Conflict in the Classroom: Educational Institutions as Sites of Religious Tolerance/Intolerance in Nigeria

Rosalind I.J. Hackett[*]

I. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, black Africa's most populous nation, it might be expected that education would be a contentious issue in terms of its provision, control, form, and content. I am concerned in this Article with the ways in which educational institutions—whether primary, secondary, or tertiary—have been connected to the growth of religious conflict in Nigeria over the last two decades. How might Nigerian schools and institutions of higher learning constitute sites for generating or countering religious intolerance?[1]

There have, in fact, been a number of incidents of religiously-linked violence involving Nigerian students since the 1980s.[2] However, efforts to utilize educational resources to achieve religious harmony and national unity also exist. Educational institutions may thus be viewed as microcosmic versions of more macrocosmic socio-political trends. Furthermore, such institutions constitute important breeding grounds for religious ideas and movements.

In that vein, Part II of this Article examines the history of religious education in Nigeria, focusing primarily on primary and secondary school education. Part III examines the role student organizations have played in shaping religious education

* Lindsay Young Professor in the Humanities, Department of Religious Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I wish to thank the following people for their assistance with the preparation and/or writing of this essay: Dr. Matthews A. Ojo, Professor H.O. Danmole, Dr. Jonathan Reynolds, Dr. Abdulkader Tayob, and Professor Abdullahi An-Na'im.

1. The topic of this paper forms part of a wider study I am engaged in for the United States Institute of Peace. *See* Rosalind I.J. Hackett, *Nigeria: Religion in the Balance* (2000) (unpublished manuscript, on file with the *Brigham Young University Law Review*).

2. *See infra* Section II.

discourse and policy in Nigeria. Part IV discusses religious education in the specific context of universities. Parts II through IV of this Article thus explore specific examples of religious conflict in the realm of education.

The examples that I utilize for analytical discussion are varied in that some pertain directly to curricular matters, as in the case of religious education, while others concern religious activities at educational sites. Some examples are more concerned with constitutional issues, namely religious bias in the educational sector and unequal access to state and federal resources. However, all of these examples bear on the relationship of religion and the state in a multireligious society such as Nigeria,[3] as well as on freedom of religion.[4] Adopting education as a lens through which we view rights pertaining to freedom of religion or belief has the methodological and theoretical advantage of obliging us to consider these questions at local "grassroots," regional, and national levels.

My analysis of these examples leads me to conclude in Part V of this Article that the Nigerian system which encourages a confessional approach to religious instruction in the schools has contributed to the further polarization of Nigerian society along religious lines. The system also leads to probable violations of the principles of religious freedom embodied in the U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981).[5] I

3. Nigeria is a multireligious state, with approximately forty-five percent Muslims, thirty-seven percent Christians, and the remainder adhering to localized, indigenous forms of religious practice, claiming no religious affiliation, or belonging to one of the Eastern-related or spiritual science religious organizations which have become part of the religious landscape in the last few decades. *See, e.g.*, ROSALIND I.J. HACKETT, RELIGION IN CALABAR: THE RELIGIOUS LIFE AND HISTORY OF A NIGERIAN TOWN (1989). However, statistics concerning religious affiliation are unavailable or unreliable. In fact, religious affiliation was excluded from the last census in 1991 for fear of political manipulation.

4. Officially, Nigeria is a secular state with freedom of religion guaranteed in the Nigerian Constitution. *See* NIG. CONST. (1979) ch. I, § 10; NIG. CONST. (Promulgation Decree of 1989) No. 12. Section 11 of the latter states, "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion." NIG. CONST. (1979) ch. I, pt. II, § 11. Pending the promulgation of the Constitution written by the Constitutional Conference in 1995, subsequently approved by the Head of State, the Government observes some provisions of the 1979 and 1989 Constitutions. The decree suspending the 1979 Constitution was not repealed and the 1989 Constitution has not been implemented.

5. U.N. GAOR, 36th Sess., pt. 1, at 332, U.N. Doc. GA/6546 (1981).

therefore recommend that the current system be abandoned in favor of one in which nonconfessional religious education is presented in an objective non-normative way.

II. HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Nigeria, like many other African nation-states that have emerged from under the cloak of colonialism, has sought to negotiate equitably its extensive ethnic and religious pluralism,[6] and channel such diversity into national integration. Many changes have been required to divest the country of its colonial heritage, not the least of which were educational reforms. The much talked about imbalance in the country, then as now, stems from the advantages gained by those who received Western education.[7] It was in the South of the country that Christian missionaries were most active in establishing schools. Because of the British policy of noninterventionism toward the Muslims in the North, the latter did not gain as many of the benefits of Western education as their southern neighbors.[8] This resulted in a lasting and destabilizing dichotomy that is firmly imprinted on the historical memory of Nigerian Muslims.[9]

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6. The population of Nigeria is generally held to be over 110 million, with about 250 ethnic groups. The three main peoples are the Igbo, Yoruba, and the Hausa. Islam was introduced into the country in the fourteenth century and by the nineteenth century had become the religion of the Hausa, Fulani, and Kanuri. Christianity was introduced into the south of the country, mainly by British missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was not until the twentieth century that Christianity established itself with the aid of British colonial rule. *See* Don Ohadike, *Muslim-Christian Conflict and Political Instability in Nigeria*, *in* THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN NATIONAL LIFE: REFLECTIONS ON RECENT EXPERIENCES IN NIGERIA 102-03 (J.O. Hunwick ed., 1992).

7. *See* A.E. Ekoko & L.O. Amadi, *Religion and Stability in Nigeria*, *in* 9 NIGERIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE: THE FIRST 25 YEARS 110 (J.A. Atanda et al. eds., 1989); E.U.M. Igbo, *Towards Distributive and Social Justice in Nigeria*, *in* NEW STRATEGIES FOR CURBING ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA 202 (F.U. Okafor ed., 1997).

8. *See* Jonathan T. Reynolds, *The Politics of History: The Legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria*, J. ASIAN & AFR. STUD., June 1997, at 50.

9. The former Federal Minister of Education and former Secretary of the National Universities Commission, Professor Jubril Aminu, spoke about this continuing educational inequality in 1994: "Certain sections of the country will be highly disturbed about their future in a united Nigeria if they study the pattern of higher educational opportunities in the country." Igbo, *supra* note 7, at 210 (quoting TELL, Nov. 14, 1994, at 15).

