

# Innovations

## Religious Crises in Northern Nigeria: An Indictment of the Nigeria Press

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**Abstract:** Religious crises in Northern Nigeria have been a recurring issue that has plagued the region for decades. These conflicts, often characterized by violence, have led to the loss of thousands of lives, displacement of communities, and destruction of properties. Despite the efforts of the Nigerian government to address these crises, they continue to persist. This research paper examines the role of the Nigerian press in exacerbating these conflicts. The study aims to address several research questions, including the media's influence in catalyzing religious crises and their social responsibilities, particularly in northern Nigeria. Through a case study analysis methodology, we investigated and analyzed specific instances of religious crisis, and how media coverage impacts the escalation or de-escalation of these crises. By closely analyzing news reports, editorials, and social media content from various outlets, we identified patterns of bias, lack of contextual reporting, and the propagation of stereotypes that compound religious tensions. The findings suggest that while the press plays a crucial role in informing the populace, it can also contribute to the escalation of conflict through inadequate and unbalanced coverage. The study's significant findings highlight the need for responsible journalism in northern Nigeria and propose measures to promote it. The conclusions drawn from this research have implications for understanding the media's impact on conflicts and offer insights into the field of ethnic and religious crises in the region. This study's potential applications lie in informing practitioners and policymakers about the importance of responsible media practices in line with the social responsibility theory of the press.

**Keywords:** Religious, Crisis, Press, Northern Nigeria, and Indictment

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## **Introduction and Background to the Study:**

In modern day Africa, the question of the crisis of the text poses a big challenge for media scholars. By the text is meant the content of media signifiers. The following are the kind or genre of mass media texts: news items, features, news analysis, news commentary, news in depth, news interpretation, news directives, news editorials, and newsletters. It can be seen from this position that the text that was analyzed by the structuralists as the constant and unchangeable is actually constant and always changeable. This problem resulted in the debate between the structuralists and the post-structuralists. The post-structuralists disagreed with the structuralists on the question of the exactitude and changeability of the media texts. According to the post-structuralists, the content of media texts is never stable and intact. Rather, what obtains is the fact that as society and its concerns change, the media also changes (Hall 1997).

One important area of media content where crucial societal changes need critical textual analysis is that of religious crises. The reason is that in religious societies like Nigeria, religious crises and conflicts have become the biggest threats to the existence of those societies. As will be shown in this paper, though these crises are issues of societal disarticulation and desegregation, the press merely reports religious crises as the actions of irrational religious fanatics. At best, the Nigerian press is interested in selling their own particular type of religiosity - the ideology and practices of the liberal religion. It is an established fact that in Nigeria, and most of Africa, the press is a partisan institution in religious and inter-religious conflicts. The press has also generally been at the vanguard of the what Smith (2023) called secular deprivatization of religious institutions. Yet, when religious crises occur, the press assumes the role of the societal moral crusaders and neutral referee (Eze 2023). This paper examines these issues by employing its content investigative techniques to certain religious crises in Northern Nigeria. In addition, the paper is also a kairos one, as it is informed by the heightened level of religious violence in which Nigerians have found themselves.

Northern Nigeria, also known as the 'Middle Belt,' is a region in Nigeria that comprises the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara. The region is home to over 200 ethnic groups, with the Hausa-Fulani being the dominant ethnic group. (Okpaga, 2017). The region is also divided along religious lines, with the majority of the population being Muslims, and a significant minority being Christians. For decades, this region has been plagued by ethnic and religious conflicts, which have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and the

