

THE MANIPULATION OF RELIGIOUS FEELINGS AS A DETERMINANT OF SOCIAL CONFLICTS – A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

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Historically viewed, religion has had a role to overcome social conflicts and promote peace among opposing parties. However, it has often known to transform into the role of a direct or indirect cause of some form of violence. Therefore, the subject of the research in this paper is the correlation of social conflicts and religious determinants as their causes, among which the manipulation of religious feelings has a special place. The central topic of the paper is the manipulation of religious feelings, i.e. the methods and techniques used by these subjects to recruit new soldiers of religiosity, with the ultimate goal of gaining supremacy by force over the opposing party, in this case religion. Accordingly, such relations have been analysed in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, where, in addition to Christianity and Islam, as two dominant religions, there are several other local religions that together, for decades, have been in an open conflict for supremacy. In this regard, the consideration of the historical context of this type of conflict in Nigeria should indicate the main motives in its background, goals to be achieved in this manner, as well as answers to the question of whether believers, who, according to the postulates of both religions, should always be on the path of peace, in fact are abused through individual or systemic manipulation.

Key words: *social conflicts, religious conflicts, religion, manipulation, Nigeria*

Introduction

Social conflicts, which in some countries can be of such an intensity and consequences that they pose the greatest threat to national security, arise as a result of many factors including political, economic, social, ethnic and religious ones as

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the most important. Even today, after centuries in which the role of religion in society has varied from crucial to marginal, in an epoch obviously marked by the domination of IT, many societies use the theological thought for the establishment of a new value system. In such situations, in order to express their religiosity and prove their affiliation with a particular religious community, some members of society practice extremism as a means to most effectively send the desired message. The moment the use of violence becomes the main way of communication within some society, the natural response of other actors in such a community is a backlash, which often involves the same or similar methods. Moreover, the repressive state apparatus can be activated in such situations, if necessary and justified, in order to protect the vital state values and the lives and health of its citizens. Such a situation leads to socio-political instability, and any further and the smallest incident can contribute to complete intra-social unrest.

When it comes to religious groups, or individuals who, motivated by religious factors, undertake acts of violence in order to send their message or accomplish a personal or general goal, the problem is that such acts generally mobilize all or most members of the same religious community, so they easily transform into long-lasting, armed and mass riots. Such an ability - to mobilize mass groups in a relatively short time - is what puts religiously motivated destructive groups in a position to be abused for achieving a certain political or other goal, using an abnormal amount of violence. Such abuse, which can be carried out by various actors, from internal authorities to foreign interest groups or individuals, can also be conducted in several ways including manipulating the feelings of believers themselves as the most dangerous one, both in terms of conflict intensity and consequences. Knowing that skillful manipulation of emotions shows the potential to create the most loyal soldiers of religiosity, those subjects who see in a society an opportunity to achieve personal or state political aspirations consciously use this fact to put the acquired affection of a particular religious group in the service of their struggle.

Today, almost thirty years after the end of the Cold War, while African countries are constantly in the process of democratization, despite all expectations, in many parts of the world there is a growing trend of religious extremism, more precisely social conflicts, based on some religious motive. Since there are many examples in which the issue of religion, as a consequence of its politicization, appears in the role of a cause of social conflicts, the very decision to consider certain methods of manipulation of this kind on a specific example is a logical solution.

Religious conflicts

By a simple view of historical context, security challenges, risks and threats which the modern world faces, have been so diverse that they are difficult to even recognize, not to mention, to develop effective preventive mechanisms. The rapid development of information and communications systems, as a specific feature of the 21st century, has further affected the development of new possible forms of endangering the vital values of state and society, but without eliminating those that previously posed security challenges. Among them, having in mind intensity and consequences, conflicts in the

