

AFRICAN PEACEBUILDING IN A WESTPHALIAN CONTEXT: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the relationship between westphalianism, religious diplomacy, and peace-building in Africa. While the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference have long been regarded as the foundation of international relations, the attainment of independence by African states has highlighted new challenges related to settling conflicts within borders. Despite being a continent of diverse ethnic groups, religious diplomacy has emerged as a viable approach for addressing these conflicts by bringing distinct groups together under the umbrella of a shared faith. Methodologically, the research design adopted was descriptive, supported by a qualitative review of existing literature. The research finds that the independence of African countries from their colonial governments guaranteed their access to the principles of Westphalian Peace, however the African Union's dismissal of the concept of non-intervention challenged the principles set forth by the westphalian system. This was due to the increase in intra-state conflict that has resulted in the loss of millions of African lives and created a transnational refugee crisis. The paper identifies religious diplomacy as a valuable approach to address conflicts in Africa due to the significant role of religion in the lives of Africans. In addition, this paper underscores the role of religious diplomacy in addressing the security architecture of African states and the need for the African Union to re-evaluate its stance on non-intervention to promote peace and stability in the region.

Keywords: Westphalianism, diplomacy, religious diplomacy, peace building.

Introduction

Peace of Westphalia was an event that made the global system switch from being under one overarching supreme authority to a system where balance of power was established (Csicsmann & Rózsa, 2020). Prior to the peace of Westphalia, the church and the state were entwined with each other because they both avowed their power and control over the people as a bestowed divine privilege. This could be seen in the appointment of top officials during this period. The Roman Emperor had full and overwhelming control on how the pope was appointed. So also, only the pope was bestowed the right and authority to crown the Roman Emperor. The Peace of Westphalia however restructured Europe, and by extension the international system by introducing a state system. It led to relative peace in Europe as it prevented states from invading other states to claim a particular territory (Croxtton, 1999).

The Westphalian system, which emerged from the treaties of Osnabruck and Munster in 1648, has been a defining force in the realm of international relations and state sovereignty. The

fundamental principles of state autonomy, territorial integrity, and non-interference the Westphalian system offered, laid the groundwork for a new political order, drastically reshaping the dynamics of state interactions. Both treaties established new concepts, emphasizing the autonomy of individual states within defined borders. The principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference created a new framework for the international system, guaranteeing states the exclusive right to govern their domestic affairs without foreign interference. These principles formed the bedrock of the Westphalian system, laying the groundwork for the nation-state system that persists to this day (Patton, 2019).

Globally, the foundation of the current international political system was laid by the Westphalian principles, which not only shaped the relationships among states in the international system but also established essential guidelines for interactions between countries. These principles have endured beyond the 17th century and gained renewed importance with the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. The UN's Charter, mirroring the core tenets of the Westphalian system, emphasized state equality, non-interference, and the respect for territorial integrity (Bauder & Mueller, 2023). This adoption marked a continuation of the Westphalian legacy, as the UN became a platform for international cooperation and conflict resolution, guided by the principles of sovereign equality among member states. Despite the emergence of supranational organizations and global challenges, the Westphalian model's influence endured, as states continued to assert their autonomy and uphold the sanctity of their territorial boundaries.

Africa's engagement with the modern world reveals the persistent relevance of the Westphalian system, which significantly influences state behaviour and interactions on the global stage. While it has faced criticisms for potential hindrances to addressing transnational issues and fostering global cooperation, the principle of state sovereignty remains a cornerstone of the international order (Hickey, 2020). States, as key actors in international politics, continue to uphold their autonomy and sovereignty, defending against unwarranted interference and intervention (Zainab & Noviard, 2018). The continuous assessment of the Westphalian system is vital to comprehend its impact on future international relations and the pursuit of peace and stability in a rapidly changing global context. Consequently, the African Union decided to deviate from strict noninterventionism due to ongoing conflicts within certain African countries (De Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2023). In addition, religion has been used as a tool by many African countries to settle conflicts within and outside their national borders, bringing about stability in the continent.