displacement of communities(Nwankwo, 2020).These conflicts have also had a significant impact on the economy and social cohesion of the region. Ultimately, religious crises are a symbol of a lack of understanding, patience, and forgiveness regarding the teachings of the two most important religions in Nigeria - Islam and Christianity, with Islam being the predominant religion in the North. It is no longer news that hostility is increasing among Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Wherever an Islamic-Christian interaction occurs around the world, it is shameful that the kind of hostility accompanying this phenomenon in the country is established. The Christian awareness today, of anything connected with Islam, is conditioned first and maybe mainly, by the confrontation that has lingered on over ages(Alabi, 2019). There is therefore no argument that some Christians have a great distrust of Islam. In the thought of the anthropologist, this situation has been fostered by the presentation of Islam not as a religion that has any coherence with Christianity, but as a power of mischief, religiously designed to oppose Christian values. However, the role of the Nigeria press in fueling these conflicts cannot be ignored. According toIgbangshagev & Abdullahi ( 2023): Nigerian press instead of contributing to facilitate peace resolution, reconciliation, and peacebuilding process was found pants down in inflaming the conflicts due to commercial drive and other political/religious motives of the owners.

The press, often referred to as the 'fourth estate of the realm,' has a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing government policies. In the case of Northern Nigeria, the media has been accused of Catalyzing the ethnic and religious tensions through biased reporting, sensationalism, and misinformation. The Nigeria press has also been criticized for its failure to report accurately on these conflicts, often taking sides and perpetuating stereotypes and hate speech. In some cases, the press has been accused of inciting violence through its reporting, leading to further escalation of the conflicts.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What role has the media played in catalyzing religious crises in northern Nigeria?
2. Have the media been socially responsible in their operations, especially in northern Nigeria?
3. How can the media help deescalate religious crisis in Nigeria?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Historical Context of Religious Diversity in Northern Nigeria**

Conflict is an intractable part of human existence, everyday humans are confronted with one sort of conflict or the other. According toStapathy (2001) cited Igbanshagev and Abdullahi (2023); conflicts are inalienably, a part of the human condition that

promises good or ill, depending on how it is understood and handled. He further explains that, conflict refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, political or other) is engaged in conscious opposition to another identifiable group because the latter is pursuing incompatible goal. By this, it is crystal clear that conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in human existence that people engage consciously or unconsciously. What matter is how people handle it.

Igbanshagev& Abdullahi(2023) describes ethno-religious conflicts as opposition or disagreement between two or more groups pursuing different goals that are not in harmony with each other which are defined by ethnic and religious basis. He Cited Salawu (2019)who explained that; religious conflicts often arise from suspicion and distrust among the major religions in the country. Explaining further she said; these conflicts are largely characterized by a lack of geniality, mutual suspicion, fear, and a tendency toward violent confrontation. It is also seen as conflicts arising from groups defined along ethno-religious lines, ethnic identities which create distinctions between conflicting groups and religious beliefs and teaching which reinforce action or inaction of adherence.

Religion is explained to be human beings' relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or worthy of especial reverence. It is widely regarded as consisting of the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death. This relation and concerns are commonly expressed in terms of one's relationship with or attitude toward gods or spirits; in more humanistic or naturalistic forms of religion, they are expressed in terms of one's relationship with or attitudes toward the broader human community or the natural world. (Britanica.com). According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2022); "The concept *religion* did not originally refer to a social genus, however. Its earliest references were not to social kinds and, over time, the extension of the concept has evolved in different directions, to the point that it threatens incoherence" Stibich (2024) explained religion to be a Religion is a set of organized beliefs, practices, and systems that most often relate to the belief and worship of a controlling force, such as a personal god or another supernatural being. Although they have not been a universal a definition of what religion is there is a common ground for understanding and agreement of what the concept of religion is, which is; an imbalance relationship between a physical and a spiritual being with the latter regarded by the former as all knowing, all powerful and all good among other exceptional qualities. There are so many religions on earth with their adherents claiming superiority against the other which has ingrained crisis to the phenomena abnatio. According to Brahm (2005); religious ia a contentious issue, and taking a

casual glance of the world affairs in the dawn of the twenty-first century will suggest that religion is at the core of much of the strife around the globe. Brahm further explained that religion is a latent source of conflict because all religions have their accepted dogma, or articles of belief, that followers must accept without question, which he said can lead to inflexibility and intolerance in the face of other beliefs. He further explained that; Religious extremists often contribute to conflict escalation, as they consider radical measures as necessary to fulfilling God's wishes. He further highlighted that fundamentalists of any religion tend to take a Manichean view of the world.

