



Rethinking Inter-Faith Relations in Nigeria: A Study of Christian-Muslims Relations in Bayelsa State, 1997-2015

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Abstract

Religious crises in Nigeria are no longer news today. Previously the *Boko Haram* insurgency sacked many communities, destroying lives and properties, especially in northern parts of Nigeria. These religious motivated crises have, so far, dented the image of Islam in the North (especially among other faiths) and other parts of the country. However, the narrative in Bayelsa State posits a different view. This paper examines the nature of inter-faith relations in Bayelsa, 1997-2015. It is an area that enjoys peaceful inter-faith relations, despite the presence of both Christians and Muslims. Unlike Northern Nigeria where there was incessant religiously motivated violence, Muslims in Bayelsa enjoy moderate harmonious relations with their Christians counterparts. The paper found that while there was never a time both Christians and Muslims got entangled in a religious motivated physical conflict in Bayelsa, the age-long struggle for dominance between the two faiths was inevitable in the area. The paper discovered growing but salient challenges in the interfaith relations among Christians and Muslims in Bayelsa. The study relies on interviews and sourced information from secondary sources. The paper finally argues that, though doctrinal difference was inevitable among the two faiths, there was no recorded religious motivated mayhem in Bayelsa. The study further suggested that other states in the country should emulate this for a better and prosperous Nigeria.



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Introduction

The need to have a harmonious relationship between/among the different peoples living in Bayelsa cannot be over emphasized. Man, no doubt, had been a social animal. At any point, however,

after contacts are established; there are inevitable chances of conflict emanating from economic, political and religious biases. The case was not different among the Christian Muslims in Bayelsa. Nigeria is a country with a diverse religious

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landscape, with Christianity and Islam being the two dominant religions. Historically, there have been tensions between these two groups, but in recent years there have been efforts to improve interfaith relations.

One key issue that has contributed to tensions between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is religious extremism. Boko Haram, a terrorist group based in Nigeria, that has targeted both Christians and Muslims in several communities in northern Nigeria had, dented the initial cordial relationship enjoyed in those affected areas. This led to a sense of mistrust and fear between the two groups. Additionally, there have been instances of communal violence between Christians and Muslims, often sparked by disputes over land or political power.

It must be noted here that relations between holders of different religious beliefs and the value differences between the conflicting doctrines is another important source of inter-group conflict. (Akinyele, 2003). Akinyele defined inter-group relations as a simple or complex, conflicting or accommodating, cooperating, consensual, peaceful or acrimonious; intense, dense or indifferent way that one group is connected or associated with each other. (Pongri, 1987, p. 4). By this definition, it is pertinent to note that there was a time in history that religious mayhem was recorded between the Christian dominated indigenes of Bayelsa and the Muslims living among them. This is not to say that there was no any form of feuds between adherents of the two faiths. This paper aims at discussing those challenges as they affect the inter-faith relations between the people of the host communities and the Muslims.

Conceptual Framework

Inter-group relation is the interaction between social groups in large political set ups like countries or in smaller territorial organizations, such as regions. In a more enlarged way, Pongri, J. H. defined inter-group relations as,

The interaction between social classes or groups (race, sex, class, occupational, religious, ethnic, communal, etc.). He said it is the interaction in large political set ups like nations, and territorial organizations such as regions or in small communal organizations like ethnic groups and the conflicts which arise from such interactions. He further

explained that inter-group relations also entail accommodation and integration processes which take place over a long period of time. Despite this, in all political organizations, he continued, the process of integration and accommodation is constantly threatened by various inter-group contradictions. Going further he posited that inter-group relations involve cooperation and conflicts. At a given time, he further reiterated, preceding historical developments determine whether cooperation or conflict would characterize inter-group relations in a given geo-political area. (Pongri, 1987, p. 5).