In African politics, the principles delineated by the Peace of Westphalia have served as the foundational framework for African states after the exit of colonial governments. The Westphalian system has greatly influenced contemporary international politics, with the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention serving as the cornerstone of relations among nations in the global community. However, countries and regional organizations have found it necessary to renounce the non-intervention principle due to the urgent necessity to resolve emerging crises on the African continent. This shift aims to bring about peaceful conflict resolution within the continent. Furthermore, the use of religion as a conflict-resolution strategy within the continent helps in peacebuilding and adds a unique dimension to the peacebuilding efforts. The principles established by Westphalianism have not only influenced the dynamics of relationships within Africa since the dissolution of European colonial empires but also continue to shape state behaviour and interactions on the global stage.

This paper explores the historical significance of the Westphalian system and its contemporary relevance, with a specific focus on its adoption by African countries. Additionally, it seeks to examine the role of religious diplomacy as a strategy in peacebuilding efforts within the African continent. The paper addresses the existing gap in the literature regarding the application and impact of the Westphalian principles within Africa, particularly in the resolution of internal conflicts and the dynamics of relationships subsequent to the departure of colonial rule within the continent. The study also spotlights on the use of religious diplomacy as an instrumental tool in the settlement of intra-state conflicts, providing a comprehensive analysis of its effectiveness in fostering peace and stability within African states. By understanding the impact of these principles on Africa's engagement with the international political system and their influence on conflict resolution and stability, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complexities of contemporary international relations within the African context.

Methodology

This paper employs qualitative research approach to thoroughly investigate the subject matter. The methodology relies on secondary data sources derived from various scholarly materials such as published journal articles, book chapters, books, and conference proceedings. Through the application of thematic analysis, the data obtained from these sources are meticulously examined and categorized, facilitating a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the research topic. This research design is based on a descriptive framework, complemented by a qualitative review of the existing literature, which serves as a sturdy basis for the analysis and interpretation of the study's findings.

Westphalian Peace

In the twelfth century, the Roman Catholic church was at the actual peak of its political and mainstream power. At the point when the new monarchical governments emerged to challenge that power, particularly the ruler of France, Pope Boniface VII in 1502 declared a ringing affirmation of ecclesiastical power in the ecclesiastical bull named *Unam Sanctam*. He proclaimed that temporal authority should be dependent upon profound spiritual power and if earthly power errs, it will be decided by the reviewed spiritual power. This statement and action brought discord between the French authorities and the Papal officials resulting in the arrest of the pope. This order was made by King Philip IV in 1503. King Philip IV believed he had the divine right to rule over people while Boniface also believed in the supremacy of the papal authority over kings (Canning, 2019).

Both Philip IV and Boniface disagreement began when Boniface gave a pronouncement prohibiting Kings from imposing taxes on the clergy without his permission. Philip IV saw taxation as his legal right as a king and he fought back by precluding the commodity of gold, silver and different materials of significant value without his endorsement, an action intended to deny the Pope from receiving donations from French Catholics (Koskeniemi, 2021).

Aside from the religious conflicts, other events shaped Europe before the introduction of the peace of Westphalia. One of which was the 30 years' war fought in the 17th century which was a devastating war that led to over 8 million death casualties from armed combats, famine and epidemics caused by the war. The war evolved from being a religious conflict to becoming a conflict of interest on which political power would control Europe. The eighty-year war was another political event that affected Europe before the signing of the Westphalia treaties. It was a war of Netherland independence from Spanish control which led to the creation of an

independent Dutch republic. Both the eighty year and thirty-year war were ended by the peace of Westphalia which brought about relative stability in Europe (Janzekovic, 2023).

The Peace of Westphalia refers to two major treaties that ended the thirty-year war (1618-1648) and the eighty-year war (1568-1648) which eventually brought about peace and stability to Europe. The treaty was established to settle conflicts, especially those caused by religion (Patton, 2019). The treaty was seen by the Pope as a sin because of the monopoly. By establishing Protestant and Catholic nations and offering some protections for religious minorities, the Westphalian peace cemented the ideas of toleration which had been absent in Europe. Religious equality was enshrined in the treaties and was an international guarantee. The peace agreements not only ensured stability in the present but also committed all parties to protect and defend every aspect of the peace from any threat, irrespective of religious differences. This cemented the influence and role of the state over any religious movement or group. The treaty also introduced for the first time a provision for moratorium of war, the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, and for states to collectively take actions against an opposing or aggressive state (Gross, 1948).

