

Examining the Socio-Cultural Dynamics: Religious Antagonism and its Effects on Community Cohesion in the Kambaata, Tembaro and Halaba Zones of Ethiopia.

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Abstract: The study utilized the Conflict Perspective Theory developed by Sears (2008) as theoretical framework to analyze the impact of religious antagonism. The study employed a mixed-methods research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of religious antagonism and its effects on community living. The study targeted religious leaders and followers from the specified zones in Ethiopia, with a sample size of 384 respondents selected using cluster sampling techniques. The study utilized structured and unstructured questionnaires, individual interview guides, and focus group discussion guides as data collection instruments. The findings of the study revealed significant impacts of religious antagonism on the surveyed communities. Signs of division, such as the use of derogatory language and disparaging expressions among religious groups, were observed. Additionally, some Christian denominations were accused of projecting an image of salvation and pressuring followers of other faiths or denominations to convert, indicating tensions arising from religious differences.

Keywords: Religious antagonism, Impacts, Community living, salvation, tension and division

I. Background to The Study

Religious antagonism can have significant and far-reaching impacts on community living. It can manifest in various forms, ranging from verbal insults and discrimination to physical violence and persecution. It often arises from differences in religious doctrines, practices, or cultural norms, and it can be fueled by factors such as historical grievances, socio-political tensions, or economic disparities. In communities where religious antagonism is prevalent, it can spill over into political dynamics, leading to instability and conflict. Politicians may exploit religious divisions for their own gain, exacerbating tensions and deepening divisions within the community.

The global phenomena of religiously motivated violence and terrorism have been the focus of media and scholarly attention in recent decades. In this regard, religious antagonism implies disagreement among the followers of different religions. It stems from the differences in religious beliefs and ideologies. The worldwide phenomena of religiously motivated violence, according to Abbink (2020), is connected to transnational narratives and necessitates a comparative examination of socio-historical circumstances and ideological mobilization patterns.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, Ethiopia has experienced a troubling surge in religious tensions and conflicts, contradicting its longstanding history of peaceful interreligious relations. Despite the nation's diverse religious traditions, instances of violent clashes between religious communities have escalated, with incidents such as the burning of churches and mosques becoming alarmingly frequent. This phenomenon stands in stark contrast to Ethiopia's historical reputation for religious tolerance and harmony. The current Ethiopian government seems to have drifted from previous administrations' policy stands on freedom of religion and the religion-state relations. It is a curious thing that religious freedom and religious equality are being talked about more at a time when tensions and violent religious conflicts are rising in contemporary Ethiopia. This situation is ironical since interreligious relations have always been peaceful and tolerant in Ethiopia. Yet, interreligious conflicts have been on the rise in recent decades. In 2019, Muslims burned down 10 Churches in one day in the town of Alaba-Kulito. Even in 2022, mosques were razed down by Christians as Muslims burned down Churches in many parts of Ethiopia. This research seeks to comprehensively examine the multifaceted impacts of religious tensions on community cohesion and social dynamics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of religious antagonism on community living in Kambaata zone, Tembaro special woreda and Halaba Zone of Ethiopia in order to suggest how the affected communities can work together and achieve unity in diversity.

Research Question

The study answered the following question:

How has religious antagonism impacted community living in the Kambaata zone, Tembaro special woreda and Halaba zone of Ethiopia?

Research Objective

To illustrate the impact of religious antagonism in the Kambaata zone, Tembaro special woreda and Halaba Zone of Ethiopia

II. Theoretical Framework**Conflict Perspective Theory**

The global inequities that exist in all cultures are examined by Conflict Perspective Theory (CPT). In particular, Sears's (2008) modern conflict perspective theory was applied in this study. Aspects of mastery in social status the main qualities that identify people according to their race or ethnicity, sex or gender, age, religion, ability or disability, and socioeconomic status pique the interest of conflict theory. Conflict theorists contend that unequal groups frequently compete because of competing objectives and ideals. Sears argues that societies are defined by inequalities that generate conflict, rather than inequalities that generate order and consensus. Such inequality-based conflicts can only be overcome by fundamentally changing existing social relations and generating new ones. In his theory of conflict perspectives, Karl Marx argues that rather than conflict being good or bad, it is an inevitable feature of human nature that contributes to the explanation of why things are the way they are. (Kirkwood, 2011).