name of religion have been characteristic, which, inter alia, Samuel Huntington recognized as future conflicts in the post-Cold War period. Today, twenty years after Huntington's thesis that conflicts between civilizations will occupy the battlefield, and that the greatest threat to humanity is Islamist extremism, his words are confirmed, especially if ubiquitous examples of terrorist acts motivated by radical Islamist attitudes are taken into account. However, far from the fact that conflicts caused by religious motives are an authentic feature nowadays, on the contrary, they represent a phenomenon that is as old as religion itself, and due to its characteristics, they have been the subject of many papers. According to some authors, religion has always been used to mobilize believers, counting on the fact that it could be a way to establish enormous mass groups that are further trained to use absolutely all available means to accomplish certain goals, in most cases political ones.¹ An additional danger, at least when it comes to parties to the conflict who have been recruited in the above-mentioned manner and who have been by constant manipulation indoctrinated with the idea of endangering religious community and their role as soldiers of religiosity to save it, is, Pascal says, that "people never do evil as completely and joyfully as when they do it out of religious conviction".² Emile Durkheim is also in the direction of understanding the destructive potential of religion, i.e. the wrong perception of religiosity, who believes that religion should be considered exclusively as a social phenomenon, i.e. that it does not have any metaphysical features.³ For Durkheim, society is the objective reality of what we call God in monotheistic religions, and, as he states, since religion has no ontological and cognitive basis, it very easily opens the way to extreme relativism, which causes some polarization within a society.⁴ Polarization of society is a factor that increases the tendency of some community to resolve its antagonisms through some of many forms of conflict. In contrast, the idea that fanatic blindness to a self-established belief system, in this case of a religious character, is at the root of a conflict is categorically rejected by Hannah Arendt, who summarises her views in the term – the banality of evil. Using this syntagm, Arendt advocates that the greatest evils in history were not committed by fanatics and sociopaths, but by ordinary people, who unconditionally accepted the state interpretation that the actions in which they participate are completely normal.⁵ The truth is, at least when it comes to religiously motivated conflicts, somewhere in the middle. Namely, most of the evil caused by these motives has been committed by religious fanatics, believing that they have been doing the right thing, but at the same time, their crimes have been a consequence of their state or some other political entity interpreting it as the only right way to achieve a goal.

¹ Dragan Simeunović, *Političko nasilje*, Radnička štampa, Beograd, 2009, p. 198.

² Blez Paskal, *Misli*, BIGZ, Beograd, 1991, p. 41.

³ Emil Dirkem, *Elementarni oblici religijskog života*, Hrvatsko sociološko društvo, Zagreb, 2008, p. 112.

⁴ Muamer Halilović, *Kritički osvrt na Dirkemov redukcioniistički pogled na religiju*, *Kom: časopis za religijske nauke*, vol. 4, br. 2, 2015, p. 59.

⁵ Hana Arent, *Izvori totalitarizma*, Feministička izdavačka kuća 94, Beograd, 1999, p. 16.

Religious wars or wars motivated by factors that include a religious issue, were a dominant feature in certain epochs in the past. This situation lasted until the end of the 17th century, when they were replaced by wars that were fought for national and ideological reasons.⁶ However, a few centuries later, at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, a new transformation took place under the influence of some factors, so today the world is again facing the risk of extreme and mass conflicts in the name of religion.⁷ Among the authors who analyse the role of religion in the 21st century, there is a consensus on the factors that contributed to this transition and which re-launched religious relations on the main stage of the world events. One of them is Milovan Subotić, who states that the return of religion to the epicentre of the world events is a consequence of the following factors: 1) strengthening fundamentalist tendencies in world religions; 2) the role of Christian churches in the radical changes that took place in some Central and Eastern countries (primarily in Poland), 3) the rise of ecumenical processes in the world during 1980s.⁸

On the basis of historical data, as one of the most common reasons for a conflict between some religious groups, the aspiration for better economic and social status is recognized. That is, it can be seen that some groups of this character were abused for the mentioned reasons in order to achieve goals that were of an economic and social character.⁹ History teaches us that conflicts in the name of religion can arise on the basis of many factors, but, above all, it is important to point out that they primarily develop in multinational, highly conflicted and developing societies. In general, in theory, the main causes of religious conflicts are:

– *“deep social crises* (breakdown of value system, anomie, social despair and hopelessness of the greatest part of population);

– *politicization of religion and manipulation of religious emotions* (by the clergy, when the clerical wing within a religious institution forms political parties or movements with political goals; or by state and political entities either in terms of imposing certain political beliefs or arbitrating on religious issues);

– *permeation of religious and national complex* (combination of nationalism, national chauvinism and religious fanaticism, as a consequence of a real or apparent coalition of religious and nationalist ethno-elite in order to gain power or high political positions in a country);

– *the existence of an undemocratic, authoritarian and totalitarian political regime and system of government that creates inequality in the social position of members of some religions, denominations and confessions”*.¹⁰

⁶ David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*. Routledge, London, 1998, p. 22.

⁷ Marko Krstić, *Verski fundiran terorizam – religija kao inicijator nasilja*, *Vojno delo*, vol. 69, br. 5, 2017, p. 420.

⁸ Milovan Subotić, *Religija i rat – povratak otpisanog?* *Međunarodni problemi*, vol. 71, br. 4, 2019, p. 483.

⁹ Jan Willem Honing, „New Conflicts: Risks and Challenges”. In: Heinz Gartner, Adrian Hyde-Price, Eric Reiter (eds), *Europe's New Security Challenges*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 2004.

¹⁰ Mladen Bajagić i Srđan Milašinović, *Verski sukobi kao savremena pretnja bezbednosti*, *Nauka, bezbednost, policija*, vol. 11, br. 3, 2006, pp. 91-92.

Nigeria – the manipulation of religious feelings in order to gain supremacy in the conflict of monotheistic religions

Located in the western part of the African continent, composed of 36 states and the territory of the capital Abuja, once the location of many kingdoms and tribal states, the Federal Republic of Nigeria is today the most populous African country, whose economy is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Due to its exceptional ethnic and religious heterogeneity, it has always been a place where extremely radical intrastate conflicts have taken place. Somewhat more than 180 million people living in Nigeria are grouped into more than 500 ethnic communities and are strictly polarized to Christians and Muslims. The Christian population (slightly less than 50% of the total population) is located in the southern part of this country and many authors who have dealt with the topic of religious conflicts in this area agree that there is a greater level of tolerance among opposing religious and ethnic groups.¹¹ On the other hand, Muslims (slightly more than 50% of them) inhabit the northern parts of the country and have intolerance towards other ethnic and religious groups, which is why the vast majority of conflicts take place in this part of Nigeria.¹²

In Nigerian national politics, Christian fears of Muslim domination over the national political space and the accompanying fear that politically dominant Muslims will use their privileged positions to Islamize national institutions and impose Islamic Sharia law on non-Muslims date back to colonial times. Muslims, especially those from northern Nigeria, have tried to defend themselves against what they believe is unbridled Westernization and have sporadically sought refuge in parish religious reforms.¹³ Colonialism did not cause the specific conditions and identity crises that created tensions and conflicts between Christians and Muslims, but it made them worse. The British colonial policy of indirect rule, according to the „divide and rule“ system, which required sharp ethno-religious differentiation among Nigerians, made religion and ethnicity blatant features of identity and pushed the policy of excluding identity into the political arena. As a result, minority ethnic groups in northern Nigeria, mostly Christians, have defined and still define themselves against the Muslim majority, especially in the Middle Belt, which is usually a place for „non-Muslims“. Since colonisation has been the basis for the use of identity politics as a means of accessing political and economic resources, religious differences have exacerbated political crises and been involved in major national conflicts such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), in which the Biafran separatist movement initiated mainly by Christians from the Igbo people, was destroyed by the federal gover-

¹¹ Jegede Paul, Implications of religious conflicts on peace, national security and development in Nigeria, *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 9, no 1, 2012, p. 58.