When related to Bayelsa as a social arena where people have interacted for centuries, we will see that there was a twist at a point in time. The area is made up of different ethnic groups such as Ijaw, Nembe, Ogbia, and Epie-Atisa as well as traders from the hinterland (mostly Hausa); who have related with one another for a very long time before the advent of colonialism. This pre-colonial relationship was built on the comparative economic advantages they enjoyed in their distinct regions. This has been recognized by many scholars that the various Nigerian peoples have had a long period of interaction among themselves. Their argument was built on the facts of geography as well as economic, socio-political and religious factors. (*Several scholars had researched on inter-group relations, among them included -*) (Akinyele, 2003) (Akinwumi O., *et al.*, 2006) (Oti, 1958).

The people of Bayelsa, and the Muslim Community among them have had a very long history of inter-relations. The Muslim community has been suppliers of animals, farm produce and ornaments such as cattle, goats, yams, onions, tomatoes, and pepper, wristwatches, earrings, necklaces etc. All of this existed for a long time, even though some of the items are recent such as wristwatches and so on. It was in this process that some of them decided to establish permanent residence in the Central Niger Delta and its environs, especially in Aritarlin, Gwegwe, Onopa, Amarata, Yenizue-Gene, Akenfa, and Igbogene. (Mohammed, 2018).

The most populated Muslim Community is located around Swali market in Yenagoa. Other settlements have similar characteristics which explain the commercial disposition of the Muslim (particularly the Hausa) in their host communities in Bayelsa.

While most other non-indigenous Muslims live in rented houses, the Hausa are predominantly clustered around shanties popularly called *bacha*, and uncompleted buildings. Generally, the mosque is not only a sanctuary but also an abode for many who as well transact business by displaying their wares around the premises. This is not to say the people of Bayelsa were not hospitable. It is a phenomenon among not only strangers/settlers but even the indigenes too. While it can easily be attributed to poverty on one hand, it can also be linked to high population and the acute shortage of accommodation due to nature of the terrain (waterlogged) which makes it difficult/expensive to build houses.

Brief History of Bayelsa

The name Bayelsa was derived from three acronyms such as BALGA, YELGA, and SALGA. BALGA stands for Brass Local Government Area, YELGA for Yenagoa Local Government Area, and SALGA for Sagbama Local Government Area respectively; out of which the first two letters of each acronyms BA-YEL-SA made up the name of our area of study. Prior to the State creation in 1996, the three local government areas formed a Federal Senatorial District during the 1979 general elections. (Ajayi, *et al.*, 1980).

However, to understand the historical origin of Bayelsa State, we must go back to the struggle for the creation of Rivers State out of which our area of study was later created too. As one of the major ethnic groups in the Niger Delta, the Ijaw were politically active around 1941 when they formed what was known as the Ijaw Peoples League (IPL). (Tuaweri, 2008, p. 110)⁷ Right from inception, their main aim was to struggle for the separation of the then Rivers Territory from Owerri Province. In six years, their agitation yielded result when the then Rivers Province was created in 1947. The new Province comprised of Port-Harcourt, Ahoada, Brass, Ogoni, and Degema. (Porter, 1931). This was a watershed in the subsequent political movements that led to the creation of Bayelsa State.

The people, at first, advocated for Abayelsa State in an effort to merge with the people of Rivers West Senatorial District of Ahoada Local Government Area in 1991; but this failed. In a relentless effort, they forwarded a proposal to the then General Sani

Abacha led military administration in 1993. One of the arguments put forward was the desire of the people to meet their special development needs. This Alagoa also went further to observe that;

The denial of self-autonomy was another argument put forward by the Bayelsa Movement.

It contended that though minorities were the progenitors of the State creation idea it has now been hijacked by the majority ethnic groups to the extent that the subsequent fragmentation of the Nigerian State from 1967 has put the dominant group at an advantage vis-à-vis the ethnic minorities. Indeed, the elites in Bayelsa area expressed their dissatisfaction with the reluctance of the Federal Government to create additional States out of Rivers State since its creation in 1967. (Bahatia, 1978).

