebuilding claim that religion produces interreligious peace on its own. Such a position would be hard to defend, as most academics interested in religion and peacebuilding recognise the complexity that characterises peace. As the above description of the relevant literature on religion, peace and conflict shows, it is widely accepted that interreligious relations are shaped by multiple factors. Peace is a complex phenomenon; even in religiously mixed societies where religion is an important identity
marker, peace between people with different religious identities is normally shaped by a variety of factors.

The issue, however, is that while peace is widely understood to be a complex phenomenon, the centrality of ordinary believers’ practical interests in the complex web of factors that lead to interreligious peace is at times not recognised by some religious leaders and others who think that (a) there are usually religious divides in religiously mixed societies and (b) religious peacebuilding is always required for violent interreligious conflict to not occur in those contexts. The reality is that there are often religious differences or divides in religiously mixed areas and religious peacebuilding that aims to bridge the divides is useful, but it seems that these religious issues are rarely at the forefront of what ordinary people think about as they live and encounter others. The level of importance that we often attribute to religion, either as a cause of divides or a source of peace, is sometimes not reflected in the lives of ordinary persons on the ground. The situation in Abuja demonstrates that practical issues could be at the heart of believers’ concerns as they carry out their daily activities and meet members of other religious communities. Those interests help to shape how they relate with religious others, help them to navigate religious differences, and serve as major reasons to reject violence, so that even when laypersons do not participate in interreligious dialogue, listen to religious leaders’ invitations to peace, or think about religious peace norms, they may choose to engage in peaceful behaviour insofar as doing so will help to protect those interests.
7.5. The religious divide between believers is sometimes overestimated

The fourth contribution of this research is that although there is religious difference between Christians and Muslims, the divide between them is at times overestimated. The overestimation of religion in the dynamics of interreligious peace in northern Nigeria seems to partly result from the widely held view that Nigeria is a very religious country, or that Africans are deeply religious. This is not unconnected with the fact that within the country and the continent are many mosques and churches, and most of the residents identify as belonging to one religious group or another. More than 90 per cent of Nigeria’s over 180 million citizens identify as Christian or Muslim (Stonawski et al 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2010), and it is estimated that 50 per cent of Abuja’s residents are Muslims and a little below 50 per cent are Christians. The gathering of Christian and Muslim worshippers on Sundays and Fridays seems to shape the perceptions of religious leaders and other observers about the importance of religion.

The overestimation of religious divides also emerges from the global North, where attacks by Muslim extremists on Western people and institutions suggest that there is indeed a divide between Muslims and the West or its major religious tradition, Christianity. Influenced by this understanding, some people also visualise the non-Western world as having this kind of civilisational divide between Muslims and Christians (Nolte and Ogen, 2017b:257). Furthermore, the overestimation results partly from the widespread focus on Christian-Muslim or interreligious conflicts in northern Nigeria and other
religiously mixed contexts within and outside Africa. While there are assumptions about the high relevance of religious issues in multireligious societies, especially where there have been cases of religion-related violence, Abuja shows that the reality on the ground is often complex, and overreliance on conflict or post-conflict settings can lead to the overestimation of religious divides in religiously diverse societies.

Although the study discovered that there were interreligious divides in Abuja, interreligious relations in the area show that religious difference is sometimes not as divisive as is held by some religious leaders and observers, and this is connected to the limited relevance of religious peacebuilding to ordinary persons. Given that certain practical issues and basic needs mattered strongly to people there, the interest in pursuing or protecting these needs also led to constant peaceful interreligious relations in which the religious difference was not prioritised. These fundamental interests draw Christians and Muslims into cooperation with each other. For example, interreligious encounters in Wuse market and Utako market illustrate how people do not go about their daily businesses constantly thinking about their religious identity and the religious identity of those they encounter. Where interreligious relationships took place in Abuja as means to an end that the different religionists equally desired, the difference in religious identity rarely mattered, or at least was often not the primary issue of concern; Christians and Muslims could work together to achieve those shared interests. It is useful to note that Meagher (2018) has also examined how economic collaboration in the informal sector exists between ethnically and religiously different people in Kano and Kaduna, under
the surface of Christian-Muslim conflicts in the region. This is reflected in motorcycle taxi businesses and among tailors, for example. She concludes that these cases of complementarity “have done more to mitigate than to exacerbate religious conflict” in those areas (217), while defining complementarity as “symbiotic economic relations across the religious divide” (189). On the street where I lived in Wuse, for example, there were small businesses and roadside sellers, including Muslims and Christians who cooperate normally, and this type of interreligious relationship among and between religiously different sellers and buyers continue to take place.

That said, I should clarify that the point here is not that there are no religious differences between Christians and Muslims in Abuja, or that or that there is some kind of “mixing” in which it is difficult to identify who is a Christian or a Muslim, or that the believers do not recognise that the differences exist. Chapter 3 shows that even where there is cooperation between members of different religious groups, it seems the believers do not become unconscious of their own identity. Also, even when participants explained the salience of practical considerations in their lives and relations with others, they were themselves often clear about their religious views and their lack of support for religious leaders who “weakly” follow their religion in the name of peacebuilding. This finding was presented in chapter 5. The point here, instead, is that although the differences exist, they sometimes do not impact on-the-ground relations as much as they are often believed to do. The divide is sometimes overestimated, and so is the importance of a religious response to it – for example in the form of religious peace activism that involves religious
leaders and religious peace norms. Abuja shows how religious differences are navigated peacefully by people in a setting where religion appears to be a major personal identity marker.

Samuel Huntington’s work on the clash of civilisations has largely helped to spread the view that religious factors usually have a strong divisive impact on (a) interpersonal and intergroup relations within countries and (b) international affairs. Arguably, recent events in Nigeria and on the global stage might have given credence to his propositions. The 9/11 attacks, the consequent Iraq war and the entire Western war on terrorism reflect a divide between a Christianity-defined West and Islam-defined middle eastern countries or groups. Also, reflecting Huntington’s category of micro-level civilisation clash, in which groups belonging to different civilisations struggle over the control of territory and each other, are the Christian-Muslim conflicts that have occurred in northern Nigeria. However, while some scholars recognise that religious beliefs could have a strong influence on people, they highlight the need for proper recognition of complexity in believers’ identities and interests, and in the dynamics of interreligious peace.

