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When Religion Cannot Stop Political Crisis in the Old Western Region of Nigeria: Ikire under Historial Review

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When Religion Cannot Stop Political Crisis in the Old Western Region of Nigeria: Ikire under Historical Review

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Abstract

Using historical events research approach and qualitative key informant interview, this study examined how religion failed to stop political crisis that happened in the old Western region of Nigeria. Ikire, in the present Osun State of Nigeria was used as a case study. The study investigated the incidences of killing, arson and exile that characterized the crisis in the town which served as the case study. It argued that the two prominent political figures which started the crisis failed to apply the religious doctrines of love, peace and brotherhood which would have solved the crisis before it spread to all parts of the Old Western Region of Nigeria and the entire nation. Moreover, it was also argued somewhere else in this paper that the supporters of the two prominent political figures also failed to apply the doctrines of love, peace and brotherhood as rightly preached in their individual religions which they professed. The study recommended that doctrines of love, peace and brotherhood should be allowed to prevail in solving any political crisis in the future. It considered religion as the spiritual thing which leads to the eternal, but other things as temporary that would soon give way for things eternal. Furthermore, the study also challenged the religious leaders to always wake up to their spiritual responsibility of building peace in the society, knowing surely that they are God's ambassadors in the human society.

Keywords: religion, personalities, political crisis, Old Western Region, morality

Cuando la Religión no Puede Detener la Crisis Política en la Vieja Región del Oeste de Nigeria: Ikire bajo Revisión Histórica

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Resumen

A partir de la perspectiva de los hechos históricos y de entrevistas cualitativas a informantes clave, esta investigación examina de qué manera la religión no pudo detener la crisis política que tuvo lugar en la vieja región del oeste de Nigeria. Utilizamos Ikire, ubicado en el estado actual de Osun en Nigeria, como caso de estudio. Se investigaron los asesinatos, provocaciones y exilio que caracterizó la crisis en la ciudad que sirvió de estudio de caso. Se argumenta que las dos principales figuras políticas que empezaron la crisis no acertaron al aplicar las doctrinas religiosas de amor, paz y hermandad, hecho que hubiese solucionado la crisis antes de que se extendiera al resto de la región del Viejo Oeste y de Nigeria en su conjunto. Además, en el artículo se argumenta que los seguidores y partidarios de las dos principales figuras políticas tampoco acertaron al aplicar las mencionadas doctrinas tal y como correctamente se predicaban en sus respectivas religiones. La investigación recomienda que se debería permitir el predominio de las doctrinas de amor, paz y hermandad en la resolución de cualquier futura crisis. Se ha considerado como religión el hecho espiritual que orienta la persona hacia lo eterno, así como otros fenómenos temporales que pronto dieran paso a cosas eternas. Así mismo, la investigación también desafía a los líderes religiosos a tomar siempre su responsabilidad espiritual de construir una sociedad pacífica, en la medida que ellos son embajadores de Dios en la sociedad.

Palabras clave: religión, personalidades, crisis política, Vieja Región del Oeste, moralidad

Religion plays prominent roles in the lives of the people living in every society of the world. Religion is so crucial that the freedom of religion is entrenched as part of the fundamental human rights that should be respected throughout the world. It is considered as part of the overall policy to promote human rights (US Government, 2010).

According to Agunlanna (2010), people use religion to organize their lives to realize the conditions of peace and harmony in the human society. Religion helps the adherents to live morally worthy lives in society. Religions help individuals to act towards one another in a spirit of love and brotherhood. Agunlanna (2010) argued further that religion need not be a source of dissolution or social breakdown but a veritable tool for social progress and development if properly managed. However, the present world is observing contradictory and opposite trends in the field of religion (Sidhu, 2014).

Agunlanna (2010) was of the opinion that religion provides instrumentation for the social acculturation of positive attitudes, values, morals and behavioral action that could positively leverage the Nigerian society and the moral tone of the populace. However, religion has turned to be source of conflict and crisis instead of performing those functions mentioned by Agunlanna (2010).