Principles of Westphalian Peace

The Westphalian system is an international law principle that each state has complete sovereignty over its territory and internal affairs and is free from any external power or influence. The Westphalia principle exerted its influence by establishing two fundamental principles in international relations: non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and the recognition of the equality of all states under international law, irrespective of their size or financial capacity. The doctrine is termed after the Westphalian Peace of 1648 which restored peace among European countries. The Westphalia principle, with a focus on sovereignty of states, gained significance in international law and the prevailing world order as the European sphere of influence expanded across the globe. The contemporary international system of states and global organizations, according to international relations scholars, began with the Peace of Westphalia. National interests and goals of states have become more powerful than any individual, group, or religion. States have emerged as the primary institutional actors in international relations. The Westphalian Peace is significant in current international relations theory because it is seen as the origin of the modern international order.

The Westphalia system introduced three principles that are still widely used today in modern diplomacy and relations among states. These are:

1. **Sovereignty:** The notion that every state has the right to self-governance over its citizens and territory. Only sovereign states could engage in relations. This is because the system introduced what is known as nation-state, which effectively replaced other existing entities as the institution for diplomatic and international relations.
2. **Legal Equality:** This treaty ensured the equality of all states irrespective of their territory, political power or other factors. This treaty ensured that all states were considered as equal participants in the international system, with no state holding superior status or position over others. This notion of legal equality laid the foundation for a more inclusive and cooperative international community, promoting diplomatic engagement and fostering mutual respect among states.
3. **Non-intervention:** Non-interference into the political activities of states was not allowed. The state has an exclusive preserve of administrative functions without fears of being influenced

by another state. This idea was later introduced during the formation of the United Nations Charter. The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members. All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations (United Nations, 1945).

Westphalian System and Africa

The principles of the Westphalia System are still being practiced today by various countries of the world. The Westphalia peace principles were enshrined in the United Nations Charter. This can be seen in the Article 2 of the Charter. Section one highlighted the acceptance of the principle of sovereignty and equality of all members. Section four stated that “all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any manner inconsistent with the purpose of the United Nations”. The number seven of Article Two asserts that the United Nations shall not in any means possible intervene in matters which are in the domestic jurisdiction of any state (United Nations, 1945).

With the independence of African States from colonial control, the United Nations charter which draws its root from the Westphalian peace fully demonstrated its commitment to ensure the total sovereignty of African States. This made African sovereignty unquestionable. The United Nation has facilitated the independence and recognition of 80 former colonies in the world. It also guaranteed the respect for the fundamental human rights, the dignity and the worth of human persons (MacLean, 2001). The United Nations General Assembly resolution 1514(XV) declared its rejection of the continuous subjugation, domination and exploitation which is a denial of the fundamental human rights enshrined in the charter. Provisions for people to have the right for self-determination, to determine their political future, were also enshrined in the United Nations Charter (Friedlander, 2019).

The United Nations opposition to the continuation of colonialism in Africa gave African States the opportunity to achieve independence, sovereignty and collectively set a roadmap for future relations among themselves. With the creation of the Organization of African Unity in 1960, Westphalian Principle was adopted from the continental perspective ensuring sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of African States. The Organization played an important role in eradicating colonial grip as well as white minority rule that had affected the continent. It was also a platform in which African States that were independent were able to formulate policies and plans on how to assist other African States in achieving independence. During the formation of the OAU, there were two Blocs that worked for the attainment of sovereignty for African states. These were the Casablanca Bloc and the Monrovia Bloc. The Casablanca Bloc was a more radical group of individuals from countries like Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Mali and Morocco. They admonished for the unification of African States to be able to defeat colonialism in all African countries. However, it was the Monrovia bloc which comprises Nigeria and most French African States that was successful in the formation of the organization. The Bloc admonished for independence and that African States to maintain their autonomy. The charter of the OAU also cemented Westphalian principles of independence, statehood, non-interference and sovereignty of African states (Leshoele, 2020).