¹² Jegede Paul, gen. quote 2012, p. 58.

¹³ Kemal Ozden and Baba Osumane, Historical Background of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no 19, 2020, p. 186.

ment, which found its way to victory through pogroms, blockades and famine.¹⁴ Religious animosities have only grown out of this tragic episode in Nigerian history. The unwillingness of the entire society to make some efforts to overcome religious intolerance, along with the already existing socioeconomic and political problems that have never been overcome, has deepened social rifts and caused extremist and violent riots. Probably the most glaring example of this process is the terrorist organization Boko Haram, which harms both Christians and Muslims, but also prevents efforts to establish a comprehensive social system based primarily on peace by increasing the level of tolerance.

The identification of methods and techniques for the manipulation of religious feelings

In the long history of sciences that have dealt with the topic of manipulation, primarily psychology, several comprehensive and purposeful definitions of this term have been offered, which adequately indicate the elements that make up this process and its recognition.¹⁵ Furthermore, during that period, a lot of methods and techniques have been identified that the subjects of manipulation, i.e. manipulators, use. Most of them are of a universal character and can be implemented in various fields of life in which manipulation is carried out. However, when it comes to the topic of this paper, i.e. the manipulation of religious feelings in order to accomplish a certain goal that is in the interest of manipulators, and on the example of social conflicts in Nigeria, we will identify some most noticeable in terms of intensity and consequences of conflicts. However, before their description, it is necessary to define the very concept of manipulation. One of the most precise and efficient definitions of this term was given by the philosopher and sociologist Đuro Šušnjić, who states: “*manipulation can be defined as a deliberate, systematic and controlled procedure or a set of procedures by which a manipulator, using symbolic means in favourable psychosocial conditions, sends some messages to the masses through the means of communication, with the intention of influencing beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of a great number of people, so that they are, in matters which there is no general agreement on, and they are vitally interested in, directed according to belief, attitudes and values of a manipulator without even being aware of it*”¹⁶. Having in mind all the listed elements of the definition of this term, the methods and techniques through which the individual and systemic manipulation of believers is performed will be presented in the continuation of the paper.

¹⁴ Ochonu Moses, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2014, p. 273.

¹⁵ Erih From, *Psihoanaliza i religija*, Oktoih-Jasen, Podgorica, 2002.

¹⁶ Đuro Šušnjić, *Ribari ljudskih duša: ideja manipulacije i manipulacija idejama*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2011, p. 42.

The indoctrination of a “new” religious concept based on a political motive

Despite all expectations, after the process of democratization and election of a new government in 1999, Nigeria went into extremist conflicts that, so far, has only led to the enormous death toll. However, the election of the Christian government from the south of this country was an insurmountable obstacle to national stability and peace, which the Muslim population could not reconcile with. The long-term Muslim imam Mohammed Yusuf, who founded the religious movement called Boko Haram in 2001, was the first to suggest that there would be an escalation as a consequence of not accepting such a situation. In fact, Yusuf, who had some contacts with similar Muslim movements around the world, as well as the strong support of the Iranian intelligence community in the post-Iranian revolution period, was a long-standing opponent of Nigerian system of values and education that was harmonized with the Western concept.¹⁷ Explaining that new generations of Muslims should be exposed to education that will bring them as close as possible to Sharia law, he established a new concept that included educating the interested population in mosques and special schools provided for this activity. The alternative model of education, which was nothing else but a process of the indoctrination of the new religious concept, as it would turn out later, was only a cleverly disguised recruiting centre for new soldiers of religiosity.