When it became obvious that the area had enormous mineral resources like crude oil, and the abysmal lack of adequate development due to its neglect, as well as persistent agitations from the people, creating the State became inevitable. Thus, Bayelsa State was created on October 1st, 1996 with Yenagoa as its capital. Other local government areas include Brass, Nembe, Sagbama, Ekeremor, Southern-Ijaw, and Kolokuma-Opokuma.

Immediately after the State was created, there was tremendous increase in population due to influx of migrants from other parts of the country in search of jobs and business opportunities. Among these migrants were Muslims who, as recorded in history, always carry with them their religious practices and at the slightest opportunity initiate the process of proselytization.

Inter-Faith Relations

Inter-faith relations, as defined by Akinyele, is the relations between holders of different religious beliefs and the value differences between the conflicting doctrines in a given society. (Porter, 1931). Here the focus is on the manner in which adherents of different religions such as Christianity and Islam or conflicting doctrines within the Christendom or Islam engage in one form of crises or the other. While major religious mayhem was recorded in northern Nigeria such as the Zango-Kataf crisis of 1993, and the Boko Haram crisis that started since 1999; the case was not the same in Bayelsa. The paper reveals that

such clashes were among the Muslims believers who were divided on ethnic lines as they struggled for power and mosque leadership.

Aspects of Inter-Faith Relations in Bayelsa

Bayelsa is strategically located around riverine terrain which naturally characterizes its economy. The people of this region have for centuries mastered the environment by extracting from it most of their economic valuables which had sustained them all the while. Most of the inhabitants of this area are fishermen. They also engage in salt making, canoe carving as well as both domestic and long-distance trade.

The arrival of slave traders in Bayelsa stimulated the growth of a few trading groups which were in effect expanded into several of small Ijaw fishing villages that occupied favourable positions on the creeks of the Niger Delta. (Ajayi, *et al.*, 1980). The most important ones among these were Bonny, and Brass which only became a major slave trading State in the early 19th century. (Ajayi, *et al.*, 1980).

The Ijaw traded with the peoples of the hinterland who were mainly Igbo and Ibibio. They exported dried fish and salt to the peoples of the hinterland in exchange for vegetables and tools, particularly those made of iron. The pattern of this relationship was radically altered by the advent of the slave. The trade stimulated more contact between the Ijaw and the people of the hinterland especially the Hausa. One of their joint ventures was the trafficking of slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era. (Tuaweri, 2008 p. 110).

Trade contact between the Hausa and the people of the Central Niger Delta was not only predicated on the sales of slaves but also in the exchange of other items. Hausa merchants introduced locally woven raffia cloths from Kano into the Delta long before the coming of the Europeans. (Porter, 1931). Pereira, a Portuguese explorer, wrote in 1508 that 'canoes made out of a single trunk brought yams, slaves, goats and sheep from as far in the hinterland into the Niger Delta.' (Bahatia, 1978). The Hausa merchants referred to here, arrived through the great River Niger. Among them are herbalists who prepared and sold crocodile medicine for the people of our area of study around the 16th century. (Tuaweri, 2008, p. 110).

More Muslim settlers from Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Niger, Kogi, Nassarawa and Benue as well as those from South-east and Western part of the country migrated into the area in search of business opportunities. Others were serving and retired members of the arm forces, police, and other para-military units; civil servants, artisans, traders, serving National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Members, okada/tricycle riders, bureau de change, and so on. One of the misconceptions among the host communities was that all northerners were viewed as *aboki* (a name the local people use to refer to Hausa). Unfortunately, most of them can neither speak Hausa fluently nor are even Muslims.

However, the presence of the Muslims in this area and their activities had a major impact in the area of interfaith relations. These relations brought about converts, inter-marriage, formation of Islamic bodies/organisations aimed at providing an umbrella for migrant Muslims, converts to foster harmonious relationship with their mostly Christian dominated host communities.