Many scholars have however disputed the Westphalian System and its adoption within Africa. The boundaries that demarcated African States were unnatural and an imposition of colonial legacy on the continent (Pride et al., 2017). When Africa was being divided and

distributed among the European countries, African representatives were not involved in the decision making. This then makes the fabrication which is today known as States in Africa a colonial creation. Little to no knowledge about Africa was known by the European powers when they drew borders and boundaries. Some of these boundaries separated families, communities and once powerful Empires that had existed in the continent predating the entry of the colonial governments into the continent. This can be seen in the Yoruba ethnic group which were separated in Benin Republic and Nigeria. Artificial demarcations separated families and communities in modern day Nigeria from their relations in modern day Niger and Benin Republic. This brought about an imposition of a new identity, the State, over the existing National Identity of their tribes (Tikumah, 2023). The fabrications made by the colonial governments is a major cause of some conflicts within the African continent. Aside from separating ethnic nationalities in different countries, the colonial boundaries forced different ethnic groups under one umbrella of the state. This brought about ethnic clashes within these countries. Also, political systems introduced made the various ethnic nationalities jostle for power resulting in violent altercations between different ethnic groups. This can be seen in the Rwandan Genocide which saw the Hutus and Tutsi, two distinct tribes with their history and culture become victims of artificial border creation and systems imposed by the colonial governments (Ordóñez-Carabaño, Prieto-Ursúa & Dushimimana, 2020)

Colonial entry displaced the pre-colonial structures that had effectively managed local populations within the continent. Rebel groups, political movements that causes violence are recurring cases in Africa. Attaining sovereignty is not enough for such groups but effectively crushing their opponents. Their capacity to do so is dependent on the control of the resources of the states which are also in the eyes or the interest of foreign countries. Thus, leading to neo-colonialist tendencies which are building up within the continent and impeding on sovereignty (Warner, 2001). Some independent states opted for the programs and policies associated and promoted by notable and influential opposition of their former colonial powers such as the Soviet Union.

Peace Building in Africa

Since the attainment of independence by most African countries, the leaders of various States have focused on building structures that would help in nation building to address issues affecting their respective countries. African States were plagued with the entry of military regimes which disrupted administrative functions and also destroyed vital institutions that protected the liberties and rights of their citizens. Military entering politics in Africa was usually done to avert challenges which the military personnel believed they could solve. Some of such challenges include corruption, ethnic based politics as well as violence caused by political actors in civilian governments. When evaluating the administrations of various governments in Africa, (Military and Civilian), one can clearly see the role in which the governments performed in ensuring stability, progress and also the negative policies which were detrimental to the growth and development of African States (Chukwudi, Gbervbie, Abasilim, & Imhonopi, 2019). The Westphalia system brought about the establishment of the Nation-State system which is used in Africa. These States now operate under international laws in the administration of governmental policies within their countries and their relationship with other countries within the continent.

Peacebuilding refers to the process of building structures, policies and blueprints that bring about restoration of peace in a given community, society or country. It is concerned with using nonviolent means to resolve injustices, inequality and conflicts. The state plays a vital role

in peacebuilding in a country or region. Other actors responsible for peacebuilding are multinational organizations like the United Nations, ECOWAS, AU, religious groups, cultural institutions, among others. The inaction of States to introduce peacebuilding efforts would lead to violent conflicts emerging and spreading within and outside a country (Ochi, Okeke, & Eze, 2023). Armed conflicts over the years usually take place in geographically specific areas where States' institutions are weak. This can be evidently seen in Africa in the 20th century after decolonization efforts were made. The foundations or institutions which are necessary for the delivery of good governance have been in a delicate situation since the attainment of independence (Shinoda, 2018). The political situation in the international system contributed to some of the instability or volatility in the continent. The conflict prone areas are oftentimes within the least developed areas that are full of corruption, low in human development index, extremely diverse as a result of imposition of boundaries by colonial governments, and most importantly heavily endowed with natural resources. Volatility arose as a result of bad governance within newly independent states that had little to no social and economic infrastructure. The political actors contribute to the menace of conflict and instability when they become corrupt and misuse their positions to achieve their personal desires instead of contributing to the growth and development of their citizens (Fernandez, Malan, Holtzhausen, & Tshiyoyo, 2023).