In the following years, the organization continued to strengthen both logistically and numerically, and when they managed to train their mass troops, it was only a matter of time before their actions became radicalized. It happened in 2009, when Boko Haram carried out a series of terrorist acts aimed at intimidating the Christian population in order to comply with demands to accept the caliphate (a form of government in which the supreme ruler is Muhammad's legitimate successor) as the only legitimate form of government.¹⁸ In the actions undertaken by the official state authorities on that occasion, in response to the previous violence, the founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, was killed, and the movement was taken over by his follower Abubakar Shekau. There are opinions that the radicalization of the organization Boko Haram was ordered by the government of that state in order to put itself in the role of fighters against terrorism and to be able to impose curfew due to the emergency situation, which Perouse de Montclos believes, was aimed at preventing the opposition from carrying out its political campaign.¹⁹ Bearing in mind the political background of the founding, existence and development of the terrorist

¹⁷ Jacob Zenn, *The Islamic Movement and Iranian Intelligence Activities in Nigeria*, Combating terrorism Center, vol. 6, no 1, 2013, p. 7.

¹⁸ Haldum Canci and Opeyemi Adedoyin Odukoya, *Ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria*. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, vol. 16, no 1, 2016, p. 14.

¹⁹ Marc - Antoine Perouse de Montclos, „Boko Haram and politics: From insurgency to terrorism”, in: Marc - Antoine Perouse de Montclos (Eds.), *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*, African Studies Centre, Lieden, 2014, p. 143.

organization Boko Haram, such statements are not surprising, but only further confirm the hypothesis of the connection of political organizations and their goals with militant organizations founded allegedly for religious reasons.

The new leader managed to bring Boko Haram and its followers closer to the final goal by declaring a caliphate in 2014 in those areas where this terrorist organization had control. However, this situation did not last long, as a common reaction of the joint forces of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin, i.e. the newly established coalition, followed in order to counter extremist attacks that became unbearable. Although Boko Haram was suppressed at one point, that is, forced to retreat to forests of mountain ranges in eastern Nigeria, general opinion is that this is a temporary withdrawal in order to regroup these units and develop a new strategy to achieve their goal, i.e. until the time comes to put religious beliefs in the service of politics and political goals. This, at least when it comes to this movement, was confirmed by the US Central Intelligence Agency, which estimates that the Boko Haram organization consists of about 9,000 warring individuals, classified into modern cells for recruiting and training the existing and new recruits.²⁰ An additional problem, according to the CIA report, is that this organization is constantly growing because it enjoys certain trust among radical Islamists and those who believe in the supremacy of Islam in relation to other religions. Therefore, it is important to conclude that the indoctrination of the “new” religious concept is a legitimate method of manipulating believers, who are actually mobilized by the teaching defined by their birth, in order to be abused for accomplishing the other, higher goal, mostly political, for which, as a rule, they are not even aware that it is in the background of such teaching. Specifically, from the analysis of this process in Nigeria, it can be concluded that the manipulation was done in the following order: 1) a Muslim imam with strong intelligence contacts founds a religious movement with the intention of changing the education system of new generations in a way that instead of the Western model he offers an alternative concept that puts the Quran in the first place; 2) with its charismatic and authoritative appearance, he gains the trust of a great number of residents who begin to enroll their children in these schools en masse; 3) the leader uses the position of trust he enjoys among members and sympathizers of the movement and with his manipulative capabilities indoctrinates the idea of a “new” religious concept, which has no alternative; 4) he uses the mass trust that he enjoys to establish a connection with political authorities in order to establish cooperation that implies mutual benefit; 5) the religious movement, which from this point of view can be characterized as a destructive religious sect, is placed in the service of politics and political goals, and followers who joined the movement from their religious beliefs become slaves of political games without even being aware of it; 6) the main goal of the established movement is forgotten, all members of the organization experiencing transformation into a terrorist cell unconsciously leave the path of peace, which religious beliefs call to and, motivated by hatred, start individual

²⁰ Judd Devermont, *The US Intelligence Community's Biases During the Nigerian Civil War*, *African Affairs*, vol. 16, no 3, 2017, p. 711.

