The Interaction Between the Church and Politics in Kenya from A Historical Perspective

JARED MAKORI

Abstract- Religious affiliations act as the motivational force behind the political differences and divisions in the society. It is indeed difficult to separate politicians from the clergy. This to some extent may explain the inability of the clergy to engage and resolve political conflicts. In Kenya for instance, the amorphous relationship between the church and multiparty politics has continued to fuel violence which cloaks the nation during every other electioneering period. This situation demands for an urgent solution or else violence will remain polarizing to the nation of Kenya and most likely split it into irreparable status along lines of ethnicity and economic stratification as ramified by religion. The study sought to analyze the interaction between the church and politics in Kenya from a Historical perspective. A cosmic war theory and just war theory which was exhaustively explained the complex and multi-dimensional roles played by the local church in the violence during elections in Kenya and therefore "Just war" theory was used to supplement and fill this inadequacy. For instance, "cosmic war" theory would not elaborately be used to explain how the church was entangled in the violence whose causes originated elsewhere other than from the biblical images. Historical design was used in this study in exploring, explaining, and understanding the causes, trends, involvement and relationship between religion and violence enabling the study to understand their multidimensional interactions. The study employed purposive and Snow-balling sampling techniques in picking the key respondents. Data was collected through interview, Focus Group discussion and Secondary data. Data was analyzed thematically in tandem which specific objectives.

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.0   Background of the Study

Religion frequently provides the philosophy, thought, creed, beliefs and organizational structures that serve as the stimulants and driving force for violent perpetrators. This is because, at some point in history, every major religious tradition, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, has functioned as resource for violent actors, resulting in escalating bloodshed between religious activists and government security systems (Juergensmeyer, M., 2003; p xii-xiii & 5). Hence religion and violence become intricate relatives.

It has equally been pointed out that religious affiliations act as the motivational force behind the political differences and divisions. This is closely connected to the commonly touted claim of the prophetic dysfunction of religion of "supplying a perspective of hatred, racism, nepotism, gender inequality and reckless nationalistic chauvinism" in the words of Nyaundi (2003) in *Introduction to the Study of Religion.*Nyaundi concludes that the history of religion is full of wars, conflicts, hostilities and clashes (Nyaundi, 2003; pg. 45). This position is ratified by Tiwari (1983) in *Comparative religion* while positing that no cultural institution has shed more blood than religion in general and confirms that history is full of evidence to support the link between religion and violence (Tiwari; 1983, 4).

Racial and religious affiliations act as the motivational force behind the political differences and divisions. This perception is reiterated by Kazin, M., *et al;* (2011) in "Religion and Politics in America since 1945", when they demonstrate that the political divisions in the American politics generally and between the political parties of the Democrats and the Republicans particularly, is affiliated to the Church along denominational lines of Catholicism and Protestantism. The authors further argue that political activities including voting during elections in America are done on the basis of racial and religious affiliations with the church leadership subjecting American political aspirants to religious questions (Kazin, M., *et al;* 2011, 445-459). This then points to the mutual interdependence between religion and politics

regardless of their constitutional separation henceforth making political states to remain both very secular and very religious.

In human communities, religion and politics are inextricably linked and intertwined. Marsden, L and Savigny, S. (2009) describe how difficult it is to divorce religion from politics or the church from the state in relation to this issue. They illustrate this opinion using the Vatican as both a political and a religious entity that has at different time exerted political influence on the world politics, foreign policy and diplomacy. It has also exerted religious power and influence by using the Vatican radio. This suggests that it is indeed difficult to separate politicians from the clergy. This to some extent may explain the inability of the clergy to engage and resolve political conflicts.

In modern democratic governments, neither religion nor the state has total authority over the other. This interpretation was articulated in political experimentation in the fourth century during the reign of Emperor Constantine of the Roman Empire, when the civil authority was subjected to religious authority and Christendom, in which there was a rejection of absolute power, whether by civil or religious, so that religion, democracy and state secularity coexisted, but with different settlements. This is why, despite the fact that the French revolution attempted to subjugate the Catholic Church to the nation, and the United States attempted to achieve separation of power between religion and politics, they remained largely bound by religions, whereas in Britain, a compromise between religion and politics resulted in a weakened monarchy and a well-established Church (Mannet; 1998, 97-115). This explains why, in the twenty-first century, the relationship between religions and the secular states, as well as debates about the role of religion in politics and public life, have resurfaced in a variety of contexts. Hurd (2008) confirms this, observing that religion in politics is frequently influenced by a notable secular bias, as well as widespread acceptance of the secularist separation of religion and politics in the public arena (Hurd, 2008: p. 1).