Nigerian Christians, for their part, still harbor fears of political domination by the northern Muslim Hausa-Fulani peoples. They remember the *jihad* movements of the nineteenth century that promoted a new, exclusive, intolerant, and militant Islamic orientation.[10] Nor have they forgotten the Islamization policy of "One North, One People," promoted by northern Muslim leaders, which gained momentum during the First Republic of the early 1960s.[11] The majority of the country's political leaders have been from the North (although not always Muslim). Thus, while the various governments have employed differing quota strategies to try to reflect a "federal character," Nigerians have every reason to be doubtful of the concept of fair play, with nepotism and corruption rife at every level of Nigerian life. A statement by a former presidential aspirant, Alhaji Maitama Sule, reflects the prevailing perceptions about cultural differences which militate against national unity:

> Everyone has a gift from God. The Northerners are endowed by God with leadership qualities. The Yoruba man knows how to earn a living and has diplomatic qualities. The Igbo is gifted in commerce, trade and technological innovation. God so created us individually for a purpose and with different gifts.[12]

More specifically, religious education,[13] which in the past was often nothing more than the Christian religious instruction of the early mission schools, has had to accommodate the religious needs of Muslims (arguably more numerous in Nigeria today than Christians) and do justice to everyone's traditional cultural heritage. The place of traditional cultural and religious values in the school curriculum never ceases to generate debate

10. *See* ELIZABETH ISICHEI, A HISTORY OF NIGERIA 202 (1983); Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, *Islam and Human Rights in Sahelian Africa*, *in* AFRICAN ISLAM AND ISLAM IN AFRICA 79, 83 (Eva Evers Rosander & David Westerlund eds., 1997).

11. *See* Ohadike, *supra* note 6, at 104.

12. Igbo, *supra* note 7, at 212 (quoting TELL, Nov. 14, 1994, at 13).

13. "Religious education" is generally taken to refer to religious and moral instruction of a confessional or denominational variety. "Religious knowledge" is another term employed to mean the same thing. These designations can also refer to education *about* religion, as a global socio-cultural, historical phenomenon in all its varied manifestations. Generally authors make a distinction by referring to the latter as "religious studies" or "religious education." *See, e.g.*, DAVID CHIDESTER ET AL., RELIGION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: OPTIONS FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA (2d ed. 1994).

among educators, politicians, government officials and parents.[14] When African traditional religions are treated in the literature, it is often as an appendage to Christian or Islamic Religious Studies.[15] Other articles have documented in more detail the sensitive relationship between religion and education in the Nigerian state, in terms of its history and political dynamics.[16] I can only attempt to highlight some aspects of this history which bear on questions of rights.

In the nineteenth century, in what was then referred to as the "Western Region" of the country, the indigenous Qur'anic and nascent Christian missionary forms of education existed side by side.[17] However, the latter began to predominate by virtue of the career opportunities brought by its association with the colonial government.[18] While some Muslims allowed their children to attend these schools, the majority did not because of the fear of Christian indoctrination. However, it should be noted that British officers had, as far back as the 1880s, sought to accommodate the demands of Muslims by separating the teaching of English from that of Christianity, and by establishing Government Muslim Schools.[19] These schools did not last beyond the late 1920s but they provided an early model for the coexistence of Western education and Islam.[20] As a result, many Muslim communities began requesting schools and challenging the government over its Christian bias. When government subventions were not forthcoming, these communities raised their own funds through

14. *See, e.g.*, AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A RESOURCE BOOK WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ZIMBABWE (G. ter Haar et al. eds., 1992); TOYIN FALOLA ET AL., THE MILITARY FACTOR IN NIGERIA, 1966-1985 at 140 (1994); R.A. Akanmidu, *The Concept of the Principle of 'Live and Let Live' in a Pluralist Religious State: The Case of African Religion in Nigeria*, *in* STUDIES IN RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING IN NIGERIA 227 (R.D. Abubakre et al. eds., 1993); P. Ade Dopamu, *African Religion in Nigerian Society: Past, Present and the Future*, *in* STUDIES IN RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING IN NIGERIA, *supra*.

15. *See* GERRIE TER HAAR, FAITH OF OUR FATHERS: STUDIES ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA 146 (1990).

16. *See, e.g.*, PAT WILLIAMS & TOYIN FALOLA, RELIGION IMPACT ON THE NATION STATE 30-69 (1995).

17. MATTHEW HASSAN KUKAH & TOYIN FALOLA, RELIGION MILITANCY AND SELF-ASSERTION: ISLAM AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA 80 (1996).

18. *See id.* at 80-86.

19. *See id.* at 80.

20. *See id.* at 81.

numerous Muslim societies such as the Young Ansar-Ud-Din (1923), the Society of Promoting Muslim Knowledge (1947) and the Muslim Congress of Nigeria (1948).[21] These societies reflected the change in attitude among many Muslims–they were now prepared to embrace Western education and ideas of progress.

When the promises of the Western Region government to accommodate the educational needs of the Muslim constituency failed to materialize in the early 1950s, the United Muslim Party (UMP) began exerting pressure.[22] Protests were organized over the Muslims having to change their names in Christian schools and having to take Christian Religious Knowledge in a state school. The UMP demanded a more equitable plan of education for Nigeria that took account of the large Muslim presence. They also pressed for better academic training in Islamic law, and for a Chair of Islamic Studies to be created in the University College, Ibadan (then still a branch of the University of London).[23]

Political independence was granted to Nigeria in 1960.[24] The subsequent civilian and military governments both opted for strong state control of education. During the 1970s and the period of the oil boom, voluntary agency schools, such as those run by the Christian missions, were taken over by the state in an attempt to ensure secularism.[25] However, the takeover did not put an end to claims of religious discrimination in the education sector. In fact, it served to aggravate these claims in many ways. In the South, new state-controlled education systems appeared to benefit Christians. Better equipped and more numerous, Southern Christians were able to influence greater numbers of students, aided by the policy of religious freedom and the teaching of religious knowledge in all the schools.

Muslims in the southwest complained about Christian entrenchment, while in the North it was the Christians who complained about the failure of the local governments to supply

21. *See id.*

22. *See* H.O. Danmole, *Islam and Party Politics in Lagos: A Study of the United Muslim Party 1953-1966*, J. INST. MUSLIM MINORITY AFF., July 1990, at 338-42.

23. *See id.* at 339.

24. *See* ISICHEI, *supra* note 10, at 468.

25. *See* WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16, at 45-46.