Tarimo (2012), argued, therefore, that many people, especially the youth, are getting skeptical about the role and scope of religion in peace building because most of the destructive conflicts have been fuelled by people who profess one faith or the other. It can be concluded therefore that religion can be used as ‘instrument’ of generating conflict instead of building peace in the society. Moreover, religion often fails in solving conflicts or crises prompted from other sources because religious institutions have simply failed to uphold their prophetic role in the society (Tarimo, 2012).

This study, therefore, reviewed how religion failed to forestall political crisis which ravaged the Old Western Region of Nigeria in early 1960.

Literature Review and Theoretical Perspective

Overview of Religion

Religion has important objectives why it exists in human society. Agunlanna (2010) discussed the fact that the first objective of religion is self – realization. Self – realization refers to a condition of existence or a state of being, which is guided by a longing or a desire for the discovery of ideal possibilities of human life, that is a quest for emancipation from the immediate compulsions of vain and petty mood. The second objective of religion, according to Agunlanna (2010), is social harmony, which refers to that element in the make – up of the individual that enables him or her act towards other individuals in a spirit of care, brotherhood and love.

Religion aims at saving us – but not just from sin and iniquity as explained by Agunlanna (2010), but to make us better and more responsible individuals, conscientious and more loving towards our fellow human beings. Religion, therefore, teaches morality which is the way humans relate among themselves and how they treat one another in their day to day interactions (Agunlanna, 2010). Morality is the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustments of the interests of the individual to those of others in society. Morality is a set of social rules and norms intended to guide the conduct of people in a society. It is a quality of human acts by which we call them right or wrong, good or evil (Anderson, 2013). It cannot be denied, therefore, the role religion plays in shaping morality in society.

Odumosu and Nabofa (2008) argued that religious missionary roles are to promote justice, fair play and the moral transformation of contemporary Nigerian society. Moreover, religion through missionary work has been the most important single factor in the process of Westernization in Africa (Arowolo, 2010).

Okon (2012) also explained how religion helped in the consolidation of the Egyptian political structure in the past. Religion also played prominent role in health care and healing systems among the Dinka community of Southern Sudan, as argued by Kamwaria and Katola (2012).

Religion also plays prominent roles in conflict resolutions. Latigo (2008) argued that religious leaders from Catholic, Anglican, Muslims and other

orthodox religious groups engaged in dialogue which led to the pursuit of peace in northern Uganda crisis. In a similar way, Villumstad (2013) explained how religious leaders in Ethiopia and Eritrea came in to settle the rifts between the two countries. The same things were done in Sierra – Leone and Kosovo. Religion, therefore, is a power instrument in conflict resolution. However, the same religion has remained a major cause of violence, destructive conflicts as well as social anarchy (Agunlanna, 2010).

Kunhiyop (2009) argued that some religious people professed good faith of their religions but their underlying beliefs, values and practices are rooted in a non – religious world view. In order to support this view, the work of Longman (2001) on genocide in Rwanda will suffice. Longman (2001) argued that Christian churches were deeply implicated in the Rwanda 1994 genocide. He argued that churches were a major site for Massacres and many Christians participated in the slaughter, including church personnel and lay leaders.

It can be deduced from the work of Longman (2001) that religion may not, at times, perform the role of peace building in the society as it is going to be explained in this study later.

The Genesis and the Aftermath Effects of Operation “Weti e” Political Crisis in the Old Western Region of Nigeria.

Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola would not be forgotten in the history of politics in Nigeria forever. The duos were good friends from the beginning and allies in the field of politics. The former was the brain behind the formation of Action Group which was a prominent political party in 1950s, and the latter was also an active and important figure in the party – a second- in- command of the party. As Adeoti and Olaniyan (2014) rightly noted, in Nigeria history of democratization and electoral process since 1923 till date is shrouded in utter controversy. One of such controversies, or rather in a stern word crises was the Old Western Region crisis. However, it is very imperative to discuss the genesis of the crisis before proceeding to the aftermath effects of the crisis which form the basis of this paper.