Karl Marx in particular thought that religion maintained the status quo and was the ideology of the ruling class. Through this interpretation of religion, subordinate masses are led to believe in the legitimacy of a repressive social order by internalizing the ideology of the ruling elite. Marx maintained that religion impeded the disadvantaged by encouraging people to focus on the otherworldly, rather than aiding social reform and growth. Drew (2023) describes the scholarly definition of conflict theory as having three assumptions, namely: humans are self-interested, societies operate with permanent resource scarcity, and conflicts within and between social groups are ubiquitous and inevitable.

III. Empirical Review**3.1 Religious Antagonism**

Religious warfare, disputes between ideologies, intolerance and discrimination against adherents of different religions, and disputes between the Church and the State are examples of religious conflicts. These disagreements cast doubt on the validity of religions as a whole and may lead to religious breakdown or apathy. Religious conflicts can result from attempts to convert tribal societies to a particular religion, which can cause ethnic disintegration and the loss of cultural legacy (Kaniki, 1976).

Extremism and violence motivated by religion are widespread and have existed for a long time in Africa. Examples of these conflicts include the Muslim conquest (the Jihadist campaigns) of the 7th and 9th centuries in North Africa, the Fulani-based Jihad of Uthman dan Fodio or of Shehu Ahmadu Lobo of Macina in the 17th and 19th centuries in West Africa, and the 16th century war from 1529 to 1543 in the Ethiopia-Somali border areas, led by the Harar-Somali Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi. Ethiopia's Christian monarchy and its houses of worship (Churches and Monasteries) were almost completely destroyed during the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, which actually extended into the interior highlands. Calls for the supreme religious identity and authority of Islam, combined with desires for territorial, economic, and political dominance, drove these tragic events. Therefore, the spread of Islam and Christianity throughout Africa has also led to the emergence of rivalry and conflict between various racial and religious groups, which had previously stabilized societal plurality (Stenhouse, 2003).

Impact of Religious Antagonism on Society

Religion is a cultural phenomenon that has played an important role in the socio-political organization of humanity, albeit outside the course of history. Religion as an institution serves a number of social purposes. Religious disputes have ramifications that extend beyond religious issues and affect all aspect of human existence, such as politics, society, the economy, and culture (Abbink, 2020).

It is reasonable to anticipate that religious discourse will continue to have an increasing impact on international politics in a world where many governments and international bodies lack credibility. Significant levels of soft power originate from religion. Systems of government and religion will always try to abuse or exploit the power of belief to further their own agendas. Therefore, it's critical to have a deeper comprehension of the underlying presuppositions of other religions and the perspectives held by their adherents on those interests. Identifying elements of commonality between major religions can also be very useful (Omotosho, 2014).

Many public incidents point to how tensions surrounding religion have created a breeding ground for disrespect, profiling, hatred and devaluation in social environments such as the workplace. A 2016 United States presidential proposal to bar foreign Muslims from entering the country had a polarizing effect on Muslim American citizens. A protest in Charlottesville, US, in August 2017 included the slogan 'Jews will not change us. Consequently, 2017 was the highest annual rise in anti-Semitic incidents in US history. Public discussions and confrontations, regardless of one's political affiliation, can reflect the religious beliefs of employees and have repercussions beyond political discourse. These repercussions can include workplace incivility, dehumanizing confrontations, and a failure to achieve organizational objectives (Darrell, 2018).

Jewish stereotypes are often portrayed negatively in public. For instance, in 2010 the chief trade spokesman for the European Union stated on a Belgian radio station that the typical Jew thinks they are correct and finds it hard to listen to reasoned

arguments. As a result, violent and physical attacks—such as bombings of synagogues and Jewish homes—are frequent in Belgium. From May to September 2014, it was especially violent during and after Israel's war with Gaza. During this time, anti-Semitic posters and banners, physical attacks, verbal threats, the destruction of Jewish monuments, and the arson of synagogues were among the acts committed against Jews. One such instance is the attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014, which resulted in the deaths of four people by an armed Muslim man. Thirty-eight percent of Jews in Belgium claimed they never wear the Star of David or kippah in public. According to a poll on anti-Semitism conducted by the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), 63% of Belgian participants reported having personally encountered or witnessed anti-Semitic verbal or physical attacks (Fox, 2021).

According to Kivimäki, Kramer and Pasch (2012), religious leaders and figures had a detrimental effect on the conflicts that occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Either there were no voices advocating for peace, or there were not enough of them. Ethnoreligious identity was a major factor in both starting and maintaining the battle, despite the fact that it was primarily about territory and power disputes. One significant aspect of the conflict that religious and political leaders exploited was the concentration of identity-based conflict aims.