For example, while Sen (2006) recognises how some Muslims’ high sensitivity about their beliefs might have defined their protest of perceived blasphemous cartoons published by a Danish newspaper in 2005, he highlights the danger of seeing only or mainly the religious in people’s identity. “What we ought to take very seriously,” he explains, “is the way Islamic identity…is assumed to drown, if only implicitly, all other affiliations, priorities, and pursuits that a Muslim person may have” (Sen, 2006: para. 2). As an
example, he refers to Al-Kwarizmi, the ninth-century Muslim mathematician whose contributions largely defined what we now call algorithm and algebra. For Sen, even as Al-Kwarizmi was a Muslim, it would be misleading to prioritise his Islamic identity over his identity as a mathematician. And, more broadly, he holds that “to give an automatic priority to the Islamic identity of a Muslim person in order to understand his or her role in the civil society, or in the literary world, or in creative work in arts and science, can result in profound misunderstanding” (Sen, 2006: para. 2). It is for this reason that he regards the categorisation in Huntington’s clash-of-civilizations thesis as misleading and unhelpful. Apart from “civilisations”, which for Huntington are primarily defined by religious identity, Sen (2006: para. 5) highlights that people can also be classified according to other markers, “each of which has some — often far-reaching — relevance in our lives;” so, by classifying the world’s peoples into groups defined by religious identity, Huntington uses a “singular classification” system that misleadingly places the world’s populations into “a unique set of rigid boxes.” Sen (2006: para. 10) also suggests that a civilisation-based way of seeing the world may be damaging in peacebuilding, as it may “miss other significant concerns and ideas that move people.” When peace is sought between people seen as civilisations, the approach speedily reduces many-sided human beings to one dimension each and muzzles the variety of involvements that have provided rich and diverse grounds for cross-border interactions over many centuries, including the arts, literature, science, mathematics, games, trade, politics, and other arenas of shared human interest. Well-meaning attempts at pursuing global peace can have very counterproductive consequences when these attempts are founded on a fundamentally illusory understanding of the world of human beings (Sen, 2006: para. 8).
The Abuja case study demonstrates this reality of broadness in believers’ interests and identities. While chapter 5 highlights the importance of practical interests in the dynamics of interreligious peace, the sixth chapter describes the vital roles played by governance, policing, and structural factors in the sustenance of interreligious peace. Chapter 3 also presents original data from Abuja that shows how religious identity is intertwined with economic aspects of believers’ lives, as in business activities in Wuse and Utako markets. The importance of practical interests for Christians and Muslims in Abuja explain why it is rarely their religious leaders or the contents of the Bible and the Quran that sustain their peaceful attitudes towards the religious other. For this reason, it may be helpful not to excessively focus on religion, even though its relevance is not in doubt, as this thesis has recognised.

7.6. The views of religious leaders at times differ from those of laypersons

Furthermore, this research shows that there is sometimes a difference between religious leaders’ understanding or representation of religion’s importance and the views of ordinary believers about the same issue. While the religious leaders that were interviewed for this study believed that there was indeed a religious divide between Christians and Muslims, for which there should be continuous religious peacebuilding, lay Christians and Muslims paid little or no attention to those differences or the religious responses to them, while they were primarily concerned about how they and their loved ones could stay alive, safe, and progressive. The degree of importance attached to religion in conversations with religious leaders was often lacking in meetings
with laypeople, who mostly knew little about efforts being made by religious leaders to promote interreligious peace in Abuja. Religious leaders sometimes do not recognise that even as religion is a major marker of identity for believers, they are able to navigate the religious differences that exist between them without hostilities with the religious other, even if they do not listen to religious leaders’ theological invitations to peace. The study questions the notion that the absence of violent interreligious conflict results largely from theological understanding about the outsider religion, partly made possible through interreligious dialogue. There are different forms of interreligious misconceptions and limited theological knowledge about the outsider religion in Wuse and Utako, but communal conflict between the religious groups there is limited. The barrow pushers, butchers, and traders in Wuse and Utako markets had little or no knowledge about theological issues in other religions. And yet, they are able to avoid violence, mainly because it will prevent them from safely living and pursuing progress for themselves and their families.

The discovered divide between the views and interests of lay believers and religious leaders has major implications for the study and practice of religious peacebuilding, and for research on Christian-Muslim and interreligious relations. For instance, it suggests that the realities in religiously diverse contexts can hardly be properly understood without an exploration of these different views and observation of the daily encounters between people. In as much as empirical evidence demonstrates the importance of religious peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas, overreliance on data collected from religious leaders in conflict or post-conflict settings and from religiously diverse
societies where interreligious conflicts have occurred could lead to works projecting a certain image of “a hugely relevant religion” without proper recognition of the issues that matter most to ordinary persons and the complex realities on the ground. While data from religious leaders about religion’s importance in peace dynamics is not necessarily misleading, it is useful to understand the perspectives of laypersons. As this study shows, what was often projected by religious leaders as the high relevance of religion in Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja did not apply in the actual encounters between ordinary Christians and Muslims. Whereas the religious leaders seem to regard religion as being heavily important for peacebuilding, religious differences are constantly navigated by people in manners that do not suggest as much prominence for religion. Attention has been drawn to the idea that to understand the real issues at the grassroots, the voices of those at the top, including religious leaders and so-called representatives, may not be sufficient, as they may not have a good appreciation of what it means to be an “ordinary” believer. Due to some factors such as power and influence, economic status and so on, the lived experiences of leaders and so-called representatives may not be the same as those of the led, even in the same group. Consequently, their views about certain issues such as what they regard as peace, their desires, or their views about the outsider, could differ strongly. With regard to religious boundaries and differentiation in religious identity, Muthuraj (2016: ix-20) observes that some of the problems with interreligious dialogue in India include the dialogists’ assumption that religious identity is fixed and their uncritical adoption of the “world religions” category. He explains that as part of
the practice of interreligious dialogue in India, the Christian-Muslim, Hindu-Christian or Muslim-Hindu binaries and similar ones are adopted by the top-level actors leading the dialogical processes, without recognition of the multiple religious and communal identities that may be held by individuals, the fluidity of these identities, and the possibility that the religious identities adopted in dialogue do not even exist as distinct categories among the masses. Based on their study of interreligious relations in the Yoruba-speaking south-western part of Nigeria, Nolte and Ogen (2017:3-4) have also highlighted the reality that the often-perceived fixed religious boundaries between Christians and Muslims do not always exist on the ground in Africa. This thesis, therefore, highlights the importance of approaches to inquiry on religious peacebuilding and interreligious relations that recognise these differences and use data from various sources. Furthermore, the proper recognition of the practical concerns of ordinary believers by religious leaders would enable them to target their attention at the issues that matter most.

7.7. **Interreligious dialogue between top-level religious leaders sometimes has little impact on the ground**

Finally, while this study shows that religious leaders help to sustain interreligious peace in Abuja, it also discovered that some of the tools they adopt for peacebuilding involve only the high-level leaders and therefore have little impact on the ground. This is especially the case for the official interreligious dialogue between religious leaders. While the study found out that this takes places in Abuja and is sometimes organised by the Kukah Centre, Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace and NIREC, many of the
interviewees have not participated in them. They involve only the top-level religious leaders; less prominent leaders of religious communities are often not involved, and it is not clear the extent to which the daily interactions between ordinary Christians and Muslims are affected by them. As mentioned in chapter 5, none of the lay Christians and Muslims that participated in this study stated that they had attended a peace workshop or interreligious dialogue. The limited impact of elite-level interreligious dialogue on the ground seems to be related to the fact that the “big” theological issues that religious leaders apparently prioritise in these conversations are not matters of fundamental concern to ordinary persons. Interviewed Christians and Muslims in Wuse and Utako markets had little theological knowledge and mostly did not communicate using the kind of relatively advanced English language that religious leaders often use. In sum, this situation in Abuja is similar to what has been observed in other parts of the country. For example, Nweke (2018:442) explains that interreligious interactions between high-level religious leaders and FBOs like the JNI and CAN take place often in the country, but they “have proven to be too elitist as it makes little or no impact on the behaviours of the local actors.” The issue here, however, is not that elite-level interreligious dialogue is generally not useful in peacebuilding. The point is that its impact on how ordinary people live and relate with religious others is often not very clear, and this study suggests that it is limited in Abuja. Hence, this work recommends that in addition to interreligious dialogue between Christian and Muslim religious leaders and other methods of peacebuilding that aim to promote peace using religious peace norms, religious leaders could adopt approaches
to peacebuilding that may have more relevance to ordinary believers. As suggested earlier, an example of such approaches is paying more attention to structures in the Nigerian society that may prevent people from accessing the fundamental needs of themselves and their families.

