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Religious Conflict in Central African Republic

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Abstract:
One of the challenges facing the world today is the issue of religious conflict. The consequences of the above are unimaginable for a land-locked country like Central African Republic (CAR). Conflicts there have led to the destruction of lives and properties in the last decades of the country's nationhood. There is a strong link between religion and violence, and this link has a long genealogy in Western scholarship. It is against this background that this research addresses the political and economic effects of the religious conflict in CAR. More than half of the respondents in this study agreed that the use of religion as an instrument to acquire political power led to the conflict in CAR. Since religion is a major source of soft power, it is used and misused by religious and governmental organizations to pursue their interests. Religion is not inherently violent; instead, it is how people choose to interpret religion that provides justification for violent actions. The study recommends that the government should emphasize the secularity and supremacy of the constitution and religious leaders should establish inter-faith platforms to curb religious crises.

Keywords: Religion, conflict, political and economic development, Central African Republic

1. Introduction

When is a conflict a religious one? One possible answer to this essential question is that the conflicting parties differ with regard to their religious identity, and their varying religious identity is a major cause of their conflict. Hormby (2006) defines religious conflict as a situation in which religious adherents are involved in a serious disagreement or argument with one religious group and another. This is a situation in which there is opposition in ideas, opinions, feelings and wishes. Etymologically and according to Council of Europe (COE, 2023), religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. The key inference is that religion is essentially about the relationship between humans and a supernatural agency. According to Global Religious Landscape report (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012), there are an estimated 10,000 distinct religions worldwide, and about 84% of the world's population is affiliated with one of the five largest religions, namely: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, or forms of folk religion.

Religion plays a significant role in many people's lives, and the choices that they make are influenced and guided by their religious practices. Religion can help people improve themselves and help others. Also, it may seem that religion can do the opposite, causing people to be violent (Moghadam, 2003). Religion often gets blamed for acts of violence, including suicide, martyrdom, and terrorism (Fox, 2007). In Western political systems, a frontier has been drawn between a human's inner life and his public actions, between religion and politics.

Religion could and has served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilizations. Paradoxically, however, it has also served as a motivation for violence, hence its indication in some literature as a "double-edged sword" (Karaca, 2007, p. 34). Some have legitimized violence in the name of God. These include Zealots in Israel, jihadists, and crusaders. Contemporary acts of extreme violence, such as terrorist attacks, are often justified as "Holy Warfare." In the past two decades, religion has been at the center of most violent conflicts around the world, thereby gaining notoriety as one of the prime security challenges confronting the world in the wake of the Cold War (Juergensmeyer, 2003).

Religious conflict, in simple terms, means the existence of a prolonged battle, struggle, or clash between two or more religious groups because they view their own religious belief as superior to those of others (Karaca, 2007). Religion has been used as a possible mobilization tool in conflict situations. The main argument is that leaders are important for the organization of collective action and, therefore, have to mobilize followers (Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Hasenclever & De Juan, 2007). In order to mobilize, leaders choose from different identities, such as religious, ethnic, or other social identities. Under specific conditions, religion may be the most rational choice. For instance, the politicization of religion might increase the risk of a violent escalation of a conflict which is principally rooted in political or socio-economic problems (Hasenclever & De Juan, 2007; Keddie, 1998).

To get a better grasp of the potency of religion, a study conducted in Spain found that societies that are divided along religious lines are more prone to intense and prolonged conflict than those divided by political, territorial, and ethnic differences (Reynal-Querol, 2002). Perhaps this reality explains the prime position that religious violence occupies

in many developing countries' security pyramids or the levels of security hierarchies and relationships in the protection of the state. Mostly, such conflicts have caused serious crises in many of these states, which have negative effects on the people.

Central African Republic (CAR) is not immune to these types of conflicts. She has experienced her own dose of conflicts and civil unrest in terms of coups and counter-coups since independence from France in 1960 for 36years between Bokassa (1965-1979), Kolingba (1981-1993), and Bozize (2003 -2013). From the 1990s to 1990s, both military and civilian rulers politicized, regionalized and weakened the CAR military by packing it with supporters from their home areas and ethnic groups, establishing alternative security structures and bringing in foreign troops to secure their regimes. Stapleton (December, 2019). At the very start of nationhood, CAR, like many other African countries, faced ethnic, regional, and religious divisions. Almost routinely, the divisions were played up, manipulated, or mobilized for political reasons. The situation has proved particularly dangerous, especially with respect to the religious polarity of Islam and Christianity. Religious identification has been used as a mobilization tool, and the ultimate purpose is to manipulate available religious resources to gain power. The cycle is complete when a bad government accentuates religious polarity to retain control of power.

