Healing and Reconciliation: Applying Trauma Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Dialogical Approaches to Interfaith Dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and the UK

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: .... (student)

Date: 25th June, 2024...

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed . ... (student)

Date: 25th June, 2024..

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List of Abbreviations

APPGFoRB: - All Party-Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief

CAN: --- Christian Association of Nigeria

CPTSD: ---Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

DA: -- Dialogical Approach

ICG: --International Crisis Group

IMC:-- Interfaith Mediation Centre

KAICIID:------------- King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue

NACOMYO: ----------------------National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations of Nigeria

NASFAT: --- Nasrul-lahi-li-Fathi Society of Nigeria

OIC: --- Organisation for Islamic Countries

PTSD: --Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RCCG: -- Redeemed Christian Church of God

SIT: --- Social Identity Theory

TRC:-- Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Acknowledgement

Abstract:

This thesis explores the intersection of trauma theory, social identity theory and dialogical approaches in the context of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Through ethnographic case studies focusing particularly on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the Nasrul-lahi-li-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT), this thesis critically examines how historical conflicts and social identities influence interfaith dialogue among the Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the Nigerian UK diaspora.

The study reveals that the memories of violent conflicts persist and actively shape contemporary interfaith dynamics. This approach provides deeper understanding and facilitates reconciliation by using the dialogical model, which emphasises individual narratives and lived experiences. Unlike traditional dialogues that often emphasise procedural methods and theoretical frameworks, this model acknowledges the profound psychological impact of past trauma and fosters mutual respect and empathy among conflicting parties. This integration of personal narratives with structured dialogue not only enhances interfaith interactions but also contributes significantly to the healing and reconciliation efforts.

This thesis contributes to the broader discourse on interfaith dialogue by highlighting the need to integrate personal experiences and trauma-informed approaches into dialogue processes. It argues for a methodological shift recognising the complex interplay between individual trauma and social identities. It proposes practical and theoretical ways to improve interfaith dialogue and promote sustainable peace in migrant communities.

CHAPTER ONE

Centring Individual Experiences in Interfaith, Dialogue, Healing and Reconciliation

1.1 Introduction

Interfaith dialogue is not just an academic pursuit; it is also a crucial societal engagement for healing divisions and fostering understanding among diverse religious communities. While acknowledging the value of existing theoretical frameworks and methodologies in interfaith dialogue, this thesis advocates for a shift toward prioritising individual experiences. This study specifically examines two Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrant groups in the UK: the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the Nasrul-lahi-li-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT). These are among the UK's leading Nigerian-led Christian and Muslim groups. However, they are also deeply influenced by deep traumatic histories and complex social identities as a result of their migratory experience, diaspora existence, and the issues of violent ethnic and religious conflicts in their home countries.

The existing scholarly discourse on interfaith dialogue often emphasises abstract theories and generalised processes, which are crucial foundational elements for building peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. However, such approaches also overlook the detailed lived experiences of the individuals engaged in these dialogues, who carry with them not just diverse religious beliefs but also histories of conflict and personal trauma. This study proposes a dialogical model that foregrounds these individual narratives, thus setting it apart from traditional dialogues, which often emphasise detached procedural methods.

This thesis significantly enriches the field of interfaith studies by focusing on the experiences of Nigerian migrants from Christian and Muslim communities in the UK, particularly their traumatic histories related to violent religious conflicts in their home country. It demonstrates how these historical conflicts and personal traumas profoundly influence interfaith dynamics within the diaspora. The research advocates for a methodological shift that acknowledges the

intricate interplay between individual trauma and social identities, providing both practical and theoretical ways to enhance interfaith dialogue. This approach not only promotes sustainable peace among migrant communities but also contributes significantly to the broader discourse on interfaith dialogue.

The dialogical model implemented in this study (see Chapter Seven) is informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogue, which centres on the idea that meaning and understanding are generated through dialogue—not just in spoken conversation but as a fundamental attribute of all human communication (Bakhtin 2010). This model goes beyond merely facilitating interactions; it is fundamentally concerned with healing and reconciliation. This model acknowledges the profound psychological impacts of past traumas on current interactions and relationships within diverse religious communities. As a theoretical and practical framework, the dialogical model prioritises open, respectful, and reciprocal communication between individuals from different religious backgrounds. This model fosters mutual understanding and learning by establishing a space where participants can openly share and reflect on their diverse experiences and beliefs. Consequently, it not only helps reduce interfaith tensions but also promotes the development of more cohesive and harmonious communities.

In essence, this thesis challenges conventional approaches to interfaith dialogue by integrating personal experiences with trauma-informed methods. This integration offers a more comprehensive understanding of the dialogue processes, bridging individual experiences with broader social dynamics. This approach not only diversifies the academic understanding of interfaith dialogue but also enhances its practical applications in creating more cohesive communities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem
The pursuit of interreligious harmony is crucial for global peace, with interfaith dialogue playing a vital role in this effort. Through the intersection of disparate faith narratives and the

collaboration of religious communities, shared pathways for grief processing and the re-humanisation of previously antagonistic groups emerge (Bohm, 2013). Nonetheless, interfaith dialogue in academia and practice has largely focused on developing theoretical frameworks and refining procedural methods. These approaches, undeniably, have yielded fruits in advancing peaceful coexistence and inter-communal appreciation by uncovering entrenched group ideologies and facilitating the critical deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of pre-existing beliefs (Bohm, 2013).

Despite these advances, a critical oversight exists in conceptualising and implementing interfaith dialogue: the underrepresentation of individual narratives. Although significant, this research asserts that the focus on procedural and theoretical frameworks does not fully encompass the essence of interfaith engagement. Instead, there is a pressing need to foreground the lived experiences of individual participants within these dialogues. In light of this, the current study uses the experiences and narratives of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrant communities in the UK to explore and refine dialogue approaches. While previous studies have focused on process and method, this study aims to shift the discourse toward acknowledging individual experiences. By investigating the effects of violent, prolonged, and seemingly intractable conflicts on the interrelationship between African Christian and Muslim migrants, this research seeks to unveil how these experiences shape inter-community relations in the Nigerian diaspora.

The dialogical approach proposed in this study emphasises the importance of focusing more on the personal journeys and narrative accounts of individuals from conflict-affected communities. It is an effort to recalibrate the mechanisms of interfaith dialogue to not only convene around theoretical and procedural dimensions but also to serve as an instrument for healing and reconciliation. Such a paradigmatic shift is poised to enrich the discourse on interfaith dialogue and enhance its efficacy in nurturing lasting peace among religiously diverse communities. This study, based on the narrative accounts of respondents from the RCCG and NASFAT, (i) examines

the nature of interfaith engagements among the Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in the UK; (ii) explores the extent to which interreligious conflict situations in their home country contribute to shaping this level of interfaith engagement in the UK; and (iii) proposes a dialogical model aimed at addressing the impact of conflicts on the psychology and worldviews of participants in dialogue. The dialogical approach is a nuanced and promising methodological framework that offers a profound lens through which interactions between diverse groups can be understood. It is rooted in the principles of open discourse, empathy, and mutual respect (Bakhtin, 2010). Yet, applying it as an interpretative lens using the case study of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrant groups in the UK also helped frame the dialogical approach in ways that set it apart beyond the superficial boundaries of mere tolerance to engage with a more profound and transformative exploration of religious dynamics.

The study includes Nigerian migrants in the UK for three main reasons. Firstly, there is a growing population of Nigerians in the UK. The Nigerian-UK diaspora community is one of the largest African diaspora communities in the UK, with 271,390 Nigerians living legally and contributing to the enrichment of the social fabric of the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Many Nigerians migrate to the UK for work and educational opportunities, and some are refugees seeking asylum due to wars and political instability in their home countries. However, the official number of the Nigerian population in the UK is also likely an underestimation since it does not include undocumented migrants and UK citizens of Nigerian descent. In 2011, Michael Adeyeye, Mayor of Brent, estimated that more than one million Nigerians live in the UK, while an annual estimate of 130,000 Nigerians visit the UK for reasons such as business and leisure purposes (Olowoopejo, 2013). They are diverse, consisting of individuals from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and they contribute to enriching the multicultural fabric of the UK. Secondly, there is a protracted history of religious conflicts in Nigeria, which impact the migration experience of migrants from Nigeria to the UK. Many communities in Nigeria

have been involved in protracted, often intractable conflicts that often lead to the displacement of citizens, many of whom travel to the UK as refugees in search of asylum. Thirdly, there is a growing spate of Nigerian-led denominations (Christian and Muslim) in the UK. Jongeneel (2003) and Casanova (2001) contend that migrant individuals often bring their religious beliefs and practices when relocating to new communities, subsequently seeking to engage in practices resembling those of their host country (Hanciles, 2003). This phenomenon contributes to the cultural and religious diversity observed in migrant-receiving nations such as the UK, the US, and Germany (Adogame, 2013; Hanciles, 2003; Jongeneel, 2003). Religion, particularly Christianity and Islam, also plays a significant role in the social organisation of the Nigerian diaspora community (Burgess, 2011; Ugba, 2008). Religion significantly influences these migrants' sense of belonging, social interactions, worldviews, and community, providing a sense of home away from home. This is particularly relevant in what many perceive as a 'hostile UK climate.' This dynamic also explains the considerable number of Nigerian-led Christian and Muslim denominations in cities across the UK. The UK's Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities represent a vibrant and diverse community. Even though the exact proportion is unknown, the Christian groups are believed to be the more significant majority (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009). A study by the Department for Communities and Local Government (now Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) estimates that Nigerian Muslims represent about nine per cent of the total Nigerian-born population in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009).

1.3 Religion, Migration, and Growth: Perspectives of Africans

Over recent decades, there has been a notable rise in migration from African countries to Europe, particularly to the United Kingdom. The data reveals that, following Africa, Europe is a primary destination for 26% of African migrants, with the United Kingdom being a significant choice. Specifically, a Pew Research Centre study from 2018 indicates that the UK, along with Portugal, Italy, and France, collectively accommodates 72% of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, with

the UK alone hosting 42.62% of these individuals (Flahaux & De Haas, 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2018). This trend can be attributed to various factors, including the search for work and educational opportunities, labour market conditions, income differentials between countries, prospects, and the search for a greener pasture. The migration experience for many of these Africans is also intertwined with challenges, opportunities, and memories, especially conflicts in their home communities. Notably, in Nigeria, conflicts such as the Boko Haram insurgency and clashes between predominantly Muslim Fulani herders and primarily Christian non-Fulani farmers have resulted in a significant loss of life and properties as well as the displacement of residents from their home communities, as would be detailed in subsequent chapters (Jegede, 2019; Onah et al., 2017). Others have experienced the enduring psychological impact of the profound traumas resulting from these conflicts, often instigated or driven by religious factors (Ugba, 2008; Adogame, 2013). Religion plays a crucial role in shaping conflicts in Africa, serving both as a catalyst for tensions and as a potential mediator of conflict (Rugar, 2020). In some instances, religious beliefs and identities have been used to mobilise and rally support for divisive ideological agendas, exacerbating tensions and even fomenting violence (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Rugar, 2020). One contributing factor is the competing interpretations of sacred texts, dogmas, or rituals, which can escalate into profound and protracted hostilities. However, religion and religious leaders have also served as a unifying force and a source of solace, offering a sense of belonging and community amidst the turmoil of conflicts. In many African societies, religious institutions and leaders have played constructive roles in mediating disputes, fostering dialogue, and promoting reconciliation efforts (Hamzaoui, 2022; Mwamba et al., 2019; Rugar, 2020). The reason for this can be traced to the nature of the Africans and the African societies as deeply religious (Mbiti, 1999; Walls,2002; Jenkins, 2011). According to Mbiti (1999:1), religion permeates all departments of life in traditional Africa so thoroughly that it is always difficult, if not impossible, to isolate it.' Mbiti argues that a study of the religious system in Africa is

ultimately a study of the African people themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life (Mbiti, 1999). This also shapes perceptions of migration. In *Religious Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Immigration,* Shepherd and Poropat (2017) examined the impact of religious beliefs on public opinion about immigration policies and attitudes towards immigrants. They found that a robust religious belief correlated with more restrictive immigration views, also rooted in the concerns for preserving culture and national identity. Notably, this correlation varied across religious groups, indicating distinct inclinations toward inclusivity and compassion. The study underscores the need to involve religious communities in immigration policy discourse and encourage interfaith dialogue for enhanced mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, and design strategies for common participation in political and democratic processes (Asha, 2023).

Within the UK, numerous interdisciplinary studies have examined the crucial roles of religion in fostering growth, development, and community cohesion among the African UK diaspora community. Burgess (2017), for example, examines how place-making practices and transnational processes can influence the civic activities and social location of African Pentecostal churches in Britain's urban spaces. He describes the growing surge in African Pentecostal churches in the UK and wider Europe as one of the most significant developments within world Christianity over the past three decades (Burgess, 2019:223; see also Adogame, 2013). In the evolving multicultural and multireligious British context, how these churches engage with other faith groups and their adherents plays a crucial role in maintaining peace and harmony within local communities in the UK. This is particularly important given that many of these migrant faith groups in the UK originated in regions characterised by entrenched interreligious conflicts, such as Nigeria (Ibrahim & Nguru, 2020; Jegede, 2019; Suhr-Sytsma, 2022).

Nigeria has a long history of interreligious conflicts, primarily between Christians and Muslims. These conflicts often stem from competition over resources, political power, and ethnic tensions.

For example, the city of Jos in Plateau State has experienced recurring violent clashes between predominantly Christian indigenous groups and the Muslim settler community, resulting in numerous casualties and deep-seated animosity (Ibrahim & Nguru, 2020). Similarly, in Kaduna State, religious violence has frequently erupted, leading to significant loss of life and property, as well as displacement of communities (Jegede, 2019). These experiences of religious conflicts profoundly influence how these faith groups perceive and relate to people of other faiths and communities of migrants from that country in the UK.

The impact of these interreligious tensions is evident in the disposition of Nigerian migrant faith groups towards interfaith activities in the UK. Their historical context of conflict can lead to distrust and reluctance to engage in interfaith dialogue, which is crucial for peaceful coexistence in the UK's diverse society. However, despite the significance of these dynamics, research in this field remains limited, leading to a significant gap in understanding interreligious interactions among migrant faith groups from conflict-ridden nations within the UK. This study expands discussion in this area and provides valuable insights into fostering better interfaith dialogue and community cohesion.

Indeed, despite their shared experiences (as individuals and religious groups) in the UK—the sense of common migration from Nigeria, experiences of alienation in the host country, and facing various forms of discrimination—the history and memories of the violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home country also mean that these migrant groups do not always work together. In many cases, they are suspicious of each other's intentions, affecting their collective impacts, development, and interfaith dialogue. As I will show in the data presentation chapters, the interviews suggest that many Christians have a taken-for-granted view of their Muslim counterparts as being inherently violent, which deepens their suspicion, resentment, and fear. The Muslim participants of the study, on the other hand, seem frustrated by these characterisations and are often evasive and defensive when they engage with people of different

faiths. There are several reasons for this, from the theological differences of each faith group to their mission agenda to evangelise and provide a spiritual covering for migrants from their home country into the UK, which inadvertently creates a sense of competition among these groups jostling for the relatively small number of Nigerian migrants to populate their predominantly ethnic faith denominations in the UK. Yet, much of the strained relationship between these two groups is also a result of the history and memory effects of the violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home country, which many Nigerian migrants have been victims of or have been affected by. For some, their communities have been ravaged and destroyed; they lost their families and loved ones in the violent conflicts between the Christian and Muslim groups and have travelled to the UK as refugees to escape persecution and death.

1.4 Research Question and Objectives

This study explores how Nigerian migrants in the UK navigate the experiences and memories of past ethnoreligious conflicts, with a focus on their quest for healing and justice. The research question of this study is therefore:

> To what extent do the memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria impact interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities, both within Nigeria and among the Nigerian migrants in the UK?

It includes the following sub-questions:

1. How do traumatic memories of the violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria impact Nigerian Christians and Muslims' willingness to participate in interfaith dialogue?
2. How do Nigerian migrant faith groups balance their religious doctrines with the expectations of promoting interfaith dialogue in a multicultural UK context?

The study will pursue these questions with the aim of understanding the intersectionality of religion, ethnicity, violence, and migration and by investigating the following specific research objectives:

Narrative Analysis: Investigate how Nigerian Christians and Muslims narrate their experiences and memories of violent conflicts and analyse how these narratives influence their engagement in interfaith dialogue.

Impact of Unhealed Memories: Examine the extent to which unhealed memories of violent conflicts impact the perception and participation in interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims both in Nigeria and within the Nigerian diaspora in the UK.

Dialogical model for healing and reconciliation: Explore how the dialogical model can facilitate healing and reconciliation among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and within Nigerian migrant groups in the UK who harbour unhealed memories of violent conflicts from their home country.

By focusing on these questions and objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how memories of violent conflicts influence interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims, both in Nigeria and the UK.

1.6 The Dialogical Approach (DA)
This study employed multiple theories (see Chapter Two) centred around dialogue as the primary analytical framework to provide a more focused and thorough analysis of African Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK. This concept is inspired by several works and theorists of dialogue, including Hans Georg Gadamer (2013), Jürgen Habermas (1985), and Martin Buber (1970). However, it is further expounded upon in the writings of the renowned Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin is particularly appropriate for this study due to his emphasis on the inherently relational and dynamic nature of dialogue. His contributions to the theory of dialogue provide a robust framework for analysing how reasoning and emotional subjects are intricately connected with language (Bakhtin, 2010). Bakhtin's perspective on dialogue as a process that goes beyond exchanging ideas to encompass personal values and subjective judgments is crucial for understanding the complex interactions among African Christian and Muslim migrants. For

example, while the concept of 'death' might be perceived abstractly as the cessation of life, its profound impact becomes more tangible and poignant when experienced through losing a loved one—an instance that provides a visceral understanding of the idea's tragic essence.

This theory has been applied in various fields, including teacher's identities (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), developing new knowledge in organisational structures (Tsoukas, 2009), international relations and identity creation (Guillaume, 2010), as well as in interfaith dialogue (Hall, 2016). Hall's application of Bakhtin's ideas in an interfaith context is particularly relevant to this study. He uses Bakhtin's notion of dialogism to explore how interfaith dialogues are not just exchanges of religious or philosophical ideas but also deeply rooted in the participants' identities and lived experiences. In this framework, interfaith dialogue becomes a transformative process that allows individuals to engage with and understand the profound values and beliefs of others, facilitating mutual respect and coexistence.

Raimon Panikkar, a recognised pioneer of interfaith dialogue, also called for in-depth dialogue, or what he calls dialogical dialogue, premised on his cosmotheandric vision, which postulates that the divine, human, and earthly realities are interrelated and interdependent (Panikkar, 1999). This vision aligns with Bakhtin's approach by inviting participants to trust that a new holistic reality experience is emerging, where every tradition can play its part in unfolding a new experience (revelation), and all can live in harmony and peace.

The dialogical approach to interfaith dialogue involves engaging in cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different faith groups and spiritual or humanistic beliefs while emphasising the importance of dialogue and conversation as vital components of the learning process. Rooted in the principles of open discourse, empathy, and mutual respect, the dialogical approach transcends the superficial boundaries of mere tolerance to engagement with a more profound and transformative exploration of religious dynamics. At its core, the dialogical approach underscores the imperative of cultivating genuine and equitable dialogues

among diverse religious traditions. Through this lens, examining interfaith dialogue becomes an effort marked by active listening, earnest exchange of perspectives, and a profound willingness to engage and relate with different beliefs and practices. In this sense, dialogue is a conduit for transcending preconceived notions, facilitating deeper understandings, and fostering connections grounded in shared values and human experiences.

Central to the dialogical approach (DA) is an emphasis on mutual recognition and recognition of the inherent dignity of each religious tradition. This foundational tenet provides a fertile ground upon which interfaith interactions can germinate, flourish, and yield transformative outcomes. It encourages a deliberate exploration of interconnectedness, highlighting the numerous ways religious traditions intersect and emphasising the potential for collaborative problem-solving in the face of shared societal challenges. DA also recognises the importance of addressing differences and disagreements, inviting scholars to navigate these divergences as opportunities for growth, understanding, and, ultimately, forging a more harmonious and cohesive social fabric. Using this theory as an interpretative lens for this study is justified for the following reasons: Among participants, religion continues to play a polarising role in shaping negative perceptions of this religious other. Hence, during analysis, the author is guided by the critical elements of the dialogical approach. First, it promotes mutual respect and recognition: DA prioritises acknowledging the dignity and legitimacy of each religious tradition, ensuring that dialogue takes place on an equitable footing. Second, interconnectedness. It recognises the interconnectedness of various religious traditions and their shared human experiences, emphasising common values and aspirations. Third, listening and learning: Central to the dialogical approach is active listening, open to learning from one another's perspectives and insights. Fourth, engagement with differences: DA encourages addressing differences and disagreements constructively while seeking areas of convergence and shared understanding. Fifth, collaborative problem-solving promotes collaborative efforts to address societal challenges

and contribute positively to the common good, thereby transcending boundaries for collective well-being (Sullivan, 2011). Another reason this approach is justified is its contribution to the construction of identity, which is a crucial tenet in how African migrants in the UK perceive and relate to the conditions in their home and host nations (Burgess, 2019). In the sense of giving us 'foundational' starting points for identity, Bakhtin's theory of dialogue sits uneasily with strong forms of social constructionism that deny any foundational dimension to subjectivity – even if it is as general as 'neediness' or 'indigency' (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Guillaume, 2010; Sullivan, 2011). Here, identity is considered open to flux and change and mediated through the desires and goals of the different conversational partners (Sullivan, 2011).

1.7 Interfaith Dialogue and Social Integration among African Migrants in the UK
 While scholars have shown interest in the increasing multiculturality and proliferation of African faith groups in major UK cities (Bryant, 2018; Burgess, 2011), it is equally crucial to explore the intricate dynamics, challenges, and opportunities associated with interfaith efforts within this migrant community. Moreover, exploring the impact of such interactions on religious identity, belief systems, and social cohesion, alongside examining the roles played by religious leaders and institutions in fostering peaceful and harmonious relationships between faith groups, becomes imperative. An expanding body of research highlights the potential of religious actors as catalysts for peacebuilding and reconciliation while also underscoring the risks posed by extremist interpretations of religious texts and teachings (Babagario, 2016; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Sampson, 2007). The dearth of scholarly literature on interfaith dialogue among African Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK also means that there is a lack of identification of key themes, theoretical frameworks, and empirical findings on the complex interplay of migration, religion, conflicts, and social identity among these migrant groups. This study highlights four critical areas of enquiry.

The first is the issue of cultural diversity, religion, and migration in the UK. To understand interfaith dialogue among African migrants in the UK, examining the broader context of cultural diversity, religion, and migration in both the sending and receiving countries is crucial. The study draws on extant literature, such as Adogame (2013) and Burgess (2011), and empirical materials from fieldwork both in Nigeria and in the UK, in a discussion on the historical, social, and cultural factors that have shaped religious dynamics and interfaith encounters in the UK. It provides a foundation for understanding the specific experiences of African migrants and how their religious beliefs and practices help shape their interactions with other religious communities in the UK. The second is the issue of identity, religion, and belonging. Exploring the intersection of identity, religion, and belonging also helps to put into perspective by drawing on how African migrants negotiate their religious and cultural identities in the UK and their interactions with other religious groups. I draw on studies such as Tajfel and Turner (2004) and Van der Kolk (2014) that explored the complexities of identity formation, religious practices, and the negotiation of belonging within interfaith contexts within migrant communities, as well as discussing the issue in my interviews from the respondents. The third issue is interfaith encounters and dialogue. The literature on interfaith dialogue, including Ahmed & Kessler (2016), Egbedike (2016), and Gramstrup (2017), sheds light on the processes through which individuals from different religious backgrounds engage with one another. This study engages with such research, as well as interfaith encounters during the research focusing on interfaith dialogue among African Christian and Muslim denominations in Nigeria and the UK and the challenges and opportunities, they present for fostering understanding and cooperation. The fourth area is the role of religious institutions in social integration. Specifically, the role of religious institutions in facilitating or hindering social integration among African migrants in the UK. Research by Shah, Dwyer, and Gilbert (2012), Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019), and

Asamoah-Gyadu (2022) explores how religious organisations contribute to community building, social support networks, and integration of African migrants into broader society.

1.8 Scope of the Study

To achieve a thorough and more contextualised analysis, this research investigates the dynamics and impacts of violent ethnoreligious conflicts and interfaith dialogue, drawing from the experiences of Nigerian Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and the Nigerian UK communities. The study focuses explicitly on Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants, deliberately excluding other African communities to maintain focus. In some cases, specifically in the data presentation chapters, the terms 'Pentecostal churches' or 'Christian groups' may be used to describe members of the RCCG, while 'the Muslim group' refers to NASFAT. These labels are used for reference purposes only and do not imply that NASFAT or RCCG represents the entire Muslim, Pentecostal, or Christian communities. This targeted approach enables a detailed exploration of the experiences and responses of this specific migrant community, offering a comprehensive and contextualised analysis of how violent conflicts influence interfaith dialogue among Nigerian migrant groups in the UK. The specific challenges and limitations of this study will be discussed in detail in section 4.8 in the methodology chapter, Chapter Four.

1.9 Overview of the Thesis

This chapter introduces the research topic and describes how the thesis understands and investigates interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. It states the research problem, questions, aims, and objectives of the study and provides the study's context and background. Chapter Two critically reviews the literature on interfaith dialogue, focusing on how this relates to dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. The chapter discusses the significance and importance of interfaith dialogue, highlighting its core themes, areas of focus, and contributions to understanding religious diversity and social cohesion. The various methods of inquiry in interfaith dialogue are outlined, and the critical literature is delineated, explained, and expanded on. It identifies the

gaps and limitations of the literature that this study aims to address. Chapter Three examines the historical context of the research, including the assessment of the violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria. It provides a historical and contextual analysis of the origins and development of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria, tracing the roots of the tensions and violence between Christian and Muslim groups in the country. The chapter further explores the numerous factors that have contributed to the escalation and perpetuation of these conflicts, such as colonialism, ethnicity, politics, economics, and ideology. It examines their impacts on society and the people. Chapter Four moved to discuss the methods of inquiry employed in this study, providing a thorough examination, explanation, and justification of these approaches. It establishes a clear connection between the research question and the underlying theoretical framework, explaining how each element contributes to the overall research process. This chapter ensures a comprehensive understanding of the methodological choices and their relevance to the study's objectives. Chapter Five, the first of three empirical chapters, presents the findings and analysis of the data collected from the case studies of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the Nasrul-lahi-li-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) in the UK. It examines how the memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria influence the perceptions of identity, trust, and cooperation among these groups and their members in the UK, using the dialogical approach as the analytical lens. Chapter Six presents the findings on interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims both in their home country, and the UK diaspora community. It explores the demographics, characteristics, motivations, and challenges for interfaith engagement of the Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities in the UK and Nigeria. The chapter also explored the impact of the violent conflict in Nigeria on the process and explored its various causes and effects. It highlights the experiences and memories of the victims and survivors of the conflicts, the challenges and opportunities for interfaith dialogue and cooperation, and the implications for the Nigerian diaspora community in the UK. Chapter

Seven, the third and final empirical chapter, presents the dialogical approach as a theoretical and practical framework for understanding and enhancing interfaith dialogue among migrant faith groups from conflict-affected countries. Like Chapters Five and Six, this chapter draws on primary data collected through interviews and participant observations with members of these faith groups. By analysing real-world examples and case studies, it provides evidence-based insights into how dialogical methods can be effectively implemented. Through detailed accounts of specific interactions and events, this chapter highlights the practical applications and outcomes of the dialogical approach in fostering mutual understanding and cooperation among diverse religious communities. Chapter Eight reviews the findings and answers the principal research question. It outlines the main contributions and implications of the research for studying interfaith dialogue among migrant faith groups and suggests several recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review: Theories and Methods in Interfaith Dialogue

2.1 Introduction

Building upon the foundation laid in the introductory chapter, the chapter reviews existing literature in interfaith studies. It critically engages with ongoing scholarly discourse on the interaction and coexistence of diverse religious traditions. The primary theoretical frameworks guiding this study are trauma theory, which explores the psychological impacts of past conflicts; social identity theory, which examines the construction of group identities; and the dialogical approach, which focuses on the processes and effects of dialogue. By integrating these theories, the chapter aims to bridge gaps in the existing literature and construct a comprehensive framework to guide the empirical analysis. This theoretical synthesis promises to provide new insights into the dynamics of interfaith dialogue and propose actionable strategies for fostering deeper understanding and cooperation among diverse faith groups.

This research focuses on a dialogical approach that provides conceptual models for understanding these relations. Interfaith dialogue has become integral to academic and professional discourse as a response to the challenges and opportunities posed by increasing religious diversity and globalisation in contemporary societies. Within these contexts, improving interfaith dialogue often aims to foster understanding, respect, and cooperation among diverse faith groups while addressing the sources and consequences of religious conflicts and violence. The chapter argues for a more holistic and nuanced approach that explores the interplay between institutional, doctrinal, personal, and experiential factors in interfaith dialogue. Finally, this chapter lays the foundation for the empirical analysis of the research questions, using the theories outlined above as analytical tools. It performs the dual role of reviewing existing literature on the significance of interfaith dialogue and identifying gaps this study addresses while setting out the theoretical framework for analysing the issue.

The chapter is organised structurally as follows: Section 2.2 examines the significance of interfaith dialogue in contemporary society, highlighting the diverse origins of numerous religions and their role in fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. It explores how Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities in both Nigeria and the UK navigate interfaith dialogue, focusing on personal and experiential dimensions that are often overlooked in existing literature. This aligns with Research Objective 1, which investigates how Nigerian Christians and Muslims narrate their experiences and memories of violent conflicts and analyses how these narratives influence their engagement in interfaith dialogue. Section 2.3 delves into the challenges and gaps in interfaith dialogue among migrant faith groups, examining barriers such as entrenched stereotypes, social dynamics, unhealed memories of violent conflicts, and Islamophobia. This is crucial for Research Objective 2, which examines the extent to which these unhealed memories impact the perception and participation in interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims both in Nigeria and within the Nigerian diaspora in the UK. Section 2.4 explains the theoretical underpinnings of the study, focusing on social identity theory and trauma theory. Social identity theory offers insights into how group identities are formed and maintained, addressing Research Objective 1, while trauma theory highlights the emotional impacts of repeated exposure to prejudice and violence, crucial for Research Objective 2. The section also discusses how the dialogical approach can facilitate healing and reconciliation, directly supporting Research Objective 3 by focusing on practical applications of confession, forgiveness, and restoration. Finally, Section 2.6 concludes the chapter, linking theoretical insights to the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters, ensuring a coherent flow and maintaining a focus on the research objectives throughout the study.

2.2 The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue

 In *Interfaith Dialogue: Its Need, Importance, and Merits in the Contemporary World*, Andrabi (2020) explores the diverse origins of numerous religions and the world's historical role in fostering and supporting multiple faith traditions. Society is a vibrant mosaic of faiths, beliefs,

traditions, cultures, languages, and identities, each contributing to the rich tapestry of human existence. The pursuit of understanding diversity within this expanse beckons us to embark on a profound journey of exploration and enlightenment. In the process, however, particularly with the significant advancement in technology, globalism, and scientific achievements, it is disconcerting to say that people are making disputes in the name of religion (Andrabi, 2020, p. 269).

Globally, we witness a sombre reality marked by widespread violence and societal divisions, often perpetrated under the banner of religion; the destruction of sacred places of worship and the loss of countless lives spurred in part by the growing surge in feelings of communitarianism among adherents of different faiths (Saada, 2022). As explored by Hovland (2008) and Cohen-Chen et al. (2014), this fear manifests in complex ways, affecting multiple dimensions of human social lives. Hovland (2008) explores the tensions between 'mission' and 'development' within the Norwegian Mission Society, illustrating how fear of religion and its implications can create discord within organisations and among individuals. This work highlights how fear can be a driving force in shaping organisational strategies and individual behaviours, leading to a cautious approach towards religious engagement.