7.8. Conclusion

This chapter uses fieldwork data and the academic literature on religion, conflict, and peace to discuss the major findings of the research. The thesis proposes that even as we observe the evidence of religious factors’ importance in conflict and post-conflict settings in northern Nigeria and other areas, we should not fail to recognise the lessons from zones of peace in Abuja, (a) where religious divides are not as pronounced as is often assumed, (b) where Christians and Muslims often place practical issues over religious considerations in their lives and daily encounters with the religious other, and (c) where interreligious peace importantly depends on nonreligious variables as well, including governance and policing, which are also intertwined with religious factors. While religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism affect believers’ behaviours towards religious others, the reality is that the factors defining followers’ attitudes are far broader than these and other religious factors. In the next chapter, I conclude the study by further looking beyond Abuja, summarising its main points, making recommendations for religious peacebuilders, considering the study’s limitations, and making suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

8.1. Introduction

As mentioned in chapter 1, Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria are complex. Hence, in this concluding chapter, I shall consider how the findings from Abuja should be interpreted in the light of seemingly different realities in other parts of Nigeria. The consideration will help to improve the relevance of this study for other religiously diverse societies. The importance of the consideration also results from the fact that interreligious conflicts have not occurred in the studied parts of Abuja and the situation in areas affected by conflicts might be different. After the first two sections where I consider the role of religious factors in Christian-Muslim relations outside Abuja, I shall conclude the thesis and then make suggestions for further research.

The following section shows that while the findings from Abuja portray the area as a place where religious factors impact on interreligious peace but only minimally, there are other settings where they appear to have more influence. However, in the section that follows it, I argue that this difference does not necessarily contradict the arguments of this study. Instead, it shows that religious factors matter in interreligious relations in various ways, and that approaches to interreligious conflicts and peace should be contextually informed. Efforts to promote interreligious peace in Nigeria and other religiously mixed societies could benefit strongly from the recognition of these variations and how they play out from one context to another.
8.2. Looking beyond Abuja

The academic literature on the causation of violent conflict suggests that religion can be involved in an intrastate conflict in various ways. For example, it could be involved as an identity and a designator of friends and enemies, an ideology and worldview, an object of dispute, a political platform or tool in the hands of politico-religious actors, a tool for mobilisation and recruitment of supporters, an element of nationalism (Little, 2006a:100), an element or source of grievances, and an interpretive lens and source of legitimacy. Stein (2011) also presents an overview of these roles. The studies equally show that the extent to which religion matters in conflicts differs according to the nature of its involvement or role in the conflict.

It seems there are situations where the religious identity of actors plays a major role in shaping the relationships between those actors. We know that even where a conflict is not religious in the sense that it was not caused by theological disagreements or that the dispute is not over a religious object, difference in the religious identity of the opposing persons or groups could have an exacerbating effect on the conflict. Also, differences in religious identity could limit peace in cases where those with a certain identity do not welcome others, or regard others as unbelievers or unclean, or as not deserving certain opportunities, rights or privileges, or as deserving exclusion. Thus, religious identity is able to shape interreligious relationships negatively. On the other hand, having the same religious identity as another could make someone regard another as a fellow, and not an outsider.
Holding that religion is a major issue in Nigeria, some researchers have tried to describe its location in the country. For Vaughan (2016), religion is among the most important issues in Christian-Muslim relations in the country, since Christianity, Islam and indigenous religious movements and structures have integrally shaped the configuration of Nigeria, from the precolonial 19th century to the decolonisation process in the 1950s and then the post-independence years. Although the term religion is quite ambiguous in Vaughan’s usage, it seems it was applied as a broad concept that refers to religious belief and practice, as well as religious traditions like Christianity and Islam. For him, understanding the role of the foreign religions of Christianity and Islam in the construction of what is now Nigeria is a path to understanding contemporary Christian-Muslim relations in the country. Specifically, Vaughan (2016:14) argues that (a) the ideologies and structures of the Sokoto Jihad and the emergent Sokoto Caliphate, and (b) mission Christianity and its huge social transformative impact on Southern Nigeria, "provided the social and political platform on which modern Nigeria was constructed after the imposition of colonial rule at the beginning of the twentieth century." This, he continues, has continually shaped the relationship between religion and politics, ethno-regional and religious relations, and contestations between Muslims and Christians on some issues such as the implementation of Islamic law in the nation-state. With the transformative advance of Christianity from the coastal region of the south west to the north, and the progression of Islamic presence in the Sokoto Caliphate, ethnoreligious identities were formed and consolidated during the British colonial control. These would combine with the
regional distinctions and identities that were already established during the decolonisation of the 1950s to shape political and social relations between people of different ethnic origins and religious affiliations in the north and south. The conflicts between the two religions and their adherents in postcolonial Nigeria, therefore, occur partly because of Christian and Muslim movements' influence on the culture and politics of the nation-state and how much they are integrated into the fabric of the Nigerian society. For example, the legislation of expanded Shari’a in the northern states and the attendant controversy over its constitutionality and justifiability, Vaughan (2016:216) argues, "were rooted in ideas of the past that continue to influence power relations through time and space." Part of the arguments of this study has been that, in terms of interreligious relations, religious factors do not appear to have as much impact in Abuja as Vaughan’s arguments might imply. However, it seems there are contexts in the northern region and other parts of the country where they play a more prominent role.