Christian teachers.[26] Furthermore, Christians resented the government takeover of Christian-built schools. In Kaduna State in the North, Christians claimed that the takeover of their schools was initiated by Muslims, and that the move to make Islamic education compulsory in the schools (when Christianity was not) was further evidence of the special status of Islam in the eyes of the government.[27]

Amidst this controversy regarding education and religion, the government introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in 1976. However, the system was inadequately prepared for the massive influx of students that followed its introduction. People were quick to blame the government takeover of the schools, and attribute the falling education standards to the absence of religious instruction.[28] Some Muslims saw the UPE scheme as a conspiracy to destroy Islamic education and disrupt the entire Muslim community by producing children with little knowledge of Islam and prone to immoral practices.[29] Yet in Ilorin, a large Muslim city, the educational expansion of the mid-1970s seems to have benefitted the private Arabic schools in the town, creating jobs for teachers and students. Islamic subjects, as well as Arabic, became established at different levels within the public educational system. So, contrary to many fears, as Stefan Reichmuth points out in his survey on Islamic education in Ilorin, there has been a "continuous interaction of the different forms of 'Western' and Islamic education in Nigeria."[30] As he astutely observes, this type of interaction "calls rather for a model whereby educational systems are seen as resulting from conflict and interaction within a given society."[31]

It was expected by some that during the Second Republic the economically weakened government would return the schools to their previous owners. But that was not to be until a

26. *See id.* at 48-49.

27. *See* KUKAH & FALOLA, *supra* note 17, at 155.

28. *See* WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16, at 48-49.

29. *See* Ohadike, *supra* note 6, at 106-07. It is important to note here that Islamic learning and its emphasis upon literacy had preceded the advent of Western education by several centuries.

30. Stefan Reichmuth, *Islamic Learning and Its Interaction with "Western" Education in Ilorin, Nigeria, in* MUSLIM IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA 179 (Louis Brenner ed., 1993).

31. *Id.*

number of voluntary agencies, namely the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches, sued the Lagos State Government in 1981 for failing to hand over the private primary schools. The previous owners finally won their case after an appeal in 1986. The Lagos case was observed with interest around the country. Some Catholics in the East staged demonstrations with the same intent, but differing reactions from governors and opposition from the teachers' union produced mixed results.

Another round of controversies over religion in the schools was sparked in the 1980s in Oyo State in the southwestern part of the country by the noncompliance of some school principals with the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of worship and religious instruction.[32] The state issued a circular detailing the rights of pupils and the responsibilities of the schools to avoid religious discrimination and rivalry. Separate morning devotions were to be observed; no mosques could be built in "Christian" schools; and no chapels could be built in "Muslim" schools.[33] But the circular aggravated, rather than pacified, Christian-Muslim tensions.[34] Christians saw the circular as evidence of the government bowing to Muslim demands. From their side, the Muslims continued to protest, as they had on previous occasions since the 1950s, the forced participation of their children in Christian worship and religious instruction, despite the mandate of the Oyo State Ministry of Education. Muslims also complained that the state government failed to supply teachers and texts for the teaching of Islamic Studies. The reply was the usual one: qualified Muslim teachers and necessary supplies were not available.[35]

Another controversy developed in nearby Lagos State, which was controlled by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). In 1982, the Governor provoked the wrath of the Muslims by banning *jumat*, or Friday prayers, on school grounds. Muslims saw this as a denial of their rights and a political ploy to appease

32. *See* WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16, at 50-57.

33. *See id.* at 51.

34. *See id.* at 52.

35. For additional discussion, see D.O.S. NOIBI, YORUBA MUSLIM YOUTH AND CHRISTIAN-SPONSORED EDUCATION (1987). Interestingly, despite the problems Muslim youths have experienced, Noibi does not advocate removal of religious education. He says that, unlike people in Western cultures, the majority of Nigerians are in favor of religious education. *See id.*

Christians.[36] The crisis was resolved by the decision of all UPN controlled states to close schools every Friday at 1:00 p.m.[37]

When the Second Republic ended in 1983 and the military took over once more, there were again varied reactions from the military governors with regard to the private ownership of schools by religious bodies. Some governors introduced fees or withheld funds from schools, while others returned the schools to their religious owners. The further deterioration of the economy in the late 1980s forced a reconsideration of the issues, and many schools reverted to the voluntary agencies.

It is important to recall that Christianity and Islam function both as minority and majority religions in the Nigerian context, depending upon geographical and historical circumstances. The cases adumbrated above reflect the prevailing situation in the South of the country. In the Muslim-dominated North, Christians find themselves in the minority, constantly having to negotiate their public presence with the Muslim majority. While space does not permit any lengthy exposition of the history of interreligious tensions over educational space and objectives in the Muslim-dominated North, some selected examples point to the ways in which discrimination may be experienced by the Christian minority.

In the North, the activities of Christians in the educational realm have often been viewed with suspicion by Muslims. These activities also caused concern among British colonial authorities, who were protective of the Muslim territories in the North. An example of such concern comes from the Middle Belt area of Nigeria. In his study of the Danish Sudan United Mission (a Lutheran group active in the region since 1913), Niels Kastefelt describes how a particular form of education, the Classes for Religious Instruction, took on political importance in Adamawa Province in northeastern Nigeria.[38]

36. *But c.f.* DAVID D. LAITIN, HEGEMONY AND CULTURE: POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE AMONG THE YORUBA 129-35 (1986) (arguing that religious cleavages among the Yoruba were not politicized as much as they might have been).

37. The "Friday Question," i.e., whether the Muslim holy day should be a public holiday in Nigeria as Sunday is for Christians, has long sparked heated debate in Nigeria. I.L. Akintola's publication on the topic articulates the Muslim sense of discrimination on this issue and the campaign for a "free Friday." *See* I.L. AKINTOLA, THE FRIDAY QUESTION (1993).

38. *See* NIELS KASTEFELT, RELIGION AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY IN MIDDLE BELT CHRISTIANITY 41-42 (1994).