Furthermore, there have also been efforts to improve interfaith relations in Nigeria and in Bayelsa in particular. One example is the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) in Kaduna, which was established in the year 2000 to promote dialogue and understanding between different religious groups. The activities of this centre are also recorded in different States of Nigeria including Bayelsa where the State branch of the Muslim Council work in collaboration with the State Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to bring about a harmonious interfaith relation.

The IMC made some successes in mediating conflicts between Christians and Muslims, and has also conducted training programs for religious leaders to promote understanding and tolerance in the State.

Another example is the work of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) who have been working together to promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation. They have issued joint statements condemning acts of religious violence and have also worked together on social and economic development projects.

The result of their efforts is seen in the peaceful activities of both the host Christian communities and the migrants Muslims communities in the State. On economic aspect, the Muslims communities enjoy a peaceful environment where they engage in different business activities. One of the common businesses associated with the Muslims in our area of study was selling and butchering of cows and goats. They were the major dealers who import large number of cattle from the north to this area. Most of them also render different services in all the abattoirs. where cattle, goats and sheep are slaughtered and meat processed. At the market place, there were those who sell fresh meat during the day, while others prepare and sell barbecue at strategic places at night; mostly at street junctions and around night clubs and brothels. This was one of the lucrative businesses among the Hausa. Apart from those who sell at street junctions and around beer parlours, it is also common to find hawkers of fried meat (usually in pieces) during the day.

Another important economic activity conducted by the Muslims communities in the State was the business of buying and selling hard currencies. The name Arietallin Road, in Ovom, Yenagoa was famous as Center for Bureau de Change. The street was occupied by Muslim men who were in the business of changing hard currencies into naira. Our informant, who was also the leader of the group, Alhaji Atahiru Mohammed, said;

“Our presence here is known throughout the Central Niger Delta and its environs. We have clients from two neighbouring States of Port Harcourt and Delta who visit us occasionally. We also trade in gold and other precious stones (mostly ornaments). In fact, the entire street is filled with our people (the Hausa) and is also referred to as ‘Hausa Quarters. (Alhaji).

There you will find tailors, tricycle (Keke Napep) riders, and their mechanics, Kolanut vendors, food vendors and so on. Little wonder why the street has more Mosques than anywhere in our area of study.

Inter-Marriage

The increasing number of interfaith marriages and the formation of interfaith dialogue groups were also signs of improved relations between Christians and Muslims in Bayelsa. It is important to also note

that the situation of interfaith relation in Nigeria was more peaceful except for internal conflicts of interest among adherents of Islam the State. More can be done to foster better relation between especially the Muslim migrants and the indigenous Muslims converts.

Inter-marriage between the Muslims and their host communities in Bayelsa was not a frequent incident but there existed quite a number. Apart from the religious difference between these two groups (the host community and the Migrant Muslims), there also exist a sharp divide in their culture and tradition. Over the years, people have conceptualized marriage in their own different ways to serve their interest and purpose. Marriage, culturally, is an agreement between a man and woman to live together, with consent of their families, after fulfilling the necessary traditional rites and testified to by some members of the kinship group. (Tamuno, 1980).

On the aspect of socio-cultural relation, adherents of the two faiths in the State also engage in inter-marriage. However, there needs to first understand marriage ceremony in Ijaw culture and Islam.

Marriage ceremony in Ijaw land was not just the coming together of two people but also both families. It was performed in a unique way and manner. Just like all other traditional marriage processes, the Ijaw marriage process begins with an introduction called *ware ogiga gbolo* which is translated as ‘to knock door’ or ‘knocking of door.’ (Jeremiah, 2018). Although the suitor must have initially visited the parents of the bride to inform them of his intention, upon which he will be given a list of things to provide and a date will be set for him and his people to come for the introduction. He is expected to come with some quantity of local gin, alcohol and other beverages. If the groom is not an Ijaw man, he could be allowed to come with kola nuts although it is generally not a tradition for the Ijaw to break kola nut for prayers.