For example, the relationship between religious and ethnic identity is often strong enough that one is used to refer to the other by some Nigerians, and “trying to differentiate between a religious identity and an ethnic one can either be difficult, impossible or misleading” (Falola, 1998, p. 13). Studies on intergroup conflicts in the country (such as Akov, 2017; Chukwuma, 2020; Eke, 2020; Iwuchukwu, 2013:62-72; Kwaja, 2011; Mu’azzam and Ibrahim, 2000: 69-76; Ojo, 2020; Sulaiman, 2016:85-88, and others) identify multiple causal factors, but the conflicts often have religious dimensions. The civil war that occurred in 1967-70 between the Nigerian government and the seceding
Biafra is a good example of a major non-religious conflict in the country that had religious components. Attempts to characterize the war as being between a Muslim North and a Christian East were challenged during the war by Christians in the federal area of Nigeria and the federal government (Omenka, 2010:379-388). The Nigerian head of state during the war – Major General Yakubu Gowon – and some of the field commanders were Christians. Also, “the majority of the foot soldiers on the federal side were drawn from the Tiv Middle Belt region, which was overwhelmingly Christian” (Omenka, 2010:368-369). In the Herald Tribune Newspaper of 31 October 1967, Gowon was reported to have said that “there is no question of religious warfare and as a Christian and the son of a Methodist minister, if there were, I should be fighting on the Christian side” (Omenka, 2010:368). But these notwithstanding, the reality was that religious interpretations were given to the war while it lasted, and these interpretations still affect Christian-Muslim relations in contemporary Nigeria. The conflictual events that preceded the war (especially the 1966 pogroms), the interrelation between religious, ethnic, and geographical markers in Nigeria, and complaints about Igbo victimisation and marginalisation after the war, seem to be part of what has given it a religious character, at least for some Christians in south-eastern Nigeria. Omenka (2010:369) explains that the pogroms made Igbos to see their Christian religion as being under threat even before the war began, and then “when the crisis resulted in war, it was immediately regarded as a conflict between Islam and Christianity.” Christianity was the major religion in Biafra (Omenka, 2010:375), and despite the growing religious diversity in the former Eastern
region, Christianity remains a key identity marker for most Igbos and other peoples in the area. The Igbo's use of the concept of genocide to refer to their pre-war and wartime experiences in Nigeria also plays a role. In the view of some Igbo Christians in the south, Igbos have been targeted in genocidal attacks carried out by Muslims of ethnic groups in the north, and the willingness to dominate the Igbo and their religion and culture still exists. This viewpoint continues to affect the way they perceive and relate with other Nigerians, especially non-Igbos and Muslims from the northern part of the country.

A contemporary issue in Nigeria that seems to be primarily non-religious but has been given religious interpretations is the conflict between mostly Muslim herders and largely Christian farmers in the Middle-Belt and other parts of the country. The movement of herdsmen southward from the core north and the attendant conflicts between some of them and the farming communities they move to have been attributed to climate change, desertification, insufficiency of grazing resources in the drier north, environmental degradation, and structural factors (Chukwuma, 2020:54-55; Eke, 2020:747-748; Ojo, 2020:91). Akov (2017:288) proposes a larger set of contributing factors that includes resource scarcity, “elite land grabbing, ethno-religious identity construction, weak state capabilities, the citizenship question, corrupt traditional institutions, lack of an effective land tenure system and a widespread culture of impunity.” However, as Eke (2020:745) has rightly observed, the conflicts are not simply “objective realities devoid of subjective beliefs”. Aside the causal factors outlined above, public perceptions about the herders’ pursuit of Islamic expansion remain (Chukwuma 2020:67-69; Ojo,
and they affect the conflict. Some Christians suspect that their movement and violent encounters with the communities are part of efforts to expand Islam into the rest of the country or subdue Christianity and its followers. Hence, even if the conflict is not religious, religion should not be ignored because it affects the farming communities’ perceptions about the pastoralists, which in turn affects how they relate with them.

One of the central issues that led to the Shari’a crisis that affected parts of the northern region in the early 2000s was Muslims’ desire for the adoption of the criminal aspects of the Shari’a and the attendant resistance from Christians (Ostien, Nasir and Kogelmann, 2005; Ralston, 2021). Arguably, the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s had their roots in the extremist preaching of Muhammad Marwa and its strong impact on his followers. Also, Boko Haram militancy has been described as emerging from both religious fundamentalism and other socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment in the region, but religion is believed to have played a significant role in the early years of the group as a mobiliser when the late Mohammad Yusuf was the leader. Moreover, Boko Haram strives to create a caliphate in Nigeria where the Shari’a is upheld, and it opposes Western principles and any institution that is perceived to support them, such as Christianity. Also, churches and mosques have been targeted in communal conflicts in the north, showing how much religious interests mattered to the attackers. Even before 1960 when Nigeria became independent, intergroup conflicts in the north were influenced by religious issues. For example, between 1804 and 1808, a jihad that aimed to forcefully spread Islam in the northern region took place under the headship
of Uthman Dan Fodio, and its legacies still live. According to Iwuchukwu (2013), religion-related factors that have influenced Christian-Muslim conflicts in post-independence northern Nigeria include the Islamic absolutist socio-political philosophy arising from the successful jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio; Christian and Islamic fundamentalism and exclusivism; competition for demographic superiority by Christians and Muslims; Islamic revivalism; the mostly Christian ethnic minorities’ resistance to the Muslim Hausa-Fulani oligarchy; intra-religious differences; and the adoption of the Shari’a legal system as the official criminal code of 12 northern states, beginning with Zamfara in October 1999.

While the situation in Abuja suggests that individual believers there are largely responsible for their attitudes towards religious others, the situation in some other parts of northern Nigeria might be different. For example, a participant and peace actor from a state in the north-east, while lamenting that some believers do not question the misleading teachings of their imam in parts of the region, explained that Islamic leaders are strongly respected in some of the areas and their words are treated as largely authoritative, to the point that mallam nace has been a common statement and principle among many lay Muslims there (CRL6, 18 March). Mallam nace is a Hausa phrase that means “the teacher has spoken” or other variants. This was also mentioned by another participant (CRL3), who explained that he knew that in parts of the north, Islamic leaders have a strong influence on their followers. This might apply to the Christian community, where some Pentecostal pastors, for example, are said to have a strong influence in their churches. It has been
argued that the various Christian-Muslim conflicts that have occurred in Jos from 2001 have been influenced by religious leaders’ inflammatory actions: “both Christian and Muslim religious leaders, through their sermons and utterances, informed passions and misled their congregations toward communal confrontations” (Mustapha et al, 2018:312). These realities might suggest that religious leaders have more influence in these other settings outside Abuja.

Ehrhardt (2016) has explored how religious leaders have influenced violent and nonviolent collective action in Kano. He argues that it was how Christian and Islamic preachers framed the Plateau riots in 2004 and the cartoon row in 2006 that accounted for (a) the violent riots in Kano that followed the interreligious conflict in Plateau State’s Yelwa, and (b) the absence of violence that followed the publication of the Danish cartoon that Muslims around the world believed to have blasphemed against the Prophet (see BBC News, 2006). So, he argues that on the one hand, the violence in Kano in 2004 largely arose from the fact that the preachers interpreted the violent conflicts occurring in Plateau state through the “Christians-versus-Muslims” frame, making the Christian and Muslim communities in the state to regard it as such and then define religious others in Kano as enemies (Ehrhardt, 2016:333). On the other hand, the Danish cartoons were “actively framed as part of the global struggle between faithful Nigerians and nonreligious Westerners, facilitating non-violent mobilisation across Christian-Muslim boundaries” (Ehrhardt, 2016:333). I should mention that residents of Abuja, including lay believers and some of the Christian religious leaders who participated in this study, have also
interpreted conflicts outside Abuja, such as the Herders-Farmers conflict, using the Christians-versus-Muslims frame. But despite that, there have not been Christian-Muslim conflicts in Wuse, Utako and other parts of Abuja Municipal Area Council. So, while Ehrhardt’s point about religious leader’s causation of the riots in Kano in 2004 might not be inaccurate, it seems not to apply universally in the region. It is, therefore, helpful that Ehrhardt (2016:333) does not fail to recognise this reality, as he rightly notes “the interaction of discursive framing with other factors, such as the role of security forces and the inextricable connections between religious and political authorities in Kano.” That said, the primary point being made in this section is that, in terms of their influence on believers’ attitudes towards religious others, religious leaders’ impact seems to vary with context.