The former Salafist branch of the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS) founded the Salafist movement in France in the early 1990s after fleeing the brutality of the Algerian government. Early on, Algerian Islamic political situations and challenges had a significant impact on Salafism in France, particularly through the FIS. France is home to more Muslims than any other country in Europe, with over 5 million Muslims. Incidents involving its Muslim population rock the French state on a regular basis. Despite the fact that French government authorities are worried about the possibility of terror strikes with Islamic inspiration, "Islamic crises" seem to be increasing since the 2005 al-Qaeda attack in France. The goal of this movement was to remove all Western cultural and theological influences from formal education. As the religion was originally transmitted to the prophet, it appears that the Muslim faith has been purified of all innovations that have tainted its teachings and canons. Conversely, it alludes to instructing Muslims to give up their immoral practices and adhere to this pure religion. Al-Qaeda believes that there are multiple stages in the development of Qur'anic law because they are convinced that Allah's rule over the world is inevitable. They become globally dominant through education, the development of Islamic consciousness, and awareness of the world's social hierarchy (Michael, 2009)

As demonstrated by the recent incidents of communal violence and anti-minority movements in Burma and Indonesia, religious strife is still a significant problem in modern society. Furthermore, in the context of historically powerful religious leadership and organized-politicized religion, the process of nation-building in split nations has become even more difficult due to the growing piety and vigorous religious involvement in civil society during the past few decades. Fanaticism and interreligious competition are frequently fueled by political ideologies, social movements, and a collective identity. The development of religious pluralism in the state and society is further complicated by this surge in religious activity on a national and international scale, which some academics have accurately dubbed the "Century of God." The most difficult issues in split democracies are, in particular, the individual and collective rights of religious minorities and the just and equitable treatment of all religious groups, majority and minority. The developing democracies of Indonesia and Malaysia, both with a Muslim majority, have been facing similar difficulties throughout Southeast Asia (Hamayotsu, 2015).

The United Nations (2018) Secretary-General, António Guterres, notes that the Middle East and North Africa region face deep divisions, disturbing currents, and the tragic destruction of its various religious, ethnic and cultural fabrics. The juxtaposition of long-standing old conflicts with new ones, as well as deep-rooted social discontent, shrinking democratic spaces, the emergence of terrorism and new forms of violent fervour are undermining peace, sustainable development and human rights in these regions.

According to Paul (2019), religious conflict is the greatest threat to peaceful coexistence, political and economic advancement, and national security. He illustrates how Nigeria, which was formerly a place where Islam and Christianity coexisted peacefully, saw significant political stability as well as consistent economic progress. Nonetheless, there are now two main georeligious factions in the nation. About 90 million of Nigeria's 180 million inhabitants are Muslims, with the remainder being Christians or traditionalists. In light of this, there has always been competition between Islam and Christianity for religious and sociopolitical spheres. Regrettably, the political elite is quick to take advantage of these contests in order to outperform their rivals on the political and financial fronts. Thus, religious strife continues to pose a serious threat to Nigeria's socioeconomic development and political stability.

Jegede (2019) asserts that several individuals have been killed, maimed, and injured as a result of Nigeria's violent religious disputes. The livelihoods of individuals and the economy have both been severely impacted by these wars. Several churches, mosques, hotels, and other businesses associated with these have been destroyed, along with several individual residences, public buildings, and automobiles, due to the religious strife in Nigeria. Let's just sum up by saying that the erroneous application of religion has caused immense harm to both people and things. In actuality, bloody religious disputes harm the nation's ability to flourish economically by fostering a climate of uncertainty and insecurity.

Peel (2003) claims that religious disputes in Nigeria have gotten alarmingly out of hand. Over a thousand people lost their lives in fighting between Christians and Muslims in 2000 over the intention to impose Sharia law in the northern metropolis of Kaduna State. President Obasanjo, visibly irate, pronounced it to be the greatest violence in Nigeria since the civil war of the 1960s. Furthermore, Muslims in southeast Nigeria have been killed in retaliation for the Kaduna violence. There has been an increase in

violence since President Obasanjo took office. More than two hundred people lost their lives in a well-reported incident of violence between Muslims and Christians in November 2002.

Musa, Adamu and Hasley (2021) report that more than 2,000 people were killed in Kaduna State during the Sharia riots from February to May 2000 alone. At the start of the 2000s, ethno-religious violence erupted in most state governments in northern Nigeria as a result of the introduction of Sharia law (the Islamic legal system). Fears of its applicability to Christians in affected states sparked religious conflict in several states.