Similarly, Cohen-Chen et al. (2014) investigate the psychological impacts of fear in the context of intractable conflicts. Their research demonstrates that fear can significantly alter information processing, leading to biased decision-making and a heightened sense of threat. The differential effects of hope and fear outlined in their study underscore emotions' powerful influence on our perception of conflict and subsequent actions. As fear permeates social and political environments, it can foster an atmosphere of distrust and apprehension, ultimately impacting how communities interact and how individuals perceive their roles within these communities. Integrating the insights from these authors, it becomes evident that fear, whether in response to religious tensions or conflict scenarios, can profoundly shape human behaviour, including the

societal dynamics that influence interfaith dialogue. This pervasive sense of unease, as identified by Hovland and Cohen-Chen et al., underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the psychological and social mechanisms that drive fear and strategies to mitigate its negative impacts on interfaith dialogue.

Nevertheless, interfaith dialogue has often been seen as a solution to protect humanity from these conditions. According to Andrabi (2020, p. 264), 'interfaith dialogue is mandatory if not dynamic for everyone to have the understanding of different religions or belief systems.' Interfaith dialogue refers to the process that encourages learning and understanding between individuals of different religions. It involves facilitating conversations and interactions that support, encourage, and challenge participants to engage with others respectfully, open-mindedly, practically, and usable (Bakhtin, 2010; Pope, 2021). Bakhtin (2010:97) observes that dialogue connects reasoning and emotional subjects with language. It serves as a conduit for exchanging ideas, transcending mere abstraction to become ingrained within values and subjective judgments. Scholars like Paul Knitter have further championed dialogue as a potent antidote to the adverse consequences of misinterpretation and the pervasive distrust often observed within religiously diverse communities (Knitter, 2014).

Interfaith dialogue also serves as a potent instrument for mitigating radicalisation by facilitating direct conversations among followers of diverse faiths (Appleby, 2003; Kopel et al., 2020). It cultivates a climate of tolerance while underscoring the significance of acknowledging and honouring religious distinctions (Isnawati et al., 2020). Interfaith dialogue also plays a role in creating a peaceful society by involving the community in discussions and interactions that focus on interfaith communities and beliefs, helping to minimise the adverse effects of globalisation and create a more peaceful society (Giordan & Lynch, 2019; Sari & Rejekiningsih, 2020). However, interfaith dialogue also transcends simple conversations among diverse faith groups. Various socio-cultural factors, including the unique experiences and existing circumstances in

each faith group, influence it. This is a notable experience among migrant faith groups and how they engage in their host countries.

When migrants travel from one community to another, they often take their religions with them and look for avenues within their host nations to practice. This explains why countries with high net migration, such as the UK, Germany, the United States, and many others, are also highly multireligious. Within the UK, for instance, there are several ethnic Asian, Caribbean, Latin American and African-led Christian, Islamic and Hindu communities. One defining aspect of these faith groups is their desire to practice their religion in ways similar to how it is practised in their home communities. Within these communities, interfaith dialogue can serve a rich diversity of interactions and exchanges and foster peaceful coexistence and negotiations reflecting the convergence of diverse religious traditions. Studies in this area have highlighted the transformative power of dialogue, the salience of communal spaces, and the imperative of navigating complex sociopolitical currents (Christiansen et al., 2017). Scholars have also been interested in the interplay of religious identities, migration experiences, and broader societal contexts that intertwine to shape the dynamic fabric of interfaith interactions among migrant communities. Christiansen et al. (2017), for instance, examine the transformative potential of interfaith encounters among migrants, unveiling the multifaceted ways in which religious identities adapt to and evolve in response to the dynamic processes of migration. Other studies, including Dermott (2019), Dwyer et al. (2013), and Shah et al. (2012), have scrutinised the intricacies of interfaith dialogue within the specific context of urban British localities, shedding light on the role of communal spaces and institutional frameworks in shaping the interplay between diverse religious groups, accentuating the significance of physical and metaphorical landscapes as sites of convergence and divergence. Asha's (2023) research highlights the intersections between interfaith interactions and broader sociopolitical dynamics. In the backdrop of contemporary global challenges, including xenophobia and cultural tensions, Patel's

investigation underscores the potential of interfaith dialogues to foster social cohesion, engendering a counter-narrative that champions inclusivity and shared values among migrant communities (Patel, 2007). Shepherd & Poropat (2017) also examined the impact of religious beliefs on public opinion about immigration policies and attitudes towards immigrants. They discovered that robust religious beliefs correlated with more restrictive immigration views rooted in cultural preservation and national identity concerns. Notably, this correlation varied across religious groups, indicating distinct inclinations toward inclusivity and compassion. The study underscores the need to involve religious communities in immigration policy discourse and encourages interfaith dialogue for enhanced mutual comprehension and empathy.

However, despite the foregoing, there is insufficient attention given to investigating the experiences of those migrants who, prior to their migration, have been victims of violent religious conflicts in their home countries and the extent to which the memories of these conflicts impact their perspectives on interfaith dialogue. There are two ways in which the memories of these conflicts can influence interreligious dialogue. First, it can serve as a motivation to participate in interfaith dialogue with the aim of finding peaceful coexistence. A dialogue segment can also provide a safe space for participants to talk about their experiences, pains, and memories (Giordan & Lynch, 2019; Pope, 2021). However, in many cases, the memories of past conflicts are unresolved and unacknowledged, persisting in collective memory and shaping narratives and social dynamics (Beckstead et al., 2011; Gordon et al., 2020). If this is not processed appropriately (Lederach, 2003; Lederach & Hampson, 1998), unhealed memories can lead to traumatisation in victims, which in many cases are channelled to several antisocial behaviours (see Herman, 2015; LaCapra, 2004). As LaCapra (2004) observes, traumatic experiences do not merely reside as historical facts but continue to permeate the present, influencing both individual and collective consciousness and behaviours. This thesis addresses these critical gaps in Chapters Five and Six by using the narratives and experiences of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants

in the UK—the Nasrul-lahi-li Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)—as case studies. Chapter Five examines the impact of these conflicts and their memories on interfaith dialogue among Nigerians in Nigerian and Nigerian migrant groups in the UK. At the same time, Chapter Six explores the respondents' management of the memories and their impact.

Beyond the foregoing, there is also an ongoing discourse among academics concerning the *raison d'être* of interfaith dialogue. On the one hand, scholars such as Hodge (2006) posited the contention that interfaith dialogue should be principally construed as a means to foster peaceful coexistence in religiously diverse communities. This notion suggests that interfaith dialogue does not necessarily require the wholesale dissolution of religious diversity. Instead, it seeks to create a conducive atmosphere wherein these distinctions are accommodated and celebrated as integral components of a collective society. In this context, the purpose of interfaith dialogue and collaboration assumes the guise of a profound, often transformative, mechanism for nurturing peaceful coexistence. It emerges as a veritable crucible in which persons representing diverse religious beliefs can actively participate in substantive dialogues, ultimately leading to the deconstruction of misunderstandings, mitigation of biases, and cultivation of empathetic attitudes. It does not require a homogenisation of belief systems or elimination of religious differences but their elevation into instruments of mutual understanding, tolerance, and social cohesion. On the other hand, this perspective has also faced several criticisms, including from studies such as Yavuz (2013), who contended that genuine interfaith engagement requires a willingness to address and grapple with doctrinal differences rather than promoting a homogenised spirituality. As stated by Yavuz (2013:195-96), the primary objective of interfaith dialogue is not centred on achieving assimilation or indifference. Still, it serves as a means to enhance and strengthen one's religious identity in connection to, rather than in rivalry with, other religious beliefs. For Yavuz, active engagement in interfaith dialogue and fostering mutual

understanding can potentially strengthen individuals' religious beliefs by deepening their knowledge of the beliefs and practices cherished by others. Yavuz (2013:142) posits that the presence of diverse religious beliefs should neither be regarded as a reason for conflict nor should it be exclusively viewed as a mechanism for promoting harmonious connections. Instead, it should be seen as a valuable asset for promoting meaningful and enlightening connections. Several prominent scholars have contributed to this argument, and it is worth mentioning here for this study.

Diana Eck, in her influential work, *A New Religious America* (2001), underscores the importance of exploring the richness of the diversity of religious traditions in America. She introduces the concept of multireligious identity, emphasising the need to recognise the interconnectedness of these traditions in enriching the multifaceted nature of human existence. Her Pluralism Project (2006, 2015) demonstrates this concept, where the author examines how diverse religious traditions coexist harmoniously in pluralistic communities. Eck's observations reveal that the simultaneous presence of Hindu temples, Islamic mosques, Christian churches, and Sikh gurdwaras within a cohesive society is a tangible illustration of the positive outcomes of interfaith dialogue. Her work suggests that such diversity can potentially enhance the collective human experience (Eck, 2001, 2015). John Hick also enriches the discourse on interfaith dialogue significantly. His book, *An Interpretation of Religion* (Hick, 2004), is a seminal work in this regard. In this work, Hick presents a comprehensive theory that attempts to explain all religious phenomena. He introduced the 'pluralistic hypothesis' that all religions are culturally conditioned responses to the same ultimate reality (Hick, 2004, p.371). He challenges the tendency to consider religious traditions in isolation by advocating for a more comprehensive expression recognising their shared values and importance. Hick argues that adopting this approach can facilitate a deeper understanding of how diverse faith communities grapple with fundamental questions related to human existence, morality, and the divine.

Another scholar whose work parallels Hick's assertion of a more profound understanding is Leonard Swidler. In his work titled *Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding* (2014), Swidler emphasises the significance of fostering understanding between various religious ideologies. He presents a structured approach to facilitate respectful and meaningful interactions among individuals with diverse religious affiliations. According to the author, pursuing a meaningful understanding of different religious beliefs and traditions requires, among other things, active listening, empathetic understanding, and a dedication to identifying shared values and objectives. In doing so, Swidler aims to inspire academics and practitioners alike to participate in constructive interfaith dialogues that transcend disparities and foster mutual understanding. A similar theme was explored in Eboo Patel's work, focusing on the role of the youth in fostering interfaith dialogue (Patel, 2007). In the *Acts of Faith,* Patel explores the significance of interfaith youth movements in promoting harmony among religiously diverse communities. His narrative underscores how the involvement of young individuals from various faith traditions can challenge stereotypes, dismantle prejudices, and cultivate deep connections. Patel's youth-centred approach injects fresh perspectives and dynamism into the discourse by demonstrating how the interactions of younger generations can bridge gaps between different faiths.

The discourse on interfaith dialogue has also been enriched by the contributions of John Lederach and Scott Appleby, who have conducted extensive research on conflict and conflict resolution. Lederach, for instance, made significant contributions to conflict transformation, delving into the potential of interfaith dialogue as a constructive tool for addressing deeply rooted conflicts. He emphasises the capacity of shared religious values to act as a bridge between opposing parties, offering a potential pathway to resolving entrenched disputes (Lederach, 2003). His emphasis on conflict transformation also aligns with Scott Appleby's (2003) work on addressing fundamentalism and religious violence. While acknowledging that religious beliefs can, under certain circumstances, incite or legitimise deadly violence, both authors contend that

the relationship between religion and violence is complex. According to Appleby, this relationship can be categorised into two forms of religiosity concerning violence: Strong Religion, which attributes religion as the primary source of deadly violence, and Weak Religion, which views religion as a secondary factor in deadly violence, often originating from secular sources. Both categories underscore the importance of comprehending the role of religion in violent movements alongside the influence of factors such as nationalism, ethnicity, or other motivations. Hence, for Appleby, interfaith dialogue can help alleviate or exacerbate conflict and the healing of the memories of past conflicts (Appleby, 2015).

The role of narrative in healing resonates well with the work of scholars like Paul Ricoeur, who argues that narratives are crucial in shaping identities and experiences within communities (Ricoeur, 1992). Through the mediation of narratives, groups in conflict are often able to understand and reinterpret each other's stories, fostering empathy and reducing prejudice. This perspective aligns with a recurring theme in many scholarly works, which emphasise three key aspects: scrutinising theological implications for engaging across different faith traditions, exploring the potential for peaceful coexistence among various traditions, and safeguarding the fundamental tenets of each religious belief system.

2.3 Challenges and Gaps in Interfaith Dialogue Among Migrant Faith Groups

Having provided an overview of existing interfaith studies, this study now identifies the current gaps in the literature to which it responds. The literature on interfaith dialogue among migrant faith groups is rapidly growing, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of religious diversity, social cohesion, and conflict resolution in multicultural societies. However, it has several gaps and limitations that this study aims to address.

Studies on interfaith dialogue often exaggerate the utility of dialogue in addressing conflicts and typically focus on the institutional and doctrinal aspects, such as the role of religious leaders, organisations, methodologies, and beliefs in promoting or hindering dialogue and cooperation

among different faith groups. While these aspects are important, they overlook the personal and experiential dimensions of interfaith dialogue. For instance, memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home countries can significantly shape the attitudes and behaviours of migrant faith groups towards other faiths in their host nations, affecting the efficacy of many dialogue processes. As would be shown in Chapters Five and Six, respondents in this study demonstrate significant scepticism about the efficacy of dialogue in addressing protracted and conflicting situations.

This study adopts a more holistic and nuanced approach by exploring the interplay between the institutional, doctrinal, personal, and experiential factors affecting interfaith relations, particularly among Nigerian-led Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and Nigerian UK migrants. This is particularly important in contemporary societies where migration and globalisation shape and proliferate interreligious relations.

While this diversity can enhance human encounters by bringing together different perspectives and experiences and fostering dialogue and collaboration, it can also raise fundamental questions about the inherent tensions that emerge when different religious worldviews intersect. Interfaith studies, characterised by rigorous intellectual inquiries with constructive perspectives, insights, and guidance towards cultivating a global community marked by compassion, respect, and peaceful coexistence, can help address these fundamental questions (Patel et al., 2018). This discipline serves as a testament to the persistent pursuit of understanding and peaceful coexistence across diverse religious traditions and practices, exemplified by significant scholarly contributions from distinguished scholars such as Hans Küng, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Diana Eck.

Hans Küng, a prominent theologian, made significant contributions to interfaith dialogue in his advocacy for a global ethic, emphasising common values across religious traditions to promote understanding and peace (Küng, 2004). Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in his comparative study of

religion, emphasised the importance of understanding religious beliefs from the perspective of the adherents themselves. His book, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Smith, W., 1991), critiqued the Western conception of religion as a distinct, separate entity, promoting the idea of faith and cumulative tradition as more accurate descriptors. Smith's work encouraged deeper, more empathetic engagement with different religious traditions. Diana Eck, known for her work on religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue, particularly through the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, maps the religious diversity in America and explores the implications of religious pluralism for a democratic society (Eck, 2015). Her efforts have highlighted the importance of interreligious understanding and cooperation in a multicultural world.

These scholars have contributed to expanding the scope of the field beyond its historical origins and theoretical frameworks, resulting in more practical methodologies that promote peace among diverse belief systems. Studies in this field have explored topics spanning the historical development of religious traditions, the impact of migration and globalisation on interreligious dynamics, and the significance of fostering peaceful coexistence among different faith communities.

However, as an emerging field, interfaith studies face several challenges, leading to significant gaps in scholarly understanding. Two main areas with significant gaps are highlighted. Firstly, while some faith communities in the UK engage in interfaith activities, there is a lack of research on the socio-cultural aspects of interfaith dialogue among migrant faith groups. Secondly, the current literature is deficient in exploring how migrants from conflict-ridden countries cope with trauma, particularly in the context of interfaith dialogue in the UK. This scarcity of research partly accounts for the widespread scepticism about interfaith dialogue observed among many respondents. These are not isolated concerns but interconnected facets of the discourse on interfaith dialogue that have hitherto been underexplored. This study is, therefore, not simply a routine task of spotting gaps solely for academic originality. Instead, it is an intellectual pursuit

grounded in acknowledging that these gaps signify significant areas in our understanding of the intricate mechanisms underlying modern interfaith dialogue.

Several factors contribute to interfaith dialogue, as demonstrated in the forthcoming empirical chapters. These include socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors, migration, and the demands and expectations of both the home and host communities. For faith groups of African descent in the UK who participate in interfaith activities, their motivation, as will be evident, is also influenced by their status as registered charities, which obligates them to operate for the betterment of the public. However, many of these groups and their members, prior to their migration to the UK, have been victims of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home countries or have been affected by them. In many of these congregations, the pursuit of interfaith dialogue remains an issue of internal struggles based on the unhealed memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home countries. While this chapter seeks to review the extant literature on the ongoing discourse on interfaith dialogue, a key consideration is to locate the conversation in the experiences of faith groups of Nigerian descent in the UK.

One notable challenge to interfaith dialogue is the resistance of traditionalists who perceive interfaith engagement as a potential undermining of the essence of their faith traditions. This study also highlights the suspicion among some religious actors that such interactions might dilute, undermine, or oversimplify the authenticity and distinctiveness of their faith, ultimately eroding its sanctity and purity. This is a critical counterargument as it addresses the fundamental issue of maintaining religious integrity while engaging with other faiths. It underscores the importance of designing interfaith initiatives that respect and uphold the doctrinal boundaries of participating groups.

While well-intentioned interfaith efforts promise harmony, they also harbour the danger of oversimplifying the complicated web of religious differences (Eichler-Levine, 2020). Jodi Eichler-Levine, a professor of Religion Studies, underscores the risk that interfaith efforts might

inadvertently overshadow authentic religious differences in favour of a superficial and homogeneous portrayal of religious traditions. By prioritising harmonisation, these initiatives could potentially erase the richness and diversity that define individual faiths, ultimately leading to an incomplete and idealised understanding of religious landscapes (Eichler-Levine, 2020; Eichler-Levine et al., 2021). Diana Eck addressed this concern briefly in her work *A New Religious America* (Eck, 2001), examining the tension between religious exclusivism and the need for interfaith understanding. She observed that religious diversity in America poses both challenges and opportunities for fostering interfaith dialogue. Eck highlighted the need for moving beyond mere tolerance to a deeper, more engaged form of pluralism where different faith communities can coexist while maintaining their distinct identities. However, Eck's work did not fully address the multiple sources of such an often-entrenched view, including the roles of social contexts and traditional and religious worldviews.

Over the past decades, various African societies, including Nigeria, have grappled with episodes of violent conflicts and warfare often influenced by or attributed to religious factors (Onah et al., 2017; Rugar, 2020). In many cases, these conflicts transform into religious conflicts and violence, where each religious group and their members find themselves in opposition, causing violence and death based on the notion of 'defending' the tenets of their respective faiths, which some feel is often undermined through beliefs in interfaith activities (see the chapter on data presentation). In Nigeria, this situation has resulted in acrimonious relationships between some adherents of Christian and Muslim faiths (Akanji, 2015). Notably, many migrants from these countries to the UK have experienced these conflicts in real life or have been affected by them, further explaining the poor interfaith dialogue among the faith groups from these countries in the UK.

While these studies have formulated important visions of interreligious dialogue and focused on procedural issues, methods, and theoretical frameworks to achieve peaceful coexistence and

mutual respect, they have largely neglected individuals' experiences—specifically, the healing and restoration needed by victims who struggle with unhealed memories of these conflicts.

This is notable not only because the impacts of these memories affect interfaith dialogue but also because, as Maurice Halbwachs (2020) observed, memories transcend generations through cultural symbols, rituals, and oral narratives. Halbwachs introduced the concept of a 'collective memory,' a paradigm-shifting notion that memory is not exclusively an individual's domain but rather a construct shaped and sustained within the social fabric. To address these gaps, Chapter Six discusses the effects of memories of violent conflicts, distinguishing between individual and collective unhealed memories.

Chapter Seven takes the discourse further and proposes a dialogue-based model that focuses on the process of healing and reconciliation for those burdened by the unhealed memories of violent conflict, drawing on the delicate balance of societal culture and the Christian and Muslim theological notions of confession, forgiveness, and restoration. As Catherine Cornille (2008) noted in *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, genuine interreligious dialogue requires a delicate balance between commitment to one's own religious beliefs and openness to the religious other.

However, she argues that this balance is inherently precarious. On the one hand, a firm grounding in one's faith tradition is essential for meaningful dialogue; without it, dialogue risks becoming a superficial exchange that lacks depth and authenticity. On the other hand, excessive rigidity regarding one's own faith can lead to a closed-mindedness that precludes a fundamental understanding of the other person. Noticeably, many perspectives on interfaith dialogue are characterised by Western influences that pursue religious goals but also have apparent secular traits. This dual nature of interreligious discourse differs significantly from the reality and complex dynamics of interreligious interactions in many non-Western contexts, including Africa. John Mbiti asserts that African society is deeply religious, with this orientation influencing

almost every aspect of life. African religion fundamentally stems from indigenous cultures, integrating traditional wisdom and worldviews (Mbiti 1999:1). In such a context, pluralism retains its intrinsic religious character yet is also guided by the traditions and conditions of the local context, which are unique and often at variance with the prevailing notion of secularism that tends to shape interfaith discourse in the West. This is among the challenges to interfaith dialogue.

While the broader benefits of interfaith dialogue, such as fostering social cohesion and resolving conflicts, are well recognised, their specific impact on African Christian and Muslim communities in the UK is particularly compelling. For example, in cities like London, Birmingham, and Manchester, where these communities often reside, interfaith initiatives can play a crucial role in addressing the unique challenges these communities face. These initiatives not only help mitigate the lingering tensions from historical conflicts experienced in their home countries but also foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect in their new environment. This is essential in contexts where these groups navigate complex identities and often encounter systemic challenges to integration, including the unique historical and cultural dynamics that shape the interactions of the migrant faith groups.

2.3.1 Islamophobia as Challenge to Interfaith Dialogue
Islamophobia represents a pervasive challenge in many multicultural societies, including the UK, where misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslims profoundly affect interfaith dialogue. This phenomenon not only distorts social perceptions but also reinforces the barriers to interfaith dialogue, driven by the social identities imbued with historical prejudices and contemporary fears.

Islamophobia, defined as an unfounded antipathy towards Islam and Muslims, manifests as a pervasive fear or hostility towards most or all members of the Muslim community (Allen, 2010). This complex social issue has far-reaching implications for interfaith dialogue, rooted in

historical prejudice and intensified by global events and skewed media portrayals (Said, 1997). This section explores the multifaceted nature of Islamophobia, particularly examining how the dialogical model—an approach based on sustained dialogue, education, and community engagement—can effectively address and mitigate these deep-seated prejudices. These prejudices significantly shape socio-political narratives and influence interfaith dynamics, particularly in culturally diverse contexts such as the UK (Rahman, 2021). By laying out the principles of this model and its application in diverse UK contexts, we aim to demonstrate how dialogue can foster a more inclusive and understanding environment among varied religious communities.

The concept of Islamophobia is multi-layered and encompasses historical, socio-political, and psychological dimensions. It has its origins in the early interactions between the Western and Islamic worlds, where Islam was often positioned as the 'other', the antithesis around which Western identities were moulded (Allen, 2016). This process of 'othering' has perpetuated a tradition of mistrust and hostility towards Islamic cultures and, by extension, Muslim communities (Said, 1997). This enduring legacy of 'othering' sets the stage for contemporary issues, where this deeply ingrained mistrust surfaces in modern societal challenges and biases.

In the UK, the post-World War II migration patterns saw a substantial influx of Muslims from former British colonies, reshaping societal dynamics (Peach, 2006). These historical migrations introduce complexities that the dialogical model can address by facilitating understanding and integration within diverse societal dynamics. Although this enhanced the UK's cultural diversity, it also introduced integration challenges that were aggravated by economic difficulties and social unrest. Often, these issues resulted in minority communities, particularly Muslims, being unfairly blamed (Rahman, 2021). The association of Islam with global acts of terrorism, especially following the attacks on September 11, 2001, in the United States and July 7, 2005, in London, further solidified Islamophobia within public discourse (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009). By

fostering a dialogue that confronts these negative associations, the dialogical model plays a crucial role in mitigating their impact on interfaith dialogue.

Islamophobia significantly impacts both Nigerian Christians and Muslims, especially in interfaith dialogue and community cohesion. The pervasive fear and mistrust fuelled by Islamophobia create substantial barriers between Muslim communities and the wider society, hindering efforts towards dialogical engagement aimed at healing and reconciliation (Esposito & Kalin, 2011). The dialogical model provides a structured approach to overcoming these barriers by fostering sustained interfaith dialogue and understanding.

For Muslim migrants, the effects of Islamophobia are particularly profound, influencing their identity formation. They are often subjected to intense scrutiny and suspicion, leading to feelings of alienation and marginalisation. This alienation necessitates targeted interventions to address these issues and rebuild trust within the community. The dialogical model offers strategies to counter these deep-seated issues and promote a cohesive community dialogue.

The situation is especially challenging for Nigerian Muslims in the UK, who must navigate both cultural adaptation and pre-existing inter-community tensions (Adogame, 2013). Islamophobia compounds these difficulties, making it harder for them to integrate and participate fully in society. Moreover, for both Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities in the UK, Islamophobia exacerbates historical tensions imported from their homeland. These tensions, already sensitive, are reinforced by divisive narratives fuelled by Islamophobia, further complicating interfaith dialogue and community cohesion (Adogame, 2013). Thus, Islamophobia not only impacts Muslim identity and integration but also reinforces pre-existing interfaith tensions, underscoring the need for dialogical engagement to foster understanding and reconciliation.

2.3.2 Manifestations and Impacts of Islamophobia in the UK
Islamophobia in the UK exhibits a complex and multifaceted presence, ranging from overt expressions such as verbal abuse and hate crimes to more covert forms like systemic

discrimination and biased media representations. These varied manifestations of Islamophobia, both overt and covert, do not only disrupt interfaith dialogue but also shape the daily experiences of Muslim communities profoundly. In *An Overview of Key Islamophobia Research,* Allen (2010) emphasises the role of societal structures in embedding these prejudices. Integral to these structures is the media, which plays a pivotal role in framing public perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

The media's portrayal of interfaith relations often includes positive stories and dialogue initiatives, highlighting their potential to counteract negative stereotypes. Hjarvard (2008) argues that this perspective is crucial for understanding the full impact of the media on public perception and interfaith relations. When it promotes narratives of successful interfaith engagements, the media can serve as a powerful tool for positive change. Such coverage not only fosters understanding and tolerance among different religious communities but also challenges and deconstructs harmful stereotypes, thereby contributing to a more inclusive society.

However, the media also plays a significant role in reinforcing negative stereotypes about religion, stoking the climate of fear and suspicion, thereby perpetuating and intensifying these societal dynamics. The media play a critical role in framing public perceptions of Islam and Muslims. Studies by Poole (2011) and Richardson (2009) emphasise that media outlets frequently perpetuate stereotypes that associate Islam with terrorism and extremism, thereby stoking a climate of fear and suspicion. Saeed (2007) argues that such representations not only marginalise Muslim perspectives but also impede a nuanced understanding of Islam, critically undermining efforts toward constructive interfaith dialogue. Further complicating this issue is the systemic discrimination that Muslims encounter in various sectors, including employment, education, and law enforcement. This form of discrimination, as discussed by Rahman (2021), serves to exclude Muslims socially, adversely affecting their socioeconomic status and limiting their opportunities. For Nigerian Muslims in the UK, these challenges are exacerbated by racial

and migratory biases, complicating their integration and interactions with the broader society, including diaspora Nigerian Christian communities. This affects interfaith dialogue too, and the fostering of mutual understanding and reconciliation among diverse religious groups. Esposito and Kalin (2011) and Saeed (2007) note that prevailing Islamophobic sentiments and stereotypes severely hamper open and respectful communication between Muslims and non-Muslims. Such conditions foster polarisation, obstructing collective efforts aimed at healing and reconciliation. In the context of the Nigerian diaspora, Adogame (2013) observes that the challenges posed by Islamophobia are intensified by the conflicts from their home country, which intermingle with the struggles they faced in the UK. This dual burden underscores the need for tailored approaches that recognise and address the layered complexities of identity and historical grievances within these communities.

2.3.3 Countering Islamophobia: Towards Interfaith Dialogue
The dialogical model (see below) presents a compelling framework for addressing the pervasive issue of Islamophobia and, in so doing, enhances interfaith dialogue among different faith groups. This model underpins a multifaceted approach integrating dialogue, education, and policy reforms, as well as key elements such as confession, forgiveness, and restoration, which are essential in addressing entrenched stereotypes and prejudices and cultivating a culture of mutual respect and understanding among diverse faith communities.

In exploring the dialogical model of healing and reconciliation within the context of Islamophobia, it becomes evident that a multifaceted approach is essential. Dialogue stands as a critical tool in breaking down the barriers of misunderstanding and mistrust that often separate different faith groups. By creating spaces where Nigerian Christians and Muslims in the UK can share their experiences, concerns, and aspirations, such interactions can facilitate the humanisation of the 'other', fostering empathy and a shared sense of identity and purpose. This process is not only about addressing theological differences but also about confronting the shared challenges that arise in the diaspora, including the pervasive issue of Islamophobia (Saeed, 2007;

Esposito and Kalin, 2011). Education plays a crucial role in this process. The integration of comprehensive education about Islam and Muslims into curricula at all educational levels helps to dispel entrenched myths and stereotypes from a young age. Moreover, community-based educational programmes that underscore the contributions of Muslims to UK society and highlight the diversity within the Muslim community are instrumental in challenging Islamophobic narratives (Rahman, 2021).

Addressing the issue of Islamophobia, especially in the UK, also requires policy reform. Policies that advocate for equality and protect against discrimination based on religion or belief create a robust legal framework to combat Islamophobia. Building on this legal framework, community engagement initiatives further enrich the approach by bringing diverse groups together, thus transforming policy into practical, inclusive actions. Additionally, the active engagement of Muslim communities in the policymaking process ensures that their needs and concerns are not only heard but addressed effectively (Allen, 2010). When combined with the principles of the dialogical model, such policy reforms enhance the efficacy of dialogues, ensuring that they lead to substantive change and mutual respect. Yet, it also requires initiatives that bring together Nigerian Christians and Muslims with other community groups to dialogue and explore ways to enhance broader social cohesion and solidarity. These initiatives may include joint community service projects and public awareness campaigns to not only challenge Islamophobia but also celebrate the diversity of the UK's religious landscape. The media, in particular, plays a significant role in this process, especially in shaping public perceptions. Efforts to foster positive representations of Muslims and Islam in the media, along with counter-narratives to Islamophobia on social media platforms, are vital. As these multifaceted efforts demonstrate, addressing Islamophobia is not a singular task but a collective journey that underscores our concluding call for a sustained, comprehensive approach to interfaith reconciliation. Partnerships between faith communities and media organisations can help develop a more balanced and

nuanced reporting of issues related to Islam and interfaith dialogue (Poole, 2011; Richardson, 2009).

To further understand these complex dynamics, the theoretical framework of social identity theory and Trauma Theory will be employed. social identity theory provides insight into how group identities are formed and maintained, particularly in the face of external threats such as Islamophobia. It helps explain the processes through which individuals and groups solidify their identities in response to discrimination and social exclusion. Trauma Theory, on the other hand, offers a lens through which to view the psychological and emotional impacts of Islamophobia on Muslim communities. It highlights the long-term effects of repeated exposure to prejudice and violence, shaping both individual and collective responses to such experiences. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the multifaceted impacts of Islamophobia and informing effective interventions for promoting interfaith dialogue and healing.