These classes "had a status between ordinary school classes and religious instruction classes."[39] They were viewed by the British and the Fulani-dominated Native Authorities as "potential centres of political unrest, in which the Christians were engaged in clandestine political activities."[40] The Fulani authorities—who further viewed the classes as breeding grounds for Western-educated political leaders—sought to prevent new classes from opening. For their part, the Christians saw the hindrances to evangelism as "part of the overall Fulani policy of suppressing the Christians and favouring the expansion of Islam."[41]

Sometimes such interreligious tensions can be projected onto public symbols. This was the case in July 1987 when a disagreement over school uniforms flared up at an elite girls' school in Kaduna, a major city with a majority Christian population in the North of the country.[42] From June of that year, the Muslim students began to claim the right to wear a Muslim uniform (pantaloons under a loose-fitting dress).[43] They were in part influenced by the national campaign of the Muslim revivalists, as well as the Muslim Students' Society, which advocated appropriate dress for Muslim women. Before the state government had reached a decision on the matter, some of the female students began wearing the uniform and insisting that all students conform. This sparked a counter-campaign among the Christian students who claimed that they did not need to wear such uniforms since they were designated as Muslim.[44] They also pointed out the consequences of a differentiated uniform. They would stand out as Christians and this could be a security risk given the grave religious riots three months earlier in Kaduna State.[45]

39. *Id.* at 41.

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.* at 41-42.

42. It is worth noting that the school was originally a Roman Catholic institution by the name of "Queen of Apostles College." It was renamed Queen Amina College at the time of the government takeover in 1972. By 1987, a fairly even balance of Muslim and Christian pupils had been achieved. *See* Jibrin Ibrahim, *Les Uniformes des Lycéennes Nigérianes*, 29 POLITIQUE AFRICAINE 102 (1988).

43. *See id.*

44. *See id.*

45. *See id.*

Neither the intervention of the Parent Teachers' Association, the closure of the school, nor the decision of the state government to authorize two uniforms could calm the angry students. When the school was reopened the students drew up enemy lines and declared war on each other. The police had to eventually intervene with tear gas.[46] The school was again closed, and this time many of the staff and pupils were transferred before it reopened.[47] Despite the localized nature of the incident, it was seen as symptomatic of the growing polarization of Muslims and Christians.[48]

While the Queen Amina College conflict stemmed from religious issues, even a minor altercation of a nonreligious nature in a school setting may flare up into a clash with religious dimensions. This was the case in 1996 at a Government Science Secondary School and Teachers' College in Toro, Bauchi State. A disciplinary incident where a Christian prefect slapped a recalcitrant Muslim student led to an outbreak of Muslim-Christian hostilities on the neighboring campuses, with mutual destruction of property and stone-throwing. There were threats of violence and evidence of students entering the sacred sites of the opposing group with intent to cause harm. It took several interventions by staff, local government officials, and finally, the police before the pattern of angry retaliation was halted.[49]

Accusations of bias continue to resurface from time to time in the public education system.[50] During the first week of September 1998, some Muslims, led by a woman activist and former Deputy Governor, Lateefat Okunnu, demonstrated at the Governor's office in Lagos, claiming that their children were being subjected to Christian propaganda in Lagos public schools.[51] A more violent incident occurred on December 11,

46. *See id.*

47. *See id.* at 103.

48. *See id.*

49. *See* FOCUS: PUBLICATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN STUDENTS 4-5 (1996).

50. Professor H.O. Danmole reports that his wife, Dr. B.T. Danmole, witnessed regular and frequent accusations of bias in the public education system while serving as Commissioner of Education in Oyo state between November 1997 and June 1998. *See* Interview with Professor H.O. Danmole (Sept. 12, 1998).

51. *See* Personal Communication from Dr. Matthews A. Ojo (Sept. 29, 1998) (on file with author).

1998, in Nigeria's northeast Borno State when three churches were attacked by Muslims in the capital city of Maiduguri.[52] Muslims were protesting the decision by the state in November to begin teaching Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) in public schools. This decision was to comply with the National Policy on Education which requires that CRK be taught in all primary schools alongside Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK). IRK was a compulsory subject in Borno State schools, but a number of Muslims were prepared to fight to exclude any Christian teaching. Following the destruction of three churches by several hundred Muslims and protests by Islamic leaders, together with the fear of further violence, the state government withdrew the order to teach CRK in the schools.[53]

Some efforts at reconciliation were made. The Governor delivered an address in which he condemned antigovernment elements; soon after, a Muslim leader spoke out on behalf of the constitutional right of Christians to have their own religious education in the schools. However, the Christian Association of Nigeria[54] in Borno State claimed that, despite advance warning of the attacks, government security forces had failed to act. They declared that "[t]here is no amount of intimidation, threat or whatsoever that will stop the Christians in the state from requesting their constitutional and legitimate right of teaching CRK. We are all prepared to die for a better and truly peaceful tomorrow."[55]

As emphasized earlier, all these charges and actual incidents of religious discrimination in the schools of colonial and post-colonial Nigeria need to be seen against a background of general fears of domination and exploitation.[56] Such incidents are forever rife in a country like Nigeria, with its fairly evenly balanced Muslim and Christian constituencies.[57] These

52. *See* Obed Minchakpu, *Four Churches Destroyed in Nigeria*, COMPASS DIRECT, Jan. 22, 1999, at 7.

53. *See id.*

54. The Christian Association of Nigeria is an ecumenical organization which began in the North of the country in 1964 to defend the rights of Christians against growing Muslim hegemony and then spread nationally. However, a militant stance is more characteristic of its northern wing.

55. Minchakpu, *supra* note 51, at 8.

56. For a litany of complaints in this regard by Muslims, see, for example, Omar Bello, *The Dirge*, 3 AFR. EVENTS, Aug. 8, 1987, at 48.

57. However, Ibrahim Gambari, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Nigerian

incidents translate into popular theories of the manipulation of religion for political ends, on which there is a vast body of academic and popular literature.[58]

As might be expected, there are many calls for education to form the backbone of a healthy nation and many laments about falling educational standards in Nigeria.[59] But despite the best efforts of some scholars, religious leaders and government officials to transform the public education sector into a site characterized by a discourse of tolerance,[60] it is noteworthy that

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Permanent Representative to the United Nations, argues that the religious divide of Nigeria is unbalanced regionally with strong Christian minorities in the North and at least fifty per cent of the Yoruba in the southwest claiming Muslim affiliation. He believes this has reinforced ethnic antagonisms in a political system driven by ethnicity. *See* Ibrahim Gambari, *The Role of Religion in National Life: Reflections on Recent Experiences in Nigeria*, *in* RELIGION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA: ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY, AND POLITICS IN THE SUDAN AND NIGERIA 85 (John O. Hunwick ed., 1992).