Recent events in northern Nigeria also demonstrate how much loyalty some religious leaders could control in the region. For example, several Shiite protests took place in response to the government’s arrest in 2015 of El Zakzaky, the leader of the country’s Shiites and head of the mainly Shia group, Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN). On many occasions, the Shiites have clashed with state police in Kaduna, with deaths and injuries being recorded. In their responses to the detention of their leader, the Shiites have sacrificed lives and comfort. In one of the nights around the first week of April, I witnessed how many Shiites made camp in an open area somewhere in the central part of Abuja, awaiting the protest that they would carry out the next day. As they usually did in parts of northern Nigeria since the arrest of their leader, the Shiites had assembled in Abuja from different parts of the north, leaving their
homes and other engagements. Discussing this during one of the interviews in Abuja, Fr CRL4 suggested on 12 March that lack of education and unemployment has made the mass assemblage possible:

You see that these people could move into Abuja, from Nyanya axis they came in, from Suleja axis they came in. And they came in their number. Ask, 70 or 80 per cent of those people who came are not educated. Because I can't leave my house and travel all the way to Enugu; what happens to my business, what happens to my work?

However, although some of the Shiites who travelled and gathered for the protests might have had those qualities, it cannot be said for certain that most or all of them were uneducated and had no employment - even in the private sector. Besides, the IMN is not a group of uneducated and unemployed Shiites, as "many of its members are known to be well-educated professionals, and some of them hold posts in the army, police and intelligence agency" (Tangaza, 2019: para 13). Furthermore, it will be unrealistic to argue that religious commitment had played little or no role in this case. Before the leader was arrested by the government, he was known to command strong respect among the country’s Shiites. “The IMN views itself as a government and Sheikh Zakzaky as the only legitimate source of authority in Nigeria. It does not recognise the authority of the Nigerian government and views its leaders - both Muslims and Christians - as corrupt and ungodly” (Tangaza, 2019). Such a leader who commands extreme respect and acceptance among his followers could wield significant influence on their thinking and behaviour, especially when divine legitimation is attached to the leaders’ speech and/or commands. During Zakzaky’s legal trial sessions in Kaduna, extra security personnel were normally deployed to the city to manage possible interruptions from his
followers (e.g., Enyiocha, 2020). Mu‘azzam and Ibrahim’s (2000:70-71) narrative about interreligious conflicts in Katsina in March 1991, Kano in December 1994, and Kafanchan in September 1996, also show the primary role played by the Shiites under the leadership of El-Zakzaky. During the crisis in Katsina, “the state governor came out with a threat of death to any person who breached the law”, but “El-Zakzaky addressed his followers and responded to the threat made by the Governor, Col. John Madaki, essentially calling for a *jihad* and justifying it by saying that paradise awaited any person who died in the course of confrontation with the state” (Mu‘azzam and Ibrahim, 2000:70).

The above-discussed realities show that while religious factors seem to have a minimal impact in Abuja, they might be more influential in other religiously diverse settings. This means that related to the question of how much influence religious factors have on interreligious peace, which this study has been concerned with, is the question of what determines variations in religious factors’ influence on interreligious peace. In the following section, I shall use primary data collected in Abuja and academic literature to think about factors impacting on the variations. The point that there are variations in the relevance and influence of religion on interreligious peace serves as another major lesson of this research. The study proposes that understanding these differences can aid the cultivation of interreligious peace.

8.3. **The issue of variation in the influence of religion**

First, it is important to note that this research demonstrates the need for caution while using the term religion, especially in the context of evaluating its
impact on interreligious relations. As explained in chapter 1, the concept of religion remains debated. While some scholars have argued that it should be discarded, others hold that it should be retained but used cautiously. In its assessment of religion’s role in peacebuilding, this study has been concerned with three of its interrelated components, namely religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism. However, the thesis has also discussed religious identity in chapter 3. The above-described cases outside Abuja, coupled with the Abuja case study in this research, demonstrate how the complexity of the phenomenon should be interpreted in relations between different religious groups, including Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria. They are reminders that there are various components of what might be regarded as religion, and they show that in terms of interreligious relations, these components might matter in different degrees in any given setting. For example, as an identity marker, religion plays a major role in Abuja, and this is shown in chapter 3. But in terms of the influence of religious leaders, religious peace norms or religious peace activism on the attitudes of Christians and Muslims in the same area towards each other, the fieldwork shows that practical issues and personal interests are of paramount importance to believers. Recognising this will help to strengthen the contributions of religious actors to peacebuilding.

Second, the study shows that given components of religion might impact on the peaceful or violent attitudes of believers in different degrees, from one area to another. For example, in some areas, religious leaders might have more peaceful or divisive influence on their followers than religious
leaders in other contexts. This raises one major question: What are the factors that account for this difference? These factors might be multiple, relating to the religious leaders themselves, the laypersons, and the environment within which they interact. In the following paragraphs, I shall consider whether these causal factors include the absence or presence of education, employment, poverty, and state presence, and then raise questions in the process for further research.

Part of the explanations for violent interreligious conflict and religion-related terrorism is that it is mostly the uneducated youths, who are easily brainwashed and manipulated by “clever” elites, that accept to carry arms against outgroups and even engage in suicidal missions. In other words, educated and/or employed people are commonly believed to be less likely to become violent, on the one hand, and the poor and unemployed are believed to be more likely to adopt violent behaviour, on the other hand. This idea also emerged during the fieldwork in Abuja, for example, when participants explained that part of why Abuja is relatively peaceful is that there is a low level of poverty and unemployment in the area, compared to the other parts of the north where Christian-Muslim violence has occurred (CRL7, 7 April; MRL4, 22 March; CRL8, 10 May). However, although this idea might not be inaccurate, data from Abuja as well as recent events in the global setting question this assumption. As indicated earlier in chapter 5, Christians and Muslims in Wuse and Utako markets who participated in this study mostly (a) did not have Western education and (b) could only speak their local language and colloquial English, and yet, they could not support the use of violence because of
practical considerations related to their own wellbeing and that of their loved ones. In recent years, news has emerged of European youths, some of whom have at least one academic degree, travelling to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS, a terror group which has been operating under the leadership of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who is reported to have postgraduate degrees in Islamic Studies. Baghdadi’s case is similar to those of Mohammed Marwa, who is also known as Maitatsine, and Muhammad Yusuf. They were Islamic radical preachers in northern Nigeria, from whom the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s and the Boko Haram militancy emerged. Both were said to have had reasonable Islamic education and they could even use English in their vocal challenges of Western education and culture. On 21 April 2019, the year’s Easter Sunday, over 250 people were killed and hundreds more injured by bombings coordinated by young people who later were reported by Sri Lankan authorities to be educated, with one of them being confirmed to have studied in both the United Kingdom and in Australia (BBC News, 2019). These events question the idea that it is the uneducated or poorly educated, the unemployed, and/or the poor that carry arms against the religious other. They show that, in the context of interreligious relations, there is no straightforward relationship between education, employment, poverty and the adoption or rejection of peace or violence.