2.4 Theoretical Framework for Interfaith Dialogue: Insights from Social Identity and Trauma Theories

Having established the challenges to interfaith dialogue, I will now explain the theoretical framework that undergirds the analysis and how to achieve the research objectives. These include social identity theory and trauma theory. Social identity theory provides insight into how group identities are formed and maintained, particularly in the face of external threats such as Islamophobia and the perceived threat to religious identity. This addresses research objective 1, which enquiries into how Nigerian Christians and Muslims narrate their experiences and memories of violent conflicts and how these narratives influence their engagement in interfaith dialogue. The theory also helps explain the processes through which individuals and groups solidify their identities in response to discrimination and social exclusion. The trauma theory offers a lens through which to view the emotional impacts of challenges to interfaith dialogue, which is crucial for assessing how unhealed memories of conflict affect individuals' and

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communities' engagement in interfaith dialogue, as stated in research objectives 2. It highlights the long-term effects of repeated exposure to prejudice and violence, shaping both individual and collective responses to such experiences. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the multiple challenges and informing effective interventions for promoting interfaith dialogue and healing. Additionally, the dialogical model will be examined as a potential framework for promoting healing and reconciliation, integrating perspectives from both social identity theory and trauma theory in exploring how structured dialogues can help individuals process their traumatic experiences and reshape their group identities in more inclusive and collaborative ways. This model aims to provide practical strategies for overcoming the psychological and social barriers to interfaith dialogue, fostering a more peaceful coexistence among diverse faith communities in both Nigeria and the UK diaspora.

2.4.1 Social Identity Theory
The social identity theory was developed and popularised by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, who introduced the concept of social identity to explain intergroup behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). It offers essential insights for analysing how individuals and groups identify themselves based on group affiliations such as religious identity (Hogg, 2016; Meyer et al., 2016; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). It asserts that an individual's conduct, self-perception, and social identity are intricately linked to their affiliations with groups that they belong to. Yet, the social identity theory (SIT) also goes into the dynamics of ingroup and outgroup categorisation, including their impact on intergroup perceptions and interactions within other groups. This also imbues interfaith dialogue and offers a lens through which to understand the complexities of religious identity, categorisation, and intergroup dynamics. Prominent scholars such as Henri Tajfel (1979) and Gordon Allport (1954) have significantly contributed to understanding individuals' perceptions and interactions with persons from diverse religious backgrounds. Tajfel's work in this field emphasises the role of categorisation in forming social identity. This is important in interfaith

contexts where individuals often categorise themselves and others based on their religious groups and affiliations. This categorisation can lead to in-group favouritism, where individuals show a preference for members of their own religious group and perceive them more positively, and in doing so, create barriers to interfaith understanding and cooperation (Brown, 1998, 2000; Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Brown's work on SIT and intergroup relations (1998, 2000) also discusses this in-group-out-group relationship, maintaining that this form of favouritism can manifest in several ways, including religious prejudice and discrimination. In a pluralistic society with multiple religious groups, individuals may strongly identify with their own faith tradition, leading to the marginalisation or stigmatisation of those who adhere to different beliefs and worldviews.

For example, when religious differences are emphasised, individuals are more likely to identify strongly with their religious group. This potentially leads to intergroup conflict. On the other hand, when commonalities between religious groups are highlighted, individuals may downplay their religious identities in favour of a broader, shared identity. This fosters interfaith harmony. There is also the tendency for individuals in these communities to undergo shifts in their religious identity when they encounter different religious traditions, which can cause many people to transition from one religious in-group to another. Ultimately, this can also result in tensions within families or communities and further raise questions about the fluidity of religious identity in pluralistic settings.

As extensively explored in existing research, social identity theory offers valuable strategies for enhancing interfaith dialogue and understanding. In their seminal work *Relationships Between Intergroup Contact and Prejudice* (2005), Linda Tropp and Thomas Pettigrew highlight the need for positive interaction through intergroup contact. They assert that 'greater intergroup contact is generally associated with lower intergroup prejudice, particularly when the contact situation is structured to enhance positive intergroup outcomes' (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005, p. 951).

Miroslav Volf's work *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996) offers profound insight into the nature of identity and reconciliation, particularly within the complex interplay of personal, communal, and cultural identities. Volf's thesis revolves around true reconciliation, especially in contexts marred by deep-seated conflict and division, necessitating an embrace that transcends mere tolerance or superficial acceptance. His concept of embrace is often juxtaposed with the dynamics of exclusion. Volf argues that exclusion, whether based on ethnicity, religion, or cultural differences, fundamentally disrupts the social fabric, leading to fragmentation and conflict. To counteract this, Volf proposes a model of embrace where the 'other' is not merely acknowledged but genuinely incorporated into one's identity sphere. This embrace does not imply a dissolution of personal or cultural identity. Instead, it represents a robust commitment to understanding, accepting, and valuing the 'other' while maintaining one's authenticity (Volf, 1996, pp. 29-30).

This perspective aligns with Gordon Allport's notion of the 'contact hypothesis' in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). Allport suggests that interfaith contact, under appropriate conditions, can reduce prejudice and promote intergroup understanding. He posits that 'under the right conditions, intergroup contact can reduce prejudice' (Allport, 1954, p. 281). This hypothesis underscores the importance of structured and positive intergroup interactions in reducing biases and fostering mutual respect and understanding among diverse religious communities.

The social identity theory also posits that when individuals from different religious backgrounds come into contact and interact positively, their perceptions of the 'other' group can change. They may start to see commonalities and recognise the shared human identity, which can weaken the boundaries between religious groups and reduce interfaith tensions (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Tropp and Pettigrew also applied and further expanded on these concepts in their work, highlighting that the reduction of prejudice goes beyond the issue of racism to include prejudice towards other religious and nonreligious groups as well (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005:951). Intergroup contact, recognition and respect for different identities are also crucial in dialogical

processes, helping to foster a sincere and respectful discussion among individuals with different religious beliefs (Keaten & Soukup, 2009). Dialogue, according to Byrne (2011), is an essential method of deconstructing preconceived notions, dispelling misconceptions, and fostering a sense of mutual respect among diverse groups. When Jewish and Buddhist leaders participate in shared contemplative practises to discover common ground, or when Christians and Muslims work together to address societal issues, they effectively put into action the potential of dialogue theory to convert interfaith interactions from potential sources of conflict into opportunities for collaboration and understanding. However, the integrated approach to the research as this current study seeks to adopt also requires an examination of the issue, paying close attention to developments in both the home and host communities. For the Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups, this includes an analysis of the impact of ethnoreligious conflicts in their home country. The details of these conflicts will be discussed in a later chapter on the research context. However, it is essential to note that many of the respondents in this research, as would be seen later in the methodology chapter, include people who continue to be affected and often traumatised by unhealed memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home countries. Some have experienced conflicts in real life, losing loved ones or even their whole communities to this conflict. Other respondents have travelled to the UK to seek asylum and to escape from being killed. These factors invariably affect their perception and worldviews towards other ethnicities or religions, as well as their interfaith dialogue, and therefore deserve to be critically analysed.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers a lens through which we can examine how individuals' group affiliations shape interactions within interfaith settings, which will be applied when addressing the study's main objectives. However, there is also a need to understand the lingering effects of past conflicts on their perceptions and behaviours. In pursuit of this understanding, the study adopts trauma theory, which provides significant insights into the discourse at both the individual

and group levels. This approach offers a comprehensive view of how personal histories and social identities intersect in multicultural religious contexts.

2.4.2 Trauma Theory

Building upon the theoretical groundwork established by Herman (2015) and Van der Kolk (2014), the trauma theory offers an essential framework for analysing how unhealed memories of violent conflicts contribute to shaping individual actor's behaviours, beliefs, and relationships with others. The trauma theory, derived from the fields of psychology and sociology, offers a valuable perspective for examining the long-lasting effects of traumatic experiences. This perspective is particularly important for understanding the dynamics within interfaith interactions, especially among migrant faith communities (Abu-Nimer, Khoury & Welty, 2007; Kazarian, 2021). It provides a comprehensive viewpoint that analyses how memories of violent conflicts manifest in the actions, beliefs, and social dynamics of both people and communities. The significance of this theoretical approach lies in its capacity to unravel the profound impact of traumatic events on the behavioural patterns, attitudes, and interrelationships of individuals and communities. Complementing these insights, Bessel van der Kolk (2014) in *The Body Keeps the Score* discusses innovative therapeutic interventions such as neurofeedback, which could be adapted into therapeutic modalities for communities engaged in interfaith dialogues, aiding in the healing process by addressing bodily and psychological impacts of trauma. Memories of violent conflicts, when viewed through the trauma theory lens, emerge not merely as historical remnants but as active agents shaping contemporary interfaith engagements. As Ruth Leys (2017) critiques, the contemporary understanding of affect and emotion in trauma responses challenges traditional views, suggesting that our interpretation of these responses needs reconsideration, especially in contexts where collective traumatic memories influence interfaith dialogue. By adopting this framework, the study acknowledges the intricacies of how traumatic memories shape the cognitive and emotions of individuals and the impact this might have on the dialogue process. In Van der Kolk's research (2014), the author emphasises the physiological and

neurological dimensions of trauma, underlining its profound impact on the human body and brain. Building on these concepts, Judith Herman, in her updated work (2015), elaborates on the complexities of trauma recovery, introducing nuanced discussions on complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which are crucial for developing effective interfaith dialogue strategies among communities with prolonged exposure to conflict. This physiological perspective provides a deeper comprehension of the somatic manifestations of trauma within interfaith communities.

Furthering this physiological understanding, Stephen Porges (2017) explains how perceptions of safety and threat are biologically mediated, which can profoundly affect interfaith interactions by shaping participants' feelings of safety or danger in dialogue environments. Furthermore, incorporating trauma theory in interfaith dialogue has been exemplified by scholars such as Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty (2007) and Kazarian (2021), who, in their respective studies, applied this theory to explore the aftermath of traumatic events in various contexts. Wilson (2016), for instance, examined how the trauma theory provides insight into the psychological impact of communal violence, shedding light on its implications for interfaith dialogue. Kazarian (2021) also examines how trauma theory informs the understanding of resilience and coping mechanisms within faith communities, which is similar to Vamik Volkan's concept of C*hosen traumas* (2021). The chosen traumas concept explains how historical traumas are not static events but evolving narratives that continue to influence group behaviour, attitudes, and conflicts. The persistence of these traumas in a group's collective memory underscores their role in both sustaining group cohesion and potentially fuelling intergroup animosities. In the data presentation chapters (see Chapters Five, Six and Seven), I will apply both the social identity and trauma theories in analysing the impact of the conflicts on its victims.

However, a more far-reaching question concerns not only the traumatic effects on the memories and areas of identity but also how individuals and communities can heal and be reconciled with

the realities of their respective communities and faith groups. Therefore, informed by the analyses using the trauma and social identity theories, this study will further discuss the dialogical approach, which provides the practical and methodological framework for improving experiences for the victims of these violent conflicts, focusing on their healing and reconciliation. This concept was introduced in Chapter One. However, I will provide further context in the next section.

2.4.3 Dialogical Approach to Healing and Reconciliation
The dialogical approach to healing and reconciliation offers a critical framework for practical engagement in interfaith dialogue. It aims to transform theoretical insights from the trauma and social identity theories into actionable strategies throughout the thesis. This framework is predicated upon three key elements: confession, forgiveness, and restoration (see Chapter Seven). This approach is particularly pertinent in addressing complex issues of Islamophobia and other interreligious conflicts and challenges related to interfaith dialogue. It ensures a safe environment in which diverse faith communities can coexist and build mutual respect.

One practical application of this approach, which will be discussed in Chapter Four, is the dialogue seminar involving Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK. This seminar facilitated open communication and addressed the traumatic memories and social identities that participants bring into the room. For example, a dialogue session begins by acknowledging the collective traumas experienced by these communities, setting the stage for empathy. Facilitators then guide discussions towards exploring shared social identities, such as being migrants in a new country, which can foster a sense of commonality and mutual respect. By weaving together personal and group narratives, these dialogues help create richer, more cohesive interfaith interactions, demonstrating the seamless integration of theoretical insights into practical outcomes.

Historically, religious differences have often catalysed conflicts, from the Crusades to more recent communal riots, leaving deep scars and unhealed memories on the human's collective psyche (Armstrong, 2001). The dialogical approach emphasises mutual exchange, allowing for the deconstruction of preconceived notions and the construction of new understandings. This two-way communication ensures that all parties are speaking and actively listening. Dialogue serves as a conduit for the exchange of ideas and a medium through which conflicting communities can share experiences and build bridges of comprehension. Bakhtin (2010) argues that these ideas must go beyond mere abstraction to become deeply ingrained within personal values and subjective judgments. The personal experiences of participants in the dialogue are often underexplored, with attention usually given to processes and methods of dialogue rather than to the individual and their unhealed memories of conflict.

In this context, the dialogical model of healing involves accepting the past and its memories with little or no hatred, bitterness, or desire for revenge. It is a collective journey towards deeper understanding and empathy, fostering a climate where diverse religious communities can coexist peacefully. This does not mean burying the past but reaching a point where remembering the past does not continue to fill individuals and the community with hate and anger (Lapsley, 2012). However, healing can be a complex process requiring the confrontation of often painful and divisive histories that resist change or reinterpretation. The challenge lies in creating safe, respectful spaces where these histories can be discussed openly.

Scholars like Robert Schreiter (2015) have explored the notion of reconciliation, which is integral to healing memories. According to Schreiter, reconciliation in post-traumatic contexts involves addressing injustices and rebuilding broken relationships among individuals, within societies, and between humanity and the Divine. For instance, in post-apartheid South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission incorporated religious leaders, rituals, and languages

to acknowledge the deep spiritual wounds that persisted alongside the political and societal ones (Tutu, 2000).

Lederach (2003) describes reconciliation as a complicated process based on four critical notions: truth, justice, mercy, and peace. The need to foster a common bond between affected individuals and their communities is at its heart. While healing helps parties live beyond the pains of past atrocities, reconciliation goes further, leading individuals and communities through a long and laborious process to change how they think about their historical adversaries (Hauss, 2010). Ultimately, reconciliation fosters the process of knowing the truth about historical adversaries and walking the delicate paths to see beyond the pain. In many African contexts, this is called ubuntu – to choose to show mercy, seek restorative rather than retributive justice, and seek the peace of the community – the belief that my humanity is inextricably caught up in yours (Tutu, 2000).

Healing and reconciliation are part of processes predicated upon three cardinal preconditions: confession, forgiveness, and the restoration of affected individuals' dignity and reintegration into their home community. This triad forms a spiritual and communal pathway through which the affected individual or group journeys, seeking to re-establish broken relationships and mend communal fabrics holistically. Confession involves a transformative interaction where truth is spoken, allowing for the deconstruction of walls of denial and creating a space where humanity is shared and acknowledged among the oppressed and the oppressor (Lederach & Hampson, 1998). From a dialogical perspective, confession is collaborative truth-telling and a shared narrative experience. During South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Desmond Tutu advocated for this form of confession, emphasising that truth-telling was essential in breaking the cycle of hidden histories that feed hatred and fear (Tutu, 2000).

Forgiveness is an intentional commitment towards empathy and relinquishing the rightful claim to retribution. As Miroslav Volf argues, forgiveness must be understood as an ongoing process

that seeks to reconstruct relationships by addressing and redressing wrongs, not ignoring them (Volf, 1996). Through this lens, forgiveness is seen as a journey often facilitated within the context of one's faith community, which provides the necessary support and accountability.

The act of restoration to the home community transcends the physical return to the reintegration into a community's life, values, and social fabric. This re-acceptance is a communal acknowledgement of the transformation within individuals, a critical aspect highlighted in Ched Myers and Elaine Enns' work on Ambassadors of Reconciliation (Myers & Enns, 2009). Without such restoration, the cycle of harm may continue, as the community is a crucial factor in identity formation and the healing process (Myers & Enns, 2009).

As explored in the forthcoming empirical chapters, this dynamic interplay between confession, forgiveness, and restoration is based on a dialogical approach centred on healing and reconciliation. The process underscores the need for active participation in truth, empathetic engagement with the 'other,' and a communal commitment to the re-formation and acceptance of one's identity within a collective. Within this sacred space, genuine healing and reconciliation can begin to flourish, knitting back together the torn segments of societies and faiths.

2.5 Conclusion
This chapter has laid a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding the intricacies of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. The chapter constructed a robust framework that captures the multifaceted nature of interfaith dialogue by integrating trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach. This synthesis of theories provides a nuanced perspective that considers the psychological impacts of past conflicts, the construction and negotiation of group identities, and the dynamic processes of dialogue and reconciliation.

The review highlighted significant gaps in the existing literature, particularly the under-explored socio-cultural dimensions of interfaith dialogue among migrant faith groups and the limited focus

on the traumatic experiences of migrants from conflict-affected countries. Addressing these gaps, this chapter emphasises the importance of a more integrated approach that considers institutional, doctrinal, personal, and experiential factors in interfaith dialogue.

 Furthermore, the dialogical approach offers practical strategies for healing and reconciliation, focusing on confession, forgiveness, and restoration. These elements are crucial for creating safe spaces where diverse faith communities can engage in meaningful dialogue, fostering mutual respect and understanding. By applying these theoretical insights to the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters, this research aims to provide actionable strategies for improving interfaith dialogue and fostering a more inclusive and peaceful society. In the next chapters, I will discuss the research contexts in which the data for this research were collected in order to put the subsequent analysis into proper context.

CHAPTER THREE

Background and Context Identity and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter set the thesis in the ongoing scholarly discourse on interfaith dialogue, highlighting the gaps in scholarship while also outlining the theoretical framework guiding this study. This chapter focuses on the research setting and context, providing an overview of the community and people of Nigeria in their home country and the UK, as well as the two faith groups used as case studies: the NASFAT and the RCCG. Nigerian migration to the UK is significant due to the long-standing historical ties between the two nations, facilitated by shared language and educational systems. Estimates suggest approximately 250,000 Nigerians are living legally in the UK, contributing significantly to society. Most Nigerians in the UK are Christians or Muslims, with Christians outnumbering Muslims. Religion plays a crucial role in helping Nigerian migrants navigate the challenges of assimilation in the UK. Nigerian faith groups, including NASFAT and RCCG, are prominent within the UK's African-descended communities, offering spiritual support and fostering social networks.

3.2 Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914 when the British government united the northern and southern regions into a single entity. This occurred fourteen years after Britain took over from the Niger Company, now Unilever. The colonial unification of these diverse regions and ethnic groups laid the foundation for Nigeria's contemporary political and social landscape, significantly influencing its development and inter-ethnic relations throughout the 20th century and beyond. This West African nation, the continent's largest economy, spans approximately 923,768 square kilometres and, as of July 2020, hosts a population of over 214 million. Nigeria's vast cultural mosaic comprises around 250 ethnic factions, conversing in over 500 languages. The religious composition of the population is nearly equal in distribution between Christianity and Islam, with Islam holding a slight numerical advantage (see Burgess,

2009). The country gained its independence in October 1960 from British colonial rule and proclaimed itself the Federal Republic of Nigeria in October 1963.

The religious violence in Nigeria can be traced back to the Kano riot of 1953 between the Northerners (mainly the Hausa ethnic group), who were opposed to immediate independence from British colonialism, and southern Yorubas and Igbos who demanded immediate independence (Fakanbi, 2019; Ajodo-Adebanjoko & Ojua, 2013). This riot resulted in the killing of over forty people and the deterioration of the relationship between North and South. Subsequent events include the anti-Igbo pogrom of 1966, a series of massacres of Igbo southerners in northern Nigeria. Between 8,000 to 30,000 were believed to have been killed in this massacre (Akanji, 2015; Enyiaka, 2019). This led to a reprisal killing in Port Harcourt and other southern cities and the attempted secession and declaration of the Republic of Biafra, which eventually led to the Nigeria-Biafra war (Burgess, 2009; Akanji, 2015). According to Akanji, these conflicts, more than any issue, are 'the biggest threat to national cohesion, stability and development, leading to fears, suspicions, unrest; destruction of lives and property, the mass displacement of people, and a major setback in nation-building' (Akanji, 2015:1)

Violent conflicts in Nigeria are the results of the 'combined effects of the history of decolonisation, modernisation, and conflict' (Burgess, 2017:133), which in itself gave rise to new demands – a new form of religious revivalism that gave rise to the salient of Pentecostalism and other forms of religious movements throughout the country. Implicit in this submission is the role that religious consideration plays in fomenting these conflicts. Other scholars, including Toyin Falola, corroborate this. In his book, *Violence in Nigeria* (Falola, 1998) described the ethnic conflicts in Nigeria as 'crises of religious politics and secular ideologies rooted in the country's history, culture, and faiths' (Falola, 1998:1). Additionally, there are religiously motivated conflicts across the country many of which

centre around fundamentalist or extremists' ideologies. This includes when radical Muslim groups in Nigeria demand the institutionalisation of Sharia as a state law in majority Muslim societies or when Boko Haram demands the erasure of Western education and influence because of its historical link with Christian ideologies. In all these cases, the extremists pursue this agenda through vociferous attacks and violence against unsuspecting members in communities like Kaduna, Kano, and Jos (Burgess, 2009). In *A Deadly Cycle* (Krause, 2011)*,* an examination of the crisis in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, the author noted a growing severity in the acts of violence, leading to profound trauma among the local population. Religious centres were also used to perpetuate this violence. According to the Human Rights Watch report, some Muslims in Kaduna and Jos use the loudspeakers at the Mosques that are often used for the *Adhan* (Muslim call to prayer) to incite fear and hate and rally the youths to riot (Human Rights Watch, 2002; see also Krause, 2011).

3.3 The Role of Religion in the Violent Conflict in Nigeria

Studies show that the polarisation of religious identities can become a reflection of an implicit agenda to perpetuate one religious worldview over the other (Burgess, 2009). In Nigeria, both Christians and Muslims suspect each other of this implicit agenda to Islamise or Christianise the country and perpetuate one religious ideology over the other (Burgess, 2009). Christians saw the Muslims' attempt to advance the creation of the Sharia Supreme Court, the country's admission to the Organisation for Islamic Countries (OIC), the introduction of Sharia law in 12 northern states in Nigeria, the increased extremism of the Boko Haram insurgence group, and the licensing of Islamic Banking in Nigeria as part of ongoing efforts to Islamise the country. Muslims, on the other hand, are worried about the increasing assertiveness and growing surge of Pentecostal Christianity across the nooks and crannies of the country, which, according to Burgess, 'contributed to a rise in religious violence as Muslim domination of the north gradually came under threat' (Burgess, 2009:274). These factors contribute to severe tensions that threaten the country's unity. Appeal to religious identity, which is often expressed

by deepening accentuations of religious differences, has not only affected the already fragile Christian-Muslim relations in the country but is also expressed in fanaticism and entrenched zealotry that degenerates into violent conflicts (Nmehielle, 2004; Kendhammer, 2013).

In the early 2000s, twelve northern states in Nigeria adopted the Sharia as the governing state law, allowing the Sharia court to treat blasphemy and apostasy as deserving a punishment up to and including execution (Nmehielle, 2004). In 2002, a Christian journalist, Isioma Daniel, wrote a newspaper column attempting to humourise and address the Muslims' opposition to the Miss World contest scheduled to be hosted in Nigeria:

> The Muslims thought it was immoral to bring ninety-two women to Nigeria and ask them to revel in vanity. What would Mohammed think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from one of them. (Aluko, 2002).

Muslims across the country assessed the article to be a 'blasphemy and apostasy' portraying the prophet Mohammed as predisposed to feminine wiles. This outrage led to the Miss World riots and reprisal killings across Christian and Muslim communities in Kaduna (Human Rights Watch, 2002). An estimated 220 people were killed, and several thousand were injured, displaced, and left homeless. On 26 November 2002, the Zamfara State governor issued a *fatwa* – an Islamic legal pronouncement that called for the killing of Isioma Daniel: 'It is abiding on all Muslims, wherever they are, to consider the killing of the writer as a religious duty' (Aluko, 2002). Daniel fled the country and sought asylum in Norway even though the Nigerian government had considered the *fatwa* to be null, void, and unconstitutional (The Guardian, 2002).

This incident underscores the extreme consequences of religious intolerance and the profound impact such conflicts have on individuals and communities. The escalation of violence in response to perceived blasphemy not only highlights the deep-seated religious

tensions but also illustrates the challenges in mediating interfaith dialogue and achieving reconciliation.

3.3.1 Boko Haram

In 2002, charismatic Muslim cleric Mohammed Yusuf set up Boko Haram as a peaceful movement aimed to ride the country of Western influence and civilisation, which 'not only contradicts Islamic values but also promotes a Christian agenda' (Murtala, 2017:89).

Since the Sokoto caliphate, which ruled parts of what is now northern Nigeria, Niger, and southern Cameroon, was annexed by British forces in 1903, an apparent aversion to Western education emerged in parts of the Muslim population (Murtala, 2017). This resistance continues and is reflected in the reluctance to enrol children in state 'Western schools'. This problem is exacerbated by the political leadership's apparent indifference to education as a strategic necessity. It was in this environment that Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic Muslim cleric, founded Boko Haram in Maiduguri in 2002. Yusuf founded Boko Haram as a religious complex with a mosque and Islamic school reflecting a confluence of religious, educational, and socio-political dynamics. He aimed to offer a counter-narrative to Western models of education (Murtala, 2017). However, in 2009, the Nigerian military authorities killed Mohammed Yusuf, and Abubaker Shakau became the designated leader who transformed the group into an extremist jihadist movement. In addition to its repudiation of Western education, Shakau's leadership also includes a relentless launch of murderous attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria (see Gilbert, 2020; APPG FoRB, 2020). In 2011, the group launched a series of attacks on churches in Abuja and Jos, bombing and killing at least 40 people (Gilbert, 2020). In December 2019, they accosted two passenger buses in Borno state, released those passengers who were Muslims, slaughtered two men and a pastor and abducted the others. During Christmas of 2019, Boko Haram released a goring video showing the execution of ten Christian prisoners and one Muslim. This was not before the massacre of a Christian

bride-to-be and her entire bridal party on their way to a New Year's Eve wedding in Adamawa state. In April 2014, as a way to emphasise their philosophy to denounce Western education, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 female students from a Government Secondary School in Chibok in Borno State. A government enquiry report suggested that Boko Haram abducted the girls to leverage a negotiation in exchange for some of the group's commanders in jail. In 2015, which was also the year Boko Haram 'pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant [ISIL]'[1] (see Gilbert, 2020:5), the Global Terrorism Index ranked it as the deadliest terror group in the world (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015:41). By August 2020, the US-based Council on Foreign Relations reported that Boko Haram had killed nearly 39,000 Nigerians since its inception in 2002 (Campbell, 2013). Yet, the devastation of Boko Haram is minuscule compared to the herder-farmer conflicts.

3.3.2 Herder-Farmer Conflict

The threat of clashes between Fulani herders and sedentary crop farmers over diminishing land and water resources is described to be more devastating to national security (Samuel, 2012). These conflicts are among 'the deadliest conflicts yet to be heard of in Nigeria' (Ilo, Jonathan-Ichaver, & Adamolekun, 2019:1). As with many other violent clashes in Nigeria, this conflict has a major religious undertone as the farmers are predominantly Christians while the herders are predominantly Muslim (Ilo, Jonathan-Ichaver, & Adamolekun, 2019). According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), the farmer-herder conflict is an evident escalation of violent conflicts – from spontaneous reactions to provocations to now deadlier planned attacks. The ICG further assesses the violence caused by the farmer-herder conflict to be 'six times deadlier than Boko Haram,' especially in states such as Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba (International Crisis Group, 2018).

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[1] This is part of a UN Security Council report on the "Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)," details of which can be found in the following link https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/islamic-state-west-africa-province-iswap-0.

So far, the herder-farmer clashes have resulted in the killing of more than 10,000 people, 40 per cent of which occurred between 2017 and 2019. So far, in 2020, an estimated 1,200 Nigerian Christians have been killed in the first six months (Gilbert, 2020), and this is in addition to the severe human and economic devastation and heightened ethnoreligious tensions. Amnesty International estimates that 'at least 3,641 people were killed in these clashes between 2016 and October 2018, and the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust reports that more than 1,000 people were killed in 2019' (Cox & Thomas, 2019). The recent All Party-Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG FoRB) report described the situation as 'unfolding genocide.'

Margaret, a survivor from Ngar village, recounted the brutal violence inflicted upon her family, detailing how her sister was raped, mutilated, and fatally shot. In contrast, her brother's family was mercilessly slaughtered (APPG FoRB, 2020:7). Veronica echoes this narrative from Dogon Noma, who survived a machete attack only to witness the death of her daughter. This harrowing scene left her unconscious and traumatised (APPG FoRB, 2020:7). Similarly, Antonia Aje from Karamai described the horrifying sight of her brother-in-law's body, dismembered by a machete amidst the ruins of her home and community, including a burnt hospital and a church desecrated by arsonists (APPG FoRB, 2020:7). These personal accounts are further compounded by the April 2020 attacks on the Christian village of Hukke, where Fulani herders killed seven people and destroyed numerous homes. A survivor's testament highlights the horror of witnessing the murder of their sons and a pastor, alongside the burning of houses, encapsulating a sense of overpowering fear and loss (APPG FoRB, 2020:8).

Moreover, the attack on Nsah village in Plateau State, which resulted in the death of four individuals, including Pastor Matthew Tagwi, reveals another layer of communal despair. A survivor's statement, juxtaposing their ignorance of COVID-19 with the acute awareness of the threat posed by Fulani attackers – 'This issue of COVID-19, we do not know anything

about it, but our problem is Fulani who are killing us' (APPG FoRB, 2020:8). This underscores the pervasive nature of violence and its overshadowing impact on every other aspect of life (APPG FoRB, 2020:8). These testimonies, while heart-wrenching, are crucial in understanding the individual experiences and traumas that interfaith dialogue in conflict-affected communities must address. They underscore the need for a dialogical approach that goes beyond theoretical frameworks and procedural methodologies, focusing instead on the healing and reconciliation of individuals deeply scarred by such conflicts.

In April 2020, when Fulani herders attacked Hura village in Plateau State, killing nine people, including a pregnant woman and her three-year-old child, APPG FoRB reports that the herders were 'shouting Allah u Akbar, come out, come out!' (APPG FoRB, 2020:8). The report also recalls Dauda Rogo, the village head's comment, 'Why did the Fulani leave the Muslims who are farmers and attack only Christians if this is not a religious issue? This is more than grazing land or farmers and herders' fight over land' (APPG FoRB, 2020:8).

In a 29th June 2018 joint statement, the Church Denominational Heads in Plateau State and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) describe the renewed Fulani herder's attacks on Christians as 'pure genocide' and a 'blood bath in mostly Christian communities and must be stopped immediately' (APPG FoRB, 2020:19). There have been similar calls from Muslim communities to denounce the 'summarily executing of Muslims in the name of counterterrorism by the empowered Christian communities and state agents' (see Human Rights Watch, 2002; International Crisis Group, 2018). These attacks have also led to periodic retaliatory violent attacks with Christian youths killing otherwise peaceful Muslims in their communities (Peterside, 2014). This is a significant development given that herders and farmers in these communities have for centuries lived in relative harmony, with each benefiting from historically symbiotic partnerships to keep cropland fertile and cattle well-nourished (Ibrahim, 2020; Gilbert, 2020). Pastoralists' livestock provides agriculturalists with

daily goods and manure for fertilisation, while the agriculturalists provide grains and other farm products for the pastoralists (Ibrahim, 2020). Even though there are occasional skirmishes, they have often always found a way to live together. One possible explanation for this new turn is increasing demand for both farm crops and meat. While the increase in farming activities drastically diminished the supply of grazing land, the steady rise in meat prices has also given rise to cattle rustling, with crime syndicates increasingly targeting herds (Ibrahim, 2020). In 2013, approximately 60,000 heads of cattle were reported stolen from the northern regions. These thievery incidents have also contributed to the need for the pastoralists to arm themselves, often with semi-automatic weapons that frequently lead to heavy casualties when they come into conflict with farmers, sometimes leaving entire villages devastated (Ibrahim, 2020). The Nigerian economy loses an estimated £10.5 billion each year to these herder-farmer conflicts (Brottem & McDonnell, 2020), and the studies show that if these conflicts were prevented, the average households' revenues would have increased by more than 200 per cent those lost years (see International Crisis Group, 2018).