58. *See generally* RELIGION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA: ISLAM CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS IN THE SUDAN AND NIGERIA, *supra* note 57; YUSUFU BALA USMAN, THE MANIPULATION OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA: 1977-1987 (1987); WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16; Olusola Akinrinade & M.A. Ojo, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Nigeria: Study of 1986 OIC Crisis*, J. ASIAN & AFR. AFF., Fall 1992, at 44; Jibrin Ibrahim, *Religion and Political Turbulence in Nigeria*, 29 J. MOD. AFR. STUD. 115 (1991); Jibrin Ibrahim, *The Politics of Religion in Nigeria: The Parameters of the 1987 Crisis in Kaduna State*, 45 REV. AFR. POL., ECON. 65 (1989) [hereinafter *Politics of Religion*].

This tendency to theorize political manipulation explains why policy which would have had educational benefits for all concerned was questioned on religious grounds. For example, Williams and Falola note the interesting case of teaching Arabic in secondary schools. While it could be justified as an international language in the same way as English or French, Christians viewed the teaching of Arabic as a means of Islamization and the issue entered the realm of "volatile religious politics." *See* WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16, at 56.

59. *See* Amadu Ali, *Education for National Development*, *in* NIGERIA: THE STATE OF THE NATION AND THE WAY FORWARD 423 (Abdullahi Mahadi et al. eds., 1994).

60. See, for example, the call by then-Vice Chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Professor Wande Abimbola, for the founding of a Centre for the Study of Religion, Ethics and Society. Professor Abimbola argued for research on religion and ethics in Nigeria to form a basis for peace in the country. The call was made at a conference on "Religion and Peace in Multi-Faith Nigeria," organized by Dr. Jacob K. Olupona in conjunction with the Council of the World's Religions in December 1989. *See* Olusakin Oladeji, *Centre for Religion and Ethics Advocated*, DAILY SKETCH, Dec. 5, 1989.

Another example can be found in the case of Professor Ismail Balogun of the University of Ilorin, renowned for having designed many programs that brought Muslims and Christians together for dialogue and for his publications. Opeloye makes a similar plea, from a Muslim vantage point, for religious pluralism to be seen as the basis of national development. He endorses the government's financial support of academic associations such as the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions

confessional pressures have held sway in Nigeria owing to the fears described above. In other words, the open, pluralist discourse of the modern, academic study of religion at the tertiary level has not filtered down into the state school system.[61] Despite educational reforms, two single-tradition programs for religious education remain, with parallel exam programs in Christian Studies and Islamic Studies. These divisions are also reflected in the manner in which religious education is taught as a standard subject (usually with moral and religious aims) at the primary and secondary levels.[62] The situation is being further complicated in some states by the growth of privatized (i.e. both entrepreneurial and denominational) educational institutions.[63]

(NASR) and the National Association for Religious Tolerance (NARETO). *See* Muhib O. Opeloye, *Religious Pluralism as a Means of Development in Nigeria: A Muslim View*, *in* STUDIES IN RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING IN NIGERIA 51 (R.D. Abubakre et al. eds., 1993).

At the national level, Muslims created the Islamic Study Group of Nigeria (ISGON). They organized national seminars to which Christians were invited on issues of common concern. *See* M.A. BIDMOS, INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE 71-72 (1993). There are also more small-scale, regional associations such as the Institute of Ecumenical Education, Thinkers Corner, Enugu, eastern Nigeria, founded by Rev. Fr. Dr. Stan Chiedu Anih in 1981. In the founding legal document, the Institute is described as "an institution of higher learning and for the training of teachers of morality or religion as well as for research in, and study of, religious or moral education" and to "promote through research, advancement of religion or morality and its practical application to the religious needs of the State." REV. FR. DR. STAN. CHIEDU ANIH, RELIGIOUS ECUMENISM AND EDUCATION FOR TOLERANCE 137-38 (1992) (quoting Institute of Ecumenical Education Law, No. 6, at ¶¶ 3(2), 5 (1983) (Anambra, Nig.)).

61. For example, in the secondary schools, other religious traditions are sometimes taught under the guise of social studies (or in the universities, as sociology). But the problem with this approach is that it "relegates" living religious traditions to historical and social phenomena.

62. *See* CHIDESTER ET AL., *supra* note 13, at 73-74. Although, as Dr. Matthews A. Ojo notes, there may be practical—rather than policy—reasons why students may not take both subjects together. Dr. Ojo himself, as a student, took both Christian and Islamic studies in school. *See* Personal Communication from Dr. Matthews A. Ojo (Mar. 4, 1999) (on file with author).

63. The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) remains opposed to the return of schools to the churches, as voiced by NUT Secretary General Chief Gabriel Salade. In a newspaper interview, Chief Salade claimed that discrimination in admission policies and charging of fees would result if the schools were returned to church control. *See Why We're Against Return of Mission Schools*, NATIONAL CONCORD, February 17, 1998, at 20.

III. STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR EFFECT ON RELIGIONS AND EDUCATION

To provide a transition for our discussion from the school to the university context, we next turn to some of the key religious associations that operate on both school and university/college campuses. Nigeria's schools have long been targeted by nondenominational evangelical movements, with their soul-winning propaganda. These include the Scripture Union and the Student Christian Movement, which flooded the schools in the 1940s with their tracts and books from Britain.[64] With their emphasis on personal salvation, a strict Bible-centered morality, and evangelism, these movements laid the foundations for the later charismatic movements. Boarding school pupils in particular commonly solicit inspirational literature from national and overseas religious organizations. Many people attest to having become "born-again" Christians in the school setting.

Of particular note is the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS)—a fairly radical, interdenominational Christian movement which developed in 1957 among the minority ethnic groups of Nigeria's Middle Belt and then spread throughout the northern region, defending the religious rights of Christian students in a Muslim environment. While only a student group (at the secondary and tertiary levels) with the support of sympathetic teaching staff, it became a vanguard of political nationalism in the contested Middle Belt region.[65] Utilizing the print media as a form of self-expression and proselytization, the group has produced several magazines, such as *Focus*, which was launched in 1996.