Northern Nigeria is a region characterized by a rich tapestry of religious diversity, with Islam and Christianity being the predominant faiths. This diversity traces its roots to historical interactions, migrations, and socio-political developments over centuries. Islam was introduced into Northern Nigeria in the 11th century through trans-Saharan trade routes. By the 14th century, it had gained substantial traction, particularly in the cities of Kano and Katsina, which became centers of Islamic scholarship (Hiskett, 1987). The spread of Islam was significantly influenced by local rulers who adopted the faith, facilitating its integration into the socio-political fabric of the region. Despite its predominantly Islamic character, pre-existing indigenous beliefs and practices persisted and coalesced with Islamic doctrine, creating a unique religious landscape.

Christianity entered Northern Nigeria in the 19th century through the efforts of British missionary activities and colonial expansion. The establishment of missionary schools and churches, especially in the middle and later parts of the century, introduced Christianity to numerous communities (Dawood, 2005). Unlike Islam, which was largely embraced by local elites, Christianity found initial acceptance among lower classes and marginalized groups. The interaction between Christian missionaries and indigenous practices resulted in a diversified religious landscape where syncretism could be observed (Nwankwo, 2012).

The history of religious crisis in Nigeria can be traced to the Usman Danfodio Jihad of 1804. Usman Dan Fodio was a Fulani scholar who launched a religious war (jihad) in northern Nigeria in 1804 which lasted for six years, the goal of which was to revive and purify Islam, and to encourage less devout Muslims to return to orthodox Islam. This influential religious revolution united the Hausa states under Islamic law, and in 1812, led to the establishment of an empire called the Sokoto Caliphate, composed of emirates and sub emirates, many of which were built on the sites of previous Hausa states. The Sokoto Caliphate became the most powerful economic and political system of the region during the 19th century, and contributed profoundly to Islamizing Northern Nigeria. (Martin 1976). The Sokoto Caliphate became one of the largest empires in Africa and a focal point of Islamic learning and governance. The jihad led to forced conversions and a stricter interpretation of Islam, yet it also

fostered the establishment of communities where Islam deeply influenced governance and daily life (Falola, 2009).

Although Othman Danfodio did not originally have any plans to go to war, he did in self defense from the attack himself and his followers received from the kings of Gobir who felt threatened by his rising popularity. Unfortunately this war has laid the foundation for religious crisis in Nigeria as fanatic members of the two dominant religions in the country view themselves with mistrust and suspicions as both faith believe it is their responsibility to fight for their religions.

Nigeria have also been deeply rooted in its colonial past, where the imposition of Western beliefs overlapped with indigenous practices, creating an environment ripe for conflict. Notably, tensions between predominantly Muslim communities in the North and primarily Christian communities in the South have led to numerous violent confrontations. Key events, such as the 2000 Sharia crisis in Kaduna and the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency, provide essential case studies on the dynamics of religion in Nigeria's socio-political landscape.

Today, the religious diversity of Northern Nigeria is accompanied by significant social and political challenges. Inter-religious conflicts, characterized by violence and discrimination, have emerged, exacerbated by political manipulations and economic disparities. Additionally, the influence of extremist groups like Boko Haram has further complicated the landscape, leveraging religious sentiments to promote their agenda (Onuoha, 2014). Efforts to promote religious tolerance are underway, with various interfaith initiatives aimed at bridging divides and fostering understanding among different religious communities.

### **Effect of Religious Crisis in Nigeria**

There is no gainsaying about the fact that the problem of religious disturbances in Nigeria has devastating effects on the stability order. The destruction which religious violence has caused to Nigeria cannot be quantified. The frequent clashes which erupted as a result of this had inflicted untold hardship on both the individuals, in term of loss of lives and property and on the Government in terms of occasional provisions of relief materials for the victims of religious disturbances.