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Religion and Politics

Mahatma Gandhi in "Mahatma Gandhi quotes" once said, "Those who say religion does have anything to do with politics do not know what religion is." Mahatma Gandhi attempted to enrich politics by incorporating into it, the good values and morals from religion. He longed for a *Ram raj* (kingdom of God) where *Dharma* (ethical commitments or moral obligations) becomes the center of our existence. He appealed not only for the public life which draws its inspiration from religion to be more enriched but also for politics which does not exert pressure to fulfill some hidden agenda for the benefit of some and exclusion of many (Mahatma Gandhi quotes htt://www.brainy quotes/quotes/m/mahatma Gandhi 135298 Htm1#xiEs404i4Fox 95.99 accessed on 30/02/2021).

From the argument of Mahatma Gandhi, this study deduced that religion can be used in shaping political moral obligations so that it can run its day-to-day responsibilities in a reasonable, fair and just way. Religion is not only the soul but necessary ingredient for good politics; otherwise without religious interjectory, politics benefit a few political elites as the most of the populace is sentenced to sufferings which when opposed, likely dives the general public into brutality. Gandhi examines how religion can be used in making politics better while the current study investigated how religion is entangled in political violence in Kenya.

Lee Marsden, and Heather Savigny, (2009) in *Media, Religion and Conflict* describe how it is hard to separate religion from politics or the church from the state. They have distinguished the Vatican as both a political and religious entity. The Vatican has not only exerted political influence on the world politics, international diplomacy and foreign policies in various ways but has also exerted religious power and influence by using the Vatican radio. This suggests that it is indeed improbable to separate politicians from the clergy: hence the inability of the clergy to engage and resolve political conflicts.

The authors further suggest that the broadcast and print media create for their own commercial and image

reasons, an impression that religion is unable to engage hard with shrewd, treacherous, opportunist and pragmatist individuals in politics. In this way then religion can be compromised in her role in resolving political conflicts. In this argument the media is identified as a modifier of the relationship between religion and politics. However, they fail to show how religious ideologies lead to political crisis in public life in general; how political philosophies use religious identities in advancing their agenda which this study partly addressed.

How has the media been used in resolving or creating religio-political violence during the national general electioneers in Kenya?; what role did the media play on issues pertaining to the church and 'Hague prayers' especially in fuelling violence subsequent elections which took place in 2013, and 2017 in Kenya? Is it media conspiracy that religion and ethnicity are portrayed negatively in the affairs of politics leading to violence? Of significance to this study is the indication that the media can be used in portraying the church negatively besides fermenting political conflicts.

The public space provided by media was of particular interest to this study because it is in this space where Kenyan local churches and politics interact and dialogue. The media as discussed by Marsden, L and Savigny, H., (2009) was relevant to this study in two ways; first this study used both broadcast and print media in acquiring relevant data related to evaluating the connection between the church and violence during general elections in Kenya; secondly the printed information in magazines, newspapers, periodicals, journals provided secondary data that was largely utilized in assessing violence as it relates to religious phenomenon in general; examining the historical interaction between the church and politics in Kenya since independence and analyzing the nature of violence during electioneering periods in multiparty politics since 1992 in Kenya respectively. Marsden, L and Savigny, H., (2009) describes how it is difficult to separate religion from politics or the church from the state while the current study assessed how historical interaction between the church and politics vaults into violence in Kenya.

Socrates in *The Apologies* said;

Be sure, men of Athens, that if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago and benefited neither you nor myself… a man who fights for justice must lead a private not public life if he is to survive for even a short time (Apologies 31C4-32A3, cf. 32E-33A, pg. 94).

The assertion by Socrates above demonstrates that politics is violent. It additionally brings up relevant issues; what is private life in the comprehension of Socrates? Does this infer that if the church for example goes public it won't endure or for the church to endure it should be private? How then, at that point, can the church play its roles of rendering her services to the society in which politics is part and parcel? Does Socrates' perception imply that the church should be tranquil in public life, and disregard politics including the wrongs that influence the people whose rights the church should defend?