As stated earlier on, Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola were good friends since the formation of Action Group as a political party. However, in 1959, the differences in their political approaches led to the great division between them. Dudley (1968: 280) observed that “one feature of the crisis which split the Action Group was the central issue involved in the dispute on which political power was to be organized in the federation. A section led by Chief Awolowo, the Action Group party leader, dissatisfied with the regional base of party power which condemned the South to a perpetual minority at the federal level, wanted the existing parties to cut across regional boundaries. The other faction, led by Premier Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Awolowo’s second – in – command, said the party’s moves attempted to betray the interests of the Western Region, preferring rather to accept the status quo”

This crisis, as noted by Dudley (1973) led to internal conflicts within the Action Group which were at the point of causing a split in the party’s ranks, thereby further weakening overall support for the Action Group. Ogunidiya (2009) posited that since this crisis, Nigeria’s political landscape had been plagued by political instability. It has stumbled from one political crisis to another. In their own argument, Ibeanu and Momoh (2008), posited that Western Regional crisis can be found in Obafemi Awolowo’s resignation as Premier of the region, in order to move to the federal parliament as leader of the opposition. Awolowo had favoured Alhaji Dauda Adegbenro to replace him as Premier, because of his disagreement with Ladoke Akintola. But by law Akintola was entitled to fill the vacancy created by Awolowo’s resignation. Ibeanu and Momoh (2008) argued further that in 1962 Action Group deposed Akintola from his party office and urged him to resign his position as Premier, but he refused. This resulted to Awolowo’s loyalists in the Western Regional House of Assembly, who were in the majority, to send a petition to the Governor to use his constitutional power to remove him (Akintola) from office. Akintola was eventually removed but he went to the high court of Western Region to challenge his removal, but another event surfaced which led to the non- undetermined of the case- the issue of state of emergency. The Northern progressive congress dominated federal government declared a state of emergency in Western Nigeria, removed the Action Group – controlled regional government under Chief Akintola and

later appointed Dr. Majekodunmi as the Region's Sole Administrator. When the state of emergency ended in December 1962, People of the Western region thought fresh election would be held, but federal government only reinstated Chief S. L. Akintola as the Premier hiding under the pretext that political atmosphere of the Western region was not conducive for fresh elections. As a result Chief S. L. Akintola never properly faced the electorate, not until 1965 (Ojo, 2012).

In 1965, the Western Nigeria regional election came up. It was a strong contest between Nigeria National Democratic Party (Akintola's group) and Action Group (Awolowo's group), to judge which of the two rival political parties would take the control of the Region (Bamgbose, 2011). But the election was marred with a lot of election irregularities and manipulations which eventually returned Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola to power. However, it was very glaring to many people in the Western Region and other parts of Nigeria that, despite its control of the administrative machinery, the NNDP could not win any genuinely free election against AG in the West (Anifowose, 1982). The 1965 electoral crisis, therefore, was the beginning of the watershed in the nation's political history. The political and electoral malpractice in the old Western region spread to other parts of Nigeria and led to a serious National Crises (Afegbua, 2010).

Protest demonstrations broke out and these were manifested in riots, arson, looting and wanton destruction of property and lives (Anifowose, 1982). Large scale killing and looting followed the election results as the youth went on rampage, burning the house of NNDP members (Bamgbose, 2011). The violence in Western Region of Nigeria (Yorubaland) was in reaction to perceived massive irregularities that characterized both 1964 federal elections and 1965 Western Region elections. The consequences of these crises largely led to the end of Nigeria's first republic (Animashu, 2010).

The aftermath effects of political crisis in the old Western State were not only felt by the entire people of the region, but also by the political leaders themselves. The crisis culminated in the treason trial of Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1963 (Nnoli, 2003), where historic judgement of justice Sowemimo became part of the political and judiciary history (Aderogba et al., 2012). Suffice it to say here, that the same crises led to the first military

coup where prominent politicians like S. L. Akintola, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa – Prime Minister, Sardauna of Sokoto and others were killed (Alabi, 2010). Hence, corruption, violence and disrespect for the rule of law would erode any success made in forging unity and promoting democracy (Yusuf, 2002).

The protest, demonstrations and wanton killings which Anifowose (1982) and (Bamgbose, 2011) discussed in their works happened in all the cities and towns of the old western region of Nigeria. Ikire was one of the towns where such demonstrations and killings took place. Ikire was a strong political hold of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and was one of the towns he visited during his political tour in 17th May, 1962 to test his political popularity which Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola said had been eroded (Awolowo, 1987).