3.4 Nigerians within the Broader Context of African Migrants in the UK
Nigeria is one of the largest sources of African migrants to the UK, a trend influenced by longstanding historical ties, the use of English as a common language, and a shared vision for future collaboration (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). Although the exact number of Nigerians in the UK is unknown, the former British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Paul Arkwright, estimated in 2015 that up to 250,000 Nigerian-born individuals live legally in the UK, contributing significantly to its society and economy (Arkwright, 2015).

The relationship between Nigeria and the UK is complex, marked by both cooperative and contentious periods that often evoke strong emotions, concerns, and resentment (Akinrinade & Ogen, 2011; Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). Many Nigerians' initial encounters with the British involved evading slavery or enduring the brutalities of the colonial era, a history that continues

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to resonate with subsequent generations. However, since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has also established new partnerships with the UK, focusing on education, development assistance, trade, investment, and religion.

Most Nigerians in the UK are either Christians (primarily Pentecostal/Charismatic) or Muslims, with many Muslims associated with the Nasrul-lahi-li Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT). Notably, the number of Nigerian Christians in the UK significantly surpasses that of Muslims, which is particularly significant given that Nigeria's population is nearly equally divided between Christians and Muslims.

Religion plays a crucial role in the lives of many Africans, including Nigerians, both in their home countries and in the diaspora. It shapes their interpretation of life and society and their coping mechanisms for difficult situations (Mbiti, 1999). Nigerian faith groups are often the dominant face of African-led denominations in the UK, providing essential community support and maintaining cultural connections.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is one of the fastest-growing religious denominations in the UK. Founded in Lagos, Nigeria, by Josiah Akindayomi in 1952, the church initially experienced slow growth, establishing only about 39 congregations within the Yoruba communities in Southwestern Nigeria over its first three decades. This slow growth was partly attributed to Akindayomi's complex and disciplinarian leadership style, which deterred many potential followers (Ukah, 2008).

In 1981, after Akindayomi's death, Enoch Adeboye, a former lecturer at the University of Lagos, became the General Overseer. Adeboye's leadership marked a seismic shift in the church's trajectory, introducing a new form of charismatic leadership that revolutionised the church's

mission outlook (Ukah, 2008; Adedibu, 2015). Adeboye set forth an ambitious mission agenda for the church, which reads as follows:

1. To make it to heaven.

2. To take as many people as possible with us.

3. To have a member of The Redeemed Christian Church of God in every family of all nations.

4. To accomplish Mission 1 above, holiness will be our lifestyle.

5. To accomplish Missions 2 and 3 above, we will plant churches within 5 minutes of walking distance in every city and town in developing countries and within 5 minutes of driving distance in every city and town in developed countries (RCCG Mission Statement).

This mission statement fuelled the RCCG's global spread over the past four decades. The church now boasts over fifteen million members and 14,000 branches in Nigeria and has established itself in more than 180 countries. The first RCCG branch in the UK was founded in 1988 by Ade Okerende and David Okunade. Under the leadership of Enoch Adeboye and the UK National Overseer Agu Irukwu, the church has grown to over 930 congregations across the UK (Adedibu, 2015; Burgess, 2011).

Similarly, the Nasrul-lahi-li-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) is Nigeria's most prominent Islamic movement and has significantly impacted the UK's religious landscape. Founded in Lagos in 1995, NASFAT has grown to over five million followers and 300 chapters across Nigeria (Adetona, 2012). The society expanded to the UK in 2007, establishing nine chapters and more than five thousand adherents nationwide. According to its constitution, NASFAT-UK aims to develop an enlightened Nigerian-UK migrant society nurtured by a proper understanding of Islam for spiritual upliftment and the welfare of humanity (NASFAT Constitution Article 3.2).

Known as the 'Muslim Pentecostals,' NASFAT follows practices similar to many Pentecostal Christian groups, including all-night prayer meetings, Sunday morning services, healing and

exorcism prayer camps, annual conventions, and televangelism (Adetona, 2012). NASFAT emerged as a response to the needs of Muslims who sought spiritual solutions in Pentecostal churches, providing a viable alternative within the Islamic faith (Adetona, 2012:102).

3.7 Relationship Between NASFAT and Pentecostal Christians

Historically, the relationship between NASFAT and the Pentecostal churches is replete with both implicit and explicit competition. Murtala (2017) and Soares (2006) argued that NASFAT was founded to compete with the growing surge in Pentecostal worldview among Muslim youths. In an interview excerpt published in *Sensational Piety* (Murtala, 2017), the General Secretary of NASFAT, Lateef Olasupo, told Ibrahim Murtala that it 'wants to make NASFAT more efficient than Pentecostal churches,' suggesting 'conscious awareness of and desire to outsmart Pentecostal churches in the game of efficiency' (Murtala, 2017:149). Lateef Olasupo, the national chair of the board of trustees and a pioneer of NASFAT, noted that 'the most important reasons for the establishment of NASFAT were due to the challenges posed by Pentecostalism on Muslim communities in the southwest' (Murtala, 2017:141). Olasupo, also a founding member of the movement, discussed the idea behind the movement's founding in an interview with Ibrahim Murtala.

According to Olasupo, he and a few Muslim elders observed with concern that there is a waning engagement in Islamic practices and rituals among young Muslim professionals, juxtaposed with the growing influence of Pentecostalism across the nation (see Murtala, 2017). This growing shift, evidenced by the increased and active participation of young Muslims in Pentecostal activities, including viewing their broadcasts programmes on the television, attending their events, and, in some cases, converting to Christianity, prompted Olasupo and his associates to establish an Islamic organisation that would reinvigorate the Islamic fervour and counter the attractiveness of Pentecostalism among Muslim youth. (Murtala, 2017). NASFAT was, therefore, established, and in addition to the Friday *Jummah* prayer, the flagship event of NASFAT is the

Asalatu [Sunday morning worship] programme aimed to keep the Muslim youths busy on Sunday morning rather than attending or watching Pentecostal programmes on Sundays. Murtala (2017:141) noted that the *Asalatu* prayers contributed significantly to the revival of Islamic zeal in Nigeria's southwest and other regions. NASFAT's success is evident in its growing membership across Nigeria and its global outreach, including in the UK.

Faith-based assemblies serve a dual purpose for numerous Nigerian immigrants in the UK. They are not only centres for spiritual congregation but also pillars of social support, fostering networks that extend beyond religious practice (Burgess, 2009). These groups provide their members a cultural 'home away from home' where they can stay connected with their culture and religion. Both NASFAT and the RCCG pose unique challenges for this study. As faith organisations, these groups exist as registered charities in the UK and are bound by stipulations of charity law – to exist for service and purpose of public benefit (Hilton, 2012). However, these groups face numerous challenges as migrant faith groups deliver their public services in the UK. For both the Christians and the Muslims, these include subtle racism and discrimination, financial constraints, hunger, poverty, immigration problems, difficulty finding places for worship, segregation, and the failure to evangelise their white British neighbours. Despite these issues, however, Nigerian faith groups, often situated within religiously diverse though socially and economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the UK, continue to be significant contributors to the socio-economic and political development in the UK (Burgess, 2017). Burgess (2017) observes that these challenges have often served as the basis for or pointers to the social issues many migrant groups are most concerned with. But while these groups and their members live together in the same neighbourhoods here in the UK and face similar social problems, they do not work together. More importantly, there are significant contradictions in what each group says and what they are willing to commit to when it comes to interfaith dialogue. One of the reasons for this, as will be discussed in the

forthcoming chapters, is the issue of the protracted, often intractable conflict between the Christian and Muslim factions in their home country.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research context and setting, including details of the respective migrant communities used as a case study. It explores the prevalence of Nigerian-led denominations, both Christian and Muslim, within the UK's African-descended faith communities. The narrative proceeds to unfold the historical trajectories and core focuses of the RCCG and NASFAT, highlighting their foundational goals in Nigeria alongside their missional intentions in the UK. Subsequent sections examine the poignant aspects of these migrant cohorts and the lived experiences of their members, particularly around the challenges of engaging in interfaith dialogue with people of other faiths. This includes the realities of their marginal position as immigrants living in and striving to negotiate their ascriptive and circumstantial identities with the realities of their host nation. Additionally, many of them face the challenge of coping with the traumatic memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts from their home countries, which have left deep, unhealed wounds.

The Nigerian scenario, in particular, presents a significant perspective on the interfaith dialogue. All participants in this study, residing either in Nigeria or the UK, are Nigerians, and their worldviews about interfaith dialogue have been shaped by lived experiences of the violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home community, mainly related to the numerous violent ethno-religious clashes. The chapter discusses the role of these conflicts in the disintegrating social fabric in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FOUR
Research Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter provided a historical overview of the contexts relevant to this study. It advances the conversation by delving into the research methodologies employed in addressing the research question, including their practical application. It accounts for the methodological framework employed in this study, delineating the research design and the rationale underpinning its selection. It explains the data collection techniques employed in this research, including interviews, observations, and informal conversations. The process of conducting ethnographic fieldwork within selected Christian and Muslim communities in the UK and Nigeria will be detailed, and a comprehensive account of the fieldwork experience will be provided. This includes an outline of the scope and limitations of the methods, the ethical considerations, and the challenges encountered during the fieldwork. Its main aim is to provide a clear and comprehensive account of the research design and implementation and the theoretical frameworks that guided the findings' collection, analysis, and interpretation.

To enhance the reliability of the data, this study employs triangulation of both research methods and theories, a practice widely endorsed in scholarly literature for its effectiveness in validating research findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Theory triangulation involves the application of various theoretical perspectives to provide a multifaceted analysis of the data. For instance, trauma theory and social identity theory are used to interpret how memories of violent conflicts in respondents' home countries influence their interfaith dialogue in Nigeria or the UK. Additionally, the dialogical approach serves as a conceptual framework to explore the dynamics and challenges of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian migrant faith groups, echoing the integrative strategies suggested by Denzin (2017).

Methodological triangulation involves the application of diverse methods to approach the same research question, thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Interviews,

observations, informal conversations, and a dialogue seminar are used to collect qualitative data on interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Content analysis further supplements these methods, examining materials such as sermon extracts, books, reports, and newsletters from the respective faith groups, a methodology reinforced by Patton (2015) for its depth and richness.

Employing these triangulation strategies allows for the cross-verification of data from various sources and methods, significantly reducing the potential for errors or biases that might arise from relying on a single source or method. This approach not only assures the validity of the research findings but also enriches and deepens our understanding by capturing the complexity and diversity of the research topic, as advocated by Flick (2022). The specific methods employed are detailed in the sections that follow.

Section 4.2 examines the theoretical underpinnings of the research methods and outlines the research objectives. It details how integrating trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach provides a comprehensive framework for analysing interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Section 4.3 discusses the employment of qualitative and ethnographic approaches, justifying the use of in-depth interviews, participant and non-participant observations, informal conversations, and dialogue seminars to capture the nuanced experiences of Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups. Section 4.4 describes the research setting, highlighting the contexts of the UK and Nigeria, where the fieldwork was conducted. It outlines the phases of the fieldwork and the selection of research sites, emphasising the significance of these settings for understanding interfaith dynamics. Section 4.5 elaborates on the research methods used, including the design and implementation of interviews, participant and non-participant observations, informal conversations, and dialogue seminars. It explains the process of data collection and the rationale behind the choice of methods. Section 4.6 addresses ethical considerations, detailing the steps taken to ensure the

ethical integrity of the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the handling of sensitive information. Section 4.7 provides an overview of data analysis techniques, explaining how the collected data were systematically analysed using trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach to address the research questions. Section 4.8 discusses the research's scope, limitations, and challenges, highlighting the methodological and practical constraints encountered during the study and the strategies employed to mitigate these issues. Section 4.9 explores the insider-outsider problem, reflecting on the researcher's positionality and its impact on the research process. It discusses the challenges of balancing insider knowledge and outsider objectivity in conducting ethnographic research. Section 4.10 addresses the hierarchy of leadership, the lack of research material, particularly within the NASFAT community, and the implications for data accessibility and collection. Section 4.11 concludes the chapter by summarising the methodologies applied and previewing the analysis of the collected data, setting the stage for the forthcoming chapters.

4.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of Research Methods and Research Objectives

By integrating trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach, this research provides a sophisticated analysis of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Each methodological approach is carefully chosen to address specific research objectives, offering profound insights into how past violent conflicts continue to influence present interfaith dialogues. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on interfaith dialogue and inform strategies for fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among diverse faith groups. The study's comprehensive approach ensures a nuanced exploration of the complexities inherent in interfaith interactions, ultimately aiming to promote an environment where different faith communities can coexist harmoniously.

4.2.1 Investigating Narratives of Violent Conflicts

To investigate how Nigerian Christians and Muslims narrate their experiences and memories of violent conflicts and analyse how these narratives influence their engagement in interfaith dialogue.

The study employs trauma theory to explore the narratives of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants, explaining the profound impacts of violent ethnoreligious conflicts on their interfaith relations in the UK. Trauma theory, particularly as articulated by Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* (2015) and Bessel van der Kolk in *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), provides the theoretical framework for understanding how these migrants articulate their traumatic experiences and memories.

Interviews and informal conversations are designed to explore the depth of personal and communal traumas. By facilitating a space for participants to reflect on their experiences, the study captures the enduring psychological and physiological effects of the conflicts in their home country. This approach is inspired by van der Kolk's work, which details how trauma reshapes mental and physical states. The interviews are structured to elicit rich, detailed narratives that reveal the lasting influence of these traumatic experiences on interfaith dialogue.

4.2.2 Impact of Unhealed Memories on Interfaith Dialogue
To examine the extent to which unhealed memories of violent conflicts impact the perception and participation in interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims both in Nigeria and within the Nigerian diaspora in the UK.
The study leverages social identity theory to explore how unhealed memories of violent conflicts affect interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Social identity theory, as developed by Tajfel and Turner (2004), examines how individuals' perceptions of their group memberships shape their interactions and attitudes within interfaith settings. This theoretical framework is essential for understanding the 'us' versus 'them' dynamics that influence interfaith relations.

Participant observations are employed to capture the real-time dynamics of social identity and interfaith interactions. This method aligns with social identity theory, allowing the researcher to visually and contextually observe how identities are formed, contested, and expressed. Observations are vital for unpacking the nuanced ways in which group loyalties and conflicts manifest in everyday religious practices and dialogues.

4.2.3 Facilitating Healing and Reconciliation
To explore how the dialogical model can facilitate healing and reconciliation among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and within Nigerian migrant groups in the UK who harbour unhealed memories of violent conflicts from their home country.

The study incorporates the dialogical approach to facilitate healing and reconciliation among Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants with unhealed memories of violent conflicts. This approach is central to the research methodology, particularly in organising and analysing dialogue seminars. These seminars are designed as practical arenas to test and refine strategies for initiating and sustaining interfaith dialogue. Drawing on Martin Buber's (1970) concept of dialogue and Mikhail Bakhtin's (2010) notion of the dialogical approach, the seminars are structured to foster mutual understanding and respect.

The seminar sessions employ facilitation techniques based on Palmer's (2022) principles of holding tensions in life-giving ways, which encourage open expression while productively managing conflicting views. This methodological approach aims to observe and document the interactions between different faith groups, capturing the dynamic interplay between theoretical concepts of interfaith communication and their practical applications. By fostering an environment where participants can freely express their religious identities and engage respectfully with one another, the seminars aim to demonstrate the transformative potential of dialogue. This approach is further informed by Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996), which advocates for moving towards an environment of embrace rather than exclusion. Volf's insights emphasise the importance of reconciliation and unity, framing the findings within a theological context that highlights pathways to healing and mutual understanding.

The theories presented in this study shape the research project from its design to empirical data collection and data analysis. By systematically integrating trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Each methodological approach is carefully chosen to address specific research questions, offering

profound insights into how past violent conflicts continue to influence present interfaith dynamics. The findings not only contribute to the broader discourse on interfaith dialogue but also inform strategies for fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among diverse faith groups. The study's comprehensive approach ensures a nuanced exploration of the complexities inherent in interfaith interactions, ultimately aiming to promote an environment where different faith communities can coexist harmoniously.

4.3 Research Design

In interfaith dialogue, understanding the nuanced and context-specific experiences of migrant faith groups requires methodological approaches that go beyond quantitative metrics. While surveys and statistical analyses, as used in previous studies (Becker, 2022; Gu et al., 2022; Oppedal et al., 2020), offer valuable generalisable data, they often fall short in capturing the depth and complexity of interfaith interactions. Such methods can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes by reducing intricate social dynamics to mere numerical representations, thus overlooking the rich, lived experiences that define these relations. Additionally, in contexts where suspicion of authority may prevail, as noted by Prideaux (2008), quantitative methods may not elicit genuine responses, further underscoring the need for qualitative inquiry.

In this study, nearly all respondents were proficient in English, mitigating concerns related to functional illiteracy. However, the suspicion of authority remained a pertinent issue, making qualitative methods particularly appropriate. This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups regarding interfaith dialogue by employing interviews, participant and non-participant observation, informal conversations, and dialogue seminars. These methods are complemented by analysing existing materials such as sermons, constitutions, books, reports, magazines, newsletters, and hymn books collected during fieldwork in Nigeria and the UK. This combined ethnographic approach is essential for contextualising these communities' interfaith dynamics and peacebuilding processes.

These methods enable researchers to delve deeply into the daily realities of their participants, providing rich insights into their religious practices, beliefs, and lived experiences. This immersive approach is particularly effective in studying interfaith dialogue, as it reveals how faith permeates the lives of individuals, influencing their thoughts, actions, and interactions.

For instance, Lamin Sanneh's *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (2015) demonstrates the value of immersive ethnographic research in understanding intercultural exchange and adaptation within religious contexts. Similarly, Diana Eck's *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (1998) and Lila Abu-Lughod's *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (2016) highlight how ethnography can illuminate the complexities of religious experiences and the interplay between beliefs, cultural norms, and personal expressions. Robert Wuthnow's *All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion* (2019) further exemplifies how ethnographic methods can uncover the role of artistic and musical contexts in fostering interfaith understanding.

By embedding myself within the faith communities of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK, I was able to gain direct and often unmediated access to their lived experiences. This approach allowed me to observe and document the intricate ways in which historical traumas and interfaith dynamics manifest in everyday interactions. The rich, qualitative data gathered through these methods provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape interfaith relations among these communities.

This ethnographic approach is not only aligned with the study's objectives but also fosters collaborative efforts to address critical societal issues. The shared ethical foundation of compassion, empathy, and justice that transcends religious boundaries underpins these collaborations. Through active participation and observation, this research offers profound insights into the challenges and opportunities for fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK.

Having discussed the theoretical underpinnings of ethnography, we now proceed to detail the specific fieldwork methods employed, which were meticulously crafted to capture the nuanced experiences of our study's participants. This methodological framework ensures that the study addresses the complexities of interfaith dialogue, contributing to a more profound comprehension of the role of religion in shaping societal dynamics.

4.4 Research Setting

The fieldwork was conducted among selected faith communities in the UK (mainly England) and northern Nigeria for a thorough analysis of the issue. These communities include the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the Nasrul-lahi-li Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT), both founded in Nigeria and maintaining their headquarters there. These denominations are among the fastest-growing faith groups in Nigeria and have significant followings among African Christian and Muslim communities in the UK. Initially, the fieldwork focused on interfaith dialogue among these groups in the UK.

Burgess (2017) suggests that the mission agenda of Nigerian faith groups in the UK is to re-evangelise an increasingly secular UK. This reverse mission includes providing a spiritual and cultural 'home away from home' for Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants (Olofinjana, 2018). However, as the data will show, the findings evolved into examining the causes and nature of violent ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, which significantly influence interfaith dynamics among these groups. Many respondents opposed interfaith dialogues, citing these conflicts (see Chapter Six) as a critical factor. This unexpected development complicated the data-gathering process, as understanding these conflict situations became crucial for meaningful interfaith dialogue.

To address this challenge, the researcher adapted the research design halfway through the empirical stage to include a trip to northern Nigeria, where these conflicts are most severe. After securing ethical approval from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David's Ethics Committee,

the researcher began the second phase of fieldwork. The forthcoming chapter on data presentation underscores the importance of this phase in understanding the strained interfaith dialogue between Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities in the UK.

4.4.1 Phase One: The British Context

Phase one began in October 2018 after obtaining ethical clearance and continued through June 2019. It focused on perspectives on interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in the UK, identifying factors that support or interfere with these dialogues. This phase included interviews, participant and non-participant observations, and dialogue seminars. Cities with significant Nigerian migrant populations, such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Bradford, were selected. Participants included members of the RCCG and NASFAT. Though interviews were not formally structured, they were designed to elicit responses addressing the research questions outlined in the introductory chapter.

4.4.2 Phase Two: In Northern Nigeria

By the end of the UK fieldwork, three key issues required further investigation: the significant lack of interest in interfaith dialogue among Nigerian groups, a pronounced disinterest in dialogue with other Nigerian faith groups compared to international ones, and the attribution of this disinterest to violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria. Thus, phase two involved fieldwork in northern Nigeria, including Kaduna, Jos, and Abuja. These locations have been epicentres of violent ethnic and religious conflicts for decades (see Krause, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2002). As the nation's capital and a relative haven of peace, Abuja serves as a crucial site for interreligious peace initiatives and shelters many displaced by northern conflicts. This phase included interviews, informal conversations, and non-participant observations to gain deeper insights. After setting the geographical and cultural stage, we explore the diverse methods used in these settings, chosen to maximise insight into our research questions.

4.5 Data Collection Methods
4.5.1 Interviews

Thirty-nine in-depth, one-to-one interviews were conducted with respondents among members and leaders (lay and ordained) of Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in the UK and Nigeria. Ethical permission was secured in advance, including permission to record and transcribe interviews with an offer to anonymise interviewees before publication. Also, as an ethical requirement, it was agreed that all respondents and their denominations and congregations would remain anonymous in any publication unless otherwise suggested by the respondents. Where it is necessary that a name be mentioned, participants are given non-identifiable pseudonyms. All other identifying information (such as the name of the participant's mosque or church), unless otherwise specified, is removed or replaced by an anonymous identifier (such as 'Church A') or a generic description (such as 'a charismatic church').

Interviewees consisted of respondents from the Muslim community, mainly the NASFAT community, and the Christian community, primarily the RCCG. More importantly, all interviewees in this study were Nigerians. In all, twenty-three (23) males and sixteen (16) females between the ages of twenty-six (26) and sixty-two (62) were interviewed. During phase one, twenty-two (22) respondents were interviewed; fifteen (15) of them identified as Pentecostal Christians and seven (7) as members of the NASFAT group. A list of the interviewees in Nigeria and the UK and their respective designations is added as an appendix. During phase two, seventeen (17) respondents were interviewed: nine (9) of them self-identified as Muslims, five (5) as Christians, and three (3) who accepted to be interviewed on the condition of anonymity identified as members of a state-financed institution, including the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI). Figures 1-3 depict these interviewees' composition by religious affiliations, age, and gender by phases.
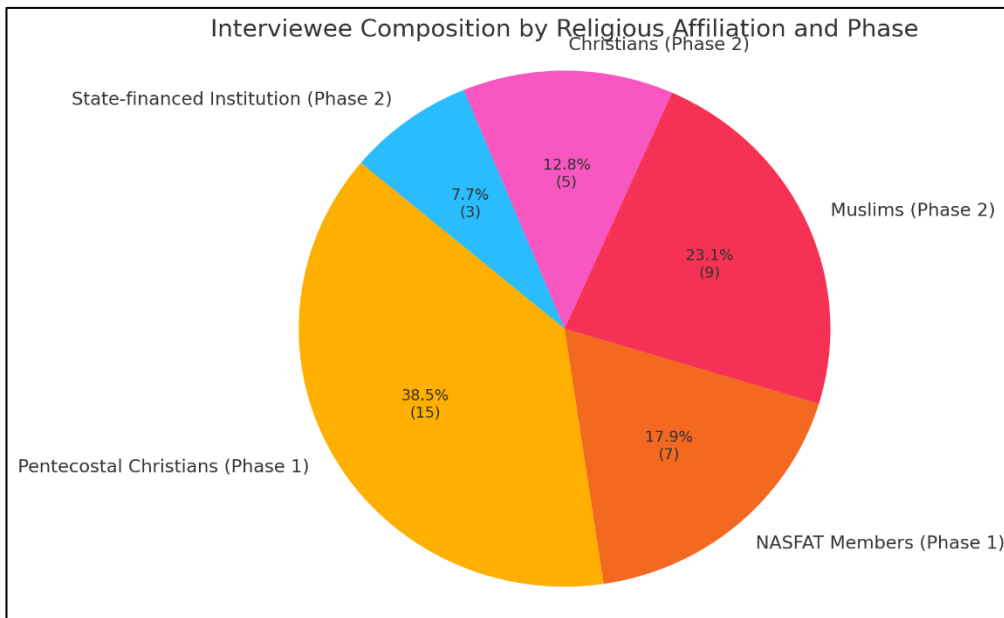
Figure 1: Interviewee Composition By Religious Affiliation And Phase

 In all, interviewees were purposively selected to reflect a range of respondents' experiences and in line with the core aims of the research project. While efforts were made to ensure both gender and religious balance, it became increasingly difficult to achieve this balance given several logistical constraints, details of which will be laid out later in this chapter.
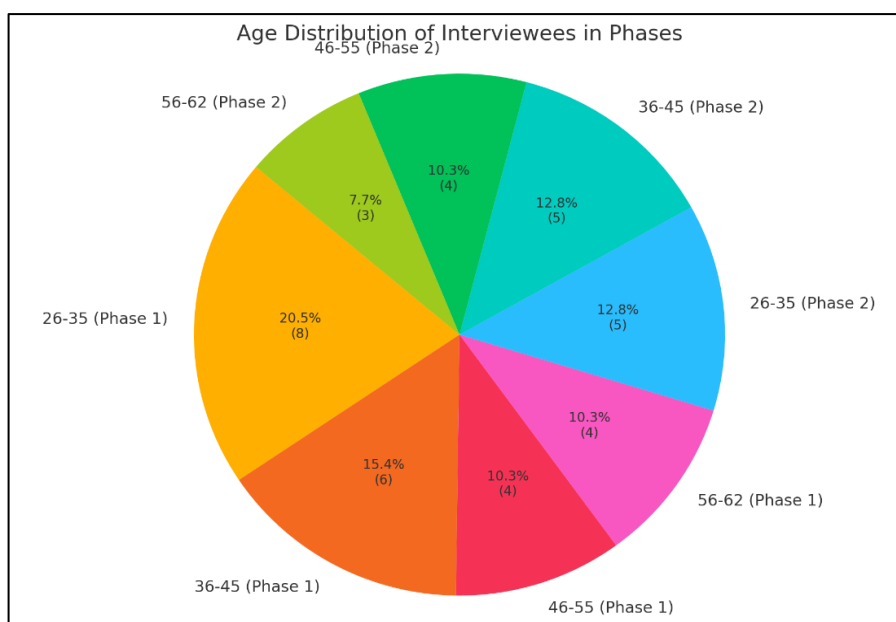
Figure 2: Age Distribution Of Interviewees In Phases

The interviews were semi-structured to ensure a more tailored conversation around the subject matter while allowing follow-up questions when necessary. Crucially, all participants interviewed had some experience with or shared a concerned account of the violent conflicts in Nigeria. This approach was adopted to help support the study's exploratory nature and ensure that any preconceived ideas gleaned from the literature did not unduly influence the focus and direction of the interviews. The interviews lasted between 55 and 110 minutes and were structured into five sections. Sections one and two inquire into biographical information relating to age, gender, profession, and religious affiliation. For those respondents in the UK, it also includes questions on why and how they migrated to the UK. Section three focuses on the demographics of the respondents' faith group, including their perspectives and engagement in interfaith dialogue.
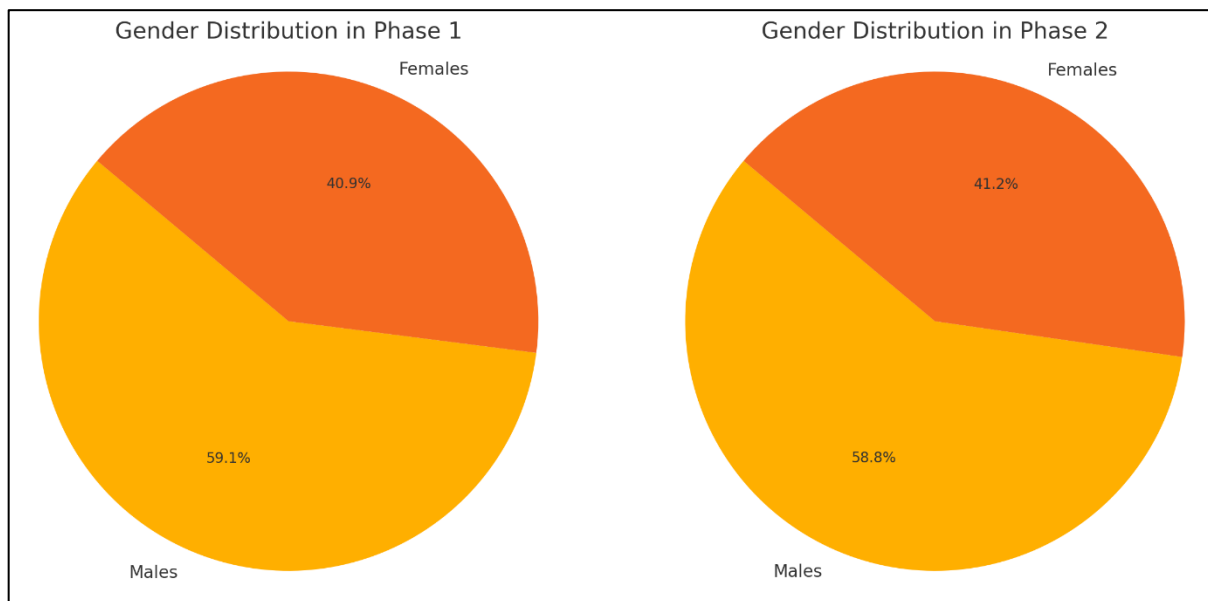
Figure 3: Gender Distribution In Phases

Section four inquired into respondents' knowledge, experience, and memories, including the nature, causes, and effects of the violent ethnic and religious conflicts in their home country. The

last section inquired what measures might support or strengthen interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the Nigerian diaspora. The interviews were later transcribed and analysed thematically, the outcome of which has been presented and discussed in chapters five and six of this thesis.

4.5.2 Participant and Non-participant Observations

Ethnographic observations (participatory and non-participatory) were conducted alongside the interviews. The first phase of the research focused on London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Bradford, where a substantial proportion of respondents reside. This includes participating in several ritual activities such as worship services, which include (for Christians) Sunday services, weekly prayer meetings, and Bible studies. For Muslims, I observed and sometimes participated in the *Salat* (daily prayers), *Asalatu* (Sunday morning worship), the *Al-Jumu'ah* (Friday congregational prayers), and special events such as *Ramadan* festivals and sports events. This approach is intended to both supplement and check the data obtained during the interviews, and the author took copious notes on each occasion, paying keen attention to the proceedings. The author visited and observed four mosques: three in London and one in Birmingham. There were also nine churches across selected communities in the UK; six were in London, two in Manchester, and one in Bradford. For some, the process was repeated two or three times to achieve a more adequate interfaith perspective among the respective groups.

Significantly, nearly all facilities at the respective NASFAT branches were either owned by the Muslim group or acquired on a long lease. This makes it possible to schedule more frequent visits to the NASFAT centres than to the Pentecostal congregations. Conversely, all the Pentecostal churches observed conduct their services in rented facilities, including community centres and libraries. Some Pentecostal congregations in the UK also share auditoriums with other mainline churches. In all these cases, the churches are constrained as their allocated periods also include

the time to set up and set down church equipment, often leaving little or no room for interactions before, during, or after the church services.

During phase two, ethnographic observations were made in six groups in Abuja and Kaduna. It includes three NASFAT mosques in Abuja, two Pentecostal churches in Abuja and Kaduna, respectively, and one non-NASFAT mosque in Kaduna. In all cases, prior agreements with the various gatekeepers were sought and secured prior to the visit.