The perception of Socrates (referred to above) could likewise infer that the church (Christians) should disregard what possesses the legislators or politicians; that is the Christians ought not be engrossed with so much things as; wealth, the positions of general public, political orators or other offices, the political club and factions that exist in the state. The moment the church congregation gets engrossed with the previously mentioned concerns, it is then handily compromised by the agile or dexterous political elites. Once the church is compromised by politics it becomes complicity with political violence.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper employed cosmic war theory; Mark Juergensmeyer maintains that all religions are intrinsically bound by violence. He claims that the religious language about tension between order and disorder easily translates to religious violence. It is this fundamental appeal to war by religion, which is manipulated by perpetrators of violence who always place religious images of divine struggle in the service of worldly political battles. For this reason, acts of religious violence serve as schemes in political strategies and as impressions of a much larger spiritual confrontations. Consequently, the Christians have developed regressive interpretation of the biblical

scriptures drawn from particular sections that support violent actions hence justifying violence.

1.3   Research Methodology

The study was conducted through qualitative research strategies both of which employed historical and ethnographic investigations. Historical research design was used in this study in exploring, explaining, and understanding the causes, trends, involvement and relationship between religion and violence enabling the study to conclude that two variables relate in multidimensional ways.

1.4   The Interaction between the Church and Politics Violence in Kenya from a Historical Perspective

Religion and Political Violence

A cleric key respondent argued that religious beliefs and practices which potentially support or oppose politics are possible causes of conflicts. The respondent also claimed that religions contain fundamental and dogmatic beliefs which adherents accept without questioning. This in turn leads to intolerance towards religious beliefs of non-faithful. Kenga (2014) noted that religious extremists contribute to conflict escalations by seeking their own interpretation of God's Will and don't consent to religious moderation. This was the case in Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine where the violent actors claimed to observe the Islamic tradition by citing that all people owe obedience to Allah, their God (Kenga, 2014; p.14-15).

In Africa, Sudanese Islamists were the force behind the creation of Islamic republic of Sudan through introduction of *sharia laws* in 1983. The implementation of these laws was the major cause of political conflicts between the Muslim dominated north and the Christian south that finally led to secession of South Sudan in 2011. To date there is political violence between the Christian south and the Muslim north who insist on establishing Islamism as an official ideology in Sudan (Kenga, 2014; p.15).

Kenga continues to postulate that in Tanzania the Christian and Islam religious beliefs led to political conflicts. The Catholic Church was worried of the political domination by the Muslims after Tanganyika was merged with Zanzibar. To counter the Muslim domination, the Catholic Church encouraged the young educated Catholic faithful to be active in Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). In 1993 there was violence between the large Muslim population and the Christians in Tanzania. The Muslims demonstrated using Christian slogans while destroying Christian owned bars and butcheries for selling alcohol and pork respectively considered illegal in Islamic religious beliefs and practices (Kenga, 2014; p.14-15).

However, some church denominations are restricted in their interaction with politics to some limited areas. Murray, (2006) in an article 'Church and Politics – A Catholic Perspective' gives three broad areas where the Catholic Church interacts regularly with politics or with politicians and governments. These areas are; in the articulation of its social teaching, in discussions arising from its involvement in schools, hospitals and welfare and in debating over particular moral issues as they arise from time to time. O'Brien, and Thomas, (2003 eds.) in *Catholic social thought: the documentary heritage,* argue;

> …the Catholic social teaching is a tradition that has its roots in the gospel and in centuries of theological development but which in its current form is captured by a series of papal encyclicals beginning with Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum in 1891.

The encyclicals tend to address pressing social issues affecting the society at the moment as they may arise from time to time. They are either addressed to particular governments proposing specific political solutions in terms of the character of the human person and of what is justly due to it. Murray & Andrew; (2006 p. 92) indicate that the encyclicals are a source of principles that guide the Catholics on how to act in the public arena. The Catholic Church's involvement in development of schools, hospitals & welfare constantly brings it face to face with governments particularly in making of policies, regulations and funding of these institutions. In most cases issues arising from these activities have become politically volatile and sources of violence between the political

elites and the Catholic clergy in particular and the entire Christian fraternity in general.