The significance of such visit is for the groom and his people to be formally introduced to the bride’s family. Spokesmen from both families would negotiate for an agreed date for the traditional marriage and a comprehensive list of items required will be given to the intended groom’s family. The list usually

contains 20 liters of gin, a canoe and fishing nets, lantern, mortar and pestle, box of clothes, money for the parents of the bride, tobacco, money for the maidens, attire for the parents, money for the bride's waist and money for the brothers.

With modernity setting in and for the fact that most people now live in the urban area, the canoe and fishing nets was usually monetized and handed over to the bride along-side money for her waist. The bride wealth varies from family to family or clan to clan depending on the state and it is usually dependent on the bride's father and the financial strength of the groom. On the day of the marriage, friends and well-wishers are invited to witness the grand ceremony. The bride's family would first ensure the requirements on the list have been fulfilled. As usual, before the bride is presented to the family of the groom, other maidens are presented to be sure the groom knows his bride. Once she has been identified, the gifts would be accepted and the bride and groom would be blessed in the traditional way. Then the bride would be accompanied to her husband's house by women, singing and dancing. Friends and other family members will come around for an after-party celebration baring gifts known as Odogboro. (Jeremiah, 2018).

However, we would like to observe that there is a big cultural difference between the Muslims and the Ijaws. While marriage rites among Muslims is guided by Islamic injunction, as directed by Prophet Mohammed (SAW) in the holy Qur'an, their host communities in Bayelsa still maintain traditional practices alongside the Christian/ wedding ceremonies. Meanwhile, whenever any member of the Muslim community indicates interest to marry a daughter of any community in Bayelsa, he was granted this request provided the prospective bride was willing to go ahead with the marriage and the parents also consented.

Regardless of modernity, marriage in Ijaw land was not the exclusive affair of the very individuals wishing to get married. After a successful marriage ceremony, the people of Bayelsa regard their in-laws as part of the respective families. This explained why the Ijaw often say yei nananiami ere didubamo nananiami meaning husband confers honour; and also fo-owei ine binaowei meaning one' in-law is his brother. (Nigerian Civil War, 2023).

Marriage between the members of the Muslim community and the people of Bayelsa, normally was celebrated at two levels i.e., the family of the bride and that of the family of the groom respectively. In a case where a Muslim is marrying a non-Muslim lady for instance, the bride's family usually carries out a separate ceremony based on the traditional rites of the people.

One of such marriage was that of Mallam Mohammed Auwal and former Charity, now Salamatu; and Alhaji Abdulrahman E. Enaware and his wife. However, it must be noted here that most of the women usually go back to Christianity. One example is Alhaji Abdulrahman and his wife both of whom are natives of Nembe. She was converted after their marriage and had a stint in Islam but has since reverted to Christianity. In response to an enquiry into why such phenomenon occur, all our interviewers agree that Islam does not impose on the people which faith to practice. (Alhaji, 2018). This may be true in principle but never in practice. It is easier for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim lady than to give out his daughter to a non-Muslim for marriage. This strong policy was responsible for the few marriages recorded between the two communities within the period of this research. More so, it hampers the trust between members of the two faiths especially among some Christians who feel the Muslims prejudice against them due to their creed.

However, the 2015 Presidential election was a dynamite which seriously affected the recorded progress of interfaith relations in Bayelsa. Even though the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was a nationalist party with members cutting across all States of the federation, the then issue of zoning and the northerners' glaring support for Rtd. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, the then All Progressive Congress (APC) Presidential candidate, brought more ill-feelings against the northerners/Muslims in Bayelsa. The electoral campaign was predicated on ethno-religious line as far as the people of Bayelsa were concerned. During that period, almost all the Muslims, especially Hausa migrants, left the State to participate in the elections on one hand and on the other for fear of possible post-election attack due to the high tension stirred by propaganda from both parties. Fortunately, the award-winning spirit of statesmanship exhibited by the then President Goodluck E. Jonathan when he called to

congratulate his opponent, and his earlier speech that ‘my presidential ambition is does not worth the blood of any Nigerian,’ saved the situation. Despite that, it is common to hear comment like ‘the north refused to vote for our brother because he is not a Muslim’ among most Bayelsans. (Juliet, 2018).