4.5.3 Informal Conversations
In-depth conversations were held with about thirty-two (32) people in Nigeria and the UK. Four of the respondents later agreed to be interviewed formally after these conversations. One of these participants is from the UK, while the other three are from Nigeria. Respondents in the informal conversations included pastors and lay members of Pentecostal churches, Imams, and members of the NASFAT, many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity. They also include students, community leaders, taxi drivers, market women, and members of national institutions, including the NIREC and the NCFRMI, who demanded to speak based on anonymity. The conversations were not tape-recorded; however, handwritten notes were taken during such discussions and later reconstructed. Another exciting site for this informal discussion about the violent conflicts in northern Nigeria is what is informally known as the Free Readers Association (FRA). It consists primarily of men who gather around newspaper vendors to read and debate the headlines on the day's issue, often loudly and furiously. The FRA is present in nearly every local community across the research sites. The data from these discussions was used in much the same way as that from the interview sessions. It provides insights into the aspects and questions that are of most relevance to the cross-section of the population as related to the conflict situation in the north, including the various descriptions, extents, and perspectives of the various drivers of the conflict.

4.5.4 Dialogue Seminar
The fieldwork also consists of a dialogue seminar section, which the KAICIID Centre sponsored for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Lisbon. There are two main reasons for organising

the dialogue seminar. First, there were conflicting narratives regarding what respondents said during the interviews about interfaith dialogue and what they were willing to commit to in practice or during informal conversations (see Chapter Five). Second, organising the dialogue seminar was important for providing a context for exchanging ideas beyond mere abstractions. It attempts to bring members of the Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups together around an issue of social concern. The details, outcomes, and process of the seminar will be presented in later chapters of this thesis; however, knife crime and youth violence were selected as issues to address during this seminar. This is because of the prevalence of the menace across the UK during the time of the research and the fact that black communities were disproportionately affected (Bailey, Harinam & Ariel, 2020; Stone, 2018). Indeed, seven (7) of the respondents in the UK (Christian and Muslim) have close relatives or members of their congregation who have been directly affected by the knife crime menace, either as a victim or as a perpetrator. Some have served jail terms or are still in detention. The significant thing about victimisation is that it does not know faith or ethnic background; both Christians and Muslims were susceptible. Still, the researcher faced numerous challenges in getting the Nigerian Muslim community together to dialogue on this issue. The details of these challenges will be discussed later in this chapter; however, it is essential to note there was no member of the NASFAT-UK community in attendance, and both theological and a history of distrust among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups were given as a reason for this boycott.

The seminar was organised to bring in additional information on the practicality of interfaith dialogue and to reflect on the information gathered from the interviews. But more importantly, it helps clarify the gaps between the interview data and informal conversations (see below). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), when researchers observe discrepancies in one research approach, combining multiple methods could help neutralise or cancel the biases inherent in a single one (Creswell & Creswell, 2003). Some Muslim respondents, for example,

indicate during interviews that their denomination is 'committed to peaceful interrelationship with other faith groups.' However, in informal conversations, they reserve a sense of scepticism about their willingness to participate in the process. On the other hand, the Christians were more ambivalent in their posture towards the discourse on the interfaith process. While they are doubtful about interfaith conversations, especially with Muslims, one respondent told me, 'For your own good, avoid those people.' She mentioned later during the informal conversation that she does attend Christian-Muslim meetings if 'she feels it's safe to do so.' The seminar aimed to assess the probable causes (if any) of this perceived and emerging trend of a disconnect in interfaith engagement among Christian and Muslim groups.

4.5.5 Data Sampling
Access to interviewees was obtained through the leaders and key members of the respective Christian or Muslim groups, and the selection of key informants often begins with visiting religious services. The author inquired about specific aspects of the issue to be investigated; members whose profiles fit these requirements were identified for an interview, which took place at the respondents' convenience, date, place, and time. Given the practical limitations in the areas of time, resources, and personnel available to conduct this research, the research focuses on the RCCG and NASFAT, which, respectively, are among the largest denominations of Nigerian-led Christian and Muslim groups in the UK (Burgess, 2011; Adedibu, 2015). Moreover, respondents were selected from a purposive sampling of a larger congregation based on various strategies and criteria to provide relevant information for the study. This approach is consistent with ongoing practice in research methodology to choose samples from larger populations based on various strategies (Bryman, 2004). Sampling is an aggregate portion of the population, which, as Alan Bryman describes, is 'the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected' (Bryman, 2004:735). In both Nigeria and the UK, the sampling is based primarily on the availability of those respondents (Christians or Muslims) whose experiences match those already set out by the researcher—that they are Nigerian Christians or Muslims, and in the UK, migrants

Christian or Muslim of Nigerian descent who have some experience of, are concerned about, or have been affected by, or shares an opinion on interfaith dialogue, and the violent conflicts in their home country.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Delamont and Atkinson (2018) emphasise the need for researchers to adhere to ethical standards in fieldwork while maintaining flexibility for success. They note that ethical considerations, such as informed consent, are complex and often cannot be governed by universal rules, particularly in the field where ethical codes' limitations become evident (see also Pridaeux, 2008). In this study, the researcher prioritised ethical standards and obtained clearance from the university's ethics committee before starting data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations were paramount in this study, with the following protocols observed to protect participants' rights and well-being:

Informed Consent: The participants were meticulously briefed about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Their informed consent, a testament to their understanding and willingness to participate, was obtained before their involvement.

Confidentiality: To uphold the integrity of the research process, data were anonymised using pseudonyms and generic coding, such as PENT1 and NAS1. All identifying information was removed from transcripts to respect and protect participants' identities.

Risk Mitigation: A proactive approach was taken to address potential risks, such as emotional distress from recalling traumatic experiences. Participants were provided with information on support services and were assured of the option to pause or terminate the interview if they felt uncomfortable, demonstrating care and consideration for their well-being.

Ethical Approval: The study received approval from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David's Ethics Committee, ensuring compliance with the university's ethical standards.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

Participants were required to give written informed consent to participate in the research. However, due to differing opinions and the sensitive nature of the topic, obtaining written consent was sometimes challenging. The researcher undertook several measures to secure consent, including obtaining verbal consent before interviews and meeting with pastors and Imams, who acted as gatekeepers. These gatekeepers were briefed about the research, ensuring their informed consent before introducing the researcher to their congregations.

Participants were informed both verbally and in writing about the research aims, objectives, methods, and data usage. They received the researcher's contact details for any concerns and were assured that participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw or refuse to answer any question without reason. During fieldwork, participants were always informed when and what data were being collected. All data were anonymised before analysis unless otherwise stated. Navigating these ethical considerations, we conclude this chapter by summarising the methodologies used and previewing their role in the forthcoming data analysis.

4.7 Data Analysis
The data collected from interviews, participant observations, and informal conversations were analysed using a systematic thematic analysis approach. This method was selected due to its robustness in identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis process was carried out in several meticulous steps:

Transcription: All interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the recorded data. Special care was taken to capture the nuances of participants' speech, including pauses and emphases.

Coding: Initial codes were generated by reading through the transcripts multiple times to identify recurring themes and significant statements. NVivo software was used to organise and manage

the coding process, allowing for the systematic and consistent application of codes across the entire dataset.

Theme Development: Codes were collated into potential themes, with related codes grouped together to form coherent categories. Themes were initially broad and then refined through iterative review to capture the depth and complexity of the data.

Review: The themes were further reviewed and refined to ensure reliability and validity. Discrepancies in theme identification were examined and resolved through analyses to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Definition and Naming: Each theme was clearly defined and given a descriptive name that encapsulated its core essence. Sub-themes were identified where necessary to provide more granular insights into specific aspects of the main themes.

Reporting: A detailed analysis of each theme was conducted, incorporating direct quotes from participants to illustrate and support the findings. The final report included rich, descriptive narratives that conveyed the participants' experiences and perspectives, grounded in the identified themes.

By following this rigorous analytical process, the study ensured a thorough and credible interpretation of the qualitative data, providing deeper insights into the lived experiences of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK.

4.7.1 Methods of Triangulation

Interviews provided direct insights from participants, capturing their personal narratives, experiences, and reflections on interfaith dialogue. This method allowed for the exploration of individual perspectives, revealing the emotional and psychological dimensions of their experiences. During interviews with RCCG members, many shared personal stories of trauma and healing, highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in their journey towards reconciliation. These

narratives were crucial in understanding the spiritual dimensions of their interfaith engagements (Ammerman, 2021).

Observations offered a way to see interactions and behaviours in their natural contexts, providing a different dimension of understanding. Through this method, I observed the dynamics of interfaith dialogue as they unfolded in real time. Observations during interfaith events revealed subtle nuances in body language and group dynamics that interviews alone could not capture (Fetterman, 2020). For instance, the hesitation or enthusiasm of participants when engaging with members of the other faith provided insights into underlying trust issues or openness. This aligns with the latest discussions in ethnographic research, emphasising the importance of contextual observation in understanding social interactions (Fetterman, 2020).

Dialogue seminars allowed for a structured yet flexible environment where participants from both faith groups could interact, discuss, and reflect collectively. These seminars provided a platform for observing group interactions and the evolution of dialogue over time. During one dialogue seminar, a heated discussion about religious misconceptions led to a breakthrough moment of mutual understanding. This instance illustrated how structured dialogue could transform conflict into collaboration, a dynamic that was less evident in one-on-one interviews (Saunders et al., 2019).

Combining these methods provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. While interviews captured personal experiences and reflections, observations added contextual depth and dialogue seminars highlighted the dynamics of collective engagement. This methodological triangulation ensured that the findings were robust, credible, and reflective of the complex reality of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups.

For example, a participant mentioned in an interview that they felt their Muslim neighbours were hesitant to engage in interfaith activities. Observations during community events confirmed this hesitance, as many Muslim participants appeared reserved and less interactive compared to their Christian counterparts. This was further evident in the events leading to the dialogue seminar, where Muslim participants expressed their unwillingness to participate. These events provide important context for understanding the complexities surrounding interfaith dialogue among these groups.

During the interviews, several Christian participants spoke about the importance of forgiveness in their faith. This theme was recurrently observed during participant observations at church services and community events, where sermons and discussions often centred on forgiveness and reconciliation. Dialogue seminars then provided a space for participants to express how these teachings influenced their approach to interfaith dialogue, thus enhancing the credibility of the findings through multiple confirmations (Yin, 2018).

Given my background as a Pentecostal Christian, it was crucial to mitigate potential biases. Triangulation helped achieve this by cross-verifying data from different sources and perspectives. For instance, observations and dialogue seminars often brought out viewpoints and behaviours that differed from or contradicted interview statements, prompting a re-evaluation of initial interpretations and ensuring a balanced analysis (Patton, 2015). By systematically integrating these methods and reflecting on their complementarity, the research findings offer a holistic and nuanced understanding of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in the UK and Nigeria. This approach not only strengthens the validity of the research but also provides a richer, multi-faceted perspective on the subject matter (Denzin, 2017).

4.7.2 Conceptual Analyses
Conceptually, the data were analysed using a combination of trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach. Each theoretical framework was applied as follows to

address the research questions, focusing on how memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home countries affect interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in the UK.

The application of *trauma theory* enabled a thorough understanding of the impact of violent conflicts on the religious and interfaith identities of the participants. Within this framework, I examined the narratives of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants to identify prominent signs of trauma, such as dread, loss, and displacement. The analysis explored how these traumatic experiences influenced their perceptions and interactions with followers of other faiths. This aligns with the research objective of how the unhealed memories of violent conflicts influence their perception and engagement in interfaith dialogue. By identifying recurring themes in their narratives, the study aimed to understand how trauma shapes their attitudes towards interfaith dialogue.

Drawing on *social identity theory*, the research delved into the construction and negotiation of group identities, particularly their religious identities. This theory was pivotal in understanding how these identities influence their disposition towards interfaith dialogue. The analysis parsed the nuances of how Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants perceived and interacted with each other, providing insights into the subconscious biases and intergroup tensions that affect their interfaith interactions. This directly addresses the research question of how memories of violent conflicts impact interfaith dialogue and the research objective regarding the influence of unhealed memories on interfaith engagements. By leveraging social identity theory, the study sought to reveal how group memberships mould attitudes and behaviours towards both their own group and the 'other' group.

The *dialogical approach* was employed to examine the complexities of interfaith conversations, focusing on the initiation, facilitation, and sustainability of dialogues among Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants. This approach goes beyond observing dialogue to analysing the methods

and tactics used to initiate and sustain it. The study investigated how such dialogues contribute to mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation within and among diverse faith communities, considering the significant changes in their interactions resulting from these dialogues. This aligns with the research objective of how the dialogical model can facilitate healing and reconciliation among migrants with unhealed memories of violent conflicts. By analysing the outcomes of interfaith interactions, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the processes of interfaith collaboration and the cultivation of mutual respect.

Each transcript was coded using these theoretical frameworks, identifying key themes, patterns, and relationships. The codes were then grouped into categories and subcategories based on their similarities and differences. The interpretation of the data was guided by the main research question: How do the memories of violent conflicts affect interfaith dialogue among Nigerian faith groups in Nigeria and the UK? The analysis, using the three theoretical frameworks, provided a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these memories on interfaith dialogue, effectively addressing the research objectives.

4.8 Discussions of the Research Scope, Limitations and Challenges
 The scope of the ethnographic method is vast, allowing for a deep understanding of the subject and its natural contexts; it provides a holistic view of the subject matter. Its method allows for in-depth knowledge of the interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. It provides rich, detailed data from a small sample size, capturing the complexity of participants' experiences and emotions. However, the findings are specific to the group studied and may not be generalisable to all Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups, including those in the UK or other migrant groups. Reliability in ethnographic research can also be affected by various factors, including the researcher's role and bias and the dynamic nature of social interactions and contexts. My positionality as a researcher and a Pentecostal Christian, combined with my extensive upbringing in Nigeria, provides me with a unique and valuable perspective on the experiences and challenges faced by these migrant groups. This background

allows me to understand their cultural nuances, religious dynamics, and social realities in a deeply informed manner.

However, reliability is also enhanced through triangulation and maintaining a clear and thorough record of the research process. The researcher used various sources and methods to triangulate the findings to ensure the data's validity and reliability. Triangulation is a research strategy involving multiple datasets, methods, theories, and investigators to address a research question (Carte et al., 2014). It can help enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings and mitigate any research biases or limitations.

Specific limitations acknowledged include **the exclusion of other African communities:** The study focuses on Nigerians and no other African diasporic communities affected by ethnoreligious conflicts. Interfaith dialogue among other African migrant groups in the UK is beyond the scope of this research.

Diversity within Nigerian religious groups: There is significant diversity within the Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities in the UK. For instance, London alone hosts over 240 black-majority churches, many Nigerian-led and Pentecostal (Rogers, 2013). The internal variations within these religious groups due to diverse theologies and doctrinal emphases pose challenges. The researcher is not an expert in all these theological nuances, meaning the study's findings, while comprehensive for the congregations studied, may not represent the entire Nigerian migrant Christian and Muslim experience in the UK.

Access to the Nigerian Muslim community: The researcher faced significant challenges accessing information from the Nigerian Muslim community in the UK, which was influenced by the complex internal and hierarchical structure of the NASFAT group. The limited time spent in Nigeria restricts the ability to account for the conflict situation fully. While the study aims to present an impartial view, the findings might not be considered exhaustive for the entire Nigerian migrant community.

The complexity of ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria: The violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria are shaped by historical, political, social, and economic factors. A detailed analysis of these conflicts is beyond the scope of this study, which focuses more on their implications for interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK.

4.9 The Outsider-Insider Problem

As the research progresses, the demands and expectations from participants from both Christian and Muslim groups make it necessary for the researcher to negotiate his role and identity as a religious practitioner investigating a religious phenomenon as an independent observer. This gives rise to the insider-outsider challenges that often plague independent research. As an African Pentecostal, though from a different country and a different congregation, the researcher possesses some knowledge of the inner workings of most African Pentecostal denominations. While this insider knowledge might benefit the overall outcome of the research, I am equally aware that this might also affect the researcher's need to be empathically neutral (Knott, 2005; Prideaux, 2008).

Some Christian respondents who know the researcher's religious background, for example, have often appeared to relate more openly and speak more freely about what borders them, therefore giving the research data an original and more organic slant. Others appear to be genuinely surprised and often express disappointment when they suspect some 'biases' in favour of the Muslim side in the line of questioning. One example of this occurred in response to the question of whether they have at any point initiated interfaith dialogue initiatives with other faith groups. One Christian respondent who seemed incredulous about the choice of question, without qualifying what he meant, asked, 'What have they done to you?' Another respondent asked, 'On whose side are you?' suggesting that the line of questioning appears to be 'advocating for the Muslims.' There is a sense among some Pentecostals who, according to Douglas Petersen (1996), are sticklers for the scriptural injunction to 'be ye separated' and 'do not be unequally yoked with

the unbelievers' (2 Corinthians 6:14–17). However, the challenge is not only for those researchers who hold an insider's view.

In her 'linear model' on the neutrality of researchers, Kim Knott sees the insider-outsider dichotomy as an evident 'continuum from the researcher's role as a complete observer to a complete participant' (Knott, 2005:256). During the fieldwork within the NASFAT's network of chapters in the UK, the researcher appeared to have enjoyed cooperation with the leadership and members of the respective chapters. However, this only lasted until one of the leaders realised that the researcher was not a Muslim but was, in fact, a Christian. The details of the experiences in the fieldwork will be discussed in later chapters; however, during one of the visits to the mosques, The respondent was preparing for *Salat*, the Muslim ritual prayers, when I arrived, and the following conversation ensued.

> Welcome. You are right on time, says the imam. Let us go for prayers, and then we can talk afterwards.
>
> Actually, I am not a Muslim; the researcher responded that I am a Christian.
>
> Oh, really? The Imam responded. I had thought that you were a Muslim. So sorry. And how come you are researching Muslims instead of Christians, then?
>
> The research is interreligious, focusing on both Christian and Muslim relations, says the researcher.

Even though the Imam did not betray any emotion during the conversation, there was no significant communication between the researcher and the Imam, including with members of NASFAT chapters afterwards. All efforts to schedule a meeting afterwards prove unsuccessful. This lack of response from NASFAT and its members is an unavoidable failing of this study, but it does not render it incomplete. As will soon be evident, part of the considerations informed phase two of the fieldwork in Nigeria.

Two weeks before the event on knife crime and youth violence, each of the three NASFAT chapters involved in the planning pulled out on the excuse that the date clashed with another event. A week before the event on youth violence and knife crime, I attended a NASFAT-UK youth sporting event in Lewisham in which the youth from all nine chapters were represented. According to one of the leaders in NASFAT-UK, the event forms part of an annual youth programme in which NASFAT brings the youths from all nine chapters in the UK together to socialise. The leadership had invited me and promised to allow me to speak with the group to elicit the interest of those who may want to attend our event on youth violence and knife crimes. I sat through the event but could not speak with the gathering as promised. After the event, the leader told me that 'they forgot.' During a phone conversation, the youth leader told me, 'There was really no time on the schedule, that's why.'

Realising that a complete insider and a complete outsider have their failings and complexities as methodological stances, the fieldwork for this research adopts Gavin Flood's first-order approach, which blends the researcher's role as a 'complete participant,' based on 'faith seeking understanding,' and a complete observer, based on empirical, scientific, and objective religious studies (Flood, 2006:55). Knott, in a similar way, proposes a midway position of observer-as-participant and participant-as-observer, which Pridaeux (2008) argues is probably more akin to the vast majority of studies in religious studies and certainly provides exemplars that sensitise researchers to the observer and participant stances (, 2005:256).

4.10 Hierarchy of Leadership, and the Lack of Research Material
In addition to the insider-outsider problem, access to respondents has been challenging because of leadership structures and communication chains within some of the groups studied. This is particularly the case with the NASFAT. As a religious denomination, NASFAT has existed for nearly three decades and is among the fastest-growing indigenous Islamic groups in Nigeria. It has also exported its denomination to Europe and America (see Adetona, 2012). And yet, when

it comes to academic scholarship, there is little or no literature on the operations of the group, which, in effect, complicates the researcher's ability to obtain data. Hence, the discourse NASFAT draws mainly from Benjamin Soares' introduction to *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa* (Soares, 2006); Ibrahim Murtala's *Sensational Piety* (2017); Ebenezer Obadare's *The Muslim Response to the Pentecostal Surge in Nigeria* (2018); and Lateef Adetona's *NASFAT: A Modern Prayer Group and its Contributions to the Propagation of Islam in Lagos* (2012). These works, though not an all-exclusive study of the NASFAT, nonetheless give valuable insights with which to engage.

Moreover, within the NASFAT, the organisational structure is a strictly hierarchical, top-to-bottom chain of communication, which complicates a non-NASFAT member's ability to assess information regarding the group. As a closely knit group, there are at least four levels of communication within NASFAT's organisational structure, comprising the branch or chapter, national, zonal, and international headquarters. There are also several layers of governing groups: the Board of Trustees, Executives, Council of Elders, Missioners, and Mission Board. The researcher engaged with seven respondents across three of the nine UK chapters, many of whom provided rudimentary information about the group's operations. However, when it comes to more structural issues, such as the group's policy and interrelations with other faith groups, nearly all respondents say what seems like 'you can get detailed information about this at the 'zonal' or 'international' level.'[2] This is among the early clues suggesting that something is hindering interfaith dialogue with people of other faiths.

The Pentecostal churches, on the other hand, pose far fewer challenges in terms of accessibility. This was partly a result of the structure and designation of many Pentecostal denominations as 'one-man churches' (Tweneboah, 2023:25). While this has the potential of stifling accessibility,

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[2] Interviewee NAS6UK (11/12/2018)

as often it is the leader at the top who decides, this researcher did not face many difficulties in this regard. The Pentecostal churches' structure was somewhat meritorious for this study since it eliminated the multilevel approval associated with the NASFAT. While our methods are designed to examine the lived experiences of our subjects, it is imperative to consider the ethical dimensions that these interactions entail, ensuring the integrity and respectfulness of our research practice.

4.11 Conclusion
This chapter has detailed the research methodologies and methods employed in this study to explore interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK and Nigeria. The integration of trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach provided a robust framework for examining how memories of violent conflicts in the participants' home countries influence their interfaith relations in their host community. The ethnographic approach, involving interviews, participant and non-participant observations, informal conversations, and dialogue seminars, has been crucial in capturing the nuanced and context-specific experiences of the study's participants. This comprehensive methodology ensured a rich collection of qualitative data, offering deep insights into the complexities of interfaith dialogue shaped by historical traumas and social identities.

One of the significant contributions of this study is the application of methodological and theoretical triangulation. By employing diverse methods and theoretical perspectives, the study was able to cross-verify data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. This approach mitigated potential biases and provided a clear understanding of the research questions, aligning with scholarly recommendations for robust research practices. Despite the challenges encountered, such as the insider-outsider dilemma and restricted access to certain groups, the research was able to navigate these issues through adaptive strategies and ethical considerations. The detailed fieldwork conducted in both the UK and Nigeria offered a comprehensive view of

the interfaith dynamics within the studied communities, highlighting the ongoing impact of past conflicts on current interfaith dialogue.

 The findings from this study not only contribute to the broader discourse on interfaith dialogue but also inform strategies for fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among diverse faith groups. By integrating trauma theory, social identity theory, and the dialogical approach, the research provides a sophisticated analysis that captures the complexities of interfaith dialogue. This approach exploration ultimately aims to promote an environment where different faith communities can coexist peacefully, addressing both historical grievances and contemporary challenges. In the forthcoming chapters, I will build on this methodological foundation to present and analyse the data collected, offering further insights into the experiences of interfaith dialogue and its dynamics among Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK and Nigeria.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conflicting Narratives on Interfaith Engagements

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methods, highlighting the critical aspects of the ethnographic method that the research employs. Building upon the historical insights discussed in Chapter Three, Chapter Five presents the first part of the empirical data from the fieldwork, addressing the first research objective, which enquires into how Nigerian Christians and Muslims narrate their experiences and memories of violent conflicts and how these narratives affect their interfaith dialogue. The chapter examines the ways in which the participants categorise themselves and others and highlights the factors contributing to and impacting group identities among Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in interfaith contexts. By employing a mix of approaches from interfaith studies, dialogical approach and social identity and trauma theories, the chapter examines the intergroup perceptions and interactions that significantly influence interfaith dialogue among Nigerian migrant groups in the UK.

The fieldwork was conducted among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in both the UK and northern Nigeria. This area is often identified as the epicentre of ethnoreligious conflict in the country. Data collection involved interviews, informal conversations, a dialogue seminar, and ethnographic observation—both participatory and non-participatory—focusing on the selected faith group activities. The research spanned thirteen months across cities in the UK (London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Bradford) and Nigeria (Abuja, Kaduna, and Jos). The data was then analysed using the three theoretical approaches, each tailored to address specific aspects of the research themes (see Chapter Two). Efforts were made to let the data speak for itself, with key concepts summarised and narrators' statements directly relevant to the topic quoted verbatim.

The Chapter is structured as follows: Section 5.2 examines the interrelations between Social Identity and Interfaith Dialogue, exploring how the social identity of Nigerian migrants

influences their interfaith engagements and perceptions. Section 5.3 explores the connections with their home community, discussing how transnational ties and cultural memories impact interfaith dynamics in the diaspora. Section 5.4 focuses on refuting the utility of interfaith dialogue, presenting various perspectives from the participants on the effectiveness and challenges of interfaith engagements. Section 5.5 provides the rationale for organising the dialogue seminar, detailing its motivations, structure, and outcomes. The seminar aims to facilitate interfaith understanding. Section 5.6 examines participation in interfaith dialogue, highlighting the specific attitudes and contributions of NASFAT and other faith communities towards interfaith efforts. Section 5.7 addresses the perspectives of the Nigerian Pentecostal UK Community, exploring their views on interfaith dialogue and their interactions with other religious groups. Section 5.8 concludes the chapter by summarising the key findings and setting the stage for the subsequent analysis in Chapter Six, focusing on the impacts of violent conflict and coping mechanisms among migrants.

5.2 Social Identity and Interfaith Dialogue

The social identity of Nigerian migrants is linked to their religious identity, which plays a pivotal role in their social interactions and personal identity formation, significantly impacting how they navigate the complexities of a diasporic existence, which often involves interactions with diverse and sometimes conflicting religious groups. During the interview, nearly all the respondents admit to identifying their religious identity as a crucial component of their overall sense of self, demonstrating the profound influence of religion on their social identity. By focusing on the interplay between social identity and religious affiliation, this analysis aims to shed light on the mechanisms through which identity influences and is influenced by interfaith engagements.

The application of social identity theory in this context allows for a nuanced analysis of the relational dynamics between Christian and Muslim groups. It helps to understand how perceptions of 'in-group' and 'out-group' are constructed and the impact these perceptions have

on interfaith dialogue and relationships. For instance, the data from the fieldwork also revealed that the Nigerian migrants in the UK felt a stronger affiliation with their religious group than with their ethnic group, which often resulted in cautious or resistant approaches to intergroup engagements. There are some explanations for this. For example, one Christian respondent in the UK suggests that their church is 'more than spiritual space, it is also social and cultural. It helps us to connect with the life and culture of our home.'[3] This sense of a home away from home that the church gives underscores the protective nature of group identities in preserving religious and cultural values (Tajfel, 1979).

Moreover, the theory helps in interpreting how external factors such as experiences of discrimination, migration stressors, and the overarching socio-political environment of the UK influence these identity dynamics (Smith H, & Leach, 2004). According to a report by the Migration Policy Institute, 54% of Nigerian migrants in the UK reported facing religious discrimination, which significantly impacted their identity negotiation processes (Ogbemudia, 2021; Fernández-Reino, 2020). Social identity theory provides insights into how these migrants employ their religious identity not only as a means of personal anchorage but also as a tool for communal negotiation and boundary-setting within a pluricultural framework.

The findings drawn from employing social identity theory illustrate the dual role of religious identity among Nigerian migrants as both a source of conflict and a resource for empowerment. This dual role is pivotal in understanding the complexities of interfaith interactions within the migrant community, offering a deeper comprehension of the potential for both conflict and collaboration (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010). This theoretical exploration sets the stage for discussing the connections with their home community in the subsequent section, linking how

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[3] Interviewee PENT1NG (27/10/2019)

transnational religious identities influence perceptions and practices of interfaith dialogue both in the UK and Nigeria.

5.3 Connections with their Home Community

As transnational organisations in the UK, both NASFAT and the Pentecostal churches are organised around the structure stipulations from their Nigerian head offices (Obadare, 2018), which on face value suggests that their practises will be consistent with or share similarities with approaches to interfaith by the respective groups in their home country. Studies show that there is nearly harmonious relationship among the southwestern Yoruba regions of Nigeria where the two religious groups originated (Falola & Akinyemi, 2016). The Yoruba society is the home origin of many of the largest indigenous Nigerian Pentecostal denominations, including the RCCG and the Deeper Christian Life Bible Church, Winners Chapel, and the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (Burgess, 2019), all of which have had significant national and international presence. Similarly, many of Nigeria's leading indigenous Muslim movements, including NASFAT and the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria (Peel, 2016), also originated within the Yoruba society. Hence, in my fieldwork in Nigeria, many respondents, with a few exceptions I will discuss later in Chapter Six, are willing to engage in interfaith dialogue. However, many of them continue to be sceptical about its efficacy.

This collaboration illustrates the dynamic nature of social identities as theorised in social identity theory, which posits that individual self-concept is influenced by perceived membership in social groups. For example, one NASFAT member in Nigeria, whose brother-in-law is a Christian, exemplifies this theory in practice. He shared:

> I am a Muslim, but whenever there is any special occasion in my brother-in-law's church, they send us an invitation, and we attend. I have contributed to their building fund to build their church. When we were building our mosque, we sent some Christian members an envelope invitation, which some of them honoured or made monetary contributions to the mosque.[4]

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[4] Interviewee NAS3NG (17/10/2019)

This reciprocity between NASFAT and Christian members highlights a fluid and constructive social identity dynamic that fosters intergroup solidarity rather than division. NASFAT members in Abuja also expressed support for interfaith dialogue and, in most cases, appear to be frustrated by the continuous animosity between Christians and Muslims in other parts of the country. One Muslim respondent emphasised the potential for shared identity and unity: 'This research you are doing is especially important. I hope you can let people know that we serve the same God, whether Christian or Muslim, and there is no need to be divided.'[5] These sentiments underscore how social identities can be navigated and negotiated to enhance intergroup relations, advocating for a shared identity as Nigerians and people of faith beyond religious boundaries.

In December 2019, NASFAT Nigeria hosted its 5th Biennial Conference in Abeokuta, focusing on the theme 'Peaceful Coexistence: Panacea for Unity, Growth, and Development'. Notably, the keynote speakers included former President of Nigeria, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, a professing Christian, alongside a Catholic Priest, highlighting the interfaith dimension of the event. This choice of speakers, representing both major religious groups in Nigeria, underscores the application of social identity theory, which examines how individuals' self-identities within groups can influence and are influenced by intergroup dynamics. The conference also featured an interfaith walk for peace and harmony, attended by diverse religious groups, symbolising a physical manifestation of the theoretical concept where collective identities are negotiated and expressed in cooperative settings.

Although NASFAT was initially established in part to compete with Pentecostal Christians, the interactions at these events often led to 'healthy competitions,' setting the tone for a mutual exchange of practices, as noted by Murtala (2017). Such exchanges underscore the fluidity and permeability of social identities in interfaith contexts, where shared goals can lead to positive

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[5] Interviewee NAS1NG (27/09/2019)

intergroup relations. Furthermore, in 2017, NASFAT Nigeria launched an annual summer holiday training for Muslim youths to deepen their interfaith dialogue and tolerance towards other faith groups in Nigeria (Murtala, 2017). This initiative serves not only as a tool for educating the youth but also as a strategy to reshape social identities toward more inclusive and tolerant perspectives.