Apart from undermining the stability order, religious violence tends to dent the image of the country in the international community. The frequent eruption of religious uprisings has forced some countries to issue travel warning advising their citizens not to travel to Nigeria because of religious tension that could erupt quickly and without warning. For instance, in December year 2003, the American State Department citing alleged resurgence of violence crises, warned its citizens of the dangers of traveling to Nigeria (Abubakar 2003: 6; Sulaiman & Ojo 2013: 21-38). Also in December year 2004, the Government of United States and Britain re-issued travel advice to their citizens traveling to Nigeria. The advisory noted among other things



that ' religious tension between some Muslim and Christian communities results in occasional acts of isolated communal violence that could erupt quickly and without warning...' (Egua & Makinde 2004: 6; Avalos 2005: 32).

### **The Nigerian Press and Religious Crises in Nigeria**

The media are naturally attracted to conflict because conflict is intrinsically linked to journalism so much so that some definitions of news often begin with the term "conflict." Since abnormality makes news and violent conflict is an abnormality, the mass media tend to thrive on conflict as conflict attracts readers, viewers and listeners to the media. The prime news value of the media are sometimes conflict, disorder and negative events as good news stories receive less media attention than bad news (Ibrahim & Ngunu2020: Sule, 2015). The press in Nigeria has repeatedly fueled disunity through sensational journalism and misleading headlines (Bashir 2002: 27-29). Such irresponsible reporting not only misinforms the public but also directly contributes to religious violence. A striking example of this occurred during a demonstration led by Mallam Yakubu Yahaya, which escalated into a riot in Katsina in April 1991. This riot was incited by an outrageous article titled "Would You Marry a Known Prostitute Turned Born Again?" published in *\*Fun Times\** by Orlando Emmanuel Giwa Atanda. This piece openly insulted both Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad (Abubakar 2003: Dauda 1993:), an act that can only be described as blasphemous and sacrilegious.

Even today, the reckless behavior of the Nigerian press regarding crucial national issues, such as Shari'ah and other sensitive religious matters, remains a significant threat that could easily spark further violence. It is imperative that the media exercise responsibility and fairness in their reporting to prevent such occurrences. One of the primary ways the press exacerbates religious violence is through sensationalism. Reports that exaggerate the extent of violence or misrepresent the facts can provoke fear and animosity among different religious groups. For instance, a study by Adetunji (2021) highlights how newspapers frequently report on violent events with headlines designed to attract attention, often using inflammatory language that paints entire communities in a negative light. Such representations can breed suspicion and hostility, as communities perceive one another through a distorted lens of violence and mistrust.

The emergence of social media has further complicated the landscape of information dissemination in Nigeria. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter have enabled the rapid spread of unverified information, which amplifies existing fears and misconceptions (Dabup, 2021). During incidents of violence in Jos, misinformation has circulated widely, often inciting further violence or panic among vulnerable populations. Mainstream media outlets, in their competition for viewership, have sometimes followed suit, borrowing language and narratives from social media

without adequate verification (Omojuwa, 2023). This underscores the responsibility that media organizations bear in curbing the spread of false narratives and ensuring that their reporting does not contribute to violence.

There are certain responsibilities that the press in Nigeria are expected to play especially as it concerns the peace, stability and growth of the nation, this responsibility includes in the manner they report crisis situations, unfortunately the press have failed in this very important responsibility. Several studies have examined the representation of different religious groups in the Nigerian press. Oyeboode (2014), for instance, discusses how the press often portrays Muslims in the context of conflict, particularly in reporting Boko Haram-related violence. This framing can lead to stereotypes that stigmatize an entire faith community, exacerbating tensions. Conversely, Christian communities are sometimes portrayed in a victimized light, further deepening the divide. Such biased reporting by the media not only harms communal relations but also perpetuates a cycle of violence.

According to Ooley(2022): The Nigerian press also often overlooks opportunities for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. When reporting on religious violence, the focus remains disproportionately on the incidents themselves rather than on narratives of reconciliation and coexistence. The absence of these stories can lead the public to believe that violence is the only reality, disregarding the efforts of numerous organizations and individuals working towards peace. By neglecting these narratives, the media misses an opportunity to inspire hope and promote understanding between different religious communities.