It seems that one other influential variable is the extent of state presence in a given area. Ojo (2020) has explored the connection between weak state presence or poor governance in parts of northern Nigeria and terrorism and militancy in the region. Part of his points is that weak state
presence “creates an enabling environment for warlordism, religious fanaticism and tribal self-defense forces” and “governance failure in these regions stimulate illegal movement of arms and ammunition, the raw material for bombs, illegal drugs and foreign machines” that make the areas conducive for extremist groups (Ojo, 2020:77). More broadly, the “state presence” explanation for religion’s importance is that when the state is largely absent in an area, for example as signified by the absence of state institutions, non-state actors and institutions might occupy the gaps created by this absence, for instance by providing the services that the state has failed to provide. Such institutions or actors can therefore become very powerful in those areas. This is a common explanation for the importance of religious institutions in parts of the global South, where it is those institutions that provide aids and even spiritual support with which locals deal with the hardship caused by weak state presence. This implies that religious factors would be less influential in many parts of Abuja than they would be in communities in northern Nigeria and other societies outside Nigeria where there is a much weaker state presence.

In addition to state presence, another societal factor that might help to determine the importance of religious actors and institutions in an area is the religious history of the territory. In terms of religious history, Abuja has features which differentiate it from some other parts of northern Nigeria. For example, as explained in chapter 1, Abuja was conceived in 1976 and built in the 1980s and 1990s to serve as the capital of a heterogeneous Nigeria. While the area was inhabited before the 1970s, it has become a largely migrant territory. On the other hand, discussions of the religious history of northern Nigeria, as in
Iwuchukwu (2013), Vaughan (2016), Falola (1998), Van Gorder (2012), Ubah (1991), Sodiq (2009) and other studies, show how Islamic institutions and the Caliphate importantly defined identities in the region, especially in the states that make up the current north east and north west. They also show how that history has helped to generate societies where religious and traditional institutions remain highly influential. Some of these mainly Muslim states in contemporary northern Nigeria are Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. These studies on northern Nigeria show how colonial indirect rule policies aided the expansion of Islam and its influence in northern Nigeria. Being a largely migrant territory that is made up of Nigerians of different ethnoreligious backgrounds, the situation in Abuja might be different from what obtains in some of these above-mentioned states. Hence, more research is required to understand the actual nature of the relationship between religious history and the impact of religious factors on interreligious peace. If Abuja represents a case where this factor has a limited impact, the current study will be useful for further inquiries, especially comparative ones that examine cases with different degrees of religious history’s impact. As the capital of Nigeria, the importance of the Abuja case in such a comparative study cannot be overemphasised. Further study on the importance of religious history can also consider the other factors that have been mentioned earlier.

What do the variations in religion’s relevance or influence mean for religious peacebuilding and Christian-Muslim or interreligious relations? Among other things, they demonstrate the importance of contextually sensitive
approaches to the cultivation of Christian-Muslim or interreligious peace that do not employ one-size-fits-all models. Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria’s communities should be treated with the recognition of contextual variations. As Akinade (2014:x) rightly observes,

> there is no universal norm for Christian-Muslim relations. Each context is different and unique. In fact, the tendency to strip Christian-Muslim engagements from their contextual situations has led to facile generalizations and hasty conclusions. To think of a new global understanding of Christian-Muslim relations is a futile exercise.

Believers “manage and engage with religious difference in multiple ways, often depending on context” (Nolte and Ogen, 2017a:6). In their study of interreligious relations in Ede, which is a largely Muslim but religiously diverse town in Osun State, Nigeria, Nolte and Ogen (2017a:13) show that the town’s “religious life…is shaped both by strict adherence to religion in some contexts, and by the transgression, transcendence and mediation of religious boundaries in other contexts.” This research has also shown that Christians and Muslims in Abuja employ their religious traditions in various ways.

This notwithstanding, Abuja’s unique identity in Nigeria makes it proper for us to seriously consider the lessons it offers for the rest of northern Nigeria, the entire Nigerian state, and other religiously diverse areas. These major lessons have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. As chapter 1 explained, Abuja was created partly as a solution to the problem of ethnic and religious divides in the Nigerian federation. Even as it is not perfect and its peace level has to be improved, its special location means that it should serve as an example to the rest of Nigeria.
8.4. Conclusion of the thesis

This study is an attempt to further consider the impact of religious factors on interreligious peace. It has been interested in lessons that could be derived from zones of peace for religious peacebuilding, interreligious relations, and Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria. Although conflicts between Christians and Muslims have occurred in some African countries, the continent “is also home to several states and regions where Muslims and Christians coexist without large-scale conflict” (Nolte and Ogen, 2017:2). Hence, agreeing with Nolte and Ogen (2017) that such contexts where conflicts have been limited should receive more empirical attention, the study did not explore conflict and post-conflict settings in northern Nigeria. Instead, it focused on zones of peace within Abuja. Specifically, the research examined the role of religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism in the dynamics of interreligious peace in Wuse and Utako districts in Abuja Municipal Area Council.

This research serves as the first, or one of the first, major studies of Christian-Muslim relations in Abuja, north-central Nigeria. Abuja was conceived in February 1976 during the regime of General Murtala Muhammad and then built in the 1980s and 1990s to become the capital of the country, in place of Lagos. As of 2020, there were up to three million people residing in the territory, over 90 percent of whom are Christians and Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria (Ossai, 2020:310). Even though Abuja occupies a special location in Nigeria, it has not received the attention of researchers interested in religion and peace. Abuja’s uniqueness partly results
from the fact that it is “one of Africa’s notable attempts to generate and sustain a unifying space and centre for a whole that includes a substantial number of dissimilar cultural, religious, ethnic and political components” (Ossai, 2020:309). This special purpose and identity in the country is indicated by its official label as the “Centre of Unity.” In sum, Abuja was selected for this study because of its peace level, its religious diversity, its unique identity, and the fact that it has yet to be explored in peace research.

The fieldwork findings corroborate the notion that religious leaders, religious peace norms and religious peace activism help to sustain peace between members of different religious groups. The relative peace existing between Christians and Muslims in Abuja has been partially made possible by the efforts being made by religious leaders in the area. Chapter 3 shows that without these efforts, there could be more opportunities for violent interreligious conflict in the territory. However, the study showed the important place of practical issues in the lives of believers and in their relations with people who do not belong to their religious groups. The research also showed that religious leaders’ interreligious dialogue seems to minimally influence the way ordinary Christians and Muslims relate with each other. The relative peace that exists in Abuja, according to the study, strongly depends on both religious factors and other issues, including the lay believers themselves, their practical considerations, and other external factors, such as Abuja’s demographics, governance, policing, and the role of community leaders.