However, the reception of interfaith dialogue differs significantly in the UK diaspora context, where many respondents express scepticism about the effectiveness of such initiatives suggesting that it does not address the deep-seated issues underlying interreligious conflicts. They argue that dialogue sessions often fail to produce tangible results or change the status quo. Less than half of respondents in the UK believe that interfaith dialogue leads to meaningful social change, compared to those who do not. This scepticism is relevant as it challenges the central premise that interfaith dialogue can be a tool for conflict resolution and community building. It also highlights the need to address structural issues and ensure that dialogues are inclusive and impactful.

These differing views on the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue can be better understood through social identity theory, which posits that people's identities may become more entrenched and polarised due to their experiences of conflict and displacement. This entrenchment can result in a heightened emphasis on distinct group boundaries and a reluctance to engage in interfaith interactions. As one Pentecostal respondent in the UK notes, 'Migrants often carry with them the scars of past conflicts, which can manifest as a heightened sense of in-group solidarity and out-group mistrust, thereby complicating efforts at interfaith dialogue.'[6] The key indication from this above is that migrants communities that have experienced direct conflict are less likely to

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[6] Interviewee PENT8UK (11/9/2018).

participate in interfaith dialogue, highlighting the profound impact of past traumas on present attitudes.

One of the reasons for this is that many of the Nigerian migrants in the UK who experienced and were often victimised by the atrocities of the conflicts in their home country before coming to the UK continue to carry the unhealed memories of their experiences with them as they negotiate the demands of their host country (see Chapter Six for a detailed exploration of this issue). For instance, one Christian respondent recounted, 'I still remember the day our village was attacked. We lost everything, and the memories haunt every day.'[7] Another Muslim respondent in the UK stated, 'The fear never leaves you. Even here in the UK several years after, you wake up sometimes thinking you were back there.'[8] These personal experiences are significant as they shape the migrants' perceptions and interactions within their new environment.

However, it is also important to note that much of the information these migrants absorb about their country is filtered through the media. The media has consistently reported on the atrocities that are often committed in the name of religion in the northern half of the country. It is important to note that diaspora communities often rely on media portrayals for information about their home country, especially when they have limited direct connections to current events. This dependence can lead to distorted perceptions that reinforce stereotypes and fuel fears (Brinkerhoff, 2009), especially as studies often show that the media tends to emphasise dramatic often dark narratives, including those involving religious extremism or inter-religious conflict (Hepp & Couldry, 2009; Hjarvard, 2008). In northern Nigeria, events associated with groups such as Boko Haram are frequently reported and overshadow the day-to-day peaceful interactions between religious communities.

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[7] Interviewee PENT1 UK (27/07/2019)
[8] Interviewee NAS6UK (11/12/2018)

Both Christian and Muslim respondents are affected. For instance, one Christian interviewee in the UK noted, 'Whenever you turn on the news, it is always about another attack. It makes you scared to think about families back home.'[9] Another Muslim respondent expressed, 'The media only shows the bad side of Nigeria. It is like they want the world to see us as violent and divided.'[10] As a result, Nigerian migrants in the UK are likely to develop a heightened sense of religious tensions in their home country, which may influence their views on the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue. As one Christian migrant noted, 'It is hard to believe in peace talks when all you hear about are bombings and killings. It makes you lose hope in any dialogue working.'[11] These insights from the migrants themselves provide a more nuanced understanding of how media portrayals and personal histories intersect to shape their perceptions.

5.4 Refuting the Utility of Interfaith Dialogue

Scholars and practitioners often posited interfaith dialogue as a tool for conflict resolution and community cohesion (Appleby, 2003; Omer et al., 2015). Scholars, including Appleby (2003) and Eck (2001), have argued that dialogue between faith groups can potentially reduce tensions, promote understanding and break down stereotypes. Interfaith dialogue can lead to tangible social action and community building (Patel, 2007) and is instrumental in resolving conflicts within conflicting communities (Gopin, 2000). However, when it comes to the perspective of respondents living in communities marked by interreligious conflict or religiously motivated violence, the verdict on the usefulness of dialogue as a tool is often mixed. While they admit that interfaith dialogue might have merits in promoting exposure to diverse perspectives, respondents in this study (both Christian and Muslim) also expressed strong scepticism about its utility and consistently challenged its effectiveness. This sentiment

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[9] Interviewee PENT1 UK (27/07/2019)
[10] Interviewee NAS6UK (11/12/2018)
[11] Interviewee PENT1 UK (27/07/2019)

is echoed in a poignant interview excerpt where a Christian respondent expresses scepticism about the results of dialogue sessions:

> We have had several of these dialogues, but what has become of them? It does not stop the conflict; we have not improved relations, and every so often, you see media reports of devastating massacres of Christians in Kaduna, Kano, or Jos. In my view, dialogue is not the solution.[12]

Other interviewees shared a similar scepticism about the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue. For example, one Muslim respondent in an informal conversation rejected the idea that interfaith dialogue, especially in the context of interreligious exchange, could offer a solution and meaningful reconciliation between conflicting religious groups. Based on the recurring interfaith dialogues in Nigeria and their failure to address and improve the strained relations between Christians and Muslims, the interviewee concludes that dialogue is merely a conversation that often does not lead to any substantial solution.

> …in the end, dialogue is just a conversation; it solves nothing. Look at Nigeria, for example. We had several dialogue sections, but the relationship between Christians and Muslims seems to be deteriorating. In the end, after all the dialogues, the pastor goes back to what he is doing with his congregations and the imam, as well as with his members. But the real problem—the actual cost of the long-standing conflict and mistrust between the Christian and Muslim groups—remains unaddressed.[13]

This criticism underlines the limitations of dialogue as a mere conversational exercise, which often fails to address the deep-seated problems and historical grievances that fuel inter-religious conflict. The example of Nigeria is particularly striking. It shows how, despite numerous dialogue activities, the deep-rooted mistrust and conflict between Christians and Muslims continues unabated. It highlights the fundamental weaknesses of the dialogue approach: its potential superficiality and failure to address not only the underlying causes of interreligious conflict but also the experiences of the individual actors affected as victims of the conflicts. However, dialogue alone is often insufficient to address systemic and deep-rooted conflicts. He argues that dialogue in such a context needs to be integrated with other strategies, such as

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[12] Interviewee PENT1 NG (27/10/2019)
[13] Notes from informal conversations with a Nigerian Muslim leader in the UK (11/11/2018)

economic empowerment and legal reform, to ensure a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. While some respondents called for a broader engagement in 'understanding the perspectives of those who are opposed to interfaith dialogue,' others quite flatly deny its usefulness, maintaining that 'interfaith dialogue has little or no positive impact, and in some cases even helps to worsen the situation.'[14] This is because 'in almost all these meetings, the people invited are hardly those with any direct link or connection with the crisis. And so, you cannot solve a problem when those causing the problem are often not at the table.'[15]

To substantiate their opposition to interfaith engagement, some respondents referred to the theological and doctrinal principles of their respective faiths. For some, their discomfort with the dialogue processes is because such initiatives, rather than fostering understanding, may lead to theological dilution or compromises. They contend that the scripture unequivocally mandates a separation from people of other faiths, especially when such partnership has the potential for unequal spiritual partnerships. These include texts such as, 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness?' (2 Corinthians 6:14). Or 'What concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with the unbeliever?' (2 Corinthians 6:15). For these respondents, these texts underscore the belief in both the inherent spiritual incompatibilities with interfaith dialogue and their missionary responsibility to 'evangelise the unbelievers' rather than being 'unequally yoked' with them.'[16]

There are several factors underlying this scepticism, including the on-the-ground experience and persistence of the conflicts despite numerous dialogue initiatives and programmes. This has given rise to a sense of disillusionment with dialogue, as many dialogue sessions have consistently fallen short of addressing the fundamental root causes of these conflicts. Moreover,

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[14] Interviewee PENT1NG (27/10/2019)
[15] Interviewee PENT1NG (27/10/2019)
[16] Interviewee PENT8UK (11/9/2018)

the dialogue sections often do not attend to individual experiences of trauma and unhealed memories which many of them continue to live and deal with on an ongoing basis. Religion, therefore, becomes a valuable tool for coping with these situations. Therefore, there is a tendency for them to be sceptical of any initiatives they perceive to have the potential to undermine their religious identity.

 This lack of interest in interfaith engagement is made even more difficult by the fact that the constant conflicts have contributed to a deterioration in trust in the intentions of the dialogue partners. Sceptics maintained that despite appearances of amicability, there remains an undercurrent of duplicity which may culminate in betrayal. Such a position is often supported by referencing historical or contemporary instances of inter-religious conflict, suggesting an intrinsic and irreconcilable divergence between the principles of different faiths (Sampson, 2007). The following remarks by a Christian respondent in the UK captures this so well:

> I do not trust the Muslims to be peaceful. It is better to not trust them as genuine people because, in the end, they will backbite you. On the surface, they will laugh with you as though everything is fine.[17]

These remarks reflect a biased, monolithic perception of Muslims that fundamentally undermines the ethos and potential effectiveness of interfaith discourse. This bias, with its sweeping generalisation about Muslims, stands in stark contrast to the principles of mutual understanding and respect that are the cornerstones of interfaith dialogue. Importantly, these remarks are also an indication of the deteriorated levels of interfaith relations among these two faith communities. Scholars such as Hick (2004) and Cornille (2008) have emphasised the importance of interfaith dialogue as a means of promoting mutual understanding and breaking down these forms of stereotypes. They argue that dialogue is important in a pluralistic society for the promotion of peaceful coexistence. The dialogical approach is a valuable tool for bridging this theoretical gap with practical applications (see Chapter One).

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[17] Interviewee PENT4UK (9/12/2019)

Reflecting on the implications of social identity theory in the context of the role of interfaith dialogue, it becomes evident that the challenges in leveraging dialogue as a tool for conflict resolution and community cohesion are deeply intertwined with the social identities and group dynamics of the participants (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These identities help the participants understand how individuals categorise themselves and others into groups, which influences their behaviour and interactions. One Christian interviewee in the UK noted, 'When we enter these dialogues, our religious identities are at the forefront, and it's hard to see past them to find common ground.'[18] This categorisation reinforces in-group biases and exacerbates inter-group conflicts, particularly in settings like interfaith dialogues where participants may hold strong pre-existing identities tied to their faith. Another participant, a Muslim respondent in the UK highlighted, 'I've noticed that people tend to stick with their own faith groups even in mixed settings, which makes genuine interaction and understanding more difficult.'[19] These insights underline how deeply ingrained social identities can create barriers to effective dialogue and mutual understanding in interfaith contexts.

When participants from different religious backgrounds come together, the dialogue's success is heavily dependent on their ability to transcend these group boundaries. However, as indicated by the respondents' scepticism and the recurring ineffective dialogues in regions like Nigeria, it becomes clear that simply bringing groups together is insufficient. The social identity of each participant often remains intact, overshadowing the potential for dialogue to foster genuine understanding and reconciliation (Gopin, 2000). This highlights a fundamental limitation of dialogue initiatives that fail to address the underlying social identities and group dynamics at play. In practice, this theory suggests that for interfaith dialogue to be more than just a conversational exercise, it must be designed to actively address and transform the social identities

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[18] Interviewee PENT4UK (9/12/2019)
[19] Interviewee NAS5UK (02/08/2019)

of the participants. This could involve creating environments that encourage participants to see each other as individuals rather than representatives of opposing groups, thus reducing inter-group bias, and facilitating more meaningful interactions (Hick, 2004; Cornille, 2008).

Therefore, while social identity theory explains why interfaith dialogue often fails to achieve its intended outcomes, it also offers a pathway for enhancing these initiatives by focusing on identity transformation as a critical component of the dialogue process. This approach not only aims to improve relations but also ensures that dialogue does not inadvertently reinforce the very divisions it seeks to overcome. This means going beyond traditional academic discourse and providing a tangible framework in which argumentation and emotional resonance converge to create an environment conducive to mutual respect and recognition of the intrinsic value of different religious traditions. In so doing, we can translate the theoretical ideals of interfaith dialogue into practical, impactful interactions, as the upcoming dialogue seminar discussion will demonstrate.

5.5 Rationale for Organising the Dialogue Seminar

In the methodology chapter, I outlined two reasons for organising the dialogue seminar. First, there were conflicting narratives regarding what respondents said during the interviews about interfaith dialogue and what they were willing to commit to in practice, or during informal conversations. These conflicting narratives can be seen among the Christian and Muslim groups alike albeit to a varying degree. For instance, there are notable inconsistencies in participants' responses during interviews when compared to data from the informal conversations.

When asked 'What do you understand by Christian-Muslim relations and how do you relate with them?,' for example, NASFAT respondents maintained that 'Islam is all about peace, and at NASFAT, we are committed to keeping the peace here in the UK and back at home.'[20] They

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[20] Interviewee NAS6UK (11/12/2018)

maintained that 'Interfaith is at the core of NASFAT's founding principles'[21] and NASFAT strives to keep 'very peaceful relations with our Christian neighbours and live peacefully with them.'[22] Other respondents point to their engagements in the UK, 'We are committed to interfaith relations. Here in the UK, our primary areas of engagement are education, spirituality, fellowship, and peaceful coexistence with people of other faiths.'[23] Still, others sought to connect with the Pentecostal ethos that guides their operations, 'You know NASFAT is sometimes called the 'Muslim Pentecostals. This is because of our interfaith worldviews and how our types of worship are similar to that of Pentecostals. We also value living peacefully with people of other faiths as this is a major part of our founding principles, as you will see in our constitution.'[24] Also, the Muslim cleric who noted that 'NASFAT was founded on the principle to contribute to peaceful coexistence with the Christians'[18] also maintained that NASFAT as an Islamic organisation supports the Quranic provisions that recognise Christians and Jews as 'People of the Book' (Qur'an 3:64-71), and it regards them as partakers in the covenant promise of Allah (see Halbertal, 2009 for more detailed conversation on the 'people of the book'). On the other hand, there is also an underlying assumption in some of the comments that interfaith dialogue is contingent upon the possibility of conversion rather than on mutual respect and understanding of intrinsic differences. According to one NASFAT respondent:

> Every Christian is a potential Muslim. Therefore, any person who kills a Christian denies him or her the opportunity to become a Muslim. Living peacefully with the Christian is the will of Allah.[25]

This remark highlights the interest that parties might wish to derive from interfaith dialogue. However, it also affirms the assertion that NASFAT was founded to be a non-sectarian and

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[21] Interviewee NAS5UK (02/08/2019)
[22] Interviewee NAS7UK (26/08/2019)
[23] Interviewee NAS6UK (11/12/2018)
[24] Interviewee NAS6UK (11/12/2018)
[25] Interviewee NAS8UK (19/09/2019)

non-political movement (see Soares, 2006). It also affirms an inherent notion of religious fluidity, which resonates with the scholarly discourse on interfaith dialogue. For instance, Lamin Sanneh (2015) explored the malleability of religious identity, arguing that faith traditions are not static but are subject to change, evolution, and cultural and individual reinterpretation. However, the commentary also implies the assumption that the potential for religious conversion is a basis for peace or that peaceful coexistence between religious groups depends on the possibility of conversion and not on mutual respect and understanding of the differences within the groups.

These are the early indicators of the profound disconnect in interfaith relations among the Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in the UK. Organising the dialogue seminar aimed at understanding these conflicting positions and how this understanding may help improve interfaith dialogue to inform academic scholarship on the issue.

The second reason for organising the dialogue seminar was to provide a context for exchanging ideas beyond mere abstractions. Bakhtin describes this form of dialogue as deeply ingrained within personal values and subjective judgments. For many people, the issue of knife crime in London might be perceived abstractly as youth violence or adolescent crimes. However, for many of the Christian and Muslim respondents interviewed, its profound impact became tangibly poignant on a personal level (see the section on Dialogue Seminar in the methodology chapter for more detailed discourse on this). In articulating his cosmotheandric vision, Panikkar underscores the emergent need for trust that a new holistic experience of reality is unfolding in which every tradition contributes to a harmonious and peaceful coexistence (Panikkar, 1998)The seminar aimed to cultivate genuine and equitable dialogues marked by active listening, earnest exchange of perspectives, and a profound willingness to engage with and relate to different perspectives, worldviews, and belief systems. However, these aims were not fully achieved as desired because the Muslim group was absent from the event.

Before proceeding, explaining the inclusion of participants from the Hindu and Buddhist communities is essential, especially as the study was designed to focus on African Christian and Muslim groups. There were two interrelated reasons for this, even though these were not included in the original design of this study. First, it is the requirement of the KAICIID International Centre for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue, which funded the seminar for the event, to include contributors from these faith groups, given that members of these communities have also been affected by the issue of knife crime in London. The second is based on the point just made; members of these faith communities have also been affected by the knife crime menace, both as victims and perpetrators. In the initial attempts to reach out to the Hindu community, I was introduced to a person in London, a 34-year-old Hindu who had been in and out of prison three times for his involvement in gang activity and a series of stabbings. He was also stabbed several times and suffered wounds of varying severity but is now working to 'live a normal life.' Based on these reasons, and after consulting with all the participating groups, including the Christian and Muslim groups, we extended invitations to Hindu and Buddhist community members with the hope that their participation might also contribute to enriching perspectives on the issue.

Reflecting on the implications of social identity theory in this context underscores the profound ways in which group identities and intergroup dynamics shape interfaith dialogue. social identity theory, as applied in this study, highlights the challenges of transcending entrenched group loyalties and perceptions, particularly when these are intertwined with historical conflicts and cultural narratives. The inconsistencies between what participants say in formal settings and what they express informally highlight a deeper, often subconscious adherence to group norms and identities that guide behaviour more powerfully than conscious declarations might suggest.

The social identity theory thus provides a critical lens for examining how identities are not just passively experienced but actively constructed and contested within interfaith interactions. It draws attention to the need for dialogue processes that do not merely seek to exchange ideas but

to fundamentally understand and reframe these identity constructions. By doing so, it might be possible to move beyond the superficial engagement that often characterises interfaith dialogues, addressing the underlying social identities that fuel conflicts and hinder genuine reconciliation and understanding. This understanding should guide the design and implementation of dialogue seminars, suggesting a shift towards approaches that actively engage with and challenge these deep-seated identity narratives. Such an approach would not only enhance the effectiveness of interfaith dialogues but also contribute to the broader field of conflict resolution and social cohesion.

5.6 Participation in Interfaith Dialogue

NASFAT
5.6.1 'Our Denomination does not Recognise Buddhism and Hinduism as true faiths.'
Although this study is an examination of the experiences of African Christians and Muslim groups in the UK, the references to Buddhism and Hinduism by the Muslim group, which also contributed to why they boycotted the dialogue seminar, introduce a crucial interfaith perspective deserving of further exploration. One reason for the boycott is the inclusion of participants from the Hindu and Buddhist communities. During an informal conversation, a senior NASFAT Imam in the UK mentioned that Islam recognises only three religions as revealed by God: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. He went on to say that their group is 'not comfortable with KAICIID's recognition and work with religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, but they will work to participate in the event given the urgency of the issue that is being addressed. He reiterated that their denomination 'does not recognise Buddhism and Hinduism as true faiths.'[26]

Based on the above comment, the boycott from the Muslim group is interesting in so many ways. This claim tends to be based on Islamic theology and the concept of *fitra* (natural disposition), which implies that humans are innately inclined towards monotheism. Quranic verses (such as

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[26] Interviewee NAS1UK (20/7/2019)

Al-A'raf 7:172) highlight the inherent knowledge of God in every human soul. Consequently, from a particular Islamic perspective, religions that do not adhere to monotheism might not be viewed as aligning with this *fitra*. However, it is essential also to understand that interpretations vary, and not all Islamic scholars or denominations might agree with the NASFAT Imam's perspective. One reason for this is its potential claim to religious exclusivism, a notion that one religion is perceived as the only legitimate path to salvation or truth, and all others are erroneous. This perspective is not exclusive to NASFAT or Islam; it is seen across various religions in different capacities. John Hick, in An Interpretation of Religion, asserts that religious exclusivism often comes as a challenge to interfaith dialogue (Hick, 2004). Second is the notion of 'true faith,' which is a complex issue raising questions about who gets to define what constitutes a 'true faith' and on what grounds. As Ninian Smart observes in his influential work, *The World's Religions* (1989), religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, are cultural phenomena that provide avenues to the ultimate or the divine in their unique ways. They evolve over time and have their own sets of practices, traditions, and beliefs, which their followers revere. This also imbues interfaith dialogue, which is crucial for fostering understanding and respect among diverse religious groups. In *God is not one,* Prothero (2011) argues that recognising the differences, rather than emphasising similarities, is vital for genuine dialogue. While the NASFAT Imam's statement appears unsavoury, it also offers an opportunity for such dialogue by allowing representatives from Buddhism, Hinduism, and other faiths to provide insights into their beliefs and enrich the dialogue process. Besides, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, the dialogical approach invites us to trust that a new holistic experience of reality is emerging in which every tradition can play its part in unfolding a new experience contributing to peaceful coexistence. However, the comment can also be juxtaposed with the earlier interview excerpt in which another Imam suggests that 'Every Christian is a potential Muslim.'

5.6.2 'Every Christian is a potential Muslim.'

This statement taps into the theology of conversion, which plays a vital role in both religious traditions. Christianity and Islam recognise the idea of conversion and the acceptance of faith by individuals who previously followed another belief system. In Christianity, Saul's conversion serves as a profound example. Initially, a persecutor of Christians but underwent a significant conversion after an encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). His conversion signifies the potential for anyone, irrespective of their initial beliefs, to turn to Christ. This concept is equally important in Islam. The Quran, for instance, contains numerous passages inviting people of different faiths, including Christians, to embrace the message of Islam. Quran 3:64, for example, read: 'Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to an equitable word between us and you – that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him or take one another as lords instead of Allah.' But if they turn away, then say, Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]. Interestingly, the respondent used this conversion theme in his argument, emphasising peaceful living with Christians as Allah's will. This is further consistent with several Islamic teachings. The Quran states: 'Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly' (Quran 60:8). This verse, along with many others, encourages peaceful relations with people of other faiths and is in line with scholars like Hans Küng, who posited that 'If there is no peace among religions there will be no peace amongst nations' (Küng, 2004: 69).

5.6.3 NASFAT's Condemnation of Extremism

The passage highlights a significant but often overlooked dimension of religious violence, specifically regarding Christian-Muslim conflicts in Nigeria. The prevailing narrative that Muslims are the primary aggressors is overly simplistic and empirically flawed, as historical, and contemporary data on interreligious violence in Nigeria reveal. The dynamics of religious violence, particularly in regions like Kaduna and Jos, are far more complex than a binary division

between aggressors and victims. Generalising Muslims as inherently violent perpetuates a simplistic and inaccurate portrayal, ignoring the nuanced realities of these conflicts. Notably, it manifests Islamophobia, a term which, as Kumar (2012) argues, is rooted in a long history of Western bias against Islam and Muslims. This stereotype obscures the socio-political complexities that underlie conflicts in Nigeria – the notion that both Muslims and Christians have been perpetrators and victims of violence at various times. Given this context, the researcher examined the responses of Muslim participants, which typically demonstrate a calm yet defensive stance towards Muslim viewpoints. Here are some of their comments addressing the portrayal of Islam as a religion that promotes violence.

> Islam teaches the way of peace; no religion teaches you to be violent, and the central tenet and core principle of Islam is *salaam* (peace). Yes, there are Quranic texts that suggest the 'killing of the infidel,' but this is the interpretation of the people; what the Quran says in Al-Baqarah 256 is this: 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clearer than the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing' (Quran, 2:256).[27]

Looking at me, the respondent repeated the phrase, 'There shall be no compulsion in religion. If people follow the Quran and the teachings of all religions, there will not be violence and killing.'[28] Another Muslim respondent in the UK says:

> Allah says, 'If someone accepts and denies and accepts again and denies, then it is up to Allah; God will deal with that.' If that is the case, that infidels would be killed; how will there be a repeated process of acceptance and denial? In all religions, there are some extremists; in Islam, there are some extremists too.'[29]

> There are extremists in all religions; in Islam, there are extremists too. Islam does not support violence; the truth is what the Quran says – to maintain peace. If anyone does otherwise, they are simply not doing it in the name of Islam, even if they claim to.[30]

One respondent in the UK believes that society and the media are 'creating Islamophobic environments.' The interviewee criticised the labelling of extremist acts as 'Islamic terrorism' as

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[27] Interviewee NAS5UK (04/02/2019)
[28] Interviewee NAS3UK (14/09/2019)
[29] Interviewee NAS2UK (05/03/2019)
[30] Interviewee NAS5UK (04/02/2019)

a contentious issue that underscores a potential bias against Islam. He argued that 'such a term unfairly targets Islam while similar extremism in other religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, or Shintoism, is not correspondingly labelled. This disparity in labelling not only misrepresents Islam but also contributes to a misleading narrative.'[31] This contentious subject is prominently featured in the works of scholars like Mahmood Mamdani and Edward Said. Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (Said, 1977) demonstrates how Western societies have historically constructed an image of the 'Orient' (which includes Islamic societies) as fundamentally 'other' and oppositional to Western values. This dichotomisation, according to Said, has perpetuated a narrative where Islam is often cast as a monolithic and antagonistic entity. Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (Mamdani, 2002) took this subject further, criticising how political events have shaped the perception of Islam as a threat. According to Mamdani, the tendency to conflate Islam with radical ideologies over the years contributed to reinforcing a simplistic 'us versus them' paradigm.

Another respondent in Nigeria maintained that the prevalent portrayal of Muslims as inherently violent is inconsistent with evidence from regions like Kaduna and Jos in Nigeria. Here, the narrative of Muslims perpetrating violence against Christians is contrasted with instances of Christian aggression against Muslims. The respondent argued that 'this one-sided portrayal of the issue undermines the shared suffering of both communities in violent conflicts. 'Evidence of the consequences of these conflicts, including loss of life, injuries, economic loss, and displacement, suggest that Muslims have endured greater hardships. Yet, the skewed representation of the issue helps fuel a sense of victimhood among Muslims, potentially escalating the cycle of violence and retribution.'[32] Thus, the discourse calls for a more nuanced

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[31] Interviewee NAS3NG (12/11/2019)
[32] Interviewee NAS4NG (7/7/2019)

understanding that transcends simplistic and biased narratives, recognising the complexities and shared sufferings in religious conflicts.

Since Nigeria's independence, Kaduna and Jos have witnessed intermittent religious clashes between Christians and Muslims. The recurrent nature of these conflicts often blurs the lines between aggressor and victim, as episodes of violence tend to breed new episodes in a cyclical pattern. Philip Ostien, in his comprehensive documentation of religious conflicts in Jos, suggests that it is nearly impossible to pinpoint a single religious group as the consistent aggressor due to the tit-for-tat nature of the violence over the years (Ostien, 2018). Higazi (2011) also underscored that while both Muslim and Christian communities have faced significant losses, it is imperative to understand these dynamics without resorting to a competitive victimhood narrative. It is concerning, therefore, that the dominant narrative perpetuates an incomplete portrayal of Muslims. This distortion has the unintended consequence of perpetuating stereotypes, thus sowing seeds for further distrust and conflict. In *Piety and Power* (Sanneh, 2015), a scholarly enquiry exploring religious narratives in West Africa, Lamin Sanneh opines that these stereotypes can distort the actual on-ground realities and create an atmosphere of mutual suspicion (Sanneh, 2015).

On the other hand, the claim that Muslims have disproportionately suffered in terms of the four major indicators of suffering in Nigeria requires rigorous empirical evidence. It astutely points out the dangers of a 'sense of victimhood.' When communities perceive themselves as perpetual victims, it can legitimise retaliatory violence. As Moghadam, (2006) notes, such sentiments can catalyse a cycle of revenge and violence, further deepening inter-communal divides. While there are undoubtedly instances where Muslim communities have experienced profound losses, the narrative is by no means unilateral. In his analysis of Nigeria's religious conflicts, John Campbell emphasises the importance of recognising the regional variation and context-specific factors influencing these events (Campbell, 2013). Furthermore, the assertion about the sense of

victimhood legitimising revenge-seeking behaviours merits careful consideration. When communities feel marginalised or victimised, it can indeed foster sentiments that can be manipulated by opportunists seeking to further their agenda. As noted by Juergensmeyer (2017), religion often serves as a potent symbol in conflicts, with extremist factions within religions co-opting these narratives to legitimise their acts of violence. From both the interviews and other existing scholarship on the matter, it is essential to note that NASFAT in Nigeria plays a significant role in condemning the extremist wings that often perpetuate violence in the name of the Islamic religion.

One of the emerging themes in the data is NASFAT's role in projecting an image of Islam as a modern religion, one that can co-exist peacefully with other faith groups in the pluralist environment while at the same time strongly condemning all forms of religious violence and conflicts. This is consistent with ongoing research. As Murtala (2017:161) observes, 'Whenever NASFAT leaders find an opportunity to talk to the media, they always emphasise that Islam is a peaceful, tolerant religion that is compatible with modern life. NASFAT leaders have also condemned all sorts of violence in the name of religion, including Islamic terrorism, as un-Islamic. It strongly condemns Boko Haram, describing the groups as 'groups of psychopaths who masquerade as Muslims' (Murtala, 2017:161). NASFAT also calls on other Muslim organisations to unite, protecting the high premium that Islam places on good, orderly behaviour by condemning the violent acts of Boko Haram. Some of the respondents expressed similar views in this current research. During interviews, some Muslim respondents criticised other Muslim groups for practising a 'strange brand of Islam and rationalising violence as a means for doing the will of Allah.'[33] One interviewee's insights highlight a profound disconnect between the actions of extremist factions within Islam and the religion's foundational teachings. He argued that the act of taking an innocent life not only invokes divine judgement but also starkly

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[33] Interviewee NAS4NG (7/7/2019)

contradicts the Quran's core principles. This assertion underscores Islam's inherent commitment to peace and the sanctity of human life. He referred to a prescient Quranic warning: 'The shedding of innocent blood will always bring a curse upon the land, and this often manifests as a cycle of further senseless violence bloodshed.'[34] This perspective contributes significantly to the discourse on religious extremism, particularly within the Islamic context, delineating a clear distinction between extremist misinterpretations and the Quran's actual teachings.

 This condemnation of innocent bloodshed, as this respondent seems to do, is consistent with the Quranic teachings. Indeed, the Quran emphatically denounces the killing of innocents, stating, 'Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or corruption [done] in the land - it is as if he had slain mankind entirely' (Quran 5:32). The connotation of such a verse is profound, equating the murder of one innocent with the crime of eradicating all of humanity. But more importantly, it draws attention to the need to distinguish between the central tenets of Islam and the actions of extremist factions. As Aslan (2005) has pointed out, it is crucial to separate the socio-political motives of certain groups from the theological teachings of Islam. Islam, like other major world religions, upholds the sanctity of human life. Armstrong (2000) also made parallels between the Quranic views on the sanctity of life and Biblical and other scriptural traditions, emphasising the universal abhorrence of unwarranted violence in religious teachings. Yet, there is a grave misinterpretation or misapplication of religious scriptures by extremist factions. As Esposito (2003) has observed, the misrepresentation of the Quran's teachings, as the passage rightly notes, only perpetuates cycles of violence, which the Quran itself has cautioned against, suggesting that innocent bloodshed begets further chaos and upheaval in the land. To understand the consequences of such misinterpretations, one can draw from the works of scholars like Nudelman (2001), who investigates the socio-political aftermaths of such extremist actions, reiterating the point that

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[34] Interviewee NAS4NG (7/7/2019)

innocent bloodshed often leads to further civil unrest, breeding grounds for more extremist viewpoints, and destabilisation of regions.

In considering the implications of these accounts as it pertains to interfaith dialogue, we must consider the profound impact that group identities have on interfaith dialogue. social identity theory explains the mechanisms through which group affiliations can both foster divisions and cultivate unity. In the context of this study, it becomes clear that the identities of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants are not just personal choices; they are imbued with historical, cultural, and social significance that shapes interactions in profound ways. The theory provides a framework to understand how these migrants navigate their identities in a multicultural diaspora setting, often reasserting their religious identities in response to perceived threats or misunderstandings.