According to Sulaiman (2016) The traditional function of the press in any society is to inform, entertain and educate and under no circumstances is the press expected to misinform, mis-entertain and mis-educate people like what we now experience. He explained that mass media practitioners ought to be cautioned in their reports on sensitive issues that could threaten peace and stability in the society. He highlighted that in Nigeria, experience has shown that the mass media reports, news analysis and features are capable of playing a positive or negative role in the relationship between religious adherents, particularly Muslims and Christians depending on the intention and orientation of the journalist concerned

### **Ethical Standards and Media Bias**

The need for the adherence of journalism ethics cannot be over emphasized. According to Study.com; Ethics are principles that a person uses as a guide when deciding between what is right and what is wrong. And they explained that they are three ethical philosophies that comprise the journalism code of ethics. The ethics of duty demand that a journalist must always do what is right, and that their duty is to report newsworthy information to the public. The ethics of final ends or



consequences states that the end results determine if something is ethical. Some journalists will argue that whatever they need to do in order to get the story should be deemed ethical. Situation ethics follow the "it depends" philosophy by determining what is ethical on a case-by-case basis.

The Society of Professional Journalists (2014) codes of ethics provides journalists with the following ethical codes: seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable.(Study.com)The universal assumption is that whatever you get from the press MUST be TRUE. It is therefore mandatory for the press to ensure that facts paraded in a news report or features are true, factual and correct. Most journalism teachers, professionals and authors of journalism books are in agreement that the fundamental ethics of journalism rest on the followings:

Facts are sacred, comment is free.

Credibility and accuracy of facts occupies the lofty height and peak of journalism profession.

Objectivity is the main pillar of journalism ethics.

Allen & Wilkinson gave some guidelines for responsible and effective conflict reporting and they include:

- a. Cover each side of the conflict
- b. Present people as individuals not as representatives of the groups
- c. Provide a right context not just coverage of the event
- d. Focus on processes not on the event only
- e. Remind the audience that ethno religious diversity is a global thing as such managing it for peaceful and harmonious coexistence is feasible.
- f. Will self-censorship or others reduce ethnic violence? If yes refrain from reporting the event completely. (Study.com)

McGoldrick and Lynch (2005), also gave some valuable guidelines for responsible and effective conflict reporting and they include

1. Avoid reporting conflict as consisting two parties contesting one goal but try to disaggregate the two into smaller group pursuing many goal for a wide range of outcome
2. Do not focus on what divide but seeking to unearth common ground that will lead to lasting solution
3. Should avoid the use of victimizing language such as destitute, devastate, defenseless and other demonizing adjectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work is based on the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press as postulated by Peterson, Seibert and Schram. The theory explains that the media has the power to shape public opinion and influence society. Therefore, they have a responsibility to use this power ethically and in the best interest of the public. This theory emphasizes

that the media should act as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable and providing accurate and unbiased information to the public

The framing theory also provides a solid theoretical framework for understanding the role of the Nigerian press in reporting religious crises. According to Erving Goffman (1974), the media not only reflects reality but also shapes it through the angles and narratives it chooses to highlight. In Nigeria, coverage of religious conflicts can accentuate divisions or promote unity, depending on how stories are presented