Peacebuilding in Africa mostly has been seen as emphasizing macro level armed conflicts while neglecting community based conflict (Omeje, 2019). Communal micro level conflicts within the continent are usually overlooked, such as the constant clashes between the farmers and herders which occurs in the middle belt of Nigeria. The negative impact of climate on the topography and also the way of life of the nomadic herders has led them to combat with local farmers who try to protect their farmlands and crops which are seen as pastures or grazing routes for the herders.

There is no region in Africa that has not been affected by conflict, with most of these conflicts being intrastate conflict, transnational conflict or international conflict. The conflicts have resulted in destruction of lives and properties, breakdown of law and order and the declining living conditions of people in such conflict areas. The OAU Charter guaranteed non-interference into the internal affairs of states within the Continent. However, with the rise of intrastate conflicts which becomes transnational as refugee burden affects neighbouring countries has made the regional organization to critically assess its plans on addressing the issue. Unlike the OAU, the new continental body the African Union was given the mandate to intervene in conflicts anywhere in the continent as long as such conflict has potential to disorganize, destabilize the socio-political and economic balance of the continent which can lead to conflicts in Africa (Ogbu, 2017).

The Peace and Security Council of the AU is an organ that specializes in restoring peace in the continent. The violence that occurred within the continent that resulted in the death of millions made the AU review its perspective of non-interference. Such conflicts in Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Somalia, etc., led to the death of millions of African people. This made the African Union as at the time of its formation to dismiss the principle of non-intervention and adopt the covenant of non-indifference. This indicates that the AU would uphold the national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of its members, yet it carries the duty to intervene in the internal affairs of its member states in situations involving war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. This made the African Union to become the first intergovernmental organization in the world saddled with the responsibility to intervene in its

members' internal affairs and also the responsibility to protect (Assembly/AU, 2000). Boutros-Ghali, the inaugural African Secretary-General of the United Nations, harboured a visionary perspective regarding the emergence of an intergovernmental organization in Africa. This entity aimed to wield substantial influence over conflict management across four pivotal domains, namely: Preventive Diplomacy, Peace-making, Peacekeeping, and Post-Conflict Peace-building. In alignment with Boutros-Ghali's advocacy, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union assumed its mandate and established several pioneering agencies intended to pursue akin objectives. Notable among these agencies are the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Panel of the Wise (POW), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Military Staff Committee (MSC), and the Peace Fund (PF) (Ogbu, 2017). The core tenet of the R2P is that sovereignty of states also means they are responsible for protection of all their citizens irrespective of tribes or religion. This clearly displaces the non-intervention principle that is in the United Nations Charter and a key aspect of Westphalian Peace. The R2P focuses on three areas. The responsibility to prevent, which is concerned with addressing the causative factors that leads to conflicts. The responsibility to react, which means the ability of the organization to respond or act by taking actions like sanctions, prosecutions and in some cases military intervention. The responsibility to rebuild which focuses on efforts to reconstruct, recover and reconcile all parties involved in conflicts (Adigbuo, 2019).