The theory's emphasis on the categorisation processes helps to explain why interfaith dialogues can be challenging yet transformative. It underscores the tendency of individuals to enhance their self-image through group comparisons, which can lead to prejudice and conflict but also opens avenues for dialogue aimed at reducing intergroup tensions. Thus, applying social identity theory in this study not only deepens our understanding of the conflicts and potential for cooperation between these groups but also highlights the need for designing dialogue initiatives that are sensitive to these identity dynamics. This approach bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application and enriches the dialogue process by ensuring it is inclusive and respectful and acknowledges the complex identities of those involved.

5.7 The Nigerian Pentecostal UK Community
As with NASFAT, the Pentecostal group in the UK presents a complex, though interesting, twist to the discourse on interfaith engagement. Unlike the Muslim groups, which often articulate a vision of interfaith dialogue during the interviews, the Christian respondents expressed a marked resistance to interfaith dialogue, particularly with the Muslim community. This viewpoint is

grounded in a perception of intractable differences and an ingrained belief in the inherent violence associated with Muslim principles. One interviewee explicitly expresses his discomfort and rejection of the concept of interfaith dialogue within her church and underlines that she cannot imagine its realisation given the perceived unchangeable and violent nature of the Muslim faith. This perspective highlights a significant obstacle to interfaith understanding and cooperation, which is rooted in deeply held beliefs about religious identity and the Other. According to the respondent:

> My church does not do interfaith dialogue, and I will not be comfortable with or support that idea. I cannot even imagine the possibility of that ever happening. Besides, that is not what the scriptures teach. The key is not to be unequally yoked with the unbelievers. I think it will be difficult, both for my faith and because I know that they [referring to the Muslims] still hold the same principle and the same belief in being violent.[35]

Two main themes emerge from these sentiments. First, it suggests that many Christian respondents perceive interfaith dialogue as a process that compromises their beliefs and faith. Second, it highlights the ongoing issue of Islamophobia, which continues to be an issue across many communities across the globe.

5.7.1 Interfaith as a Compromise to Beliefs and Faith?

There is a conjecture that interrelationships with non-Christians may diminish the genuineness and uniqueness of their religious beliefs, weakening the sacredness and integrity of their faith. Jodi Eichler-Levine highlights this form of resistance by traditionalists as one of the numerous challenges to interfaith dialogue (see the section on 'The Importance of Interfaith dialogue' in Chapter Two). She observed that often, these traditionalists perceive interfaith engagement as a potential undermining of the pristine essence of their respective religious traditions, and therefore, warns of the potential pitfall in oversimplifying the intricacies of religious distinctions (Eichler-Levine, 2020). By prioritising harmonisation, some traditionalists believe that these initiatives could potentially erase the richness and diversity that define individual faiths, leading

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[35] Interviewee PENT2UK (17/12/2018)

to an incomplete and idealised understanding of religious landscapes (Eichler-Levine, 2020; Eichler-Levine et al., 2021). This further affirms an ongoing discourse suggesting that there is a longstanding sense of suspicion and mistrust of Muslims among some Pentecostal Christians, and this has often caused Muslim-Christian relations to be riddled with distrust and antagonism (Murtala, 2017). In his work on *Sensational Piety,* Murtala observes that not only do some Pentecostals harbour suspicions about interfaith activities with the NASFAT, but he also notes that this sense of suspicion can be so often heightened among some Pentecostal groups that, as a researcher, he felt he was treated with a significant understanding of suspicion because of his Muslim name, Ibrahim (Murtala, 2017).

As with the Muslim respondents, there is also ambivalence in the Christian respondents' attitude toward interfaith dialogue. This is particularly evident in what they say during interviews and informal conversations and what is often revealed during ethnographic observations or dialogue seminars. For example, although they expressed misgivings about interfaith activities and events during interviews, the Pentecostal respondents were nonetheless participants in the dialogue seminar. They brought delegates from their congregations, while NASFAT members did not participate. NASFAT members did not express any objection to the Pentecostal groups' involvement, and the exact reason for not participating was not clear other than the piecemeal information described earlier in the research methodology chapter. One of the critical insights into Pentecostal disengagement with Muslims came through after the event. In a post-event conversation, one member from the Pentecostal churches said, 'You see, we cannot organise this kind of event by ourselves, but when another person [like a third party] organises it, we can participate.'[36] One of the obstacles to interfaith engagement among Nigerian Christian groups in the United Kingdom pertains to their hesitancy or disinclination to assume the role of organisers

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[36] Notes from informal conversations (10/10/2018). Insertion mine

for such interfaith events. This potentially stems from theological reasons or distrust towards other faith communities.

The dialogical approach seeks to help overcome this sense of suspicion by emphasising the importance of open dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect between different religious traditions. It maintains that interfaith dialogue is not about compromising one's beliefs but rather understanding and appreciating the beliefs of others. As Tracy (1991, 1994) argues, the aim is to engage in a mutual exchange. For participants to correlate their beliefs and interpretations with those of other traditions, identify shared perspectives, and recognise differences. Scholars such as Buber (1970) also suggest that actual dialogue involves the recognition of the other as a unique and individual presence, not as an embodiment of a category or stereotype. While these interview excerpts hold an exclusivist perspective, the dialogical approach encourages others to engage with this perspective openly and without judgment. By doing so, mutual understanding can be achieved even if agreement is not reached (Buber, 1970; Knitter, 2014). Knitter (2014) argues that for interfaith dialogue to be fruitful, it is essential for all participants to come with an attitude of humility and a willingness to learn from the other. Even when faced with strong exclusivist views, it is the responsibility of the dialogical participant to approach the dialogue with respect and openness (Knitter, 2014).

5.7.2 The Fear of and Reaction to the Suspicion of Islam as the Enemy
The literature review discussed the current discourse on how different approaches can help promote peaceful coexistence between different faith groups, including in communities affected by conflict. It highlights the lack of case study materials on what happens when parties to a conflict reach an impasse and how to create a safe space for dialogue between perceived enemies. An important example of this was when many of the Christian migrants in the UK remarked that they viewed their Muslim counterparts and Islam in general with fear and great suspicion. One Christian respondent said she saw Islam as 'inherently violent' or 'encouraging its members to

be violent.'[37] This view is rooted in deep-seated historical grievances, which also contribute to the poor interfaith relations among these faith groups and their members. One interviewee referenced ancestral narratives of violence, suggesting that memories of violence inflicted by Muslims continue to influence contemporary interfaith interactions.

> When it looks like there are some frictions and Christians do not seem to want to engage with the Muslims, yes, there could be a lot of backstories to that. People could have heard that their grandfathers were brutally murdered by these people. It is not an easy thing.[38]

For the respondent, this historical context is crucial for understanding the complexity of the conflicts and the lack of interreligious engagement among the faith groups. To a large extent, the respondent also believed that the context rationalised the deep-rooted scepticism towards Muslims, characterised by a categorical rejection of their beliefs and practises.

> We do not have time for the Muslims; they are liars. There is nothing to learn from them. If you want to learn anything from them, you will learn to be radical, engage in *jihad*, and kill other innocent people.[39]

These sweeping generalisations were not backed up by data other than their perceptions or personal accounts. Yet, they reflect a deep mistrust of individual interactions and the broader religious and cultural teachings of Islam. Others express their suspicion of duplicity in the Muslims' intention towards interfaith engagements. She believes that while some Muslims appear to be outwardly cordial, they harbour ulterior motives. This mistrust is so profound that the respondent suggests that any Muslim who is committed to the Quran is an obstacle to genuine interfaith engagement.

> It is better not to trust them to be genuine because, in the end, they will backbite you. But on the surface, they will laugh with you as though everything is fine. I do not trust Muslims so long as they say they believe in the Quran. I can only believe in and work with a Muslim if they do not think that the Quran is true and from God.[40]

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[37] Interviewee PENT11UK (09/12/2018)
[38] Interviewee PENT10UK (12/06/2019)
[39] Interviewee PENT8UK (11/9/2018).
[40] Interviewee PENT11UK (09/12/2018)

Taken together, these perspectives underline a significant obstacle to interfaith dialogue. They reflect deep-rooted prejudices and historical resentments and point to a complex web of socio-religious dynamics that hinder mutual understanding and trust between Christian and Muslim communities.

When some participants learnt about my faith background as a Pentecostal Christian, they were surprised by specific questions during my interview. Some said they did not understand why I did not seem to condemn Muslims enough. In response, one participant asked with obvious incredulity but without explicit clarification, 'What have they done to you? Whose side are you on?'[41]

Among some Pentecostal Christians, adherence to the biblical commandment of separation is interpreted as a call to preserve the integrity of the Christian faith. This requires a necessary avoidance of entanglements and alliances with non-believers. It is based on the Bible: 'What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?' (2 Corinthians 6:15). For these respondents, maintaining the purity of the faith serves as a bulwark against possible influences to turn away from the Christian faith and its teachings. In two separate conversations, a Pentecostal pastor, upon learning of my Pentecostal Christian background, warned, 'You have to be careful. If you do not, you will not be a Christian again after you finish this programme. Make sure you do not just backslide. I mean, the Bible says not to live in an unequal yoke with unbelievers.' He continued:

> We do not even agree theologically on many things; we [Christians] believe in peace and loving your neighbour, including your enemies. We preach the good news of Jesus, and if you believe and are baptised, you will be saved. They [Muslims] believe in violence and the killing of unbelievers; they force you to believe and accept their ways, and if you do not, they kill you.[42]

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[41] Interviewee PENT11UK (09/12/2018)
[42] Excerpts from informal conversation PENT1UK (19/08/2019)

Furthermore, some Christian respondents in the UK express a sense of fear and dread towards Muslims. One respondent claimed, without clear evidence, that she suspected some Muslims in her class were planted to 'listen and monitor what the Christians say.'[43] She added, 'I am very careful about what I say in class; I don't want anyone to do anything to harm me.'[44] Another respondent in the UK said: 'I used to be very scared every time I saw a Muslim, but that has changed now that I know what the real problem is. I now know how to avoid them.' When the researcher asked the interviewee to explain what she meant by this statement, she said, 'I think Islam is the main problem because it incites people to violence. If you allow me, I can quote from the Quran to show you what I am talking about.'[45] She picked up her phone and read from the Quran (9:29, 30–36):

> Fight those who do not believe in Allah or the Last Day, who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful, and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture—fight until they give the *jizyah* willingly. At the same time, they are humbled with willing submission and see themselves subdued. The Jews say, "Ezra is the son of Allah ", and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah." That is their statement from their mouths; they imitate the sayings of those who disbelieved [before them]. May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded? ... And fight against the disbelievers collectively as they fight against you collectively. And know that Allah is with the righteous [who fear Him].

Looking at me as if to gauge my reaction, she said:

> Several texts in the Quran make them [Muslims] want to harm or kill people because their scripture supports it. They believe that they are doing the will of Allah. I have collated more than 109 verses in the Quran that encourage violence against non-believers, and I will gladly offer them to you if you want. But for your own safety, please avoid them.[46]

Another Christian respondent, who is a university lecturer in the UK, says:

> I am very sorry, but Muslims are the problem; they seem to enjoy conflict. It appears that violent traits in the Islamic religion are cultural. That is my opinion, and I am very cautious about this feeling, but it is my opinion. For us Christians, the Crusades and violence were terrible in the past, but all that is in our past now, and while the Christians have left that behind, that is not the case with the Muslims. In Nigeria, the Christians

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[43] Interviewee PENT9UK (09/8/2019)
[44] Interviewee PENT9UK (09/8/2019)
[45] Interviewee PENT11UK (09/12/2018)
[46] Interviewee PENT11UK (09/12/2018)

were very peaceful, but the Muslims were not. That is because the Quran encourages them to do so.'[47]

When asked about similar texts in the Bible that call for violence, he asked, 'How many Christians have you ever seen doing that? But in Nigeria, Muslims go to a village and kill everyone in the village, including babies and pregnant women. These people are heartless.'[48]

 These remarks may appear harsh, unpalatable, unsavoury, and distasteful. However, they represent the views of the Christian respondents in this research. These sentiments mirror the entrenched, deep-seated prejudices and biases towards Muslims, a sobering reality of the extent of the work that needs to be done in fostering interfaith understanding, as well as the promotion of religious tolerance. Notably, the remarks also remind the scholarly community of the influence of worldwide Islamophobia. Indeed, the growing contention that is often perpetuated in various spheres of society, viewing Islam as an adversary is not a new idea. Historically, this fear has been deeply entrenched in various societies' social and political fabric. The media has also amplified these sentiments (Hepp & Couldry, 2009; Hjarvard, 2008). Though subjective and often based on misconceptions, such a perception has had profound implications for the interfaith dialogue and broader community relationships. These behaviours can be traced to the Crusades (1095-1291), one of the early instances wherein Christianity and Islam were pitted against each other. According to Armstrong (2001), the Crusades played a significant role in planting the seeds of suspicion, where Muslims were often portrayed as 'infidels' or 'enemies' of the Christian world. In contemporary times, events such as the 9/11 attacks intensified the suspicion and fear of Islam in the West. According to Esposito (2002), the post-September 11th event in which four coordinated Islamist suicide terrorist attacks on the United States led to a resurgence of the longstanding anxiety that erroneously associates Islam with terrorism. Such broad-brush generalisations fail to recognise the diversity within Islam and the multifaceted nature of the

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[47] Interviewee PENT9UK (09/8/2019)
[48] Interviewee PENT9UK (09/8/2019)

Muslim global community. In this context, the importance of interfaith dialogue becomes even more paramount. In the past, initiatives such as the 'Common Word' (El-Ansary & Linnan, 2010; Volf et al., 2010) sought to bridge these gaps and challenge misconceptions about the Muslim faith. This movement, backed by numerous Muslim scholars and theologians, emphasised the shared values between Christianity and Islam, particularly the love of God and the love of neighbour (Sacks, 2002). Moreover, the works of scholars like Nasr (2003) have also highlighted the richness and profundity of Islamic philosophy, spirituality, and art. By appreciating the depths of Islamic contributions to global knowledge, one can challenge the stereotype of Islam as an 'enemy'.

The implications for social identity theory are evident as deeply ingrained social identities significantly shape interfaith relations and dialogues, especially among Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrant communities in the UK. The reluctance of Christian participants to participate in interfaith dialogue can be attributed to their strict adherence to religious doctrines, which is often accompanied by a fear of diluting their faith. Their hesitancy to participate in these initiatives is further reinforced by their perceptions of Islam as inherently violent. These observations underscore the significant roles social identity plays in defining 'in-groups' and 'out-groups.' Such reluctance is often rooted in the perception of the religious 'other' as fundamentally different or antagonistic, manifesting in hostile attitudes towards Muslims and perpetuating stereotypes of Islam as a violent religion.

The social identity theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand these dynamics, suggesting that such identities are not just self-conceptions but also social constructs that influence and are influenced by the social environment. The reluctance to engage in interfaith dialogue reflects a protective stance towards one's group identity, highlighting a fear of dilution or contamination of one's faith through exposure to conflicting beliefs. This phenomenon is critical for policymakers and practitioners in the field of interfaith dialogue, as it points to the

need for addressing underlying identity-based fears and biases as part of dialogue initiatives. Effective interfaith dialogue must therefore not only seek to build bridges between differing faith perspectives but also to engage deeply with the social identities that shape these perspectives, fostering environments where these identities can be expressed safely and constructively. This approach could help mitigate the impacts of social identity barriers and encourage more meaningful and transformative interfaith interactions.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter synthesises findings from case studies of the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Nasrul-lahi-li Fathi Society of Nigeria, both in Nigeria and the UK, employing mainly the social identity theory to analyse how historical ethnoreligious conflicts influence identity, trust, and interfaith cooperation among migrants. social identity theory has revealed that these migrants' identities are layered, influenced by their religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, yet marred by integration challenges and discrimination in the UK, impacting their sense of belonging and social cohesion. While religion provides a framework for community and resilience, it also seeds division, particularly when intertwined with violent pasts. Similarly, variations in trust and cooperation levels reflect individual experiences and the residual impacts of past conflicts, affecting their current interfaith interactions.

Furthermore, attitudes towards interfaith dialogue range from disengagement to active participation, influenced by personal convictions and past traumas. Some individuals withdraw due to theological rigidity or disinterest, while others engage in dialogue driven by a desire to bridge divides, highlighting the importance of the various theories used in understanding how migrants navigate their identities in conflict and dialogue settings. This chapter significantly contributes to the literature on interfaith dialogue by providing a nuanced view of how complex identities and histories of violence affect people's social dynamics and dialogue efforts. In the next chapters, I will examine the impacts of violent conflict and the coping mechanisms

employed by migrants, and a dialogical model aimed at fostering healing and reconciliation for those grappling with unresolved memories of conflict. While Chapters Five and Six discuss how unhealed memories of the violent ethnoreligious conflict impact interfaith dialogue, Chapter Seven highlights the importance of harnessing the potential for these memories to foster resilience and a strong desire for peace among affected communities rather than solely perpetuating trauma and mistrust.

Dealing with the Unhealed Memories of Violent Conflicts

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the complexity surrounding interfaith engagement between the Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in the UK. Several theological, social, and relational reasons were offered for why interfaith dialogue between these migrant groups appears to be poor or non-existent. However, the most common reason for this is the impact of religious conflicts in their home country. This chapter goes deeper into the application of trauma theory to interpret the personal narratives collected from Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants. It addresses the second research objective that asks to what extent the unhealed memories of violent conflicts influence the perception and engagement in interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and the UK. By examining how past conflicts in their home countries continue to shape their interactions in the UK, this analysis aims to uncover the deep-seated emotional and psychological residues that influence current interfaith relations. This focus on trauma theory allows us to explore the profound and often hidden impacts of historical conflicts on individual and communal levels, providing a nuanced understanding of the ongoing challenges these migrants face in forging new communal ties in a different cultural context.

These impacts of past conflict in the respondents are further exacerbated by reports in the media and the growing prevalence of Islamophobia. However, many of the respondents interviewed before they migrated to the UK were also victims of the violent ethnoreligious conflicts in their home country or have been affected by them. Others have travelled to the UK to 'escape being killed' as their home communities and families have been destroyed and killed, respectively. For those in this category, the unhealed memories of these conflicts cause them to reserve a 'special kind of dislike for Muslims.'[49]

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[49] Interviewee PENT11UK (09/12/2018)

Building upon the theoretical foundations laid in Chapter Two, this chapter applies a mix of trauma and social identity theories and the dialogical approach in interpreting the personal narratives collected through our ethnographic study. It examines how past conflicts in the home countries of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants continue to influence their interactions in the UK. By analysing their stories through the lens of trauma theory, the chapter aims to uncover the deep-seated emotional and psychological residues that shape current interfaith dialogue. The chapter also discussed the unhealed memories of the violent religious conflicts in Nigeria, their impacts on its victims, and what are the coping mechanisms that they use in dealing with the effects of these experiences.

As in the previous chapter, efforts have been made to allow the data to speak for itself. Where a particular narrator says something that has a direct bearing on the subject, they are quoted verbatim and brought into dialogue with existing frameworks in the scholarly discourse on trauma, healing, reconciliation, and interfaith dialogue.

The discussion hinges on using the Trauma and Social Identity Theories as analytical lenses. It acknowledges the intricate and often ambivalent nature of the discourse surrounding memory and trauma. The chapter recognises that diverse groups can possess divergent recollections of the past, and these memories can become ensnared in varying dynamics of remembrance and forgetfulness (De Jorio, 2006). There are also valid concerns about individuals' accounts of repressed memories, intricately interwoven with the narrator's identity and their objective authenticity versus fabrication (Loftus & Polage, 1999; Becker, 2022). However, the primary objective here is not to scrutinise these narratives' veracity or temporal accuracy nor to impose judgment on the discourse. Instead, the focus is to allow the empirical data to speak for itself while also seeking to understand the impacts of the narratives on interfaith discourses among those who have been victims of the conflicts or have been affected by them. The chapter also seeks to provide context for why those respondents in the UK who consider themselves to be

victims of the violent conflicts in Nigeria are also among the most reticent on discourses on interfaith dialogue.

This approach also aligns with the existing body of research in memory studies, drawing inspiration from the contributions of scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs. In his work *On Collective Memory* (Halbwachs, 2020), he contends that facts alone are insufficient to explain how the image of a place conjures up thoughts about an activity of the group associated with that place. Although each mental representation does have a framework, there is no strict and necessary relationship between the two; the framework alone cannot conjure the mental image. This objection would have been meritorious if the term 'space' exclusively pertains to physical space, encompassing the entirety of visual forms and colours as they are perceived in our surroundings (Halbwachs, 2020:7). While Halbwachs's temporal and historical context differs significantly from the violent conflicts in northern Nigeria and the experiences of Nigerian migrants in the UK, his emphasis on the significance of felt experiences, constructed from a holistic perspective, resonates with the narrative testimonials provided by the individuals I interviewed. These narratives consist of their recollections of past traumatic events and situations that play crucial roles in shaping the respondents' perceptions and interactions with Christian and Muslim communities in their respective localities in the UK. It highlights the complexities in the discourse that memory transcends national and cultural borders and aligns with the existing scholarly conversation that emphasises memory's transnational and transcultural nature. William Faulkner succinctly articulated this when he said, 'The past is never dead; it's not even past' (Faulkner, 2022:73).

Section 6.2 examines issues of Trauma and the Impact of Unhealed Memories of violent conflicts in Nigeria. This section explores how trauma theory helps in understanding the impacts of past conflicts among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. It explores personal memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts, focusing on individual experiences and

their effects on current interfaith interactions. The section also addresses collective unhealed memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts, analysing how shared historical grievances shape group dynamics and interfaith relations. Section 6.3 discusses the concept of the dangerous other, emphasising the importance of understanding the perceptions of the 'other' religious group as dangerous, cruel, and untrustworthy, and its implications for interfaith dialogue. Section 6.4 explores the effects of the unhealed memories of violent conflicts on migrants in the UK. It highlights four primary outcomes: (i) suppression of memories and silent prayers for healing and justice, (ii) feelings of powerlessness and reserved resentment against supposed enemies, (iii) revenge as a form of propitiation and defence, and (iv) numbness to the experience of violence. Section 6.5 concludes the chapter by summarising the key findings and setting the stage for the subsequent analysis in Chapter Seven, which will focus on the inspiring potential of the dialogical model for healing and reconciliation among Nigerian migrant groups.

6.2 Trauma and the Impact of Unhealed Memories of the Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

Building upon the foundational understanding established at the beginning of this chapter, this section explores how trauma theory helps the understanding of the impacts of past conflicts among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Trauma theory provides a framework for understanding how unhealed memories of violence affect individuals' current social interactions and perceptions, especially within the context of interfaith dialogue. The theory posits that traumatic experiences, especially those related to ethnoreligious conflicts, leave enduring psychological residues that shape one's identity and social relationships. For instance, the persistent impact of trauma can manifest as ongoing fear, mistrust, and sometimes hostility towards members of other religious groups, which directly influences the dynamics of interfaith engagement. These unresolved traumas, as highlighted by Judith Herman in her seminal work, *Trauma and Recovery* (2015), indicate that the past experiences of violence continue to resonate with victims, affecting their ability to form new social bonds and trust others

(Herman, 2015). This is particularly critical in interfaith settings where past grievances can significantly hinder the potential for reconciliation and mutual understanding.

In line with trauma theory, the approach adopted in this chapter not only examines these unhealed memories through the narratives of the participants but also seeks to understand how these experiences influence their current perceptions and interactions in the diaspora. This chapter aims to bridge the theoretical exploration with practical insights, providing a nuanced understanding of the migrants' experiences and their ongoing challenges in forging new communal ties in a different cultural context. The insights gathered here are crucial for informing effective strategies for interfaith dialogue that are sensitive to the trauma histories of the participants.

Analysis of the data shows that many Nigerian Christians and Muslims in their home country or the UK continue to struggle with the unhealed memories of the violent conflicts they were exposed to or affected by in their home country before they migrated to the UK. These memories can be categorised into personal and collective memories of the past.

6.2.1 Personal Memories of Violent Ethnoreligious Conflicts
During the interviews, the respondents (both Christians and Muslims) indicated that they had been victims of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria or had been affected by them before they arrived in the UK. Some have travelled to the UK to seek asylum, while others are in the UK in search of educational and economic opportunities. But nearly all the respondents admit having been personally affected by the violent attacks in Nigeria. Many of them carry with them not just the memories but the palpable scars of violent conflicts from their homeland. One respondent, who is a Christian leader in the UK, said:

> Many of the Nigerian migrants in the UK, as you see them, are carrying the baggage of unhealed memories and trauma of the violent conflicts in their home country. Some have lost their relatives to the violence, and some do not even have a home to go back to anymore. The victims are not only those who were killed or those who lost their relatives

or property; it includes even those who participate as perpetrators, playing major and active roles in perpetuating the conflicts.[50]

Unhealed memories are often not fully understood. They are not the violence or trauma that lingers but the very lack of understanding of what happened (O'Connell, 2016). For Nigerian migrants, the trauma is not just historical but recurs every time they are reminded of their losses. Such trauma often manifests in numerous ways, from emotional numbing and avoidance to intrusive re-experiencing of the traumatic events, forms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, or other mental health issues. The assertion that many Nigerian migrants in the UK carry unhealed memories and trauma from violent conflicts in their homeland is, therefore, not just an anecdotal observation, as the various respondents have shown; it is a lived reality that many of them deal with. Still, it can be analysed through the lens of trauma theory. Judith Herman (2015) outlines the profound and prolonged effects of traumatic events on individuals, positing that such traumatic experiences can lead to a complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD), which affects victims long after the traumatic event has ceased. Van der Kolk (2014) also posits that trauma often remains trapped in the nervous system and resurfaces through intrusive memories, emotions, and bodily sensations. Such memories are not merely recollections; they are visceral, vivid, and impactful, affecting one's thoughts, actions, and relations (Van Der Kolk, 2014).

For the above respondent, these traumatic experiences are rooted in real-life events. Nigeria has seen a persistent occurrence of religious, ethnic, and political conflicts throughout its history, resulting in the displacement of individuals, destruction of property, and loss of human lives. Hence, it is not atypical to encounter migrants who have experienced the loss of family members or the whole destruction of their residences due to such acts of violence. Yet, for many Nigerian migrants, the loss of family members and the destruction of their entire community also means

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[50] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

that they have lost more than just their homes; they have also lost their identity anchors – family members, cherished possessions, and familiar surroundings. Herman notes that traumatic events demolish the 'structures of the self' and rupture the 'systems of attachment' (Herman, 2015:56). For these migrants, the daily struggle is about assimilation and rebuilding these fragmented structures.

One noteworthy remark concerns the concept that those affected by trauma are not limited to those who experienced the loss of family members or property. This group includes individuals who actively participated in these conflicts and engaged in acts of violence within the context of these conflicts. This is consistent with Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman's thoughts in their work on *The Empire of Trauma* (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009). According to the authors, individuals who commit acts of violence may experience trauma as a result of their actions. Engaging in acts of violence can elicit feelings of remorse, humiliation, and a deep sense of moral distress, particularly when these actions are subsequently contemplated beyond the immediate context of conflict. For example, some of the individuals interviewed for this study maintained that they have engaged in acts of violence as a method of 'defending the tenets of their faith.' Indeed, the term 'defend the tenets of faith' has been used consistently as a euphemism for the violent attack on adversaries and bloodshed. During interviews, individuals reflecting on their behaviour and its consequences in a new environment may confront the profound impact of their actions, such as psychological distress and trauma. This reflection also involves comparing their in-groups to out-groups, influencing their identity and behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). When individuals participate as perpetrators in violent conflicts, it is often driven by a distorted sense of protecting or elevating their in-group, and in doing so, they dehumanise and victimise the out-group. However, the aftermath of these conflicts reveals a startling twist. The very act of perpetration alienates them from their core humanity and thrusts upon them a burden of guilt, shame, and trauma. Thus, in the broader social identity framework,

they also become an 'out-group', distanced and isolated from their community and sense of self. This raises the critical question of the gap in scholarship pertaining to the trauma and identity struggles of migrants who migrated from conflict-affected communities, particularly within the context of interfaith engagement. Indeed, understanding the trauma and identity struggles of these migrants is not simply a necessary work of academic exercise. It is crucial for fostering an environment of interfaith dialogue and integration in the UK. Recognising and addressing their trauma is essential to building bridges, fostering mutual respect, and nurturing a cohesive society. Also, the intersection of trauma and religious faith provides a more profound concern. Catherine Keller (2003) *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* mentions how trauma can lead individuals to question their faith, seeing it either as a potential source of solace or a cause of their suffering. Thus, the challenge for interfaith scholars within the UK context is to address these complex traumas carried by Nigerian migrants, offering platforms for healing, dialogue, and potential reconciliation with both their past and their faith.

The social structure in the UK also contributes to the complexity of the trauma and memory phenomenon among the migrants struggling to negotiate their identities as Africans living and striving to integrate their experiences with the values and cultural needs of the host nation (Ejorh, 2012). One of these respondents is a pastor of a local congregation and the leader of an Apostolic congress in the UK. Due to his role as a leader of a Christian community in the UK, he maintained that he has 'the duty and need' to show leadership by trying to put the past behind him and face the demands of his new role as a leader in the religious community in the UK.

According to this respondent, 'For many like me, I go to interfaith meetings, and I am friendly with my Muslims in those meetings. It is quite a big thing for me to be friends with them. But they do not even know what I have been through.'[51] Looking straight at me as if to say, I know

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[51] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

you understand what I am about to say, 'and you know what? I cannot even share that with them.'[52]   He raised his voice a little louder and hit the table between us once he said the following: 'This is the reality and a dimension of the life of many Nigerian Christian migrants in the UK, but not many people know this. At some point, you need someone to acknowledge your pain and say, yes, this happened to you; it should not have happened, and it was bad that it happened to you.'[53]   He went on to say, 'Yes, Muslims are also suffering, but these are only a minority of them. As much as people will want to say that Muslims are also suffering just as Christians are,' he said, raising his tone a little louder again, now more affirmative, and emotional. 'I am sorry, but it is not a level playing field at all as Christians are particularly being singled out.'[54]

The evident emotional distress and fervent expression of challenges in interacting with members of the Muslim community by the individual in question reflects the hardships encountered by numerous Nigerian migrants as they strive to reconcile their unhealed memories of past atrocities the need to foster peaceful coexistence with individuals they see as their victimisers. As indicated by the responder, 'The reality of the issue I am talking about is pervasive among the black African community across Europe. But like myself, would not know until you were told.'[55] To put the respondent's remarks into context, a brief background of his experience, which he 'decided to bottle up so I can present a more conciliatory font for other Christian leaders to follow,'[56] would be helpful. According to the respondent:

> I grew up as a child during the Biafran war; my father fought and was killed in that war, and I can still remember that so well. After the Biafran war, it took me several years to understand that I was carrying the baggage and burdens of what today they call post-traumatic stress disorder. There were days you just tried not to remember or refused to remember, and there were days when it was more difficult than others. And sometimes, there will be triggers that bring back memories of those feelings.