### **Presentation and Analysis of Facts.**

#### **Case Study 1: Kaduna Crisis**

The fighting began following debate around the proposed introduction of Sharia in Kaduna State. Sharia has existed in northern Nigeria for many years, but until 1999, it had only been applied to personal and domestic law. From 1999 onwards, in a move which was popular among many Muslims but highly controversial in the broader Nigerian federation, a number of northern state governors began extending its application to criminal law and other areas that had not been previously regulated. Zamfara was the first state to do so; others soon followed, and by 2001, most of Nigeria's twelve northern states had adopted some form of Sharia in criminal law.<sup>8</sup> Although designed to apply only to Muslims living in these states (non-Muslim criminal suspects are not tried by Sharia courts), its application has been strongly opposed by Christians, who find themselves directly or indirectly affected by it in different ways; for example in some states, the sale and consumption of alcohol is prohibited, and women are prohibited from traveling with men in public transport vehicles. Aside from these practical effects of Sharia, many Christians have strongly opposed its application for reasons of politics and "principle", arguing that its spread is a way of perpetuating the historical dominance of the Muslim north. In view of Kaduna's large Christian population, the possibility of introducing Sharia in Kaduna State was always likely to attract more controversy, and more protest, than in other northern states. A Lagos-based human rights activist described Kaduna as having become a place of contestation for Muslims and Christians, a battleground for the "forces of secularity. According to Boer(2003); the fighting was exacerbated by one sided reports by Radio Kaduna, a federal institution. Boer further explained thus: " Even though the House of Assembly had not reacted to the report of the adhoc committee, a member of the committee, Muhammad Abubakar, spoke publicly about the issue and decried the heat it generated. The entire tone of his presentation as featured in the NN, was one of paternalism and arrogance towards Christians who do not know what they are doing. The fact that this speech was reported in the NN during the riots leaves the paper open to charges of recklessly encouraging the continuation of the crisis. Throughout the riot and its heated aftermath the paper kept

publishing stories about the progress of the shari'a in other states. One could understand this to be either as a conscious attempt to keep rubbing salt into the wounds of Christians or as encouraging Muslims by showing that Shari'a is on a successful march in other states- or even both!"

### **Case Study 2: Katsina 1991 Riot**

The Katsina riot of 1991 was a muslim vs government crisis. The demonstration which led to crisis was catalyzed by an article titled: 'would you marry a known prostitute turned born again?' in Fun Times, a publication of Daily Times, written by Orlando Emmanuel Giwa Atanda. The article was said to have been reckless and insensitive to the feelings of religious adherents of the two major religion in the country, Christianity and Islam( Dauda 1993).

The article claimed that both Mohammed and Christ had sexual relations with women of easy virtue. This was considered a direct insult to both Mohammed and Jesus. In reaction one Yakubu Yahaya a leader of the Muslim Shi'ite sect led a group of people to Daily Times office to confiscate every copy of the offending magazine. This action snowballed into a crisis between the group and the government leading to loss of lives and properties. As seen the media was the major catalyze of the crisis through an irresponsible report. It well known that religious issues are very sensitive in the country especially in northern Nigeria and it is the height of insensitivity to broadcast an information that touches negatively on the key figures of the two biggest religion not only in Nigeria but the world.

### **Case Study 3: 2002 Miss World Crisis**

The Miss World pageant is an international beauty pageant that has been running since 1951. It is a highly anticipated event that is broadcasted to millions of viewers worldwide. However, the 2002 Miss World pageant held in Nigeria was marred by controversy and chaos, leading to a crisis that shook the country and drew global attention. The controversy began when the organizers announced that the pageant would be held in Abuja, Nigeria, a predominantly Muslim country. This decision was met with strong opposition from conservative Muslim groups who believed that the pageant promoted indecency and was against their religious and cultural values. They argued that the pageant was a form of westernization and a threat to the moral fabric of their society.

To further add salt to injury, a Nigerian journalist, Isioma Daniel, wrote an article for a local newspaper, ThisDay, highlighting the need for the pageant in response to those questioning the appropriateness of holding a beauty pageant in a country with a predominantly Muslim population. She stated that if the prophet Muhammad were alive, he would have taken one of the contestants as a wife. This statement, which was deemed blasphemous by many, sparked outrage among the Muslim community

in Northern Nigeria. The media, both local and international, picked up on this story, and it quickly became a national and international news item. The article was reprinted in other newspapers, and the story was extensively covered by television stations and online news outlets. The media's coverage of the controversy played a crucial role in amplifying the issue and spreading it to a wider audience.