and group wars against “enemies” of religion; 7) political authorities achieve their goals (win elections), and members of the religious movement allegedly founded with the idea of spreading the influence of Islam are killed (like Mohammed Yusuf), exiled or imprisoned; 8) after the political goal is achieved, the state armed forces take action against the organization of this kind, the few remaining comrades withdraw in a short time, and established or new political structures recruit a person to gain the trust of new recruits and the whole process starts again.²¹

The infiltration of foreign intelligence services into domicile religious communities in order to accomplish the foreign policy interests of their state

The use of intelligence structures for the promotion and affirmation of some foreign policy interests is not a legacy of the 21st century, but exists as long as intelligence communities. On the path of the development of intelligence methods for penetration into military, security, political or economic structures of another state, different methods could be noticed, which have also led to different results. There is a consensus among security sciences theorists, or authors who have studied or study intelligence and counterintelligence theory, that the United States are pioneers in the use of intelligence community for foreign policy interests. The presence of this country's intelligence structures has not been absent in Nigeria either, and some authors, such as Judd Devermont, a former US intelligence operative in Africa and director of the African Department at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies now, believe that the US intelligence community also had a characteristic role in the Nigerian Civil War (Biafran War), which took place in the late 1960s.²² However, there has been some progress in that field since then, and given that other great powers have recognized their interest, both political and economic one, it can be said that Nigeria is today the right place to meet intelligence communities from different parts of the world, dominated by those from the United States, Russia, China and Iran.

Although it is unclear to what extent all these intelligence communities are involved in Nigerian political and other structures, their motives for such an action are clear and in compliance with foreign policy strategies of these countries and their pursuit of global dominance. Thus, Russia, partly through its official military channels, partly through intelligence community, delivers military equipment and weapons that the Nigerian authorities should use in the fight against terrorism represented by the Boko Haram movement.²³ On the other hand, the intelligence structures of the People's Republic of

²¹ It is important to note that in some cases, at this stage, such a movement may be completely destroyed or dissolved, which will not prevent the holders of political manipulation from founding another movement, using the same methods and with the same goal.

²² Judd Devermont, gen. quote 2017, p. 708.

²³ Osumah Oarhe, „Responses of the Nigerian Defense and Intelligence Establishments to the Challenge of Boko Haram”, in: Ioannis Mantzikos (Ed.), Boko Haram Anatomy of a Crisis, International Relations, Bristol, 2013, p. 69.

China harmonize their presence in this African region with the economic interest of their country, which is probably the greatest motive for its foreign policy commitment.²⁴ Accordingly, Chinese intelligence community is focused on securing routes for the exploitation of natural resources. The curiosity is that it is mostly about cobalt and lithium, i.e. materials that are necessary in the production of modern information technology, which is currently the only field in which China competes globally.

Although the US intelligence agency, from this point of view, came up relatively late with data that would help it prevent the civil war in Nigeria in the 1960s, the very acquaintance with the situation in the field enabled it to predict future directions of development and recognize threats to national security in the future. In that sense, immediately after the end of this war, the CIA reported that in the following period there would be intensified activities of intelligence structures in this territory, that many of these structures will use religious communities to pursue their goals and that in such a situation there is a danger of the establishment of mass religious movements (sects) which, through manipulation and violence, would try to impose their ideas.²⁵ Only a few years after this report, when the Iranian revolution took place, the Muslim lobby in Nigeria began to strengthen rapidly. Encouraged by the new hope brought about by the Iranian revolution, the Muslim population started to organize and group itself in order to propagate the preconceived idea of the inviolability of Islam. They also had the strong support of the Iranian intelligence community, which helped Ibraheem El-Zakzaky to establish the "Islamic Movement in Nigeria", which still gathers a great number of Muslims.²⁶ Ibraheem El-Zakzaky, the leader of this movement, completed all the existing leadership training, which inevitably includes manipulation, and which was provided to him by the Iranian authorities through its intelligence structures. Moreover, El-Zakzaky was a close associate of the Muslim Imam Mohammed Yusuf, the founder and leader of the Boko Haram movement. As already mentioned, this movement was used to achieve certain goals that were not only religious, but also political, and it should be pointed out that the Iranian intelligence service sought to establish a movement that would be different from Boko Haram, both in its form and by character. In fact, the real reason is manipulation, i.e. the establishment of an alternative group to the Boko Haram movement, which will be joined by the less extremist population of Nigeria, under the excuse of returning to true values and the path of the Prophet Muhammad. However, as in the case of Boko Haram, the goal of the founder of the movement was not only religious, but, from the analysis of intra-social conflicts in this country, it can be concluded that certain political interests are hidden there. Namely, despite the geographical and cultural distance of Nigeria from Iran, there is no region out of the Middle East in which the Iranian ideology has a greater influence than in northern