Murray (2003: 34 – 35) highlights that the Catholic Church teaches on moral matters that arise from time to time around many issues and take a moderate position while leaving legislation to the legislators. The Catholic Church has mostly engaged around issues to do with the abortion and family planning; use of condoms as a protection against HIV-aids or abstinence from sex and issues of using certain vaccines etc. It is these engagements that bring Catholic Church in constant touch with politics and have been centers of conflict with politicians. The various religious landscapes that result from the interaction between church and politics in Kenya can be serious sources of barbaric behavior and violence.

5.4 Religious Landscapes in Kenya and violence

The study found it necessary to review the religious landscape in Kenya because this helps in understanding the complex overlapping dynamics of religiosity, ethnicity and violence due to religious affiliation and specific church denominations attached to specific geographical regions of the country which in turn are associated to particular political outfits. Ethnicity and religio-political affiliations are not only key in understanding the politics in Kenya but also work hand in hand with religion in causing violence as it is elaborated in the later discussions of this study. People's religiosity in Kenya and religious affiliations to ethnicity is explained in sections 5.4.1 & 5.4.2 respectively.

5.4.1 Kenyan's religiosity and violence

In an interview held with World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) officials on 17th April, 2019, it was indicated that religious or spiritual language, rituals, places of worship, and prayers are seen and heard almost everywhere in Kenya. In the same interviews a key respondent emphasized that for most Africans, spirituality is foundational for their life's rhythm and interactions; "it is there as you grow up; you are socialized in it" (World Faiths Development Dialogue. April 17, 2019). In addition to this a survey conducted by Pew Research Center in December 2008 reported that in an interview carried out on one thousand five

hundred Christians and Muslims in Kenya, ninety five percent of Muslims and eighty six percent of Christians claimed that religion is very important in their lives.

This demonstrates that Kenyans take religious matters seriously in their lives. The same survey conducted by Pew Research Center in December 2008 reported that eighty one percent of all the one thousand five hundred people surveyed attended religious services at least once a week. However, it was noted that the fluidity of religiosity is high in Kenya making it difficult to measure members by their denominational institutions (Pew Research Center, April 15, 2010, "*Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa,*" http://www.pewforum.org/interactives/africa/country/ 113/.Methology:http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010 /04/sub-saharan-africa-appendix-c.pdf. accessed on 8/7/2020). Kanu and Paul (2011) had observed that in Africa, there is widespread belief in a Supreme God, with a profound sense of the sacred and mystery. Mbiti (1969) puts this succinctly,

> Wherever the African is, there is his religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting new crop, he takes it with him to a beer parlour or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament (Mbiti: 1969; p. 2)

Kenyans are Africans, thus, it is difficult to separate their political life from their personal inclinations to the divine. In this regard, Kenyan Christians do everything with the consciousness of God.

In this respect the Kenyan Christians embraces politics in their daily life which entails many beliefs to be observed, and many daily practices to be performed, either to appease the community or the divinities. The Kenyan Christians are directly and consciously enslaved and biased in the prevailing politics to an extent of holding perpetual allegiance to one political party or another on the basis of their ethnic backgrounds; the Agikuyu based churches support the Agikuyu political outfit whereas the Jaluo based churches literally supports the political party affiliated

to the Luos etc. Either the clergy or the political elites take advantage of the Christians religiosity to direct their political insights and perceptions. The membership of a given church is easily manipulated to support a particular political candidate on the basis of ethnicity thereby ethicizing the church on the basis of its religiosity, yet ethnicity is one of the major moral and social evils which cause violence, in that way then the church found itself participating in the ethnic violence during elections in Kenya due to ideals of ethnicity and tribalism.

1.7 Recommendation

It is important to understand the dynamics of the roles played in violence by other religious organization in multi religious nations like Kenya. The degree to which Muslim faithful influence political views in Kenya with regard to election violence is critical. It is my hope that researchers with interest in Islam, violence and politics in Kenya will pursue this area further.

REFERENCES

[1] Mahatma Gandhi quotes *htt://www,brainyquotes/quotes/m/mahatmagan* 135298 *Htm1#xiES404i4xFox* 95.99 accessed on 30/02/2020)

[2] Mbiti, J.S (1969), *Africa religions and philosophy*, London; Heinemann

[3] Pew Research Center (2010) U.S. religious knowledge survey. Available at: http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2010/09/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf (Accessed: 22 April 2019).

[4] Tiwari; N. K., (1983), *comparative religion,* MotilalBanardidass, Delhi