All these factors contributed to blight the growth of the land-locked state, which has had no functional central government for over three years and has culminated in the current crises in which Muslims (*Seleka*) and Christians (anti-*Balaka*) have further impoverished the already stunted state. With the overthrow of the central government (which was led by a Christian, Francois Bozize) by the Muslim-dominated *Seleka* rebels in March 2013, Michel Djotodia proclaimed himself president of the republic. He was forced to relinquish power after 10 months in January 2014 due to the escalation of the crises and non-recognition and support from regional and international powers. He was later granted asylum in Benin Republic, the country of his wife.

CAR has spent more than half of its 63 years of independence in instability manifested in its political institutions, difficult electoral process, poor administration, lack of equity and justice, intrusion of the military in the political institution, and other similar factors (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2016). There were violent conflicts in CAR in 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2008, and 2012, as well as the protracted conflict between Bangui, the capital inhabited mainly by Christians, and the northwest inhabited by a Muslim majority. Unfortunately, the current conflict has further polarized the already vulnerable state to the extent that over two-thirds of its population is either displaced or are refugees, while the interim government of Catherine Samba-Panza (former Bangui mayor) and now Fausten-Archange Toudera since 2016 to date has been unable to meet its obligations in salary payments to civil servants, provision of security to the citizenry, and other state responsibilities.

On May 5, 2015, the various militia and rebel groups agreed to release thousands of child soldiers in their ranks. This promise was the sequel to appeals and peace agreements between the rebel groups, the interim central government, and the French and UN peacekeepers. The promise of the interim central government of CAR to prosecute French soldiers accused of raping and sexually molesting CAR girls in exchange for relief materials is being treated with caution in diplomatic circles (Dearden, 2016). Unfortunately, some of the rebel warlords, like Major General Joseph Zoundeinko, are already calling for the division of the CAR along religious lines between Christians and Muslims. It is obvious that religious crises in the CAR have serious effects on the country. Some of these effects include internally displaced people, refugees, and a weak central government that allows various militia groups to thrive. This research is, therefore, intent on objectively critiquing the negative deployment of religion as an instrument for social disharmony in CAR.

1.1. Religion as a Violent Tool: Case of CAR

The link between religion and violence has a long genealogy in Western scholarship (Cavanaugh, 2004; Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000). Specifically, the concept of religious terrorism goes back to Rapoport (1984), analyzing the use of terror in three monotheistic religions. This influential paper inspired many subsequent studies on the subject, primarily in the field of terrorism studies, which sought to explain "why violence and religion have re-emerged so dramatically at this moment in history and why they have so frequently been found in combination" (Rapoport, 1984, p. 20).

The CAR is plagued by the crisis of perverted religion and sectarian and political upheavals. The consequences of the above are unimaginable for the country where these three ills have gone largely unchecked. CAR, being a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, has experienced massive ethnic, sectarian, religious, and political violence that has led to grievous socio-economic and political consequences on the psyche of the nation.

Religion often gets blamed for acts of violence, including suicide, martyrdom, and terrorism (Adesoji, 2010). Such is the situation in the Central African Republic, where the conflict has degenerated into a religious one. The precursor to the present conflict was the rebellion instigated by the Muslim-dominated Seleka rebels in 2012 against the government of former President Bozize, which culminated in a unity government between the government and the rebels. The unity government eventually collapsed, with the rebels capturing Bangui in 2013.

The rebel leader, Michel Djotodia, took the reins of power but was forced by the regional and international communities to relinquish power to a handpicked unity government, which is trying to bring peace to the fragile country with the support of regional and international aid agencies. This conflict has cost the country tremendously, especially politically and economically. Thus, the relationship between Islam and Christianity in CAR contributes to conflicts which have serious socio-political consequences.

This chapter discusses the dangers of the role of religion in conflict in CAR and the use of religion to help achieve political ends. It focuses on Islam and Christianity and these religions' attitudes to the secularity of the CAR state. It

examines the danger of equivocations by governments who have sympathy for a particular religion and how this partisanship fuels fundamentalism, fanaticism, and conflicts. Recommendations for dialogue and tolerance are presented throughout the chapter. Although peace efforts have ameliorated the situation, the conflict is ongoing.