²⁴ Richard Ogunleye, „Religion, Peace and Conflict: An Assessment of the Role of African Religion towards conflict management in Nigeria”, in: Jacob K. Ayatayo (eds.), *Religion and Governance in Nigeria*, Dept. of Religious Studies, Ibadan, 2012, p. 29.

²⁵ Marcin Stonawski, Michaela Potančokova, Matthew Cantele, Vegard Skirbekk, *The changing religious composition of Nigeria: causes and implications of demographic divergence*. *J. of Modern African Studies*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2016, p. 19.

²⁶ Jacob Zenn, gen. quote 2013, p. 11.

Nigeria.²⁷ Behind such a relationship lies the Iranian aspiration to gain as many allies as possible for the final war against its centuries-old enemies Israel and the United States. On the other hand, the US intelligence community, which the official authorities of this country use to carry out its foreign policy, undertakes some actions in order to counter the growing and more terrible conflicts within Nigeria. Accordingly, it can be heard that the United States periodically trains Nigerian soldiers in order to allegedly make them competent to fight terrorism, primarily to oppose the Boko Haram movement as the group that leads actions of this kind.²⁸

Thus, intelligence services of foreign countries, primarily the Iranian intelligence community, have recognized religious polarization, which is the main feature of the Nigerian society, as the vulnerability of the system, so they are trying to turn it into their advantage that would help them at some point in the future achieve some, mainly a political goal. From the analysis of the situation in Nigeria, it can be concluded that intelligence community, i.e. some influential religious person capable of gathering a great number of believers with his charisma and authoritative attitude, who was also directly trained by some intelligence service, can be used as a method of the manipulation of believers, who should, mostly by its massiveness, represent the main weapons in some future war. In order to prevent this type of manipulation, it is necessary that the counterintelligence services of the state on whose territory it is implemented recognize this method, first of all, as a form of endangering national or any other concept of security, and then develop effective counterintelligence mechanisms.

Conclusion

If some environment or social community, by factors such as socio-economic indicators, heterogeneous ethnic structure or pronounced religious polarization, shows such a tendency towards social conflicts that the national security strategy of that country recognizes them as the main threat to peace and stability, the politicization of religious issue is even more dangerous to these values. However, political authorities and some foreign actors, who see their geopolitical, military or economic interest in some country, use these factors as indicators that guide them in the direction in which they should recruit and mobilize domicile population in order to create as mass groups as possible, which they will then put in the service of their struggle. Since tribal and ethnic differentiation of population significantly affects the intensity of conflicts, the very nature of antagonisms is highly complex. In such situations, especially when it comes to greatly religious communities, the manipulation of religious feelings is simply offered as the most effective method in achieving the ultimate goal. At least when it comes to a society in which religious beliefs are more important than life, and counterintelligence potential of a state is weakened due to the actions of the

²⁷ Jacob Zenn, gen. quote 2013, p. 16.

