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## Religion, Culture and National Security: A Nexus

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### **Abstract**

The interconnectedness of the world has blurred the boundaries between religion, culture and national security. This complex nexus poses significant challenges to promoting peace, stability and security. This study on “religion, culture and national security: a nexus” examines the intricate relationships between religion, culture and national security, highlighting the potential for religion and culture to be exploited for violent purposes. It also explores the opportunities for building bridges and promoting understanding through interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange and people-to-people diplomacy. By adopting a nuanced and multidisciplinary approach, this research provides insights into the complex dynamics of this nexus and offers recommendations for policy makers, scholars and practitioners to navigate these challenges and promote a more peaceful and secure world.

**Key Words:** Religion, Culture, National Security, Violent Purposes, Interconnectedness

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian nation-state appears to be susceptible to a variety of forms of insecurity due to its inherent composition and nature. These include assassination, ritual killings, armed robbery, pen robbery, kidnapping, ethno-religious violence, suicide bombings, arsons, floods, food shortages,

unemployment, corruption, police and military brutality, impunity, lawlessness, and a plethora of other sources of insecurity. In general, the underlying causes of insecurity or security threats in Nigeria are poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, ignorance, and poor or ineffective leadership or governance. If these highlighted causes of insecurity are not comprehensively addressed, Nigeria will

continue to be at risk in terms of family, disintegration, social, economic, and political aspects of national insecurity (Emmanuel et al, 2024).

The primary objective or ultimate objective of religion and culture should be national security, as stated in the thrust of this paper. Religion and culture that do not culminate in the harmonious coexistence of diverse nationalities and the enhancement of national security is not deserving of the title. The world is increasingly becoming interconnected and the boundaries between religion, culture and national security are becoming increasingly blurred. As global events continue to unfold, it is clear that understanding the complex relationships between these concepts is crucial for promoting peace, stability and security.

## **The Concept of Religion, Culture and National Security**

### **The Concept of Religion**

Religion is defined or conceptualised by Taylor (1985) as a belief in spiritual entities. It does not include rituals and ceremonies, which are integral to the majority of religions, including Judaism and Buddhism. The propitiation or conciliation of power superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the cause of nature and human

existence, is what James Frazer defines as religion. Karl Marx, on the other hand, characterised religion as the opiate of the populace. Marx viewed religion as a symbol of the subjugated creature, the sentiment of a callous world, and the soul of a soulless condition. Religion, which is as ancient as society, is the result of humanity's endeavour to reconcile with a severe and ambiguous world. It has always been the final resort of all those in distress, as nearly all religious groups that are known to humanity originated in conditions of social and economic dislocation.

These movements were originally composed and led by the impoverished and oppressed in society (Albert, 1999). In other words, religion unites individuals of the same faith in a social and spiritual sense, ensuring a degree of physical and spiritual security in both the present and the future. The faith perspective in the Christian religion is centred on the Holy Bible and Jesus Christ (Oluwawunsi, 2013). Islam is founded on the Qur'an, one of the sacred texts of the Muslims, and its faith perspective is centred on Muhammad (PBUH) (Oluwawunsi, 2013). In Africa prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity, the African traditional religion, was in existence. Among other new religious movements in Nigeria, these ones

provide their followers with assurances of spiritual and social security. They emphasise that faith is the essential means of divine security in life, providing adherents with holistic divine security that encompasses the tripartite being of man (spirit, soul and body) (Admas, 2007).

### **The Concept of Culture**

In its broadest sense, “culture” refers to the set of beliefs and values held in common by a group of people, reflected in their shared habits of communicating and interacting. “Identity” refers to the unit to which an individual belongs. It can take various forms: the unit can be all of humanity, a particular civilisation, a specific nation, an ethnic group, a province, or portions thereof. In fact, individuals possess an array of identities—concentric circles, as it were, each representing a different sphere. The first circle would be the unique characteristics of the person; the second, the immediate family; the third, extended kin; and so on, through occupation, political affiliation, nationality and religion. Identity therefore refers not to specific physical attributes but to one’s relation to the environment in which one lives, and to all therein.