Role of Religion in Peacebuilding in Africa

Religion has played a critical role in restoring peace in Africa. The entry of foreign religions into Africa has helped to unify distinct ethnic groups under these new religions. Before external contact or influence from foreign countries, Africa had their different religious values. These religions were closely linked to the cultural beliefs of the people. Looking at the Yoruba kingdoms and entities that existed before foreign contact, it can be said that the culture, history and mythologies of the people were the bedrock of their religion. The arrival of foreign religion thereafter affected the practice of the traditional religions as they were seen as inferior and the practitioners were considered heathen. The Trans-Saharan trade brought about the entry of Islam into Sub-Saharan Africa as the traders and merchants introduced their religion and traditions to the African people in the Sahel (Lofkrantz, 2023). This trade began in the 7th century and attributes such as religion and political structure were adopted by the African people. By accepting the foreign religion, Islam, various ethnic groups were under the Islamic religious control. This helped to reduce conflict among the African tribes of the Sahel as they were unified under a single faith. Political relationships between political leaders were cordial because of the influence of religion. This could be seen when Mansa Musa visited Cairo and built a hostel on his way to Mecca (Bell, 1972). This shows how political entities during the precolonial times had relative diplomatic relationships and as facilitated by religion. The adoption of Islam also led to the arrival of Sheiks and other religious leaders who settled disputes in various communities. In the eastern part of Africa, trade along the Indian Ocean with the Arabian Peninsula led to Arabic and Islamic influences in the region.

The Christianity religion was however introduced during the colonial control of Africa. The European powers were able to bring missionaries who taught the locals the Christian faith. The term Bible and plough became widely used to describe the early missionaries' activities on the continent (Webster, 1963). With the attainment of independence of African States, the foreign religions introduced became widely practiced by the African people. The religion also has been able to bring about peaceful settlement of conflict in Africa (Agensky, 2019). The

tenets of religions admonished for peaceful coexistence among people. Some of Christian agencies that have assisted in peacebuilding efforts in Africa include Caritas, Pontifical Mission Society (PMS), Red Cross, and the World Council of Churches.

Religious diplomacy encompasses the practice of engaging in dialogues both within and between diverse religious groups. Its purview extends to the active participation of religious leaders in resolving disputes, conflicts, and the formulation of strategies aimed at conflict resolution and prevention. Notably, one such influential figure who has made significant contributions to peacebuilding endeavours is the Pope. On the historic date of July 31st, 1969, Pope Paul VI embarked on the inaugural papal visit to Africa, commencing with Uganda. During his visit, he delivered a momentous address to the country's Parliament, admonishing the people on the importance of guaranteeing freedom of worship and upholding the dignity and liberty of people. He advocated a paradigm shift, stating that the resolution of disagreements among humanity should no longer be predicated upon conflict, but rather compassion and love. Moreover, he championed the notion of fostering unity and fraternity, promoting a collective endeavour of mankind in pursuit of harmony and solidarity. (Vatican Radio, 2015). In 1988 pope Paul visited Nigeria and praised the role of Abacha's military in helping to end the civil war that struck Liberia. He thanked the troops for their efforts in protecting civilian lives and also thanked them for rescuing catholic priests and social workers who had been attacked and threatened by the Junta forces.

Another notable religious individual who used his religion as a tool to solve conflict was Desmond Tutu. He was involved in activism against white minority rule by the Apartheid government in South Africa. He was bold to condemn the views and perspectives of Western countries who were against liberation movements in Southern Africa. He signed a petition calling for the release of the ANC activist Nelson Mandela. His involvement in restoring peace and in the abolition of apartheid rule earned him global respect (Tutu, 1983). In 1984 he won the Nobel Prize for Peace.

The presence of religious tensions and the activities of terrorism in northern Nigeria have had profound implications for the economic and political stability of the region, leading to the displacement of numerous citizens from their homes (Olanrewaju et al, 2019). In response to the banditry activities that had plagued the North Western region of Nigeria, Nigerian leaders sought the assistance of religious leaders to address and alleviate tensions in the area. This gave rise to the emergence of Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, an Islamic cleric, who assumed the role of a mediator between the bandits and the government. On February 4th, 2021, the Sheikh embarked on a visit to the hideouts of the bandits in Zamfara State, resulting in the repentance and voluntary surrender of weapons by 500 bandits to the state authorities. The Sheikh attributed his success in convincing the bandits to his preaching of the Islamic faith, emphasizing that their actions were contrary to the teachings of the Prophet (Duyile, 2023). However, this undertaking elicited both condemnation and commendation from citizens and opinion leaders within the country. Criticism stemmed from the fact that Sheikh Gumi's shuttle diplomacy did not yield the anticipated significant outcomes as envisioned by the government. Despite the organized meetings between the religious cleric and the armed bandits, incidents of kidnapping and other criminal activities persisted in the North Western region of the country. This unequivocally highlighted the complex interplay between religion and the pursuit of peaceful resolutions among communities in Africa during that period (Ifatokun, 2022).