²⁸ Osumah Oarhe, „Responses of the Nigerian Defense and Intelligence Establishments to the Challenge of Boko Haram”, in: Ioannis Mantzikos (Ed.), *Boko Haram Anatomy of a Crisis*, International Relations, Bristol, 2013, p. 71.

mentioned factors, it manifests in two manners. The first manner, defined as the indoctrination of a “new” religious concept based on a political motive is manifested by an authoritative and charismatic religious leader, with certain contacts in political structures, forming a religious movement for supposedly purely religious reasons. By promoting a “new” concept of religious teaching that should help believers find their way and return to the foundations of religion, such a leader gains trust that allows him to recruit many believers, thus transforming the movement into a mass community ready to achieve its goal that is in the background of such a concept, which is mostly political, by all available means. The second manner, defined as the infiltration of foreign intelligence services into domicile religious communities in order to accomplish the foreign policy interests of their state, is manifested when some state (regional or global leader) through its intelligence community establishes a religious movement in the state that is the subject to intelligence and operational penetration, which will act in the direction of achieving the goals of such a state.

In order that religion, considered as a transcendent phenomenon, can return to its foundations, it is necessary to explicitly distance it from politics and political processes that take place within some society. From the Middle Ages, when the theological world view gained in importance, until today, the correlation of religion and politics, given the totality of their mutual differences, has mostly led to destructive consequences. Bearing in mind that, after a certain period in the history of mankind, countries with a high percentage of religious population are again in the process of transformation from secular to clerical societies, the perspective of the possibility of stopping the politicization of religion is practically minimal. At the same time, this unequivocally shows that this issue will require much more complex analyses from the aspect of various social sciences in the future, and given that the conflict potential of religious fundamentalism may pose the greatest threat to national security, security sciences will not be exempt from such a necessity and requirements.

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Summary

As a prevalent characteristic of an epoch, the theological worldview has had a flagrant and, above all, decisive role in creating the medieval thought about social conflicts. Even today, after many centuries in which the role of religion in society has varied from crucial to marginal, in an epoch obviously marked by the domination of IT, many societies use the theological thought for the establishment of a new value system. Although the world's two largest monotheistic religions, which, among other things, have been the topic of this paper, strive to create a value

system that would be based on the foundations of human and moral values, we are witnesses to the fact that today they are politicized, in some cases even radicalized, for the purpose of achieving different goals.

An incessant striving of particular members of the social community, or the same kind of striving of all members of the global community for better and higher-quality life and disproportions between wishes and needs on the one hand and real capabilities on the other, have always led to open antagonisms, which used to and still frequently result in conflicts of different kinds. Even though religion, in reality, is only a specific system of beliefs meant to provide believers with a particular alternative option when they cannot find a different path, that is, to educate believers through such a system and always orient them toward peace, we are nevertheless witnesses to the fact that throughout history, as well as today, a certain kind of politicization of this issue has produced an opposite effect. Placing religion at the center of political or state events, that is, placing it in a position where it does not get along well – although, in the past, there were examples of certain religious communities or their leaders skillfully reconciling religious postulates and political demands – would often end in some kind of conflicts which, in most cases, would escalate into wars. Recognizing this kind of polarization as a trump card in achieving particular goals, the holders of political power and different interest structures have developed adequate methods and techniques to, firstly, politicize the issue of religion and then undertake manipulative actions with the aim of putting massive religious groups to the service of the accomplishment of those same goals. Different religious movements founded in the territory of Nigeria with the abovementioned motives – some of which, in the meantime, have grown into terrorist organizations – have guided themselves by the famous wisdom of Sun Tzu. In this sense, they have brought their followers – who, by the methods and techniques of manipulation that were previously discussed, they turned into what Sun Tzu calls ‘sons’ – to such an enormous level of delusion that they are no longer capable of distinguishing the truth from lies. Expressing a willingness to sacrifice even their lives for the success of the “new” religious concept presented to them, they find themselves in such a situation that they will not hesitate to engage in a conflict, which makes security situation that is already complex, even more difficult.

Key words: social conflicts, religious conflicts, religion, manipulation, Nigeria

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