A major idea emerging from the research on religion, conflict and peace in conflict or post-conflict areas is the view that religion is strongly relevant for
peace in religiously mixed settings. In as much as this is not inaccurate, the concentration on conflict or post-conflict contexts could easily lead to the overestimation of religion in the dynamics of peace in religiously mixed areas. While the occurrence of religion-related attacks in the West and the occurrence of Christian-Muslim conflicts in northern Nigeria and other parts of the global South have brought to the fore the issue of religion, they have also contributed to the overestimation of religious difference. Additionally, the role played by religious actors in conflict management and resolution in several societies help to project the idea that there usually are religious divides in religiously mixed areas, for which religious responses should be encouraged. Abuja shows that the lives of laypersons and interreligious relations on the ground sometimes do not reflect these common assumptions about a heavily important religion. Interreligious relations in the area show that while religious differences exist, religious responses to them in the form of theological interventions are at times not as necessary as religious leaders and some observers might think. Nigerians’ adherence to different belief systems is not necessarily a problem and this is demonstrated by interreligious relations in Abuja. While Christianity and Islam serve as major sources of identity for people, many Christians and Muslims are navigating the religious difference between them daily, without violent conflicts. Ordinary persons are more concerned about fundamental human needs and these interests constantly bring them into cooperation. Abuja shows the complexity that characterises interreligious peace in northern Nigeria and in fact in other settings where members of different religious groups reside. Religion impacts interreligious peace, but the latter importantly
results from nonreligious factors as well, and sometimes in a manner that positions religion as a helpful but secondary variable.

However, as explained in chapter 1 and other sections of the thesis, the point in the study is not that there are no religious boundaries in Abuja, or that religious differences do not exist between Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria, or that religious leaders do not help to bridge divides between Christians and Muslims, or that believers do not find religious peace norms useful. The preceding chapters, especially 3 and 4, have presented findings on these differences and the contributions of religion to the relative peace existing in Abuja. In fact, part of the arguments of the thesis is that a consideration of religion’s contributions to peace in zones of peace and in conflict-affected areas shows that religion does help to sustain interreligious peace. This is discussed in detail in chapter 7. Furthermore, as explained in chapter 1, the point in the thesis is not that religious leaders in Abuja are simplistic persons who do not know that there are many factors that affect the level of peace that might exist between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria or between members of different religious groups in other areas. Such an argument will be nearly impossible to defend, as the religious leaders that were interviewed for this research also helped to explain the importance of nonreligious factors in Abuja. The study is also not arguing that scholars who have written about the importance of religious peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas are equally simplistic researchers who fail to see the complexity that characterises interreligious peace. The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of
this thesis clearly show that researchers duly recognise the complexity that characterises interreligious peace and this work adds to their studies.

The issue, instead, is that the way Christians and Muslims live their lives in Abuja do not reflect the kind of importance that religious leaders often attach to religion, either as a cause of divides or a source of peace. Fundamental needs of survival, accessing money, family safety and personal safety are often placed above religious difference or theological sources of peace. These practical considerations help Christians and Muslims to navigate their religious differences. At times, religious leaders who build peace do not recognise that even with the religious difference that exists between Christians and Muslims, those practical considerations help to reduce the divisiveness of the difference, and some of what they do to promote peace do not really have a major impact on the relations taking place between people on the ground. Furthermore, in many studies that highlight religion’s positive contributions to peacebuilding in religiously mixed societies, it is not common to read about the strong importance of practical issues for believers. The lack of attention on the impact of these factors on the relevance or non-relevance of religious difference and religious peacebuilding in northern Nigeria and other religiously mixed areas impairs our understanding of Christian-Muslim and interreligious relations in those areas. Largely due to (a) the strong Christian and Islamic presence in Nigeria and Africa, and (b) the involvement of religious factors in several cases of armed conflicts or violence that have occurred in northern Nigeria, in other parts of the global South and even in the West, many persons often over-see religious identity and religious difference in the relations between Christians
and Muslims and between members of other religious groups. Abuja shows that these divides exist, and religion is important in peace dynamics, but the divides and religion’s role in peace dynamics are overestimated sometimes.

The crucial issue of peacebuilding’s efficacy remains a major concern of peacebuilders and researchers (e.g., Autesserre, 2014:2-3; Markiewicz, 2018; Muthuraj, 2016; Owen and King, 2019). Similarly, this study has been interested in how to enhance the positive influence of religion in Nigerian society. Although some of its implications for interreligious peace and the theory and practice of religious peacebuilding have been discussed in chapter 7, I shall conclude this section by highlighting some of its key lessons for peace work in Nigeria. Among other things, the research shows that it is important to promote (a) theological understanding between Christians and Muslims in the country and (b) public interest in Christian and Muslim peace norms. This will help to prevent violent conflict in relatively peaceful parts of the country, such as Wuse and Utako in Abuja Municipal Area Council, where interreligious suspicions exist. It will also help to promote peace in conflict-affected communities, such as parts of Kaduna and Plateau states, where Christian-Muslim divides might be more pronounced. Furthermore, given the importance of practical issues for believers in Abuja, the study suggests that religious peacebuilders and other actors interested in peace in the country, including local and foreign actors, should equally pay significant attention to humanitarian and developmental issues. In addition to helping to provide these through charity or other empowerment programmes, they should work to challenge structures in Nigeria that obstruct the provision of these needs.
Preventing or addressing structural violence involves paying attention to any “structure at work [that is] churning out harm, causing basic human needs deficit” (Galtung and Fischer, 2013:35). While the religious peace activism that aims to promote interreligious understanding and cooperation is important, it is also crucial to constantly make efforts to reduce extreme poverty, provide opportunities for formal or informal employment, and challenge poor governance or other political and economic problems in society. Doing these in Nigeria and other religiously diverse settings is very useful, partly because the protection of believers’ fundamental needs is of paramount importance to them, and it affects their decisions regarding how to relate with religious others. Apparently, the absence of some of these essential needs, the presence of threats to them, or the presence of obstacles to their realisation has been a contributing factor to religion-related violence in parts of northern Nigeria. That said, it is useful to note that religious leaders and other peace actors in Nigeria or other contexts may not possess the political and economic power required to “solve” problems like poverty, unemployment, corruption, and other such societal problems. Hence, this study recommends that they can use their important socio-cultural locations to influence the actors who may have more access to the resources required to address them. By so doing, they will be contributing to the cultivation of a positive and just peace in the country.

8.5. Suggestions for further research

As we have seen, this study is primarily a qualitative exploration that is guided by interpretivism, the case-study research design, the content analysis method of qualitative data analysis, and principles of phenomenology and
grounded theory. Most research methods normally have one or more potential weaknesses (e.g., see Denscombe, 2010), and this also applies to the case-study design that was adopted in this study. Case studies provide rich descriptions about the explored cases and therefore often yield rich insights into them. However, they often have a limited scope, and it might be difficult to generalise from their findings. As this work has recognised, Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria are complex. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the amount of impact that religious leaders and other religious factors might have in northern Nigeria, Nigeria, or other religiously mixed settings where religion is a major identity marker. Hence, a relatively sufficient answer to the question of how much impact religious factors have on interreligious peace in the country would require the use of multiple cases drawn from its various parts and perhaps a mixed-methods research design. Similarly, a broader inquiry is required to have a relatively comprehensive understanding of the reality on a global scale. A cross-country analysis of the results of case studies like this research on Abuja would be helpful. Such a study can involve religious groups other than Christians and Muslims – and therefore contexts where Christianity and Islam are not the only or major religions practised. Among other contributions, such a study could yield more insights into the actual relevance of religious factors in the dynamics of interreligious peace.