Another group, the Muslim Students' Society (MSS), was founded in 1954 to counter the perceived indoctrination of Muslim children into Christianity in the schools.[66] The group initially flourished in the South because it made up for the discrimination Muslims faced in Christian-dominated schools. Initially, its main aim was to promote and strengthen Islam among students. It organized conferences, religious instruction,

64. *See* WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16, at 163-64.
65. *See* Ohadike, *supra* note 6, at 110-11.
66. *See* WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16, at 177.

and produced tracts, newsletters, and magazines—sometimes with funding from other parts of the Muslim world. By 1987 it had a membership of over five million and had garnered the support of major Muslim leaders.[67]

In the 1970s, however, a more extremist element began to characterize the MSS leadership in some of the northern universities. The new leaders turned their attention to proselytizing and protesting the sale and consumption of alcohol on campuses. The radicalism turned violent at Ahmadu Bello University during the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Social clubs were attacked and the student union bar was burned down. The MSS was implicated in attacks on the *tariqa* or Muslim brotherhoods and on Christian churches in the North. It also became an advocate for the place of Shari'a (formal Islamic law) in the new constitution, before rejecting the latter, as well as the existence of the secular federal government, in 1980.

The extension of its activities beyond the campuses reflected the influence of the Islamic revolution in Iran on many of the MSS leaders. In fact, widespread allegations exist that the Iranians trained some of the MSS leaders in Iran and supplied propaganda literature to challenge Nigeria's secular state. The radicalism of the northern zone eventually spread into the South, and MSS students became vocal in their call for the establishment of Shari'a courts in southwestern Yorubaland. MSS Students were also instrumental in the crisis over the cross at the University of Ibadan in 1986. This incident is described below.[68] In short, the formation and growth of student associations in Nigerian schools and universities has contributed to the Muslim-Christian tension and the problems associated with integrating religions and education.

IV. UNIVERSITIES

Universities represent extremely important and interesting sites with regard to our analysis of the relationship between religious tolerance (or intolerance) and educational institutions. Nigeria's university campuses have long held a reputation for

67. *See id.* at 177-80.

68. For a discussion of this and another incident involving MSS students, see *infra* notes 80-94 and accompanying text.

political activity—frequently in the form of critical challenges to government policy and military rule. Strikes, clashes with armed police, and closed campuses are not uncommon. As Jibrin Ibrahim noted, "[t]he important role played by universities in fomenting religious fanaticism [among Muslims and Christians] is not unique to Nigeria."[69] Such radical religious elements can also be found in other African countries such as Sudan and Tunisia.[70]

But before considering the negative incidents, we could begin by discussing the ways in which the universities have promoted religious tolerance. The academic study of religion at the tertiary level has a relatively long history in Nigeria. In 1948-49, when Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan, was still a branch of University College, London, it was decided to create a more pluralistically oriented Department of Religious Studies that would be more in keeping with the Nigerian religious landscape.[71] So it is not surprising that some of Nigeria's leading academics have long advocated teaching about religion as an important means of achieving national unity.

For example, Jacob K. Olupona, an internationally recognized Nigerian scholar of religion, makes a strong claim for the comparative history of religions to be taught from the secondary level to the university level in Nigeria. He argues that Muslim and Christian children should be versed in each other's traditions as well as the ethical heritage stemming from traditional religious culture.[72] Simeon Ilesanmi cogently articulates a plea for religio-political interaction in Nigeria in the form of "dialogic politics," and, consequently, perceives a greater role for religion in shaping a curriculum for national unity.[73] He sees the primary goal of education not as cultivating

69. Ibrahim, *Politics of Religion*, *supra* note 58, at 73.

70. *See id*.

71. *See* Rosalind I.J. Hackett, *The Academic Study of Religion in Nigeria*, 18 RELIGION 37 (1988).

72. *See* Jacob K. Olupona, *The Dynamics of Religion and Interfaith Dialogue in Nigeria*, *in* RELIGION AND PEACE IN A MUTLI-FAITH NIGERIA 1, 7 (J. Olupona ed., 1992); Jacob Olupona, *The Study of Religions in Nigeria: Past, Present, and Future*, *in* THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN AFRICA: PAST, PRESENT AND PROSPECTS 185 (J. Platvoet et al. eds., 1996).

73. *See* SIMEON O. ILESANMI, RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE NIGERIAN STATE 61-63, 241-42 (1997).

good Christians, Muslims, or scientists, but rather as cultivating the "civic self" as a means of living together harmoniously.[74]

As is often the case, there is ignorance between Muslims and Christians concerning one another's traditions. African traditional religions fare even worse for a variety of political, cultural, and religious reasons.[75] The Departments of Religion at the Universities of Jos and Ilorin (which produce many graduates who will go into teaching) provide an important model for combating this ignorance by requiring courses in both the Islamic and Christian traditions.[76] Unfortunately, though, with the resurgence in revivalist activities by both Christian and Muslim groups on university campuses in Nigeria (over the last decade in particular), there has been a deterioration in Christian-Muslim relations and scholarly cooperation. Furthermore, Muslims are reluctant to allow Islam to be taught by non-Muslims (unless the scholar is a recognized authority, as in the case of Rev. Professor Joseph Kenny at the University of Ibadan).[77] For example, from the mid-1980s until 1997, the campus Muslim community at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife exerted pressure on the Religious Studies Department to employ a Muslim lecturer to teach Islam.[78] Muslims also resent some Christian lecturers using the classroom as a site for proselytization. The response of one Christian professor to me on the matter was, "If we do not capture these young minds, the opposition will."[79]

74. *Id.* at 242 (quoting William F. May, *Public Happiness and Higher Education*, *in* CARING FOR THE COMMONWEAL: EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND PUBLIC LIFE 244 (Parker J. Palmer et al. eds., 1990)).

75. *See* Hackett, *supra* note 1.

76. *See generally* I.A.B. BALOGUN, UTILIZING RELIGIONS FOR PEACEFUL UNITY AND PROGRESS IN NIGERIA (1981). However, Professor H.O. Danmole, a colleague in the History Department at the University of Ilorin, reports that a strong territorial and competitive sense divides the department of Religion. Interview with Professor H.O Danmole (Sept. 12, 1998).

77. *See* BIDMOS, *supra* note 60.

78. However, most of the applicants at that time had a narrow focus, so none was employed. In December 1997, a Muslim lecturer, Mr. A. Adeniyi, was appointed. Courses on Islam had been taught since 1977 by Rev. E.O. Oyelade, after the departure of the Muslim scholar Prof. A.R. Doi in 1975. The Department now teaches up to eight courses in Islam.

79. Personal Communication from a senior member of the Department of Religious Studies at OAU, Ile-Ife, in Ile-Ife, Nigeria (Apr. 1991) (on file with author).