Findings

In the wake of colonial rule's departure from the African continent, independent African states embraced the principles established by the Westphalian system, attaining full sovereign status. With newfound autonomy, they exercised control over both domestic and foreign policy decisions, free from external interference. Simultaneously, African countries gained recognition as equal participants in the international system, marking a significant turning point in their history. No longer subservient to European powers, they assumed leadership roles within their own nations.

Findings reveal that despite these developments, certain African countries encountered internal chaos and conflicts that threatened to spill over into neighbouring nations. To safeguard their sovereign status and maintain regional stability, it became necessary to deviate from the non-intervention principle of Westphalianism. By taking measured actions in the face of internal strife, they aimed to prevent the disruption of other states' autonomy. This intricate scenario underscores the challenges encountered by some African countries as they navigate the principles of the Westphalian system. Although it granted them independence and sovereignty, the changing circumstances within the continent demand strategic adaptations to safeguard their newfound autonomy and maintain regional stability. Examining this historical context provides the necessary knowledge into the complex dynamics of statehood, diplomacy, and governance in post-colonial Africa.

The research findings demonstrate the use of religion as a strategic tool achieving peaceful conflict settlement in Africa. This was necessary due to limited success of other strategies employed in conflict resolution. Religion is highly valued by Africans, playing a central role in shaping their interactions. Leveraging on the cultural and social significance, religious diplomacy becomes an essential strategy facilitating relative political and social stability in the region. By recognizing the role of religion in the lives of Africans and its potential as a bridge-building mechanism, policymakers and peacebuilding practitioners can harness its power to facilitate dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation among conflicting parties. The utilization of religious networks, leaders, and institutions can help establish conducive environment for open dialogue and understanding, leading to more sustainable resolutions of conflicts.

Discussion of Findings

The research findings highlight the convergence of religious diplomacy, the Westphalian system, and peacebuilding efforts in Africa. The principles established by the Peace of Westphalia have not only permeated regional organizations like the United Nations and the African Union but have also played a pivotal role in safeguarding the territorial integrity of nation-states through the concepts of sovereignty and non-intervention (Duruji et al., 2019). The attainment of independence by African nations solidified their embrace of the Westphalian principles, empowering them to assert their autonomy and decision-making in domestic and foreign affairs. The attainment of independence by African nations from their colonial rulers ensured that they too would fully embrace the tenets of Westphalian Peace. However, the African Union has departed from the concept of non-intervention. This departure stems from the escalating occurrences of intra-state conflicts, resulting in the loss of millions of African lives and the emergence of transnational ramifications, including the displacement of refugees into neighbouring countries. In response to these challenges, the African Union explicitly asserted

during its formative years that it would intervene in countries where crimes against humanity were being perpetrated. In this regard, religious leaders have been enlisted by African states as instrumental figures in conflict resolution efforts, facilitating the attainment of peace within these nations.

The Westphalian principles have been widely embraced by various regional organizations, including the United Nations and African Union, due to their critical role in safeguarding states' territorial borders through the creation of sovereignty and non-intervention. The realization of Westphalian Peace principles in Africa was largely facilitated by the independence of African nations from their colonial governments. Nevertheless, the African Union has disregarded the principle of non-intervention, citing the rise of Intra-state conflict that has caused millions of African deaths and transnational refugee crises in neighbouring countries. The AU explicitly announced its intention to intervene in countries where crimes against humanity are being perpetrated during its early years (Witt, 2022). To resolve conflicts and promote peace in these countries, religious leaders have been enlisted by African states.