Furthermore, this thesis has observed that religion’s impact on believers and relations between members of different religious groups varies with context. For example, religious leaders and religious norms have more influence on Christians and Muslims in some areas in northern Nigeria than
they have in others. Although this work suggests that the variations could be
affected by (a) education, (b) state presence, and (c) religious history, more
research is required for us to have a more adequate understanding of the
factors that determine the variations. Further study could consider how each
of these factors functions, or how they combine to determine the power of
religion in any given context. Among other things, research on the issue would
help governmental actors or non-governmental peacebuilders to deal with the
negative instrumentalisation of religion by religious and other leaders in some
societies.

One other way by which the current study could be advanced is to test
its relevance in other relatively peaceful areas within or outside northern
Nigeria. Such communities exist in other parts of the north, even in states
where interreligious conflicts have occurred, such as Plateau and Kaduna. In
the Middle Belt and other parts of the country where mainly Muslim herders
and largely Christian farmers have clashed, there are communities where
herder-farmer relations have been more peaceful. For us to have a better
understanding of Christian-Muslim peace in Nigeria, more research has to be
done on those communities. In addition to the qualitative methods applied
here, further research could be done using quantitative approaches, involving
the issuance of surveys to lay Christians and Muslims and the statistical
analyses of the responses. Furthermore, the exploration of zones of peace in
the predominantly Christian southern part of the country could yield more
insights into how Nigerian Christians and Muslims deal with religious
differences. The south consists of three geopolitical zones. These are south-
east, south-south, and south-west. There are five states in the south-east, including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, while the south-south consists of six states, comprising Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. Six other states make up the south-west zone. These are Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo. Given that relatively peaceful interreligious relations in the Yoruba-speaking south-western communities have received some academic attention, the situation in zones of peace in the rest of the wider southern region of Nigeria, particularly the south-south and south-east, could be given more empirical attention. In these sub-regions, Muslims constitute the minority. However, in some of the communities, there is an increasing population of indigenous Muslims. Coupled with the migration of Muslims from other parts of the country, this has helped to make the Muslims a major minority within those areas. For instance, this is the situation in Enugu state, where communities in the Nsukka cultural area have a significant Igbo Muslim population. Although studies on Muslim minorities in the Igbo region currently exist, examples being Uchendu (2010a, 2010b, 2011) and Rufai (2012), major explorations of Christian-Muslim relations in relatively peaceful zones in the region have yet to be done.

Finally, although the qualitative approach adopted in this study has been useful, the significance of its findings could be explored further through a theological lens. For example, the study’s usefulness for the grassroots and the transformation of believers’ lives could be enhanced through the lens of liberation theology. Furthermore, it is important to consider how the research findings may relate to interreligious engagement by major Christian, Muslim,
and other religious groups. For instance, such reflection could be done in the context of Catholic social teaching and Catholic peacebuilding, which have been explored by Hawksley (2020) and Schreiter, Appleby and Powers (2010), among others. The case of the Catholic Church is crucial because its “capacity to act as a force in peacebuilding is immense”, partly due to its long history, hierarchical structure, and global presence and networks (Hawksley, 2020:2).

More than many other Christian groups in Nigeria, it is largely involved in interreligious engagement and has functional bodies which help with its coordination. For example, it has the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), which is an apex organ of the church consisting of all the Catholic episcopal heads in the country. Also, it has the department of Mission and Dialogue, which was created in 2002 in accordance with the Second Vatican Council’s declaration on the church’s relationship with non-Christian religions.

According to Omonokhua (2014:7-8), this department “promotes ecumenical dialogue within the Christian family and dialogue with other religious bodies” and has committees on mission, on ecumenism, and on interreligious dialogue. Also, within the church’s Episcopal Committee for Interreligious Dialogue is The National Think Tank for Interreligious Dialogue, which was inaugurated on the 20th of August 2008, at the Conference Hall of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Abuja, to assist the committee on dialogue to (a) monitor and identify potential hot spots for brewing religious intolerance and violence, (b) prevent and manage conflict, (c) respond to marginalisation due to religion through advocacy and capacity building, (d) research and report on religious tension, and (e) advise the CBCN, among other things (Omonokhua, 2014:8).
Furthermore, “to take the work of dialogue to the grassroots, the provincial coordinator in every province and the diocesan director in every diocese coordinate the work of inter-religious dialogue” (Omonokhua, 2014:9). Hence, further reflection on the practical components of Catholic peacebuilding in Nigeria would help the Church to fully realise its potential to transform the lives of Nigerians. Furthermore, this would be useful in addressing the broader question of how the Catholic Church can fully realize its immense potential as a global force for peace, which motivated Hawksley’s (2020) recent in-depth exploration of the tradition of Catholic teaching on peace.
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**APPENDIX A**

**CONSENT LETTER AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh

Consent Letter

for participation in research

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**Dear Participant,**

I am inviting you to be interviewed for the PhD research described in the following table. Could you please go through the details and confirm at the end whether you consent to being interviewed for the project.

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<thead>
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<th>Title of research project:</th>
<th>Religion and peace in North Central Nigeria’s zones of peace</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of researcher:</td>
<td>Mr Emmanuel Chiwetalu Ossai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Contact details:</td>
<td>School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+234xxxxxxxxxxxxx</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scope of the project:</td>
<td>This research project aims to find out whether and how religious leaders promote peace in parts of Abuja where violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims have not occurred. The project calls those areas “zones of peace”. Also, it aims to discover other issues affecting how Christians and Muslims relate with each other in the territory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How you will participate</td>
<td>If you kindly accept to be interviewed for this project, I shall be asking you questions on how religious leaders help to promote peace in Abuja, and you will respond to them as you wish. I hope that this conversation will not last for more than an hour, and a break in the process will be welcomed if you want it. I have attached a list of the major questions and issues which will be addressed during our meeting.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Recording

For my personal reference and the research, I would like to record the interview electronically with a tape recorder and take notes when I need to. However, no electronic recording will be done at all if you do not permit it, and I could take notes instead.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidential data received during the interview will not be revealed to a third party and where it has to be used for the thesis, it will be anonymised.

Handling of Data

Be informed that data received during the interview will only be used for this research and no other purpose, unless where your consent is obtained. The data will be deleted as soon as this project is completed.

Please complete the following:

I consent to participating in this research project and understand that I may withdraw at any time. YES ☐ NO ☐

Name & Signature: 

Date: 

Major interview questions

Please tell me, when do you regard a society as peaceful?

How would you describe the level of peace in Abuja?

What do you think are the reasons for this peace here?

Are there factors that threaten peace here? (Among Muslims, or among Christians?) / What do you think could lead to interreligious violence here in Abuja?

How would you describe your own relationship with Christians and Muslims in Abuja?

Could you speak about grievances/problems that Christians have against Muslims or that Muslims have against Christians here in Abuja?
Could you please speak about the complaints or comments you have received from Christians about Muslims in Abuja, or from Muslims about Christians?

What do you recommend for a lasting peace between Christians and Muslims here?