Nevertheless, most of the Muslims family in Bayelsa had a harmonious interfaith relations setting. In most indigenous Muslim families, one will find only the father practicing Islam. In another instance, one will also find either both parents their wards are Muslims or the wards practiced either faith of their choice.

Sponsoring Islamic Pilgrimage as an Aspect of Interfaith Relation in Bayelsa

Pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is the most important of all Muslim pilgrimages, and is the largest pilgrimage for Muslims. Muslims anywhere in the world are admonished to perform the Hajj at least once in a life time. The pilgrim should be there during the sacred month *Dhu-al-Hajja* to enter with thousands of the circumambulation of the *Ka’aba*, the lesser and greater pilgrimages, and the Great Feast. In the absence of war or other pestilence, the pilgrims go to Saudi Arabia by rail, ship or by air. Over the years, pilgrims from Bayelsa also perform the pilgrimage where they travel by air using the Port Harcourt International Airport.

We must reiterate that Bayelsa was a Christian State. More than 70% of its indigenes are Christians, others still practice traditional religion and a few are today practicing Muslims. There are many Muslims in the state majority of whom were Hausa, Yoruba, Igbira, and Nupe to mention a few. Yet successive Bayelsan governments sponsor those who intend to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj).

The first attempt to sponsor Muslims from Bayelsa to the holy land (Mecca) under the then military administrator Omoniyi Caleb Olubolade failed. It was during the reign of Governor D. S. P. Alamiyeseigha that the first successful pilgrimage was made and subsequent once too. (Luka, 2014, P. 90). The first contingent from Bayelsa was made up of 40 Muslim faithful headed by Alhaji Sama’ila Alagoa (Bayelsa), Alhaji Ali Ogobio (Bayelsa) and Alhaji Ahmed Muntari (north).

However, the number keeps soaring as the population of Muslims increases and more indigenes get converted. Both the Goodluck E. Jonathan led administration and that of Governor Timipre Silva also made remarkable impact on the development of Islam in Bayelsa. Our informant, while recalling the last months of Governor Timipre Silva, said during his tenure, the Governor was very helpful to the Muslim community in Bayelsa. Alh. Isa Ogbotobo, a former President of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) Bayelsa Council, recalled his last meeting with the Governor when in his remarks, Governor Timipre Silva stated, in November 2011 during a special dinner to mark the year’s Eid-el-Kabir celebrations in the Government House, Yenagoa, that;

“the State Government has established an Independent Pilgrims Welfare Board for Muslims in the State. That the decision to create a separate pilgrims board for Muslims was borne out of government’s recognition of the Muslim community as an integral part of the State.”

This gesture has not only fostered the relationship between the two faiths in the State but also help in strengthening Islam in Bayelsa. The table below shows an astronomical increase in the number of intending pilgrims from the State in following years except in 2007.

Table 2: Muslim Pilgrims from Bayelsa State in Some Years

YEAR	NUMBER OF PILGRIMS
2004	40
2005	138
2006	133
2007	85

Source: Table compiled by the author

The change was in connection with an internal bickering between the indigenous and non-indigenous Muslims. More so, State sponsorship by the State government also suffer a setback due to the bickering mentioned earlier.

However, the State Government resumed sponsorship last year 2022. The Government approved ten (10) seats for the Muslims community. In an interview with Alhaji Abdulrahman Eneware, fifteen (15) seats were approved by the State Government for any member of the Muslims community who intends to participate in this year's pilgrimage to the Holy land (Mecca). He further stated that a total of 5 seats were also sponsored by Alhaji Asari Doukobo as contribution towards the growth of Islam in the State. (Alhaji, 2023).

Challenges Facing Interfaith Relation in Bayelsa.

The proselytization of Islam in a Christian dominated society like Bayelsa or even a Muslim dominated area usually faces a daunting challenge in its interfaith relation. This is because the people in Bayelsa are predominantly Christians with strong cultural values that are to a large extent not connected to Islamic doctrine.