The International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic (CAR) published a report in December 2014 that attested to the anti-balaka's ethnic cleansing activities in Muslim-populated areas. The outcome comes after anti-balaka fighters started executing Muslims in January 2014 on the basis of their religious identity. A total of 99% of Bangui's Muslim population was forcibly displaced as a result of this bloodshed. Furthermore, 80% of the Central African Republic's Muslim population has fled to Chad and Cameroon. According to the research, 417 out of the 436 mosques in the nation were destroyed. The remainder of the Muslim minority now mostly resides in enclaves guarded by troops, and their return to the CAR has been extremely gradual. A few of the returnees said that anti-balaka forces had forced them to convert. Additionally, intimidation and abuse of returning Muslim minorities have been documented by UN forces (Barsky, 2015).

Ochab (2018) asserts that religious identity remains one of the most significant indicators of violence in the Central African Republic. Muslims in the West are not allowed to freely practice their faith, and many Muslim communities have been uprooted. In an effort to guarantee cooperation and alleviate the increasing hostilities between religious communities, the Central African Republic's government has started a few initiatives. The CAR's circumstances merited the designation of the nation as a country of special concern by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) (2018). According to a 2018 USCIRF analysis, Muslim minorities in the CAR were already marginalized before the present crisis. In the Central African Republic (CAR), systematic discrimination against Muslims still exists in a number of areas, including identity documents and education.

Research indicates that the implementation of Sharia law in northern Mali between March/April 2013 and January 2014 resulted in a significant and swift decline in the state of human rights. Even though the country is moving toward secularism, the brutality employed made sure that the people had few chances to rebel. The population's accepted understanding of Islam was rapidly undermined by the imposition of strict laws based on Sharia law (Primo, 2013; Lecocq et al., 2013).

Mwangi (2012) the legitimacy acquired by Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin (Al-Shabaab), a non-state armed extremist group that has caused difficulties for local governance, as described in the Coalition of State Failure and Islamization in Somalia. He characterizes Islamism as a political theory that aids in addressing the social and political issues that the Muslim world is currently facing rather than as a theological construct. Mwangi claims that when Muslim communities see a threat from secular or Christian administrations, they are more likely to be mobilized by radical Islam. Höhne (2009) also connects the issues the Somali people suffered after the state's collapse, which robbed the nation of central authority, to the emergence and radicalization of Al-Shabaab and the American Ethiopian counterterrorism strategy.

International Christian Concern (ICC) (2011) holds that the Anti-Christian violence in Asendabo town, Oromia, western Ethiopia, has left over a dozens of Christians dead and many injured. The International Christian Concern (ICC) investigation claims that Muslims set fire to 30 Christian homes, 69 churches, a Bible school, a Christian orphanage, and a church office. The attacks on Christians started on March 2, 2006, following accusations by Muslims that Christians had damaged the Qur'an, the sacred book of Islam. The ICC reports that 3,000 Christians were forcibly removed from their homes in the early days of the attack due to ongoing violence against local inhabitants. To put a halt to the attacks, military personnel were dispatched to Asendabo and the surrounding districts. Because the Muslim local administrator did not defend Christians, federal government officials fired him. The Voice of America said that MelesZenawi, the prime minister of Ethiopia, attributed the attacks to the Muslim extremist organization Kwarej. According to some estimates, 130 Muslims were detained on suspicion of being involved in the incident. According to Jonathan Racho, the regional manager for Africa at the International Christian Concern, Islamist militants are battling to create an Islamic state in Ethiopia, a country with a majority of Christians. He warned that until the Ethiopian government takes decisive action to stop Islamists from carrying out such acts, Christians will continue to be killed. Churches in western Ethiopia are reportedly having difficulty meeting their people's basic necessities, such as clothing and food, according to ICC reports. Emergency help is offered by organizations like Serving in Mission (SIM), an arm of the ICC, and others (Clinton, 2011).

Agenzia Fides (2018) claims that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has suffered greatly as a result of the violence spiral. It mentions how at least seven Orthodox churches have reportedly been attacked and set on fire, and how at least six priests and several people have reportedly died as a result, according to local media accounts. Conflict started when armed men from the Somali-born Liu militia (special force) attempted to break up a meeting between representatives of the city of Dir-Dawa and members of the local parliament on Abdi Illey's (president of the Somali region) orders. The Ethiopian army intervened in response to the violent episodes, stationing troops near the institutional headquarters, which included the Abdi Illey presidential house and the local parliament building. Following attacks on targets connected to minority ethnic groups supported by Liu militia members, there was a significant intervention. The local governor resigned as a result of violent conflicts that worsened between the Addis Ababa

government and the local administration. According to reports from the local media, Addis Ababa authorities detained and arrested Abdi Illey. The Tewahedo Orthodox Church's official sources claim that over 20,000 Christians have been forced to flee.