The intensity of religious activity on university and college campuses in Nigeria, with its attendant factionalism and territoriality, has at times generated unrest which radiates beyond the boundaries of the educational institutions themselves. Frequently the clashes are over space and symbols. Born-again Christians, as they are popularly known, have become adept, in southern universities in particular, at transforming dormitories into mission terrain, sports stadia into crusade headquarters, and the refectories into charismatic discotheques, angering non-Christians and generating administrative concern.

Two incidents of this type of religious intolerance and violence may serve as examples. The first could be labeled the "Crisis over the Cross." This incident ended up becoming a national news item. For thirty-two years, a stone cross stood in front of the Chapel of the Resurrection at the University of Ibadan. In 1985, a new mosque was built on adjoining ground. Visitors to the launching of the mosque in late 1985 complained that they could see the cross while worshiping. Then followed several months of wrangling over this cross. The Vice Chancellor, Professor Ayo Banjo, called a peace meeting which resulted in deadlock.[80] It was resolved to erect a screen, but this plan did not placate the angry Muslims who claimed they were being distracted by the cross during prayers.

By May 1986, a wooden sculpture of the Risen Christ at the entrance to the Protestant chapel had been set alight, perhaps over the delay at erecting the screen. Some Muslims were also annoyed that the screen was nearer to the mosque than it was to the cross. A temporary screening for the Id-ul-Fitr festival in June was refused by the chapel leaders. By the time the Vice Chancellor was summoned to Lagos to meet with the Minister of Education in July 1986, the situation was extremely volatile. The Mosque Management Committee had already submitted a direct complaint to the Minister, who then purportedly called for the cross to be taken down. Within a week, many Muslims took to the streets with placards asking for the removal of the cross. They were joined by Muslims from outside the university.

80. *See* AYO BANJO, IN THE SADDLE: A VICE-CHANCELLOR'S STORY 69-78 (1997).

Following intervention by the state police commissioner, the Muslims finally resolved to accept the building of the screen.[81]

A far more serious incident occurred the following year, in March 1987. It took place on a far less prestigious campus, the College of Education in Kafanchan, during a Christian revival week entitled "Mission 87." Prior to the most serious incident, the MSS had already been angered by the Protestant students' erection of a banner which said "WELCOME TO JESUS' CAMPUS."[82] The college authorities asked for the provocative banner to be removed. There was also anxiety over the fact that the key speaker at the revival was a Muslim convert, Rev. Abu Bako. The real trouble began when Muslim students invaded the meeting and attacked the speaker and some of the Christian leaders. The offending students argued that the attack was in defense of their religion, since it had occurred after a female Muslim student overheard the speaker blaspheme against the Qur'an by the use of wrong quotations and interpretations.[83] She had reported the incident to fellow Muslim students who then purportedly went on the attack. A college official, himself a Muslim, was assaulted for trying to stop the conflict. He ended up in the hospital.[84] The next day the college was closed as a preemptive strike against further violence.

Some of the Muslim students then began blocking roads around the Kafanchan campus and intimidating local residents by forcing them to recite the Shahada or Muslim article of belief.[85] Since the town was predominantly Christian, this created panic among the townspeople. In the skirmishes that followed, the mosque of the College of Education was burned. Following interventions by local Muslim leaders, the situation was again brought under control; but this was to be of short duration.[86] Fresh violence erupted in the town of Kafanchan

81. *See* Kolawole Ilori, *To Be or Not to Be*, NEWSWATCH, Aug. 4, 1986, at S. 31; Dawud Noibi & Sayed H.A. Malik, *The Cross Controversy*, DAILY SKETCH, July 28, 1986, at S. 7; Godwin Sogolo, *Religion and Religiosity: The Cross Case*, THE GUARDIAN, July 28, 1986, at S. 9.

82. KUKAH & FALOLA, *supra* note 17, at 145.

83. *See id.* at 144-46.

84. *See id.* at 146.

85. *See id.*

86. *See id.*

some two miles from the campus. Christians began destroying mosques and Muslim property, motivated by rumors that Muslims intended to burn down Christian churches that Sunday.[87] By then, the official death toll was twelve.[88]

Before long, despite the actions taken by the Governor of Kaduna State, the riots began to spread to other cities and towns—Kaduna, Zaria, Funtua, Gusau and Malumfashi.[89] The riots were characterized by the looting and destruction of the homes and property of Christians and southerners. These reprisals instilled a general insecurity among Christians in the state and many returned to the South. The Donli Committee, which compiled the later report on the riots, listed "nineteen people and eight animals killed, 169 hotels and beer parlors destroyed, 152 private buildings, 152 churches, five mosques, and ninety-five vehicles damaged,"[90] all within the course of twenty-four hours.

In the view of Nigerian political scientist Jibrin Ibrahim, "religious fundamentalism" on the Kafanchan campus or other Nigerian campuses would have remained marginal had this not been incorporated into the goals of those bent on political domination, namely the powerful northern oligarchy dominated by Hausa-Fulani peoples.[91] This elite "mafia" is frequently credited with selfish ends. Having lost power after the creation of new states in the country (which devolved power to increased numbers of local state officials), this faction has "increasingly come to use religion as a tool to forge a new hegemonic coalition."[92] So, while acknowledging as a contributing factor the growth of influential reformist and revivalist elements among student religious groups and their outside influences in the U.S. and Middle East, Ibrahim thus prefers to attribute the disruption caused by these *jihads* and crusades primarily to this northern oligarchy's attempts at political manipulation. This was also the view taken by the then-head of state, President Babangida, in his broadcast address on the riots in

87. *See id.* at 146-47, 147 n.14.

88. *See id.* at 147 n.14.

89. *See id.* at 147.

90. Ibrahim, *Politics of Religion*, *supra* note 58, at 67 (quoting NEW NIGERIAN, May 12, 1987).

91. *Id.* at 81.

92. *Id.*

Kaduna State.[93] The inertia of the security forces during the riots is an oft-cited example of this, as well as the failure to apprehend the protagonist of the initial conflict at the College of Education, Kafanchan: Rev. Abu Bako, who now resides elsewhere in West Africa. The Committee of Inquiry also cited the decades of deprivation of the indigenous Christians by the Hausa-Fulani elite as a root cause of the incident.[94]

V. CONCLUSION

I have argued in this paper that the Nigerian educational sector constitutes a microcosm of wider religion-state relations. Its general shape and direction, and the specific issues of religious freedom that have emerged from it, have clearly been influenced by persistent fears of domination and manipulation, as well as actual cases of religious discrimination, by the respective religious and ethnic groups. As has been noted from the examples adumbrated above, each of the major religious traditions of Nigeria, namely, Christianity and Islam, exist as both majority and minority religions, depending on the historical or geographical context in which they are considered. Each religion has had its share of manipulating resources and political power to its own advantage. These local experiences play into, and also are negotiated in terms of, the historical memory and ongoing nationalist discourses on religion and the state. When violent conflict has resulted, these issues receive media coverage and get catapulted onto the national political stage.