Culture as a specific phenomenon is by no means limited to its functions. In this paper

we will explain and interpret those we deem particularly important for representing culture as national security interest, which is most clearly seen in its special form – security culturea (Stanareviü, 2012). Through its functions culture helps to create an adequate framework for this concept, which is subject to various kinds of analyses. The final outcome of the development of the concept of security culture is the new role and definition of culture as national security interest. Just so and the analysis of the security concept can be implemented in the context of possibility of its development, firstly, as a separate human need, and then as an interest in the context of cultural needs, applying the culturological approach, shaped by the category of national security.

This approach can be shown through the articulation of culture in the security concepts, as well as on the levels of reflection, which are manifested through the prism of personality, society, community or entity; and thus reflects the culture as a vital national security interest. Namely, the impact of culture on the field of security occurred through identity (Jepperson, 1996), and the connections between these categories are made in various ways.

## **Concept of National Security**

The concept of national security has its roots in the origins of nation-states. Since the beginning of time, armies have been in existence to maintain national sovereignty and maintain domestic tranquilly; history this has been documented. Civil and national security forces have also existed for millennia (Bostman, 2006). Governments, intelligence agencies, and secret services have been in existence since antiquity, including the Roman Empire, Benin Kingdom, and Bornu Empire, among others in Asia. Although the fundamental principles of maintaining the security of a nation are not novel, the precise English term "national security" was introduced into common usage during the 20th century.

The concept of national security can be seen as the freedom from starvation or a threat to a nation's ability to protect and defend itself, as well as the promotion of its cherished values and interests and the improved well-being of its citizens (Animoshe, 2006). It is evident from the aforementioned definition that national security is not limited to military preparedness and armaments; it also encompasses the political, social, and economic well-being of the populace. As a

result, any threat to any of these is a threat to national security.

Additionally, the issue of national security is so critical to national interests and the leaders of nations that they are willing to risk everything in order to defend the nation or ensure its security. Consequently, Walter Lippmann noted that a nation is secure to the extent that it is not at risk of losing its fundamental values, including life, property, and liberty. Nineteen National security also encompasses the necessity of ensuring the survival of the nation state by employing economic, military, and political authority, as well as the practice of diplomacy. While delivering his grand strategy, President Olusegun Obasanjo declared that the primary goal of national security is to fortify the Federal Republic of Nigeria, advance its interests and objectives, contain instability, control crime, eliminate corruption, promote genuine development progress and growth, and enhance the welfare, well-being and quality of life of the citizenry (Admas, 2007).

## **The Role of Religion in National Security**

Religion at the service of national security is seen as a natural element in man. To this end, religion does explain the social living of people and prevails in all aspects of the human society. It is an indubitable fact that

religion has a pervasive and powerful influence on the cultural, economic, socio-political and spiritual activities in the Nigeria society. Thus, religious beliefs and practices are fundamental for enhancing national security. This establishes the fact that the link or relationship between religion and national security is that of mutual transmissibility of impacts and their subsequent repercussions.

Here, we shall adopt the functional theory of religion to state that religion acts as a sociological tool which fosters a sense of belonging in human society and plays the role of community binding of social integration. Therefore, religion performs the role or function of re-inforcing the collective conscience of the society requisites for social order, stability, peaceful co-existence and in all human society (Keenan, 2007). With the above in mind, one can say that whatever constitutes fear before people, constitutes security threat to them. Religion has a role to help man cope with fear of the supernatural which man acknowledges every day. On this, it can be submitted that freedom from fear is the nexus between religion and security. Functionally, religion provides meaning to life in the face of frustrations, pain, loss and sickness.

Religion provides security against the mystery and vicissitudes of life. It equally provides and ensures freedom from pain and hard experiences and in this way, it serves as a security provider in all human society. It is against this background that one argues against the scientific and philosophical positivists that religion will die or cease to exist in the world and particularly in Nigeria. Religion will continue to perform its role in the society since it is always man's last resort when and after all other avenues for problem solving and man's emancipation has failed. As long as people still believe in and acknowledge the presence of the supernatural in their lives and affairs, irrespective of their philosophical and scientific orientations, religion will continue to play a very significant role in the affairs of man.

### **Religion and National Security in Nigeria: A Perpetual Paradox**

Religion and national security are related because their effects and consequences can spread to one another. Religion can be seen as the "opium of the people, the sign of the oppressed creature, the sentiments of a heartless world and the soulless conditions" (Keenan, 2007). Put in another way, the ruling class uses religion as an excuse for tyranny and oppression of the subject class.