1.2. The Role of Religion in Society

Yinger (1957) observes that there is no corner of society in which religious practices do not exist. For him, "religion is an ancient component of human culture which grew out of [hu]man and out of which [hu]man grew" (p. 63). Smart (1984) maintains that "throughout history and beyond in the dark recesses of the human race's earliest cultures, religion has been a vital and pervasive feature of human life" (p. 32). This is corroborated by Giddens (1993), who notes that "religion has continued to be a central part of human experience, influencing how we perceive and react to the environments in which we live" (p. 15). Edokobi (2002) is equally aware of this fact when he writes that "one of the most common practices of humanity all over the world is the practice of religion" (p. 41).

There are varieties of religious experiences (James, 1902). Streng, Lloyd, and Allen (1973) delineate eight different ways of being religious. They include: rebirth through personal encounter with the holy, creation of community through myth and ritual, living harmoniously through conformity to the cosmic law, spiritual freedom through discipline or mysticism, attaining an integrated self through creative interaction, achievement of human rights through political and economic action, the new life through technocracy, and enjoyment of the full life through sensuous experience. This is perhaps why Madu (2003) writes, "During the thousands of years of [hu] mankind's history, [hu]man's search for God has led down to many pathways. The result has been the enormous diversity of religious expression found world-wide" (p. 43).

Consequently, CAR is a multi-religious society harboring Islam, Christianity, and traditional religions, among others. In CAR, there is an experience of "religious pluralism" which "within the socio-political context" is described by Imo (1990) as "the result of social transformations which give rise to people of different beliefs, values and customs being brought together by the forces of history in the social relationship" (p. 8). Although Haralambos and Heald (1980) hold that religious pluralism "has been seen as a further fragmentation of institutional religion and therefore an evidence of the weakening hold of religion over society" (p. 447), it is still a fact of human experiences that there are individual differences which lead to different religious pathways.

However, religion as a social institution is not an isolated social fact that is unrelated to any other. It is both a dependent and an independent variable. Religion generally affects societal structure, and social structure affects religion. Religion influences the social units and is influenced by them. No wonder Yinger (1957) sees religious change as both a cause and an effect of social change. In the same manner, if it holds true as Adogame (1999) observes that "all social phenomena within any given group or societies are interrelated" (p. 22), then religion as an indisputable social fact affects the development of a society.

Hence, Okeke (2008) affirms that "religion is in a continual, reciprocal interactive relationship with other social units like politics, economy, the class system, family, law and so on which together constitute the essential ingredients of a human society" (p. 7). It is, therefore, no wonder that Okwueze (2004) rightly observes that "a major concern which has emerged in the study of religion is the examination of its relationships with economic, political, cultural and social institutions as well as its diverse functions and dysfunctions in the life of society" (p. 2). The next section is devoted mainly to this task.

1.3. The Role of Religion in Armed Conflict

Over the last decade, there has been growing interest in research on the link between religion and conflict (Juergensmeyer, 2008). Religion may not only incite violence but also contribute to peace (Appleby, 2000; Philpott, 2007). Sometimes, religion may count more; in other circumstances, it may not count as much. It seems plausible that the ambivalence of religion depends on context (Basedau & De Juan, 2008). Under certain religious and non-religious conditions, religion spurs conflict, fosters peace, or differs regarding how much religion counts. Finally, it appears useful to consider different religious dimensions. This study, therefore, is based on two theories that help explain the role of religion in the armed conflicts of CAR: relative deprivation and group mobilization.

1.4. Research Questions

The study aims to find answers to the following questions:
- What role did religion play in causing conflict in CAR?
- How has the conflict affected the country politically and economically, and in other areas?
- What are the steps taken by the government, international community, and other stakeholders in resolving the conflict?
- What are the challenges to resolving the conflict?

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1. Theoretical Background

2.1.1.Group Mobilization Theory

In his insightful article titled "Ours is the Way of God," Jeffrey Seul (1999) powerfully argued that religious conflicts are not always caused by religion. They are called religious conflicts because religion is the unifying and mobilizing identity. In his words: "Religion is not the cause of religious conflict; rather for many ... it frequently supplies the fault line along which intergroup identity and resource competition occur" (pp. 553, 558). This telling passage provides an entry into understanding the religious conflict in CAR.