Theoretical Perspectives

There are three major perspectives on Religion: Functionalist Perspective, Conflict Perspective and Symbolic Interactionist Perspective. However, Functionalist Perspective would be discussed as a theoretical anchor for this research work because of its relevance to this study.

Functionalist Theory of Religion

Emile Durkheim was a proponent of Functionalist Approach to religion. His theory of religion is a functionalist account. It clearly offers some useful insights into the role of religion in society (Brym et al., 2003). Durkheim emphasized that religion is essential to the maintenance of society. He suggested that religion is a cultural universal found in all societies because it meets basic human needs and serve important societal needs (Kendall, 2007).

According to Functional Perspective of religion, religion satisfies individual needs and offers individuals ways to reduce anxiety and to promote emotional integration (Tischler, 2002) Religion offers meaning for human experience. Some events create profound sense of loss and concerns which can be explained by religion (Kendall, 2007). Moreover, Functionalist Perspective argued that religion creates social cohesion and a sense of

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belonging. Religious teachings and practices, by emphasizing shared symbolism, help promote social cohesion (Kendall, 2007). According to Durkheim, all societies have a continuing need to reaffirm and uphold their basic sentiments and values. In order to achieve this, people come together and communally proclaim their acceptance of dominant belief system (Tischler, 2002).

According to Functional Perspective, religion helps to control and maintain social order. Religion helps maintain social control in society by conferring supernatural legitimacy on the norms and laws of society (Kendall, 2007).

In summary, according to Durkheim, there are five major social functions of religion:

- (1) To integrate individual members into a group;
- (2) To regulate their daily activities;
- (3) To empower their activities with a sense of meaning or purpose;
- (4) To interpret their social and natural world and
- (5) To represent and express their relation to the social group (Teevan & Hewitt, 1995)

The Functionalist Perspective is very relevant to this study because religion is expected to ensure social cohesion and help to control and maintain social order. The religions (Christianity and Islam) failed to perform these two prominent functions and as a result led to the problem addressed by this research work.

Methodology Applied

Historical events research was used in this study. It investigated questions concerning past time (Schutt, 2004). The study applied historical events research because social events (political crises) of the past time were studied. The study employed key informant interview as the research instrument because the participants knew and experienced what happened during the crises which they share with the researcher. Purposive sampling method under non – probability design was used to select the key informant participants (Four Key Informants), because the researcher based their

selection on the judgment that they would facilitate the investigation of the study (Adler & Clark, 1999). The names discussed in this study were withheld and replaced with alphabets. Moreover, codes were given to the respondents as follows:

1. Princess Matilda Oyeronke Ojo (F1)
2. Madam Rainat Abike Oyeniya (F2)
3. Mallam Yekini Ajenikoko (M1)
4. Mr Nathaniel Akinbile (M2)

Content Analyses of the Key Informant Interview Data on Western Region Political Crisis in Ikire

The political power tussle between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola has been discussed under the section of literature review. However, it is very imperative to discuss here that the effects of such tussle actually led to the crises which engulfed the supporters of the two factions throughout the old Western region of Nigeria. Awolowo (1987, p. 65) alleged that

from about the beginning of July, 1961, right up to the early part of 1962, there were large – scale and widespread acts of violence, terror, and hooliganism in Western Region. These terrorist acts were directed against adherents of the AG. There were killings, maiming, and looting. Well known members of the AG would be woken up in the dead of night by marauders of other political party. They would be savagely beaten up or fatally wounded, and their properties would be forcibly seized

In order to support such terrorist acts perpetrated against Action Group members in Ikire, one of our key informant had this to say:

There was a particular high Chief in Ikire who was also appointed as judge of a customary court, who masterminded many terrorist acts against AG members. Some members of AG were wrongly alleged of various offences and were unjustly sentenced to prison, even without normal court procedures. The so called judge of the customary court

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were even said to have sentenced some members of AG when taking bathe in his bathroom (F1)

Another key informant who was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment for being a strong member of AG also gave the following testimony to support such unjust sentence:

I had suffered in the past because of my strong belief in Awolowo's ideology. I had served 6 month imprisonment unjustly because of my belief in the man. This is the reason why I can never belong to any party which is not Awolowo's party in my life (M1)

The allegations against AG members were so serious ones: the allegations that can nail them in the law which would eventually cause them terms of imprisonment. A key informant had this to say on this:

The allegations against AG members took different forms. They were so serious that members may wake up in the morning and found dead bodies at the back of their houses (F1)

All the responses given by the key informants showed that AG members really suffered from the hands of the members of other political party as written by Awolowo (1987, p. 65). In order to deliver themselves from political tyrants of the opposite party, members of AG re – grouped and planned strategies of retaliating the evils that the members of the party suffered from the other political party. The retaliatory missions were carried out in major cities and towns of the Western region, but that of Ikire were discussed in this paper.

I would discuss the victims of the retaliatory mission in Ikire community and its' environ as explained by the key informants who participated in the study. The crisis happened in 1965 and was fuelled by the mysterious death of Honourable Prince Ademola Olaniran (an Honourable member of Western Region Assembly under the AG Party).

The victims would be taken one after the other and their fate would be discussed as explained by the key informants who participated in the study.

Those who died during the crisis were explained first before others who suffered one misfortune or the other. A key informant explained that:

During this political crisis, Mr. A was riding a bicycle, when he was caught up by members from the other political party, who had his hand amputated and later died as a result. When this hand was cut off, the wrist – watch on his hand continued working (F1)

The key informant also related how another victim was killed by the irate political thugs:

Alhaji B was also killed during the political crisis. He was observing his salat when the political thugs from other part shot him at the back. He died instantly. Another Mr. C had just come back from church when he was also shot at the back. He too died instantly. Hence, the crisis was a terrible one and lasted for about seven days. Nobody went out or came in throughout the period. The town (Ikire) turned to a serious desolate (F1)

I remembered vividly that my late grandmother told me the story of those terrible seven days. She was forced to go out looking for the means of getting how to feed her family when she met on the way, the irate political members who were on retaliatory mission. She was very afraid when she saw them and gave the comments below to narrate what happened:

Nobody went out for those seven days. Everybody was living in perpetual fear. Even, the movement of lizards on the iron roof set jittery on everybody. But one day, I summoned courage to go out to get the means of feeding the family when I met some members of Action Group.” I was afraid but they said: Mama Elelubo, we are not after you, you can go to where you are going”. They were all dressed in charmed clothes and carried deadly weapons with them (F2)

Another evil perpetrated during the crisis was arson. Many people were set ablaze by the irate politicians and many houses were burnt likewise. For instance Alhaji B who was killed when observing ‘Salat’ had his son burnt

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alive inside his house. A key informant narrated how Alhaji D's Cocoa store was burnt into ashes during the crisis thus:

Alhaji D's cocoa store was burnt into ashes during the crisis. Many bags of dry cocoa were burnt. For three months, the bags of cocoa were still burning. However, fortunately for Alhaji D, the cocoa store was insured and the insurance company gave him the money to cover the loss as the terms of the insurance stipulated (M2)

It was from the act of the arson that the political crisis under study got its "Christened name" – Operation Wetie. Operation we ti e can be literally translated as 'operation wet him with petrol and set him ablaze'. The process involved filling a sprayer with gasoline and spraying the target persons or houses with the gasoline in the sprayer before setting the persons or houses ablaze. Figure 1 (see figure 1) is an example of the sprayer used during the crisis.

Apart from the notable political personalities killed during this crisis, many important personalities were forced into exile at least for some months as explained by an Informant: *Chief E ran away from Ikire to Akure (his mother's place of birth) with a wrapper tied round his body. Alhaji D, Chief F, Alhaji G, Madam H, Chief I and Mr. J, all ran away for their lives (M2).*

Apart from killing and arson, public humiliation was also carried out by the irate politicians. A key informant explained thus, how Mr. K was publicly humiliated:

Mr. K was 'arrested' by the irate politicians. His cloth was removed and an old basket was tied round his neck with a long rope and was forced to dance round the town with humiliating song: Give us a rope Mr. K has turned to a goat. It was a serious humiliation but he was so lucky that he was not killed in the process (F1)

The atrocities committed by the irate politicians took place with total impunity and neglect of their religious faith which forbidden their acts of violence.