One the major challenges of interfaith relations in Bayelsa was that most of the Muslim migrants there, especially the Hausa, were males who unfortunately left their family in the north. This practice hampers the chances of interfaith marriages which, when encouraged, will foster more harmonious relationship through inter-marriage among adherents of Christianity and Islam in the State. More so, even those who live in Bayelsa with their family seldom give out their daughters to non-Muslims. On the other hand, it was more common to find Muslim men marrying Christian girls/ladies even though most families also detested such union based on religious grounds or doctrines.

Furthermore, an incident described as forced marriage which affected the interfaith relation between Christian and Muslims also occur in Bayelsa. The ugly incidence that dented the interfaith image of in Bayelsa was the abduction of a thirteen (14) years old Ese Rita Oruru, an Epie girl from Opolo in Yenagoa, Bayelsa whose parents are Mr. Charles Oruru and Mrs Rose Oruru. According to our informant, Ese was abducted on 12th August 2015 by Yunusa Dahiru, also known as "Yellow", who was a regular customer at her mother's food store. (Jimoh, 2017). Dahiru transported her from Bayelsa to Kano where they got married and she was obliged to change her religion and name. During the

first attempt on 15th August 2015, her mother, Mrs. Rose Oruru, travelled to Kano, where the village chief informed her that her daughter had converted to Islam, changed her name to Aisha, was now "married" and was in the custody of the Emir of Kano, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi II. Mrs. Rose proceeded to the emir's palace where she was insulted and assaulted on at least two occasions by irate youth, was refused direct access to her daughter despite being accompanied by police officers and was eventually told by the Kano Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to return to her home and report the situation to the Yenagoa CID. (Akinlabi, 2017). Her family sought the assistance of the press and local NGOs after failing to secure her release on several occasions. This unfortunate incidence was a bad pointer in the progress of interfaith relation in Bayelsa.

Another factor militating against peaceful interfaith relations in Bayelsa was the issue of global Islamic fundamentalism. Nigeria as a country has been facing such challenge for a while now. Just as S. I. Ugbegili puts it succinctly:

Religious conflicts in northern Nigeria where Muslims dominate is an impediment. In most of the conflicts, Christians have been killed by Muslims. This has made many in Tivland to associate Islam with violence and to abhor the religion. Specific instances of such acts of violence against Christians include the Sharia crisis of 2000 that raged in Kaduna State, the 2001 riots in support of Osama bin Laden's sponsored insurgency against the United States of America, the crisis over the Miss World pageant in 2002 which engulfed Abuja and other cities in Northern Nigeria, and the 2006 riots over the Newspaper, *Tyllands Posten*, in September 2005. (Ugbegili, 2002, p. 67-68).

This ugly picture painted by the activities of those Islamic fundamentalists was also a daunting challenge to Muslims in Bayelsa who were seen by their Christian dominated host communities as extremists or adherents of a violent faith. This was reiterated by our informant, a member of the Muslim Corpers' Association of Nigeria (MCAN), who lamented the misconception of Islam among the peoples of Bayelsa State. He said each time

they team embarked on an outreach, the people always argue saying Islam is a religion of terrorism. (Kaura, 2017).

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always argue saying Islam is a religion of terrorism. (Kaura, 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, while there have been tensions between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria in the past, the case in Bayelsa was different in the sense that there were no recorded crises between both faiths except among adherents of the fundamentalist Izala subgroup of the Islamic religion. Organizations such as the Interfaith Mediation Centre and the cooperation between the Christian Association of Nigeria and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs have been successful in promoting dialogue and understanding between the two groups. More so, unlike in the Northern part of Nigeria where there was incessant religious motivated violence, Muslims in Bayelsa enjoyed moderate harmonious relations with their Christians counterparts which is a very important aspect that needs to be studied and encouraged to foster peace among the Nigerian populace at large.

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