The theory also provides a critical analysis of the causes and escalation of the conflict in the CAR. Though rebellions were present for almost a decade, a qualitative change occurred at the end of 2012 with the emergence of the Seleka rebel alliance, comprised of a heterogeneous collection of armed men hailing from northeastern CAR, Chad, and Sudan. By the end of the year, a diverse group of militias had mobilized against them. These fighters, who called themselves anti-Balaka, framed their grievances using the idioms of religion and foreignness. According to them, they sought to rid the country of troublesome Muslim foreigners, particularly those coming from the CAR, Chad, and South Darfur borderlands.

2.2. Research Design

2.2.1. The Study Area

Bangui is the capital of CAR and its largest city. It was established as a French outpost in 1889 and named for its placement on the northern bank of the Ubangi River (French: Oubangui). The Ubangi itself was named after the Bobangi word for the "rapids" located beside the settlement, which marks the end of navigable water north of Brazzaville. The city consists of eight urban districts (arrondissements), 16 groups (groupements), and 205 neighborhoods. As the capital of CAR, Bangui acts as an administrative, trade, and commercial center. It is served by the Bangui M'Poko International Airport.
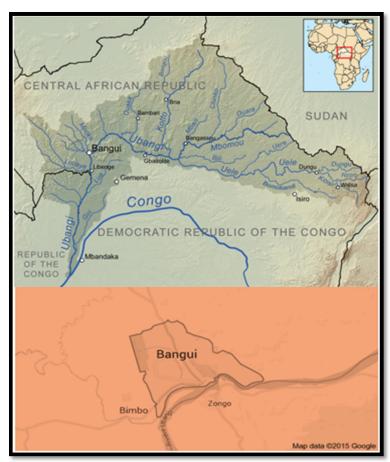

Figure 1: Maps Showing the Ubangi River Drainage Basin
Source: Kmusser, May 5, 2010)[i] and Bangui
Source: Google Maps, 2015

2.2.2. Population and Sampling

According to the 2017 World Population Review, Bangui has an estimated population of 734,000. A sample size of 280 respondents was drawn from Bangui, using nonprobability convenience and heterogeneous sampling techniques. The participants were sampled across different ages, religions, genders, educational levels, ethnicities, and work experiences.

2.2.3. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The research made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources involved the use of questionnaires (250) and interviews (30), while secondary sources on religious conflicts were reviewed from journals, newspaper articles, magazines, reports, and online materials. The data gathered were analyzed using content analysis, reporting frequency and emergent themes.

2.2.4. Socio-Demographics

The 250 respondents from the 2015 field survey were made up of 100 females and 150 males, with a majority of the respondents being between 18-33 (70.8%) years of age. More than half of the respondents were married, while 97 (38.8%) were employed as civil servants, 65 (26%) were students, 40 (16%) were farmers, 11 (4.4%) were religious leaders, and 37 (14.8%) identified as traders/merchants. Of the 250 individuals surveyed, 160 (64%) reported being Christians, 80 (32%) were Muslim, and 10 (4%) practiced another religion.

3. Findings of the Study

3.1. What Role Did Religion Play in Causing Conflict in CAR?

Causes of Religious Conflict	Frequency	Percentages
Use of religion as instrument to acquire political power	127	50.8
Hate preaching and differences in religious ideology	63	25.2
Media reportage	39	15.6
Religious fanaticism	21	8.4
Total	250	100

Table 1: Causes of Religious Conflict
Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 1 revealed that 127 (50.8%) of the respondents agreed that religion was used as an instrument to acquire political power, 63 (25.2%) agreed that hate preaching by different religious leaders and differences in religious ideology were significant factors in causing conflict, 39 (15.6%) of the respondents agreed that the media secularization and reportage escalated conflict, and 21 (8.4%) of the respondents agreed that religious differences led to the conflict.

3.2. What Is the Political and Economic Effect of the Conflict on the Country?

Effects of Religious Conflict	Frequency	Percentage
IDPs and refugee problem	53	21.2
Destruction of lives and properties	79	31.6
Discouraged foreign investment and banking	17	6.8
Divided country along ethno-religious line	33	13.2
Political instability	28	11.2
Gross abuse of human rights	19	7.6
Increased fear of insecurity	21	8.4
Total	250	100

Table 2: Effects of Religious Conflict
Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 2 reveals that 53 (21.2%) of the respondents agreed that the conflict led to internally displaced people (IDPs) and a refugee problem, 79 (31.6%) agreed that it led to the destruction of lives and properties, 17 (6.8%) of the respondents agreed that it discouraged foreign direct investment and killed many of the small scale businesses, 33 (13.2%) of the respondents agreed that it divided the country along ethno-religious lines, 28 (11.2%) agreed that religious conflict led to political instability, 19 (7.6%) agreed that it led to gross abuses of human rights, and finally, 21 (8.4%) agreed that it increased the fear of insecurity.