According to Terje (2019) in the Addis Standard, Ethiopia has been praised as a model example of religious harmony across all parties. But it appears that this view has been warped by the recent spike in acts of religious violence. Reports of victims for religious reasons, attacks on Christians and Muslims, church burnings and mosque demolitions, and individuals taking refuge in churches have both verified and unverified sources. Furthermore, since July 2019, numerous Christians have perished, primarily in the country's east, the Sidama region in the south-central area, and the SNNPRS. Large-scale protests were called by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) in September 2019 in response to these killings, particularly in the country's north.

Michele (2022), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, says he was deeply saddened by recent violent clashes between Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia, which reportedly saw at least 30 people killed and more than 100 others injured. Interreligious clashes, first reported in the city of Gondar in the northern Amhara region on April 26, 2022, were linked to land disputes and appear to have spread rapidly to towns and cities in several other regions, as well as the capital Addis Ababa. *Deutsche Welle* (2022) reported that an unidentified armed group attacked Muslims in the city of Gondar, in the Amhara region of north-western Ethiopia, on April 26, 2022, after violence erupted during the funeral of a prominent local sheikh. A group of Muslims attending a funeral was bombed, killing three and injuring five; this sparked chaos and violence in the city. The mayor of Gondar, Zewdu Malede, told *Deutsche Welle* on May 6, 2022, that authorities had set up an investigative team to look into the attack, which left around 150 people injured. More than a week after the violence, the death toll remained unclear. The State Peace and Security bureau in the Amhara region put the number of victims at 14, while the High Council of Islamic Affairs in Amhara said 20 people were killed. According to the mayor Zewdu, both Muslims and Christians were killed in the attack, which local Muslim leaders blamed on heavily armed extremist Christians.

According to Helena (2022), in the days that followed, similar atrocities motivated by religion extended to other regions of Ethiopia. On April 28, 2022, two mosques in Debarq town were attacked and set on fire by a mob of Orthodox Christians. The attack was in response to a report that the Gotet Mariam Orthodox Church in Kebele 01 had been destroyed; in reality, the church's compound had been set on fire, but the building itself had not been destroyed. It is unclear whether the fire was set intentionally or accidentally. A member of the security forces was murdered by unknown gunshots in a nearby mosque, according to the head of the North Gondar Zone Security Office (Debarq City Communication, April 29, 2022). To protest the attack on Gondar city on April 29, 2022, Muslims gathered in most Muslim-dominated locations, including Jijiga in Somalia, Jimma, Dire Dawa, Oromia Region, Semera in Afar, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR). After rioters threw stones at police, the demonstrations at Dire-Dawa grew violent, injuring 22 police officers. Government vehicles and banks were vandalized by protestors. A stray bullet killed a kid in Dire-Dawa, and 89 people were taken into custody in relation to the violent protest.

On April 28, 2022, Muslim protestors in the Silte zone of Worabe town assaulted and set fire to two Orthodox and three Protestant churches in the wake of the Gondor crisis in southern Ethiopia. Similar to this, on April 28, a gang of Muslims broke into the AlemGebeya Church in Sankura woreda, SNNPR Silte woreda, attacked monks, and set fire to the church. The location was Sankura St. Gabriel Church. In addition, the Christians' hotel was demolished by the mob, and roughly fifteen individuals were hurt. As per the Administrative Communications Office of the Silte Zone, 79 individuals were taken into custody in relation to the violent protests that took place in Worabe and Sankura. The Muslims destroyed another Orthodox church the following day (*Voice of America*, May 9, 2022).

According to Borkena (2022), a day following the tragic events in Gondor, 14 people were killed in fighting between two members of the Islamic faith and followers of the Orthodox Church, and at least three churches were set on fire. According to the Interreligious Council of Ethiopia (2022), demolishing churches and other houses of religion in southern Ethiopia's Silte region is an outright crime. It further stated that no religion can accept this. Not only were the mosques set on fire, but there were also reports of at least three fatalities inside the church. The Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate received a letter from the Diocese of Silte pleading with the authorities to defend the Orthodox churches and adherents in Bhadrāsana. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church patriarch, Abune Mathias, expressed his condolences in a statement following the events in Gondar and the Silte Zone in southern Ethiopia. According to him, Ethiopians are embarrassed in front of the world. Saying, "Fire cannot be extinguished with fire," he begged for moderation. Additionally, His Holiness urged the religious authorities to put forth great effort in moulding the generation. It is the responsibility of religious leaders to actively encourage their followers to uphold moral principles, world peace, and understanding. Religious leaders can significantly contribute to the promotion of peace, compassion, and respect in their communities by influencing the mind-set and behaviour of their followers. He implored the government to accept accountability for both God and the people.