The interplay between religious diplomacy, the Westphalian system, and peacebuilding in Africa exemplifies the complexity of addressing conflicts within the continent. As regional organizations embrace Westphalian principles while accommodating specific challenges, religious diplomacy emerges as an essential component in the pursuit of sustainable peace (De Coning, Yaw Tchie & Grand, 2022). This integration highlights the interconnections of historical principles and contemporary strategies, shedding light on the multifaceted approaches required to promote peace and stability in Africa's dynamic geopolitical landscape.

Recommendations

It is essential for African governments to carry out a thorough analysis of how Westphalian principles, particularly sovereignty and non-interference, intersect with the impact of religion on their national policy. Recognizing how these principles have influenced state behaviour and interactions within the international system, as well as how they interact with religious considerations, can be extremely helpful in understanding the difficulties of efforts to resolve conflicts and build peace in the Africa. By doing this, religion can develop into a strategic tool for resolving conflicts in the continent.

Furthermore, due the rise in conflicts and subsequent humanitarian crises on the continent, African countries need to reevaluate their adherence to the non-intervention principle of Westphalianism, with sub regional bodies within the continent taking leadership position. While non-interference was initially intended to safeguard state sovereignty, the escalating occurrences of intra-state conflicts have necessitated a reassessment of this principle. Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) need to set aside strict non-intervention policies in exceptional cases where crimes against humanity and gross human rights abuses are being perpetrated within their borders. By doing so, African states can demonstrate their commitment to protecting human rights and preventing conflict spillover that could destabilize the region.

In addition, as religious diplomacy emerges as a viable approach to resolving conflicts in Africa, it is crucial for African states to consider how Westphalian principles of sovereignty and equality can be balanced with the involvement of religious leaders in the peace-building process. While respecting state autonomy and non-interference, governments can collaborate with religious figures as essential partners in conflict mediation and resolution. This collaboration can

harness the moral authority and influence of religious leaders to effectively engage with diverse communities, foster dialogue, and promote reconciliation, ultimately advancing peace and stability within the state. Addressing the role of religion and Westphalian principles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is a multifaceted endeavour for African countries. By evaluating the intersection between religious considerations and Westphalian principles, actively engaging religious leaders within the confines of state sovereignty, and revaluating strict non-intervention policies in exceptional circumstances, African states can navigate the complexities of conflict resolution and peacebuilding more effectively.

Conclusion

Peace building remains an integral aspect of nation building. It does not only deal with efforts being made to settle conflicts but also the frameworks and structures that are put in place for the fostering of peace and advancement of the livelihood of people. The state has a role in using all instruments at its disposal in bringing about peace. One of such instruments is religion. It can be used by African States to foster peaceful coexistence and prevent conflicts from emanating.

In conclusion, the prevailing conflicts and humanitarian crises in Africa underscore the urgent need for a thorough evaluation of religion's role in conflict resolution. As intra-state conflicts involve diverse ethnic and religious groups, religious leaders are well positioned to engage government officials in collaborative efforts to resolve potential crises before they escalate into devastating conflicts. Religious diplomacy has emerged as a promising approach, as demonstrated by the involvement of religious leaders in peace-building initiatives in Nigeria. Acknowledging and nurturing this approach while devising comprehensive strategies tailored to each conflict situation can lead to lasting peace and stability in the region. In addition to religious leaders' efforts, African states must undertake a comprehensive assessment of the influence of religion on their national policies. Religion holds significant sway over African nations' social and political fabric. In certain contexts, religion has been employed as a rationale to perpetrate violence, while in others, it has played a pivotal role in fostering peace and societal cohesion. African states must formulate policies that acknowledge religion's role within society and harness its potential to advance peace and social concord.

African states face the crucial task of evaluating the relevance of religion in conflict resolution across the continent. Engaging religious leaders and organizations in the peace-building process, as well as incorporating socio-cultural considerations into national policies is crucial to promoting social harmony and peace. Consequently, drawing from the principles of the Westphalian system, which recognize the sovereignty of states and the equality of nations, African countries can leverage these tenets to facilitate peace-building and nation-building efforts. By adopting religious diplomacy and recognizing the potential of faith-based institutions as agents of positive change, African states can effectively address the underlying causes of conflicts on the continent. This will pave the way for a safer and prosperous future for their citizens.

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