While there are clear cases of failure to recognize the rights of minority groups in terms of education and religion, many times the inability to demonstrate equity in the education system is due to lack of resources, untrained staff, and poor governance.[95] Some of the problems could also be ascribed to

93. *See* W. AFR., Mar. 23, 1987.

94. *See* KUKAH & FALOLA, *supra* note 17, at 158-59. For fuller accounts of the whole series of events, see AFR. GUARDIAN, Mar. 26, 1987; NEWSWATCH, Mar. 30, 1987; W. AFR., Mar. 23, 1987.

The economic explanation is favored by Sabo Bako (no relation to the evangelist at the center of the Kafanchan riots). *See* Sabo Bako, *World Economic Recession and the Growth of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria*, *in* RELIGION AND PEACE IN MULTI-FAITH NIGERIA 147 (Jacob K. Olupona ed., 1992).

95. *See* TER HAAR, *supra* note 15, at 157-58.

the belief of the various actors—parents, government officials, educators, etc.—that the public school should provide the resources for the religious (meaning confessional or denominational) education of the child. This type of emphasis is also seen in the recent publication edited by Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report*, where "religious education" in the respective country reports is understood as tradition-specific "religious instruction."[96] As Williams and Falola correctly surmise, attempts to reform the teaching of religion in Nigerian schools in a more academic, multitradition direction or exclude it have failed for two reasons.[97] First, the provision of education was closely tied to the missions from the beginning of the modern Nigerian state. Second, there exists a strong belief in Nigerian society that religious education is closely connected to moral education. This idea can be traced even more broadly to the widely held belief of Nigerians that the foundations of a just and peaceful nation are predicated on its belief in God and religious values.[98]

As David Chidester and his associates rightly observe in their book on religious education in South Africa, separate religious programs in state schools are more likely, in a religiously divided society such as Nigeria, to contribute to further polarization along religious lines.[99] This type of segregated system is also more conducive to manipulation by the revivalist or fundamentalist elements in the society, which are a significant factor in present-day Nigeria.[100] Chidester and his colleagues strongly advocate, for pluralistic societies such as

96. FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF: A WORLD REPORT 55 (Kevin Boyle & Juliet Sheen eds., 1997) [hereinafter FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF].

97. *See* WILLIAMS & FALOLA, *supra* note 16.

98. *See* ILESANMI, *supra* note 73; M.I. Mozia, *Religion and Morality in Nigeria: An Overview*, *in* 9 NIGERIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE: THE FIRST 25 YEARS (J.A. Atanda et al. eds., 1989). For a specific example, see the text of the Nigerian National Anthem which reads, "O God of creation, direct our humble course, Guide our leaders right."

99. *See* CHIDESTER ET AL., *supra* note 13, at 74. As ter Haar notes, West African students, for the most part through the agency of the West Africa Examinations Council ("WAEC"), were constrained to take *either* Christian Religious Studies, Islamic Religious Studies, *or* African Traditional Religion, but certainly no combination of them. *See* TER HAAR, *supra* note 15, at 159.

100. *See* Rosalind I.J. Hackett, *Radical Christian Revivalism in Nigeria and Ghana: Recent Pattens of Conflict and Intolerance*, *in* PROSELYTIZATION AND SELF-DETERMINATION IN AFRICA (A.A. An-Na'im ed., 1999).

South Africa, the merits of a multitradition, nonconfessional approach to teaching about religion in schools.

In a paper presented at the Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion and Belief in August 1998, I likewise built a case for teaching *about* religion in an academic, non-normative way as a means of generating cultural consensus for religious tolerance. I find endorsement for this in the U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, where Article 5(3) states:

> The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of religion or belief of others, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.[101]

Moreover, the U.N. Human Rights Committee "is of the view that article 18(4) permits public school instruction in subjects such as the general history of religions and ethics if it is given in a neutral and objective way."[102] Furthermore, "[t]he Committee notes that public education that includes instruction in a particular religion or belief is inconsistent with article 18(4) unless provision is made for non-discriminatory exemptions or alternatives that would accommodate the wishes of parents and guardians."[103]

Overall, ethnicity has tended to generate more controversy in Nigeria than religious identity. Yet it is interesting to note that religious differences seem to have dominated in the educational context. This may be due in part to the greater

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101. U.N. GAOR, 36th Sess., pt.1, at 334, U.N. Doc. GA/6546 (1981).

102. *General Comment No. 22 on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Human Rights Committee, 48th Sess., U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 (1993), *reprinted in* FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF, *supra* note 96, at xx, xxi. In early 1998, an Oyo state court granted 12 pupils of the American Christian Academy the right to refuse the Bible study course required of all students. The court decreed that the students be granted leave to enforce and serve their fundamental human rights of thought, conscience, and religion. *Court Grants Pupils Rejection of Bible Study*, NIGERIAN TRIBUNE, February 28, 1998, at 19.

103. *General Comment No. 22 on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Human Rights Committee, 48th Sess., U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 (1993), *reprinted in* FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF, *supra* note 96, at xx.

political efforts expended to downplay ethnic diversity within schools and universities in the interests of national integration. It may also reflect a political underestimation of the mobilizing capacity of religious sentiments and associations. Alternatively, the democratic political participation denied to Nigerians by successive military governments may find its outlet for some in educational politics. The sensitivity of the educational sector is also a factor, given its symbolic and actual role as the nurturing ground of the next generation—notably its leaders. As the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, Professor Abdelfattah Amor, noted in his address to the Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion and Belief in August 1998, the battle against religious persecution and discrimination will not have lasting success if it is not grounded in an educational system (notably its "hard core," the primary and secondary institutions of learning), that is itself predicated on values of tolerance and freedom. Access to resources and equitable distribution thereof are clearly paramount in Nigeria's educational system, for justice needs to be done and seen to be done in this area of people's lives in which everyone has a stake one way or another.