As the news of the article and the ensuing backlash spread, tensions began to rise in Northern Nigeria. Protests and demonstrations were organized by Muslim groups, demanding an apology from ThisDay newspaper and the cancellation of the pageant. The media's role in this crisis shifted from reporting on the issue to becoming a platform for the different sides to voice their opinions. The media also played a role in escalating the crisis through sensationalism and biased reporting. Some media outlets portrayed the Muslim protesters as violent and intolerant, while others painted the pageant organizers as insensitive and disrespectful. These one-sided narratives further deepened the divide between the two sides and fueled the already tense situation. Moreover, the media's coverage of the crisis also had a significant impact on the pageant itself. Due to the security threats and protests, the organizers had to make last-minute changes, including changing the location of the pageant from Abuja to London. This decision was met with criticism from both sides, with some claiming it was an insult to Nigeria's sovereignty, while others argued that it was a necessary precaution for the safety of the contestants.

Eventually, after weeks of protests and international pressure, the pageant was held in London, and a new Miss World was crowned. However, the crisis in Nigeria had already caused significant damage. Over 200 people were killed in the protests, and the country's image was tarnished globally.

In conclusion, the 2002 Miss World crisis in Northern Nigeria was a result of a series of events, with the media playing a crucial role throughout. While the media's coverage of the controversy helped bring attention to the issue, its sensationalism and biased reporting also contributed to the escalation of the crisis. The role of the media in shaping public opinion and influencing the decisions made by the pageant organizers and the Nigerian government cannot be ignored. It serves as a reminder of the powerful impact the media can have in shaping our perceptions and shaping the course of events.

#### **Case Study 4: Shiites Vs Soldiers Crisis**

Shiites, a minority Muslim sect in Nigeria, have been at loggerheads with the Nigerian government and security forces, particularly the army, for several years. The group, led by their charismatic leader Sheikh Ibraheem El-Zakzaky, have been calling for the release of their spiritual leader, who has been detained by the government since 2015. The first incident that sparked the recent crisis was the clash between the Shiites and the military in Zaria, Kaduna State, in December 2015. After

the incident, media houses, both local and international, reported that the army had attacked a peaceful procession by the Shiites, resulting in the death of several of their members. The Nigerian media, in particular, portrayed the Shiites as victims of an unprovoked and brutal attack by the soldiers.

These reports, without proper investigation or verification, were quickly accepted as the truth and widely circulated on social media, with many calling for justice for the Shiites. However, it was later discovered that the Shiites had staged a roadblock, preventing the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, from passing through the area. This led to a confrontation between the army and the Shiites, resulting in the deaths of several soldiers. The inaccurate and sensational media reports had a significant impact on public perception and fueled the crisis between the Shiites and the soldiers. The Shiites, believing that they were innocent victims, went on to stage protests and demand the release of their leader. The Nigerian Army, on the other hand, felt misunderstood and maligned, leading to further clashes between the two groups.

The media, which is supposed to be an unbiased and objective source of information, played a significant role in escalating the tensions between the Shiites and the soldiers. Instead of verifying the facts and presenting a balanced report, they chose to sensationalize the incident, painting a one-sided picture that fueled the crisis. Furthermore, the media failed to highlight the long-standing grievances between the Shiites and the Nigerian government, which were also contributing factors to the crisis. The detention of Sheikh El-Zakzaky and the Shiites' demand for his release were largely ignored, and instead, the focus was on the clash between the soldiers and the Shiites. The consequences of these inaccurate and sensational media reports were far-reaching. It not only resulted in unnecessary loss of lives but also created a deep divide between the Shiites and the soldiers. The Shiites felt victimized, while the soldiers felt demonized by the media.

### **Case Study 5: 2008 Jos Religious Crisis**

The city of Jos, located in central Nigeria, has been marked by a history of religious and ethnic violence, particularly exemplified by the unrest of 2008. This period was characterized by fierce clashes between Christian and Muslim communities, which left hundreds dead and thousands displaced. While several factors contributed to this tragic escalation, the role of the Nigerian press in shaping public perception and potentially exacerbating tensions cannot be overlooked.