A Christian humanitarian organization claims that Oromo youth organizations known as "Qeerroo" were responsible for the widespread violence in the Oromia region and several areas of Addis Ababa that followed the June 29, 2020, murder of well-known musician Hachalu Hundesa. In the Oromia region, several Christians were slaughtered with deliberate intent. The regions most impacted by the violence are Chrio, Awedaye, Ginir, Asebot, Assasa, Sashemene, Bale-Robe, and Arsi. According to estimates from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), 123 people died between June 29, 2020, and July 2, 2020. According to a statement released by the EOTC, the church's investigations in the impacted areas of the Oromia region led to the specific targeting of 67 adherents (*Ethiopia 2020 International Religious Freedom Report*, 2020).

The media reports that on January 19–20, 2020, multiple people died and property was destroyed as a result of youth fights during the EOTC's Epiphany celebrations in Dire-Dawa, Harar, and Abomsa in the Arisi zone of the Oromia region. In Harar, on the eve of the Epiphany holiday, largely Muslim youth groups halted EOTC processions on January 19, 2020. Christian youth groups in Harar destroyed homes, shops, and cars owned by Muslims on January 20, 2020. On cars outside a mosque in that city, they painted Coptic crosses. Comparable acts of violence took place in Dire-Dawa on January 19, 2020, when one EOTC supporter died following a stone attack and twenty-one were shot. After the assault, 14 police officers who attempted to break up the fight were beaten up, and cars, homes, and businesses were destroyed. Two EOTC supporters were killed in an incident at Abomsa at the same time by a group of local adolescents. Christian adolescents murdered one of the attackers, while Muslim adolescents targeted Christian-owned businesses, properties, and cattle, inflicting multiple injuries. Churches and private and public property were destroyed, according to Arisi Zone Police, and 19 people, including 15 security personnel, were given minor injuries. To end the altercation, federal police stepped in. (*Ethiopia 2020 International Religious Freedom Report*, 2020).

On February 9, 2019, a group of Muslims armed with sticks, stones and fuel attacked a Church in Halaba Kulito, 320 kilometres south of the capital Addis Alaba. Thirteen different Church buildings, 14 motorcycles and an unknown number of bicycles, as well as Bibles and furniture were damaged by the mob in Halaba. Mobs moved from Church to Church, destroying buildings and people's belongings. By the end of the violence, 26 worshipers, including four Church workers, had been injured trying to protect their Church buildings. Halaba Kulito is a predominantly Muslim town, and almost all Christians have moved from the surrounding villages for work reasons. Muslims in Halaba Kulito reportedly chanted jihadist slogans, "Allahuakbar (God is great)" and "Halaba belongs to Islam", as they burned Churches and destroyed properties belonging to eight denominations. Despite the devastation, the entire congregation managed to gather for worship the following Sunday. At the same time, they learned that a significant number of Christians chose not to attend services out of fear following the attack. The local government has assigned a guard to each Church attacked (*Morning Star News East Africa Correspondent*, 2019).

IV. Research Methodology

This research applied a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods involves a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis approaches. The research involved 384 respondents identified from Kambaata zone, Tembaro special woreda, and Halaba Zone. The researcher used cluster sampling technique to select seven religious institutions. This study used structured/unstructured questionnaires, individual interviews and focus group discussions as the primary data collection instruments. This research also used secondary data. Secondary data for this study was sourced from articles in academic journals and related scholarly publications on the impact of religious antagonism on community living, religious council reports, newsletters, newspapers, data archives, unpublished reports, literature reviews, and internet sources. Since the study adopted a mixed-method approach, data analysis was undertaken using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires and analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data was analysed using SPSS version 26. The data obtained from the questionnaires was analysed quantitatively in line the research question of the study. The findings were tabulated, interpreted and presented. Qualitative data was analysed thematically. The responses of some respondents were recorded and quoted verbatim to contextualize and validate the study data. The conclusion on the impact of religious antagonism on the communal life of society was highlighted in the Kambaata, Tembaro, and Halaba Zones.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

In this study, the researcher used the sampling formula by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to determine the required sample size from the target population (n) as follows:

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

Where: S = required sample size

X² = the table value of chi-square for one degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841)

N = the population size

P = population proportion (0.50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05)

According to the above formula, the sample size of this study was determined as follows:

$$n = \frac{x^2 NP (1 - P)}{e^2(N - 1) + x^2 P(1 - P)}$$

N = 1.313,162

X² = 3.841

P = 0.5

e = 0.05

= 383.98

n = 384

In this case, the sample population size of the study was 384 respondents.