According to the functional theory of religion, religion serves as a social tool that helps people feel like they belong in human society and acts as a community's glue for social cohesion. Stated differently, religion is perceived by functional theory as fulfilling the essential function of strengthening the society's collective conscience, which is necessary for maintaining social order, stability, peaceful coexistence, and overall human security (Keenan, 2007).

Religion has long played a significant role in shaping national identities, influencing foreign policy decisions and informing moral and ethical frameworks (Haynes, 2014). However, the rise of religious extremism and terrorism has highlighted the potential for religion to be exploited for violent purposes. On one hand, religion can be a powerful force for good, promoting values of compassion, tolerance and understanding (Appleby, 2000). Many religious leaders and organisations are working tirelessly to promote interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution and community development. On the other hand, the manipulation of religion for political or ideological purposes can have devastating consequences. The spread of extremist ideologies, the recruitment of vulnerable individuals and the justification of violence in the name of religion all pose

significant threats to national security (Kepel, 2002).

### **Managing National Security Threats and Promoting Harmony through Religion in Contemporary Society**

Nigeria Religion has a crucial role in addressing security concerns and fulfilling human needs. As previously noted, religion and security are inextricably linked as human security is the ultimate goal of all faiths. So religion may be modified. Repackaged to address, manage and control national security risks. Nigeria's three major faiths (Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion) should prioritise enhancing individual residents' security in the following ways (Gaffer, 2014).

- i. Enhancing Economic Desires and Security
- ii. Improving Food Shelter and Clothing Security
- iii. Improving Health Security
- iv. Enhancing Environmental Services
- v. Improving Personal Security
- vi. Strengthening Community Security
- vii. Strengthening their Political Safety

### **Impact of Culture on National Security**

Culture creates various means of protection in order to maintain the necessary balance between man and the environment and to keep him safe from dangers concerning the excess or shortage of specific life-preserving factors. The period following the Ice Age and the drop in temperature saw the introduction of fire and warm clothes and the building of the first settlements. As cultural potential and human activity increased, physical boundaries of social and individual life, as well as boundaries of the cognitive world, gradually expanded. Each new sphere of activity discovered by man involved new dangers. Culture's answer was to create more efficient means and mechanisms of protection (Stanareviu & Gayiu, ).

It took time for man to outgrow the primitive way of thinking and learn to tell the difference between dangers real (actual) and unreal (the world of magic and supernatural forces), so that, based on the real sources of danger, he could produce rationally chosen means of protection. The better man got to know his real and potential enemies, the more efficient his means of protection became. Means of cultural protection, be it material, social or psychological, constitute a unique system where each has its own sector of

protection; however, and this is very important, they are all linked to natural forms of protection. An attempt at one form of protection can result in weakening other important mechanisms of protection (Stanareviu & Gayiu, ). However, inadequate assessment and perception of dangers, specifically risks and threats, can lead to responses, i.e. means of protection, which prove inefficient and useless when danger occurs.

The correspondence between Voltaire and Rousseau in 1756 clearly shows the fundamental change in the perception of irresponsible behavior of human societies. Namely, speaking about the most devastating earthquake in the history of mankind, which happened in Lisbon in 1755, Rousseau takes the density of population in the city and the height of the houses to indirectly account for the death toll: "Admit, for example, that nature did not construct twenty thousand houses of six to seven stories there, and that if the inhabitants of this great city had been more equally spread out and more lightly lodged, the damage would have been much less and perhaps of no account."

Rousseauistic intuition no doubt represents a turnabout in the perception of risk. It projects us into a new period because it does not look

for an explanation for evil solely in the human domain, but rather brings to light the interdependencies between nature and society. It is no longer God that punishes; rather, the frenzy of human activity in the world becomes counterproductive when jeopardising the natural balance. In the ninth chapter of Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Language", he alludes to the role of natural disasters in forming human societies: "Human associations are in large measure the work of accidents of nature; local floods, overflowing seas, volcanic eruptions, major earthquakes, fires started by lightning and destroying forests, everything that must have frightened and dispersed the savage inhabitants of a land must afterwards have brought them back together to restore in common their common losses." Rousseau undoubtedly introduced a new line of thought about the relationship between nature and culture (Valter, 2012).