Religion Failed to Stop the Crisis

The two political giants who started the crisis as a result of their political differences were Christians. Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo was a Methodist by Christian denomination and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola was a Baptist. From my personal opinion, I would be expecting their religious belief or faith to have prevented the crisis from generating to the one that engulfed the whole nation. The duo read the same Bible, proclaimed the same Christian faith and held the same Christian doctrine of love and brotherhood. However, I was of the opinion that the Longman (2001) submission that Christian churches and Muslim mosques were not only closely allied with the state and involved in battles over state power, but they were themselves important arenas of political struggle, was exactly why the churches were involved and other proclaimed Christian churches were unable to call the duos to order, using Christian and Muslim doctrine of love, brotherhood and 'holy life as instruments'

With all indication, it seemed the parties involved in the crisis were nominal Christians but their underlying beliefs, values and practices being rooted in Christ image is a matter of theological debate; for such may not be found in Christian world view (Kunhiyop, 2009).

The inability of religion to stop the crisis among the political disciples of these two prominent political actors (Chief Awolowo and Chief Akintola) needs to be discussed. The inability of religious beliefs to caution and prevent this political crisis from happening was rooted in the view of Agunlanna (2010) that there is no correlation between the people's religious avowals and their moral life. The craving for spiritual perfection was never matched by a life of decency and uprightness among believers. I argue that the people who were the adherents of the two warring political parties did not allow moral principles taught by their individual religions to work in their lives, because morality deals with how individuals treat one another in their day to day interactions and how humans treat themselves to promote mutual welfare and growth (Agulanna, 2010).

Finally, I am of the opinion that if the personalities involved in the crisis and their supporters had brought the doctrines taught by their religions into

active play concerning love, endurance, faith and brotherhood, the story would have been of peace not of political war.

Summary, Recommendation and Conclusion

It can be summarized that the personalities involved in the old western Region of Nigeria political crisis called or Christened “Operation Wetie” did not allow religion to play active role in solving the crisis. The personalities involved at the top were both Christians, but did not allow the doctrines of love, brotherhood and peace preached in the religion of Christianity to supercede their personal and political interests at the expense of the peace of the region concerned.

Moreover, the adherents of the warring political parties acted the same. Religious consideration was neglected in the crisis. A man assassinated when he was observing his Muslim prayer (Zalat) had some Muslims as members of the group that assassinated him. The man who was also assassinated when just arrived from church had some Christian brothers among those who assassinated him. Hence, Christian brotherhood and Muslim brotherhood were not considered before the implementation of the plans of the crisis.

It is very important to mention too that religious institutions (majorly Christianity and Islam) failed to intervene to settle the crisis before it spread to the whole region and to the entire nation. No records showed that religious leaders came in to settle the crisis. Hence, I argue that the failure of the religious leaders to mediate in the crisis was a strong indication that they failed their people.

This study recommends that individual persons should allow the religious and spiritual matters they profess to take pre-eminent control on what they say, do or think about others in the society. The religious doctrines of love, peace and brotherhood are eternal but all other things in life are temporary. The morality which is taught by every religion must be the guiding principles of our daily interactions with others in the society.

It is equally recommended that religious leaders in Nigerian society should wake up to the responsibility of peace building in the society. The religious leaders should play active roles in conflict resolution during crises,

especially the political crises. The religious leaders should not forget that they are the representatives or ambassadors of God. They are the spokes men and spokes women of God. Hence, they should ensure that everything that would bring peace in the society is done, for this is the will and wish of God for every society of men.

It can be concluded, therefore, that religion can play significant roles in conflict resolution in the society. Political crises are not beyond what can be effectively solved through the channel of religion. Religion is a powerful social instrument that should be used to solve social crisis. Therefore, religion should be allowed to play prominent mediating roles in every human business in life, politics inclusive.



Figure 1. A Sprayer: This is an example of Sprayer used during the crises to spray gasoline on the political opponents before they were set ablaze.
Source: Researcher's Survey 2014.

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