V. Discussion of Findings

The study's findings regarding the impact of religious antagonism on community living indicate that the study underscores the multifaceted nature of the consequences, affecting social, economic, educational, and political aspects of society. According to the study's findings, a substantial majority of respondents 90.1% of those who identified as religious followers and 98.4% of those who identified as religious leaders acknowledged that religious antagonism had a detrimental impact on society's ability to live as a community. Some respondents explained that religious antagonism can erode social cohesion and trust within a community. When people from different religious backgrounds feel threatened or marginalized, social bonds weaken, and cooperation becomes more challenging. This could impede the growth of a society that is inclusive and united. Some described how religious antagonism may hinder the celebration and appreciation of religious diversity within a society. It can lead to exclusionary practices, making it difficult for individuals of certain religious backgrounds to fully participate in social, economic, and cultural activities. Social life and economic activities can be negatively impacted when religious tensions spill over into the economic realm. Discrimination based on religious identity might affect job opportunities, economic cooperation, and overall prosperity in a community. Religious antagonism can influence educational systems by shaping curricula, textbooks, and even the social dynamics within schools. In extreme cases, it may lead to the segregation of students based on religious lines, hindering the development of open-mindedness and tolerance. This has been happening at universities and some high schools.

Religious antagonism can have various negative consequences for both individuals and societies. Most frequently, respondents said that religious antagonism often leads to social division, creating "us versus them" mentalities. This can result in increased tension, conflict, and even violence between different religious groups, contributing to societal strife and discord. Religious antagonism can foster intolerance and discrimination, with individuals from different religious backgrounds facing bias, prejudice, and exclusion. This can manifest in various aspects of life, including employment, education, and social interactions. In extreme cases, religious antagonism can escalate into violence and conflict. History has seen instances where religious tensions have led to acts of terrorism, communal violence, and even wars, causing significant human suffering and loss of life; social cohesion relies on trust and cooperation among community members; religious antagonism undermines these foundations by creating mistrust and animosity, making it challenging for diverse individuals to collaborate and build a cohesive society; and religious tensions can have economic repercussions, affecting businesses, investments, and trade. Discrimination based on religious identity may limit economic opportunities for certain individuals or communities, hindering overall economic development. A good number of respondents also agreed that religious antagonism can spill over into the political sphere, contributing to instability and unrest. Politicians may exploit religious differences for their gain, leading to polarization and fragmentation within the political landscape. Religious antagonism may discourage cultural exchange and understanding between different religious communities. This can limit the sharing of diverse perspectives, hindering the enrichment of a society through cultural diversity.

The findings of this study accord to Abbink (2020) and Jegede (2019) that religious tensions harm social life and economic activities. The recognition that discrimination based on religious identity permeates various facets of life, including job opportunities and economic cooperation, is particularly noteworthy. Additionally, the observation that religious animosity has influenced educational systems, shaping curricula and social dynamics within schools, highlights the pervasive nature of these tensions. The link between religious antagonism and its spillover into the political sphere, contributing to instability and conflict, aligns with broader discussions on the intersection of religion and politics. Recognizing that religious enmity was impeding cultural exchange and understanding between different religious communities raised worries about social cohesiveness and unity. Moreover, the exploitation of religious differences by politicians for personal gain and its subsequent impact on polarization and fragmentation within the political landscape were recurring themes in studies examining the interplay of religion and politics.

VI. Conclusion

The study concluded that religious antagonism, or enmity or conflict between various religious groups, can have a big influence on social life in society. When religious tensions proliferate into the economic sphere, social life and economic activity might suffer, all of which can be negatively impacted by discrimination based on religious identification. Religious antagonism lead to discrimination in hiring practices A society characterized by religious conflict may experience a decline in overall prosperity. When discrimination based on religious identity is pervasive, it creates a fragmented and divisive social environment that can impede collective efforts for societal development. Religious tensions can extend beyond economic activities and impact social interactions. Communities may become polarized, leading to a breakdown in social cohesion and trust among individuals from different religious backgrounds.

VII. Recommendations

Following the analysis of respondents' data and study conclusions, the following recommendations were offered. The Religious Council, civil authorities, policymakers, and all communities were the targets of the recommendations.