The role of culture's protective function becomes crucial nowadays with old dangers (famine, disease, fire and flood) acquiring new, more frightening dimensions and new ones arising at the same time, mostly through society's own fault. Polluted water springs, polluted air, soil erosion, catastrophic tsunamis, international terrorism, organised crime, and new diseases all threaten to

destroy higher forms of life on Earth. Mankind is facing the question of life and death and is therefore forced to pursue a complex and intense development of social means of protection.

Organisation of defense from a natural disaster or cataclysm, from animal attack or human violence, involves certain institutions such as households or local communities. Protection is very often based on anticipation and planning. Different house construction techniques, erecting walls, and selecting locations on which to build settlements to avoid the danger of tidal waves, volcanic eruptions or earthquakes or repel the attack of a potential enemy – all these forms of anticipatory or preventive protection could be linked with the biological need for security and its culture-based protection responses (Stanareviu & Gayiu, ). In other words, it includes mental images, that is, appropriate schemes of reality of a collective, social and cultural nature which strive to be effective. "In the 20th century the cultural model of the perception of danger and risk openly opposes the rational model of the economic or expert type. In the former, the emphasis is on values, personal views, and the role of individual experience, in the latter – on current priorities such as economic gain" (Valter, 2012).



The security function of culture “accompanies” the protective allowing us to tell the difference between what is good for us and what is not. It is this difference that generates conflict at different levels, for what is good for us is not necessarily good for others and vice versa. Through its security function culture teaches us to spot danger, identify the “enemy”, uphold the chosen values and, by means of correctly steered and well-thought-out communication, make compromises and seek solutions that will be less “painful” but nonetheless ensure survival, offer protection, maintain order and lend meaning to life, even death.

Culture plays a vital role in shaping national identities, influencing foreign policy decisions and informing moral and ethical frameworks (Huntington, 1996). Cultural differences can often be a source of tension and conflict, particularly when different cultural values and norms come into contact. However, culture can also be a powerful tool for building bridges and promoting understanding. Cultural exchange programmes, educational initiatives and people-to-people diplomacy can all help to foster greater understanding and cooperation between nations (Nye, 2004).

## **The Intersection of Religion, Culture and National Security**

The world is increasingly interconnected, and the boundaries between religion, culture and national security are becoming increasingly blurred. As global events continue to unfold, it is clear that understanding the complex relationships between these concepts is crucial for promoting peace, stability and security. The intersection of religion, culture and national security is complex and multifaceted. On one hand, the manipulation of religion and culture for political or ideological purposes can have devastating consequences. On the other hand, the promotion of interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange and people-to-people diplomacy can help to foster greater understanding and cooperation between nations. To navigate this complex nexus, policy makers, scholars and practitioners must adopt a nuanced and multidisciplinary approach. This requires the following:

- i. Understanding: developing a deep understanding of the complex relationships between religion, culture and national security (Katzenstein, 2010).
- ii. Dialogue: fostering open and inclusive dialogue between

- different religious and cultural communities (Bloom, 2005).
- iii. Cooperation: building partnerships and collaborations between governments, civil society organisations and religious leaders to promote peace, stability and security (Johnson, 2011).
  - iv. Education: Promoting education and cultural exchange programmes to foster greater understanding and empathy between different nations and cultures (Huntington, 1996).

## Conclusion

This paper has been able to show that religion is a potent and veritable tool for enhancing national security; also, it has revealed that culture and its normative function help establish and develop norms and rules which are used to steer useful and purposeful behavior while preventing harmful and socially unacceptable activity. Religion and culture create various means of protection and their security and protection function are usually based on anticipatory and planning activities with the purpose of determining in a timely manner which means must be used and to what extent. This function stems from

the decision made by religious bodies, the society or a community to distinguish good from evil, what is good for society as a whole from what is not, and to uphold the chosen values by taking measures which ensure survival, provide protection, maintain order and peace, and lend meaning to everything produced by society and the individual.

The intersection of religion, culture and national security is a complex and multifaceted issue. While there are many challenges to be addressed, there are also many opportunities for building bridges and promoting understanding. By adopting a nuanced and multidisciplinary approach, we can work towards a more peaceful, stable and secure world.

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