In the lead-up to the violent outbreak in Jos, media coverage played a significant role in framing the narrative surrounding the religious tensions. Newspapers and broadcast outlets often resorted to sensationalism, emphasizing violence and portraying it as a clash between distinct religious groups rather than a complex interplay of politics, economic hardship, and social discontent (Norris et al., 2005).

For instance, headlines such as "Religious War Brews in Jos" painted a picture of inevitable conflict, which may have inflamed existing tensions (Adebayo, 2010). By adopting incendiary language, these media outlets potentially incited fear and hostility among their audiences.

#### **Case Study 6: 1987 Kafachan Crisis:**

The Kafachan crisis erupted in December 1987, stemming from long-standing ethnic and religious tensions exacerbated by socio-economic factors, such as poverty and political marginalization.

The role played by the press in the year 1987 Kafachan riot was also negative. Members of the public were grossly misinformed by the press with partial reports which created another crisis between Muslims and Christians. As noted by Akinyemi (1990), the newspapers often emphasized religious affiliations, portraying the clashes in an "us versus them" narrative that intensified sectarian divisions. Headlines that highlighted the violence between Christians and Muslims instead of focusing on communal harmony inadvertently incited further violence by painting entire communities with the same brush.

In the lead-up to escalated violence, local and national newspapers circulated rumors without verifying the facts. For instance, sensational reports about the destruction of religious texts galvanized religious sentiments and pushed communities toward confrontation (Kukah, 1999). This unbalanced reporting not only misrepresented the situation but also stoked fear among both communities, creating an environment ripe for conflict. (Bidmos 1993: 32-39; Sulaiman & Ojo 2013: 21-38)

#### **Answer to Research Questions**

##### **1. What role has the media played in catalyzing religious crises in northern Nigeria?**

From the various situation analyzed it can be seen that the media has played significant role in catalyzing religious crises in northern Nigeria through the spread of misinformation, hate speech and biased reporting. The Miss World crisis and Katsina crisis and Kafachan crisis are veritable scenarios where irresponsible news reportage from the media catalyzed crisis in northern Nigeria.

##### **2. Have the media been socially responsible in their operations, especially in northern Nigeria?**

From the role played by the media in catalyzing or aggravating the various religious crisis experienced in Northern Nigeria, the media cannot be said have been socially responsible as their actions are acts of irresponsibility.



### **3. How has media coverage impacted the escalation or de-escalation of religious crises?**

By publishing biased reports, half-truths and in other times absolute false reports, media coverage rather than helping in the de-escalation of the crisis helped in the escalation. The Kaduna crisis, Jos crisis and the Shites religious crisis are perfect examples of this situation

### **Conclusion**

The Nigerian press has a significant role in the discourse surrounding religious violence in Northern Nigeria. Through sensationalism, bias, and neglect of peace narratives, the media can exacerbate tensions rather than mitigate them. Religious crisis has been a major issue threatening the peace and unity of this country and it is very sad to note that the media which has a huge responsibility in ensuring the peace, unity and progress of the society is a major factor that has aggravated and escalated religious crisis in Nigeria through irresponsible journalism. This situation is highly disappointing and calls for a sober reflection among the major stakeholders in the media industry. It is therefore crucial for journalists and media houses to adopt ethical reporting principles, prioritize accuracy, and provide balanced narratives that foster understanding. To break the cycle of violence, stakeholders in the media must recognize their power to shape public perceptions and contribute to peacebuilding efforts rather than inflame existing divisions.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Journalist and media practitioners must avoid reports that are religiously insensitive and capable of catalyzing crisis in their medium.
2. The media must be alive to their social responsibility to the society by carrying out only actions that can promote peace, unity and the progress of the society.
3. During crisis media must only churn out reports that will help in de-escalating the crisis rather than escalating it.
4. There is need for increased diversity and sensitivity in newsrooms, training for journalists on responsible reporting, and the establishment of a self-regulatory body to monitor the media's coverage of sensitive issues.

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