Recommendations for Religious Forum

Education and Awareness: Initiatives to educate communities about the value and benefits of religious dialogue could help dispel negative perceptions. Highlighting that dialogue does not necessarily entail compromising one's faith but rather encourages mutual understanding may be crucial. By implementing education and awareness initiatives, communities can cultivate an atmosphere of respect, understanding, and cooperation among individuals of diverse religious backgrounds. Education and awareness are powerful tools in breaking down stereotypes, fostering empathy, and building a foundation for peaceful coexistence. Emphasize the importance of being well-informed about one's own religion as well as the beliefs and practices of others. Religious literacy can reduce misunderstandings and contribute to more informed discussions.

Interfaith Dialogue Platforms: Establish and actively participate in interfaith dialogue platforms where representatives from different religious communities can engage in open discussions and collaborative initiatives.

Religious Literacy Program: Implement programs aimed at enhancing religious literacy among the members of religious forums. This can include workshops, seminars, and educational materials to deepen understanding of diverse faiths.

Joint Religious Events: Organize joint religious events that promote unity and understanding. These events could include shared prayers, ceremonies, or festivals that emphasize common values.

Leadership Engagement: Involving religious leaders at the grassroots level in promoting dialogue can be instrumental. Leaders can play a key role in shaping community attitudes and fostering an environment conducive to open and respectful discussions. Collaborate with religious institutions to promote interfaith dialogue, encourage religious leaders to engage in joint initiatives that foster understanding and respect among their congregations

Recommendations for Civil Authorities:

Support for Educational Initiatives: Allocate resources and support for educational initiatives promoting religious tolerance and understanding. Collaborate with educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, and community organizations to integrate lessons on religious diversity, tolerance, and dialogue into school curricula. Encourage open discussions in classrooms that promote critical thinking and understanding of different faiths. Target educational initiatives towards the youth, as they are often more open to new ideas and less entrenched in pre-existing prejudices.

Community Outreach Programs: Implement community outreach programs to facilitate communication between civil authorities and religious communities. This can involve town hall meetings, awareness campaigns, and collaborative projects.

Recommendations for Communities:

Community-Based Dialogue Sessions: Initiate community-based dialogue sessions where residents can openly discuss religious differences, dispel misconceptions, and build stronger relationships.

Cultural Exchanges Programs: Actively participate in and support cultural exchange programs that promote understanding and cooperation among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. Organize cultural exchange programs that allow individuals from diverse religious backgrounds to interact and learn from each other. This could include visits to religious sites, shared cultural events, and collaborative community projects. Cultural exchange programs can be powerful tools for promoting mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. The key is to create opportunities for meaningful interactions that go beyond surface-level differences, fostering a sense of shared humanity.

Youth Engagements: Implement programs specifically targeting the youth to foster interfaith understanding and tolerance. Encourage youth participation in community projects and activities that promote diversity. Create activities specifically designed for young participants, such as art workshops, sports events, or youth forums. Youth engagement is vital for building a future generation that values diversity and inclusion. Create youth forums and activities that encourage dialogue and collaboration.

Promotion of Religious Literacy: Encourage community members to learn about and understand different religions. Foster an environment where individuals are curious about and open to learning about the beliefs and practices of others.

Recommendations for Policymakers:

Policy Framework: Develop and enforce comprehensive legislation that protects freedom of religion or belief for all individuals. Create legal frameworks that facilitate dialogue and mediation between different religious communities to resolve conflicts peacefully; develop and enforce legal frameworks that address hate speech and discrimination based on religion; ensure that the legal system provides protection against religious antagonism and promotes peaceful coexistence.

Ethical Media: Encourage responsible and ethical media coverage of religious issues, avoiding sensationalism and stereotyping. Promote the representation of diverse religious perspectives in mainstream media and entertainment to counteract negative stereotypes and promote understanding.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations:

Collaborative Initiatives: Encourage collaboration among religious forums, civil authorities, and communities to address the root causes of religious antagonism collectively.

Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms: Establish mechanisms for monitoring and reporting instances of religious hate speech or discrimination. Encourage individuals to report such incidents and ensure swift and appropriate responses.

Inclusive approach: Designing ecumenical activities that are inclusive and respectful of diverse religious beliefs can encourage participation. Creating platforms where individuals feel that their faith is respected and valued can contribute to a more positive perception of religious dialogue. Facilitate regular community dialogues where members of different religious groups can come together in a neutral and safe environment. These dialogues can provide a platform for open communication, dispelling misconceptions, and building bridges.

Strong Stockholder Partnerships: Foster partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, and religious institutions to develop holistic approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

By tailoring these recommendations to the specific roles and responsibilities of religious forums, civil authorities, and communities, a more comprehensive and coordinated effort can be made to address the challenges identified in the study and foster a more tolerant and understanding society.

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