3.3. What Steps Have Been Taken in Resolving the Conflict?

Steps Taken to Resolve the Conflict	Frequency	Percentage
Bringing them to dialogue	56	22.4
Intervention by CEMAC/AU/UNOs	95	38.0
Sending the deposed president into exile	26	10.4
Asking the rebel leader to relinquish power	28	11.2
Intervention by France	45	18.0
Total	250	100

Table 3: Steps Taken to Resolve the Conflict
Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 3 shows that 22.4% of the respondents acknowledged mediation efforts in the conflict while 38% recognized the intervention by the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), a sub-regional block of the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). French intervention was acknowledged by 18% of the respondents, and 10.4% agreed that the sending of deposed President Bozize into exile helped resolve the conflict.

3.4. What Are the Challenges to Resolving the Conflict?

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Porous borders	43	17.2
Corruption and lack of commitment from the government	79	31.6
Poorly trained and equipped military	49	19.6
Funding of basic services and development	54	21.6
Foreign terrorist/influence	25	10
Total	250	100

Table 4: Challenges to Resolving the Conflict
Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2015

Table 4 shows that 31.6% of the respondents agreed that corruption and lack of commitment from the government made the conflict very difficult to resolve. Porous borders and foreign terrorist influence exacerbated the situation. Other challenges to resolving the conflict included a poorly trained and equipped military and a lack of funding overall for basic services and development.

4. Discussion of Findings

The first research question was asked to discover the role religion played in causing the civil war in CAR. The crisis in CAR cannot be understood without accounting for the role religion and religious organizations played in mobilizing people to engage in conflict. Imam Oumar Kobine[1] at Abubakar Sidiq Mosque, who doubles as chief Imam of CAR and is the President General of the Muslim community in CAR since 2010, said that because he rejected what many Muslim politicians said, they wanted to kill him, and he had to take refuge in the Catholic Church in Bangui for more than six months. Reverend Clottaire Siribo Redonne echoed this sentiment when he said, "Politicians and rebel fighters in their quest for power brought religion into play, and this aggravated the CAR conflict" (personal communication, June 27, 2015), suggesting that the conflict in CAR was more political. However, religion was used by many of the politicians to gain support with the aim of obtaining political power. For instance, Alhaji Bantua Njama, a popular businessman in Bangui, said that many clergy have allowed politicians to use them to preach against the ethos of their religion and morality. These have contributed immensely to the conflict in CAR. Those seeking goods, recognition, and money decided to use hate preaching on both sides against perceived opponents.

The conflict was escalated by media reportage, creating enmity among the different ethno-religious groups. Otite and Albert (1999) opined that the media's penchant for exaggerating details of religious violence and thereby fuelling their intensity is well-known and documented.

Religious fanaticism, such as the global Islamic Jihad, exacerbated the situation in CAR. The Seleka insurgents in CAR, according to them, hold the vision of global political Islam, which wants to overthrow all worldly government (i.e., the Kufur system) to enthrone an Islamic theocratic state (Jackson, 2014).

The findings of the second research question set out to discern the political and economic effects of religious conflict on CAR. The IDPs led to many people being put into camps with few resources or fleeing to other countries, leaving all their belongings that were then looted or destroyed. Mr. Francis Mbutu,[2] founder of a non-governmental organization

(NGO) based in Bangui, said the conflict has led to Muslims living in the airport under harsh weather conditions, and many of the citizens, including Christians, Muslims and practitioners of other religions, fled to other countries with bleak futures, causing problems for neighboring countries because of the influx of people on a large scale. The CAR conflict has destabilized the region, with the country now described as a fragile state (Peace Direct, 2015). Politician Mr. John Sunday revealed that the country is in limbo politically as they are still waiting for a new government that will have legitimacy and be generally accepted by the people across the different political, ethnic, cultural, religious, and social lines (personal communication, June 29, 2015). One of the rebel leaders in Bangui, Yussuffi Ibraheem, suggested that the religious crisis in CAR has inflicted suffering and pain on the people and caused enormous stress on the environment. He added, "CAR civil war has resulted in various human rights abuses, gender violence, rape and crime" (personal communication, June 28, 2015). The head of an NGO cited gender violence and rape, maiming, immolation, and other human rights abuses resulting from this conflict on all sides of the fighting.

The religious crisis in CAR has led to political instability in the country, causing it to have no legitimate government. This has made the future of the country bleak as there is no acceptable government to formulate policies and foreign policy objectives. Even the civil service that is supposed to carry out the function of government has been destroyed, and some workers have been maimed, killed, or displaced, becoming refugees in other countries. In CAR, there is basically no elected stable government on all levels (Peace Direct, 2015). The existing government is operating on an interim basis. The current situation is that there is tension everywhere as people are skeptical of the security situation since movements are restricted at night. The capital, Bangui, is divided on religious lines at a place called "Kilometer Five."[3] Therefore, it is evident that politically, no single person or government is in charge of the entire country as a result of the conflict. Rebels still control the northeastern parts of the country and dictate what occurs in those areas.

The conflict in CAR has led to the destruction of lives and property, a slowing down or stoppage in commercial activities, the destruction of small-scale businesses, and the discouragement of foreign investors. Other implications include the loss of lives and essential properties, provoked violence, instilled fear and insecurity, and panic among the population. The conflict has also led to increased frustration, suicide, mental illness, drug abuse, and other such other social ills. The implication of all these is a reduced workforce, social disunity, and insecurity.

Conflict management refers to the strategies implemented by members aimed at reducing or resolving conflict. Since the CAR conflicts have been cast in religious terms, they have developed a resemblance to deep value conflicts, which appear unresolvable except by force or separation. Different stakeholders like the UN, AU, and France have tried to intervene in the management of the conflict in CAR, which finally led to the de-escalation of the level and mitigation of the suffering of people affected by the conflict.

France was the first foreign power to intervene in the conflict because of its long-standing historical relationship with this country as a former colony. It, therefore, still wields great political and economic influences in the country. Mr. Patrick Ateri[4] said that France, in a way, contributed to the conflict as well because of their colonial policies that created great divisions in society and favored the Christian majority (personal communication, June 25, 2015). The French also handed political, economic, and military power to the Christian majority. This led to the marginalization of the northern part of the country, which was resource-rich. Therefore, the French intervention was viewed with mixed reviews.

Almost 40% of the respondents agreed that the intervention by CEMAC was also a major step in de-escalating the conflict. Their involvement in the conflict compelled the parties to sign the peace treaty in 2015 and allowed peacekeepers to monitor the actions and behaviors of the different parties to the conflict. An interview with a civil rights activist revealed that the United Nations had done tremendously well for CAR and that if not for their actions, the conflict would have escalated, and a signed peace agreement would not have been possible, which is currently responsible for the fragile peace (personal communication, June 30, 2015).

Bringing round table discussions to fruition from the conflicting parties under the auspices of a third party, Babacar Gaye helped mitigate the conflict. Alh Imam Oumar Kobine, the chief Imam for Bangui, mentioned that this really helped to reduce the crisis (personal communication, June 25, 2015). This is important so that aid can now reach areas most affected by the conflict; however, the round table discussion did not address the underlying cause of the conflict, which means the conflict may escalate again.

Sending Bozize into exile to the Republic of Benin was a major breakthrough and a way to manage the conflict. In an interview, a rebel leader said that when Bozize was in power, he did nothing for the country. One of the respondents said, "Former President Bozize was unpopular as he did not bring any meaningful development to CAR and was oppressive against political opponents" (personal communication, June 29, 2015). Instead of improving the lives of the citizenry, he persecuted anyone who worked against his policies. This made the country very tense politically and created animosity among various factions. This animosity prevented the signing of a ceasefire agreement since he was the one giving arms to the anti-Baleka fighters. The respondent stated, "Having lost a lot of territories to us (Seleka rebels), Bozize started giving arms to anti-Baleka fighters to retain power" (personal communication, June 29, 2015).

Asking the rebel leader whose government lacked legitimacy to relinquish power to a transitional government was also a major breakthrough and stabilizing force in the management of the crisis. The anti-Baleka would not have signed any ceasefire with the rebel leader as president of the country. Ethno-religious groups resort to violence when they are not assured of other ways of seeking redress and getting justice (Maitama-Sule, 2000). Ibrahim (1995) adds that a

major contributory factor to ethno-religious conflicts is the undemocratic nature of governance. He says many African regimes and rulers have repressed sections of the people and, by implication, ignored their aspirations.

Conflict, whether religious conflict or resource-based, exists in all human societies and at every level of society as social interactions and relationships are prone to swing from agreement to disagreement, which results in disharmony and, in some cases, tension and antagonism (Sani, 2007, p. 8). As such, conflict is inevitable in human and organizational relations and will naturally occur with the passage of time. Darby (1995) observes that conflict is neither good nor bad but intrinsic in every social relationship, from marriage to international diplomacy. Whenever two or more people are gathered, there is a conflict or potential conflict. The real issue is not the existence of conflict but how it is handled. This implies that societies are either in a state of conflict or peace.

The Muslims, who had been marginalized in political appointments and economic development for decades, recognized relief through the discovery of crude oil in the north, where they dominated, which they believed would change their situation. However, the Christian-dominated south attempted to control and manage it. The relative deprivation theory by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939) explains why the conflict witnessed in CAR is difficult to resolve. When expectations outstrip achievement, regardless of the absolute levels of economic consumption or the provision of political rights, frustration is generated.

Alhaji Mohammed Mallam Arzika, Charge D'Affairs of the Nigerian embassy in Central Africa Republic, who was deployed to CAR in 2012, said the conflict was difficult because people were denied not only their biological needs, but also their psychological needs that relate to growth and development. He stated, "The CAR civil war brought untold hardship to citizens, especially northerners, due to lack of health facilities, schools, water, security, food, etc." (personal communication, June 30, 2017). The people's basic needs (such as food, water, shelter, good roads, schools, and health facilities), most especially for those in the north, had been denied to them for years.

Religious conflicts are usually value-based conflicts, and they are the most difficult conflicts to resolve because they deal with something that touches on humankind's emotions and the very purpose of their existence (Obasi, 2009, p. 314). The conflict in CAR is more difficult to manage now because of deep-rooted hatred and anger. Fawole and Bello (2011) observed that religious conflicts in CAR have presented many challenges that border security and corporate existence.

5. Conclusion

CAR needs a new set of global ethics derived from the country's religious values. Religions and religious organizations have an untapped and under-used integrative power potential. The socio-economic development in any society cannot be achieved in the midst of insecurity and conflict because of the direct implications for peace, stability, security, and development. Prosperity and peace in CAR can only be achieved when the local, state, regional, and national dimensions of the current crisis are addressed.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends the immediate disarmament and demobilization of all the warring factions. It is also recommended that a general election be conducted to bring about stability in the war-torn country. Whoever wins should run an all-inclusive government to accommodate everybody and bring peace and progress. This should be supervised by the UN, AU, and other regulatory bodies.

The fact that sectarian violence is the main form of conflict in CAR should encourage a more proactive assistance approach on the part of faith-based NGOs, both local and international. Violence has long been a central element of popularized modes of governance in the country, and studies purporting to explain the reasons for and character of the war and focusing on fighters' stated grievances and/or the machinations of politico-military entrepreneurs are incomplete without recognizing this fact. Similarly, "post-conflict" initiatives aiming to "build peace" must also recognize the effect of different forms of violence unleashed upon the civilians in CAR amid the widespread anomalies in the CAR, which are likely to persist even after the wartime fighting has subsided.

The resolution must start with religious leaders guiding against ignorance among themselves because when the clergy are ignorant, political leaders will use and dominate them for their own gains. Christians and Muslims must not be biased against one another. They must trust one another and work together as religious entities, and each must study others' sacred texts like the Bible or Koran to properly understand the essence and purpose of religious doctrine.

The government and religious leaders must maintain their integrity and independence because without these they cannot do their work well. The clergy should not allow politicians to use them for campaigns because they will not be able to hold such politicians accountable when they are in power and are not performing as expected. This is the weakness of most African clergy as they seek approval and protection from politicians. The clergy should avoid getting involved in politics or elections and face their spiritual roles squarely.

The government should also emphasize the secularity and supremacy of the constitution above every person, organization, and group within the state. The principle of the rule of law should be respected above all, and good democratic leadership should be in place. Religious leaders should establish inter-faith platforms to quench religious crises before they get out of hand. This committee/platform should not be set up by the government so that the clergy will be able to assert themselves when necessary.

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