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[52] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[53] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[54] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[55] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[56] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

> There is also a lady member in my church whose father has been a pastor in northern Nigeria for several years. During one of those recent conflicts, some Muslim groups seized him in his church auditorium, bound and burned him alive in the church, and then set the whole church building on fire before leaving. Like many of us, you can imagine that she still carries that experience's scars.[57]

Another respondent in the UK also narrates a very graphic account of the killing of her friend's wife in Kano:

> My friend's wife runs a provision store in northern Nigeria. It was in the evening, around 6 p.m. The store was still open, and customers were still coming in when this Muslim man stood in front of her store to pray. She did not like that, so she told him to move away from the front of the store, which got the man upset. He said that she was insulting Allah. On that same day, some Muslim guys came to attack her, cut off her head, hang it on a stick, and run across the city to put fear in people and warn them not to insult Allah. There are videos of this, and you can see them on the internet. Someone sent it to me on WhatsApp, but I could not bring myself to watch the video, so I deleted it.[58]

The foregoing highlights a significant yet often overlooked aspect of interfaith dialogue: the personal histories and traumas individuals carry into these interactions. For many Nigerian migrants in the UK, as is with migrants from other conflict-affected communities, there are often hidden narratives of pain and suffering, compounded by an apparent disparity in the acknowledgement of these experiences. The phenomenon of migration, especially in the context of religious persecution or tension, has been well documented. Magan and Padgett (2021) emphasises that the act of migration itself can lead to feelings of alienation, identity crisis, and trauma. Both victims and perpetrators often carry the weight of past experiences, which can range from direct persecution to witnessing violence against their co-religionists in their home country.

These experiences colour their interactions in the diaspora, but importantly, they pose significant barriers to interfaith dialogue. As one of the respondents said, 'I cannot even share that with them, underscoring the difficulties that are often unexpressed during interfaith sections. As Latinovic et al. (2016) suggest that for interfaith dialogue to be truly transformative, it must

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[57] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

[58] Interviewee PENT14UK (15/07/2018). During fieldwork in Nigeria, another participant narrates the same account and often confirms this story's veracity. However, as a researcher, I did not confirm independently that the victim was related to the respondent I interviewed for this research.

create a space where individuals can vulnerably share their lived experiences and histories. Cornille (2008) posits that true interfaith dialogue requires mutual respect and a deep understanding of the other's pain and historical trauma. Without this understanding, dialogues risk being superficial, and participants may feel their experiences and traumas are overlooked. These statements underscore an often-ignored gap in the current format of many interfaith activities, where politeness or fear of stirring controversy may prevent individuals from engaging deeply in their stories, as the above respondent seems to suggest.

However, it is also essential to note the assertion made about the disparity in the suffering of Christians and Muslims. While the experiences of any individual or community should never be downplayed or dismissed, one must be wary of generalising claims about broad religious or ethnic groups. The nuances of inter-group dynamics, especially in a context as complex as Nigeria, defy simple categorisations. As Vaughan (2022) has argued, both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have faced persecution and hardship in various contexts, and both communities harbour stories of pain. For the migrants who found themselves at the receiving end of these experiences, their sentiments shed light on the broader complexities of migration, faith, and trauma and their intersection in the interfaith context. Yet, it is also essential to put these accounts in the historical context of personal trauma. Nigeria, with its diverse religious landscape, has been plagued with religious tensions, particularly between Christians and Muslims. These tensions have resulted in violence, with churches and mosques being attacked. Both Christian and Muslim casualties have been reported, albeit in unequal proportions. Many have been displaced or lost loved ones (Onapajo, 2012). These experiences colour their interactions in interfaith spaces in the diaspora. The trauma is personal and sometimes remains unspoken in interfaith dialogues. These deep-seated emotions cannot be ignored. However, the feeling that 'Christians are particularly being singled out' should also require a more in-depth examination, as it often highlights the challenges of comparing sufferings, a subject that Peter

Admirand addresses so well. In *Dialogue in the Face of a Gun?* (Admirand, 2016), the author highlights the challenges of comparing sufferings, emphasising that in interfaith dialogues, acknowledging one group's pain should not diminish or negate another's. Instead, David Blumenthal's deep need for acknowledgement should be emphasised. In *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Blumenthal 1993), the author argues for the profound theological and personal necessity of acknowledging pain and suffering. Acknowledgement is central to healing. In this respect, the respondent's yearning for acknowledgement, both of his trauma and that of the broader persecution of Christians, is crucial and echoes this sentiment. Including perspectives from respondents in Nigeria underscores the universality of this need for acknowledgement across different religious and cultural contexts. For instance, a Muslim community youth leader in Kaduna shared deeply personal accounts:

> The injustice against the victims of ethnoreligious conflicts across Nigeria is among the root causes of many of the violent conflicts we are seeing. I am one of the victims of these conflicts. My parents live in a village called Masaraga in Zangon Kataf Local Government. In 2011, there was significant post-election violence, and my village, in particular, was cleansed. One hundred and twenty-four people were killed, and the whole town was displaced. Both my parents died in that attack, and I lost eighteen members of my family. Now, I cannot go back there because of the memory; this is where my forebears have lived for over four hundred years. So, when people talk about Muslims being violent people, a lot of people do not understand what the Christians have done to Muslims in my village.[59]

This narrative highlights the shared experiences of suffering and the desperate need for acknowledgement and reconciliation among both Christians and Muslims. By illustrating the depth of trauma experienced by individuals from different religious backgrounds in Nigeria, the study emphasises that healing and acknowledgement are not confined to a single group but are necessary for all affected by ethnoreligious conflicts.

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[59] IntervieweeMUS2NG (10/10/2019)

Imam Mohammed Ashafa is the co-director with Pastor James Wuye[60] at the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) in Kaduna. The IMC is an internationally acclaimed mediation centre on issues of religious and ethnic conflicts and is partly funded by the United Nations. There will be more discussion on Imam Ashafa and Pastor James' role in mediating conflicts in Nigeria later in this chapter; however, prior to the setting up of the IMC, Imam Ashafa led the National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations of Nigeria (NACOMYO), and Pastor James led the youth wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kaduna. Each was a leader in an opposing group in the deadly conflicts and considered the other as a sworn enemy. During the interviews, both respondents admitted actively seeking ways to eliminate the other. In 1992, during a deadly clash between Christian and Muslim groups Kaduna, Pastor James lost one of his forearms, and over two thousand people were killed. Imam Ashafa recounted his grievances following the 1992 clash.

> This was not the calling that I would have chosen to follow.[61] I was a victim of the circumstance. In 1992, during one of those bloody clashes, I lost two of my cousins and my spiritual teacher. He was a Sufi who believed in an inclusive Nigeria. He was a good man, an ideal role model and a Muslim Sheikh. So, naturally, you will want to go for an act of revenge and avenge the deaths of these essential people in your life, but I was just too overwhelmed with grief; it feels like I lost everything and the people who are dearest to me.[62]

These remarks touch upon the profound psychological and societal implications of ethnoreligious conflicts, the profound trauma they produce, and the lasting consequences for those who survive them. It indicates not only the physical violence endured by individuals but also underscores the long-lasting traumatic effects and collective memories that shape interreligious relations and identities, necessitating an analysis informed by trauma theory and theological reflection. Trauma theory, in contexts of violent conflicts, often emphasises the individual and collective psychological responses to shocking events. The traumatic impact of

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[60] These respondents have offered for their names to be included in this publication.
[61] Referring to his role in the conflict
[62] Interviewee with Imam Ashafa (31/10/2019)

the ethnoreligious cleansing mentioned by one of the interviewees can be understood through Herman's complex posttraumatic stress disorder (complex PTSD), where the individual suffers from a prolonged period of trauma rather than a single event (Herman, 2015). For Herman, the aftermath of traumatic events can lead to a protracted state of hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. This theory helps explain the interviewee's inability to return to their home community, which is a poignant reflection of the constriction that many survivors experience: unable to confront the painful memories associated with particular places or events. Moreover, the displacement of communities due to ethnoreligious violence can lead to the loss of cultural heritage and identity, creating a sense of alienation and uprootedness, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

However, in his book *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf (1996) also provides a theological reflection on identity and reconciliation. Volf argues for the will to embrace the other, informed by Christ's example, promoting a transformative encounter that reshapes identities and breaks down the barriers erected by conflict. This approach could profoundly impact the interviewee's context, where the memory of violence serves as a continual reminder of division. It is also crucial to recognise that behind statistics of the conflict lie stories of disrupted lives, broken families, and uprooted communities. The interviewee's story is a stark reminder that reconciliation requires systemic and structural change and deep, empathetic engagement with the traumatic experiences of individuals. To create lasting peace, efforts to foster interfaith dialogue and healing in Nigeria must consider these personal and collective traumas.

Moreover, the impact of these conflicts is not confined to Nigeria. With its significant Nigerian diaspora, the UK is directly affected by these events. Many Nigerians in the UK carry with them the memories and traumas of ethnoreligious conflicts, influencing their communities and interactions. These collective memories and historical narratives not only shape perceptions of other faith groups but also play a significant role in the perpetuation of successive violence. The

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cyclical nature of ethnoreligious conflicts, therefore, extends beyond Nigeria, affecting communities in the UK and highlighting the need for a global perspective on reconciliation and healing.

6.2.2 Collective Unhealed Memories of Violent Ethnoreligious Conflicts

In Volkan's exploration of *Chosen traumas* (Volkan, 2021), the author suggests that groups unite around the inherited pain of past injustices, which can fuel ongoing cycles of violence. In this context, it resonates with the way historical grievances are held by religious communities, as indicated by the interviewee's reference to the generalised accusation against Muslims. This sentiment overlooks the multifaceted nature of violence and victimhood. While certain participants report individual experiences of victimisation based on the conflict, others, mainly individuals who played pivotal roles in the violent conflicts in Nigeria, acknowledge that their involvement was the result of, and in some instances, compelled by their awareness of the 'collective unhealed memories' of past atrocities committed against their forebears. These traumas have been transmitted intergenerationally, creating a collective memory that continues to resonate from one generation to another.

Numerous studies, including Bar-On (1999) and Volkan (2014), have demonstrated that intergenerational trauma—the transmission of traumatic experiences and their psychological impact across generations—inevitably characterises the dynamics of interfaith dialogue. Volkan (2014) offers a critical perspective, observing how large-group identities, shaped by historical traumas, influence both individual and collective psychologies in interfaith settings. He posits that these traumas, though not experienced by the current group members, are 'chosen' to be remembered and re-enacted symbolically across generations. His analysis of the Serbian national psyche discusses how the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, a significant defeat for the Serbs, has been perpetuated as a 'chosen trauma.' Despite occurring centuries ago, its memory continues to influence contemporary Serbian nationalism and political discourse. This historical event is not

just a recollection of the past but a dynamic force shaping group identity and driving current political and social actions. Bar-On's (1999) research among Jewish and German contexts echoed this. According to Bar-On, the reverberations of Holocaust experiences on the descendants of its survivors reveal the deep infiltration of these historical traumas in dialogues between Jewish and German communities. This concept also emerges as a collective memory in interfaith discourse. Hirsch (2008) introduces the term 'post-memory' to describe this phenomenon, referring to a potent, cross-generational conveyance of experiences that were not directly experienced by subsequent generations. This idea is further explored by Rothberg (2009:168), who examines the interactions between Palestinian and Israeli teenagers, uncovering how longstanding grievances significantly impact their current perceptions and interactions. Lastly, as Kirmayer et al. (2014) highlighted, intergenerational and transgenerational implications and consequences often emerge if traumas of unhealed memories are unaddressed and unattended to. These can perpetuate misunderstandings and biases. The findings of this current study corroborated these observations.

In Nigeria, Pastor James, who in 1992 lost one of his forearms in a violent clash between Kaduna Christian and Muslim groups, also led the youth wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria to become one of the most vicious Christian opposition rebel groups in the country. Even though he has since reneged on those violent acts and is now a leading advocate for peace and reconciliation, Pastor James also admitted the following during the interview:

> The work we did, even though it was borne of measured ignorance and fanatism, was also necessary at the time for us to fight to defend the tenets of the Christian faith, which had been undermined and dominated by aggressive Islamic forces in the city.
>
> Even though I lost one of my arms, we knew that struggle was for a bigger and larger goal. So, I was fully prepared to use my remaining hand to fight to protect and defend the tenets of the Christian faith. I know many people who share experiences of collective unhealed memories.
>
> Sometimes, these memories are not entirely ours; they have been transferred to us by our parents and grandparents before them through negative narratives. You see Christian youths speaking hateful words to other groups, and the others reciprocate as if they were the actors at the time. But they were not; it is the anger and pains that were transferred to

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us that we have not transformed that we are transferring to the next generation, and they are running along with it. During the civil war, for example, many young people and others were not even born. But they carry the memories, agitating and narrating various versions of the civil war as if they were active during the war.[63]

Imam Muhammad Ashafa, a co-director of the IMC with Pastor James in Nigeria, also remarked:

Many of these conflicts are the results of the collective unhealed memories of past atrocities. They are built on perceived notions of religious and ethnic subjugation, which were handed down from one generation to the next. Some of the violent killings are mostly emotional reprisal attacks for what the perpetrators perceive to be signs of a recurrence of the history of oppression that their forebearers have narrated from one generation to another, and this is my own experience as well.

For a long time, I was not interested in this notion of inclusivity; I was an exclusive person who did not believe in others. This is because we have been victims of the collective unhealed memory of our parents, transferred from generation to generation. These unhealed memories were transferred to us.[64]

The theme of transferring 'unhealed memories' across generations aligns closely with the oral history traditions prevalent in traditional African societies. These oral traditions serve as a vital conduit for preserving cultural heritage, communal identity, and historical continuity. In many African cultures, the act of storytelling is not merely a recounting of events but a powerful means of embedding collective memories within the social fabric. This process ensures that the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of ancestors remain an integral part of the community's present consciousness. Oral history serves as a potent conduit for preserving memories, traditions, and cultural heritage (Haley, 2015). However, oral traditions can also be detrimental to society, contributing to the incitement of individuals toward violent actions. As one respondent noted, 'The memories run deep and remain for generations in families. It will take some time to undo this damage and to restore the trust.'[65] The accounts also underscore a profound insight wherein respondents identify themselves as 'a victim of circumstance,' reacting to oral narratives of events that transpired generations before him. Chapter three of this thesis discusses the history of the religious conflicts that these respondents have consistently referred to. However, during

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[63] Interview with Pastor James (1/11/2019)
[64] Interview with Imam Ashafa (30/10/2019)
[65] Interviewee PENT7UK (10/10/2018)

the interview, Imam Ashafa in Nigeria described his experience with how this transition of collective memories of violent conflicts occurs across generations in his family:

> Remember, my son, before the colonial masters came to our soil in Nigeria, we had an educational system that was based on God at its centre. The colonial authority came and colonised us by force. And for forty years, our ancestors fought against them until they subdued us in March 1903. They changed our educational system, which has God at its centre, to a secularised one. They changed our economic system from a non-interest-based system to an interest-based system. They changed our language of communication from Arabic and Hausa to English and rendered all those literates in Arabic or the local language under Islamic authority as illiterates. Prostitution was a rare thing; it is now open galore in the name of multiple rights without responsibility.
>
> These are the issues and challenges that our parents and grandparents found difficult to forgive. The Whiteman came to colonise us. And our parents told us that the missionaries were offshoots of the colonial authorities. So, when the Whiteman is not here, even the friend of the Whiteman becomes the enemy. The enemy of my enemy can be my friend, but the friend of my enemy is my enemy. These are among the narratives and realities that many of us grew up with. And some religious leaders have also repeatedly told us this type of story so that it can sink in.[66]

These narratives epitomise a vivid account of the intergenerational transmission of collective memories and accounts concerning colonial encounters, alterations in societal structures, and resulting intergroup attitudes. Importantly, they support what the trauma theorist have said about how the psychological processes work and the social effects, and how this affects in-group identity. The trauma, as well as the social identity theories, highlight how individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups, often leading to an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. This in-group favouritism and out-group derogation phenomenon are conspicuously evident in the above narratives, particularly regarding attitudes towards remnants of colonial influence. The imagination and idealisation of what might have been, the loss of educational and economic paradigm, and 'non-interest-based' with 'God at its centre' contrast with imposed secular and capitalist structures. These reinforce in-group identity (Hausa and Islamic communities) through a shared sense of loss and differentiation from the out-group (colonial authorities and their affiliates) (Beckstead et al., 2011). According to Beckstead et al. (2011), this

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[66] Interview with Imam Ashafa (30/10/2019)

nostalgia and idealisation of the past explain a strategy for maintaining a positive social identity, wherein groups hark back to a 'golden age' and perceive subsequent changes as degradation imposed by out-groups.

An essential part of this process of identity construction and intergroup perceptions is the role of the ancestors and religious leaders as mediums through which collective memories are both shaped and transmitted across generations (Vollhardt, 2012). Bar-Tal (2007) notes that such shared narratives, especially surrounding conflict, and societal disruption, become integral to in-group identity and worldview, fostering cohesion and continuity. Hogg (2001) illustrates how authority figures often exploit social identity dynamics to shape group members' perceptions and attitudes. By repeatedly emphasising historical grievances and moral contrasts, they fortify in-group cohesion and sustain out-group derogation, ensuring the longevity of these social identity contours. The endurance of these polarised identities and narratives also poses a significant challenge for interfaith dialogue and intergroup reconciliation. One way that this affects interfaith dialogue is the erosion of trust and the perception of the (religious) other as a dangerous enemy.

6.3 The Dangerous Other
The lack of confidence and trust in interfaith processes is also based on the perception of the other (religious) groups as deeply dangerous, cruel, and untrustworthy. Imam Ashafa in Nigeria expressed this sentiment in his account of how, during the 1992 clash, he lost two of his cousins and my spiritual teacher –

> He was a Sufi who believed in an inclusive Nigeria. He was a good man, an ideal role model and a Muslim Sheikh. Indeed, one of the many sad consequences of the crisis is the seeds of distrust that it often sows between communities. These seeds will only continue to grow. For one thing, people are seeing each other not only with suspicion and jealousy but also with fear and hatred.[67]

Also, the Muslim community youth leader in Kaduna, who described himself as a 'victim of the injustice against the victims of ethnoreligious conflicts,' expressed similar views.

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[67] Interview with Imam Ashafa (30/10/2019

for someone like me who lost eighteen members of my family, including his father and mother, in a Christian-Muslim clash that wiped out our entire village, it is impossible to accept the characterisation of Muslims as the victimisers.[68]

Instead, this respondent blamed the Christians for manipulating the news circle and 'painting Muslims and Islam in a negative light.'[69] He also challenged the prevailing narrative that attributes the act of violence against Christians in Nigeria to Muslims, characterising it as both 'cruel and untrue.' Even though he offered no specific evidential support, this respondent contended that Muslims have endured a more significant share of suffering in Nigeria since the nation achieved independence. This suffering, he argued, has manifested in various forms, including loss of life, severe injuries, economic assets, property damage, and forced displacement.

This deep-rooted distrust and perception of victimisation also has significant implications for interfaith dialogue among the Nigerian migrant groups in the UK and often shape their worldviews and attitudes when they migrate. They bring with them a history of trauma, fear, and mistrust towards other religious groups. This can hinder the success of interfaith initiatives in the UK, as these ingrained perceptions and past traumas complicate efforts to build trust and cooperation between different religious communities. Therefore, understanding and addressing these underlying issues is crucial for fostering genuine interfaith dialogue and harmony in the UK.

Similarly, the Christian respondent whose friend's wife was beheaded in Kano describes Muslims generally as 'dangerously cruel people.'[70] The Christian community leader in the UK whose father was killed during the war in Nigeria said, 'If you see some of those images and the violent destruction of Christians, it not only reminds you of your own experience, but it also

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[68] Interviewee MUS3NG 25/09/2019
[69] Interviewee MUS3NG 25/09/2019
[70] Interviewee PENT14UK (15/07/2018)

makes it hard for anyone to want to trust Muslims without a negative suspicion of what their real intention might really be.'[71] He went on to say that it is an 'emotionally traumatising reality having to live and engage continuously with people you believe that based on the dictates of their faiths are the architects and perpetrators of those violent activities.'[72] As one Christian respondents in Jos noted:

> Yes, I heard the announcement on the mosque's loudspeaker; it was a worrying development. Saying, 'Kill and finish them off if you catch any of them.' Religious centres are not where you announce to kill people; that is troublesome.[73]

Another respondent says that during the violence, 'one of the Muslim community leaders in their sermon was urging them to defend their interest and faith. He was urging them on. He told them, ' If you died in the process, *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to God), you would go to heaven.'[74]

Impacted by the reality of these happenings, the Nigerian Christian community, both Nigeria and in the UK appears to be divided on how to respond. On the one hand, some respondents in Nigeria maintained that 'we need to stick to our Christian testimony of peace. We cannot change our Christian testimony because we are under attack.'[75] Yet, other Christians, especially in the UK, feel that the churches needed to be more militant to be able to counter 'the deliberate efforts to sow misinformation and disinformation. It is an issue of an eye for an eye now. God did not redeem us to be slaughtered like animals and fools [sic]'[76]. Another respondent in the UK says,

> People think that we were too stupid, that we were too naïve, just relying on prayer. God is not going to come down and fight for us. They usually refer you to what Jesus said, 'If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.' But Jesus did not tell us to be fools forever. In our case, they slapped the right cheek, we

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[71] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[72] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[73] Interviewee MUS3NG 25/09/2019)
[74] Interviewee PENT4NG (04/11/2019)
[75] Interviewee PENT5NG (23/10/2019)
[76] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

turned the left, they slapped it, and we even turned our face, and they slapped it; we have gone above and beyond.[77]

This sense of anger is not limited to the UK context only. In June 2018, there were reports of attacks on Christian villages in Plateau and Benue states, allegedly perpetrated by Fulani herders, a predominantly Muslim group. These attacks resulted in the tragic loss of over 350 lives within the Christian community. In response to these events, Bishop David Oyedepo, the esteemed founder of Winners Chapel International and a prominent figure in African charismatic Christianity, called for the expression of 'holy anger' within the Christian community against the Fulani herders, Boko Haram and those who sponsor them. During his sermon in church, Bishop Oyedepo describes the perpetrators and their sponsors as follows:

> These are the troublers of the church, and it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that troubles the church. Christians need to defend themselves against these killings by people who look like Boko Haram. I decree the curse of the Lord upon the troublers of the church and a rejection of any Islamisation agenda to Islamise Nigeria. If the church does not stop them, religious war will break out. It is going to be the most devasting of all wars. To pray for killers rather than against them, therefore, is to be religiously foolish (Asabe AfrikaTV, 2018).

Again, during the 2010 conflict in Jos, 'Christians mobilised, blowing a whistle, and asking people to 'come out and fight for Jesus' (Higazi, 2011:24; see also Ostien, 2009; Krause, 2011). According to Krause (2011:60), these escalations have significantly eroded trust and hindered effective communication between the various religious communities in the region. Krause observed that these heightened tensions and mutual accusations significantly impede efforts toward dialogue, the prevention of violence, and the promotion of peace (Krause, 2011:60). Based on the above elucidated impacts of historical memories of violent conflict on individuals and the community, the next section, I will focus on the impact of these experiences on respondents' self-perceptions and the four types of responses to these memories that have emerged from the data.

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[77] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

6.4 Effects of the Unhealed Memories of the Violent Conflicts on migrants in the UK

The foregoing has demonstrated the profound impact and effects of the violent conflicts and the memories of it. These conflicts have left behind not only physical destruction but also deep psychological scars and 'unhealed memories.' The implications of these unhealed memories are profoundly negative on interfaith dialogue, yet the impacts are equally severe on the individuals themselves. In this section, I highlight four primary outcomes.

6.4.1 Suppress the Memories and Silently Pray for Healing and Justice

Many of the respondents who have been impacted by the traumatic memories of these violent conflicts in their home country found themselves in religious leadership positions in which they are required to 'be conciliatory and show leadership.' To do this, they try to suppress their memories of the past and 'silently pray for healing and justice.' According to one interviewee,

> there were days you just tried not to remember or refused to remember, and there were days when it was more difficult than others. And sometimes, there will be triggers that bring back memories of those feelings. But in all, we only pray for healing and justice. We are told in scripture to lay our burdens and sufferings upon the Lord, for he has suffered more than we have in our place. He has borne our grievances and sorrows. And the Holy Spirit; he is a comforter and a 'balm in Gilead'; he understands and will comfort.[78]

Pastor James Wuye, who lost one of his forearms during a deadly clash in 1992, showed me his prosthesis during the interview and said, 'It was a struggle; it is still a struggle; these things never fully go away. You see, I carry the mark on my body.'[79] This respondent says he finds his healing and motivation to do the work of mediation in biblical texts. Yet, he continues during the interview to evoke the theme of justice and the healing of what he refers to as collective unhealed memories.'[80] As one interviewee rightly admits, the reality of this is that 'there is really never complete healing; these things really do not go away.'[81]

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[78] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[79] Interview with Pastor James (1/11/2019)
[80] Interview with Pastor James (1/11/2019)
[81] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

Based on the foregoing, it is evident that faith plays an essential part in the coping mechanisms employed by the respondents in dealing with traumatic situations. They identify strongly with a Christian faith group, using religious teachings as a tool for understanding and processing trauma. The Christian theology of suffering is grounded in understanding Christ's suffering as redemptive and the Holy Spirit as a source of comfort. The reference to the 'balm in Gilead' is particularly poignant. This biblical allusion from Jeremiah 8:22 poses a rhetorical question about whether there is a remedy for the suffering of God's people. In black spirituality, this 'balm' has been interpreted as a healing salve provided by God (Cone, 2004). Hence, in the context of trauma, it signifies the therapeutic and comforting role that religious beliefs can play. Different religious traditions offer separate ways and avenues for processing and healing from trauma. For example, Buddhism might emphasise the impermanence of suffering, while Islam may highlight the virtue of patience (*sabr*) during trials. Thus, by invoking scripture and referencing the Holy Spirit, these respondents are signalling their strong membership in the Christian faith community, seeking solace and validation from its shared beliefs and teachings. This resonates well with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) notion that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from the groups they identify with. However, there is also evidence of dissociative tendencies in their remarks, which, according to Herman (2015), many trauma survivors experience. According to Herman (2015:37), traumatic memories are qualitatively different from ordinary memories; they tend to be intrusive and are often triggered by unrelated events. In these cases, Herman believes that they might attempt to protect themselves from the overwhelming emotions associated with traumatic memories (Herman, 2015).

6.4.2 Feel Powerless in Their State of Victimhood and Often Reserving Resentments Against Their Supposed Enemies

In addition to those who try to suppress their memories, others express the feeling of powerlessness in their state of victimhood. The study shows that these people often reserve the strongest resentment against their supposed enemies. One of the respondents alluded to the

clashes that led to the demolishing of her home community. Both of her parents and sister were killed during the clash. One of the perpetrators has now 'turned a new leaf' and is currently leading peace efforts in Kaduna and Jos. According to this respondent, even though he has repented, he cannot bring my family back. According to her, 'I saw him then as my number one enemy, and I wished that he had a very fatal accident and died. Not, like the car accident, that he will die, but like an animal (a lion or something) to eat his flesh alive [sic]. In the end, I had to leave the area completely.'[82]

The visceral reaction described by the respondent, particularly her vivid wish for the perpetrator's gruesome end, is indicative of the profound impact of trauma. Again, this resonates with Herman's (2015) work on PTSD. According to the author, trauma can shatter the construction of the self and relations with others. For this respondent, losing her family – her foundational relationships – could disrupt her sense of self and place in the world. Her evocation of predatory animals consuming the perpetrator underscores the magnitude of her anguish, which seems beyond the comprehension of simple revenge. Again, from the narrative, the respondent appears to have accepted the genuineness of the perpetrator's shift from a violent actor to a peace leader. However, for victims, accepting this transformation can be excruciatingly difficult. As LaCapra (2004) notes, the past, when mediated by trauma, does not remain in the past; it continually returns and haunts the present. Besides, the decision to relocate reflects the need to distance oneself from reminders of the traumatic event, a common coping mechanism. Relocating can act as an escape from the scene of violence, providing a semblance of control over one's life and a way to start anew (Bracken, Giller & Summerfield, 1995). Hence, in interfaith discourse, it is imperative to recognise and address the enduring nature of trauma. Efforts should focus on dialogues and shared rituals and provide spaces for individual and

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[82] Interviewee PENT14NG (4/11/2020)

communal healing. As LaCapra (2004) further noted, healing from trauma is crucial for genuine reconciliation.

6.4.3 Revenge as a Form of Propitiation and Defence
There are also respondents whose memories of their victimhood make them want to perpetrate further violence as a form of atonement or in defence of their personal or group interests. Unlike those who feel powerless in the wake of their grief, the victims who react with a sense of vengeance often manifest it in violent altruistic behaviours. Notably, they consider revenge as an expression of a religious act and devotion to the sacred. Bishop Oyedepo's remark that 'it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that troubles the church' is indicative here. However, beyond the harsh rhetoric, others also welcome the sense of self-sacrifice inherent in their revenge measures.

Imam Ashafa argued that the National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations of Nigeria he led was set up to primarily 'protect the sacred places of worship.'[83] However, this organisation became one of the deadliest and most violent groups across Kaduna and nearby states in the 1980s and early 1990s. According to the respondent, 'As the then national secretary of the organisation, I drive the life bits of thousands of youths across the Muslim community. We were always prepared to defend the course of our faith and protect our sacred space even at the cost of our own lives.'[84] Pastor James, who led the Christian version of the opposing group that aims to 'decapitate the Muslim community,' spoke about his frontline role in the violent conflicts in Kaduna.

> Even after we started working together [with Imam Ashafa] and talking to people about the need for change, deep inside me, I have not been able to let go of the pain fully. I have an unhealed memory within me. Then, I was always looking for a good opportunity to take him down. You know, I lost an arm in one of the crises. So, I still nurse the range and the pain of my incapacitation. I saw myself then as using this remaining hand in

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[83] Interview with Imam Ashafa (30/10/2019)
[84] Interview with Imam Ashafa (30/10/2019)

activities geared towards revenge and the defence of the church, even if it is the case that I will die in the process.[85]

In his book *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation,* Scott Appleby observes that ethnoreligious nationalism and fundamentalism are among the conditions where religious actors justify violence as a sacred duty or privilege (Appleby, 2003). He argued that humans are often oriented towards a horizon beyond history, and self-sacrifice is one important pattern of behaviour called forth by this claim (Appleby, 2003). Appleby used the term militancy to describe what he considers to be the willingness and sometimes the eagerness to make even the ultimate sacrifice in defence of the service of a noble cause perceived to be transcendent, sacred, and beyond space and time. Again, the author argues that people who turn their grief into activism and revenge, especially in a religious context, tend to experience authentic, deep dynamism, power, wonder, and awe (Appleby, 2003). Moreover, the notion of revenge as a way of defending the church also illustrates the dual role trauma plays in motivating both destructive and protective actions. Janoff-Bulman characterised this behaviour in *Shattered Assumptions* (2010). According to the author, traumatic events can shatter fundamental assumptions about the world as safe and meaningful, leading victims to pursue aggressive actions in a bid to regain control or defensive ones to safeguard what they still hold dear.

6.4.4 Numbness to Experience of Violence

Moreover, there are also some respondents whose memories of the violent conflict make them somewhat numb to the idea of experiencing violence. One respondent in the UK suggests that, to the extent that he had no choice but to live with these violent conflicts and witness them daily, it has now made him numb to any issue of violence and see them as usual.

> Even though I am a Christian and a pastor, I can hardly be scared because of my background and these experiences. For instance, if I hear gunshots outside, I will go out and ask where the gunshot is coming from. This is clearly dangerous, but that is what those years of living with the crisis can also do. I come from a background where we witnessed this violence on a daily basis. I have seen my entire village burn down, including my house, my father's house, my books, and my bachelor's and master's degree

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[85] Interview with Pastor James (1/11/2019). The insertion is from the researcher.

theses and certificates; everything was in ashes, and we had to hide in the bush to see the place being destroyed by fire. You must stay there to save your life. So, having seen all that, you know, it becomes part of you—what else could anyone do to me again? [86]

This deep resilience expressed almost a numbness to danger—can be explained and contextualised using trauma theory. As Herman (2015) posits that trauma is an experience that overwhelms the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning. Overwhelming the system of care often leads to the breakdown of one's worldview. In this account, the experience of trauma is so intense that it appears to have become a part of the respondent's worldview. The memories of witnessing his village and home being destroyed are not just an account of physical loss but also signify a profound loss of his sense of safety, achievements, identity and belonging. Their response to contemporary dangers, such as gunshots, is informed by a perceived culmination of their traumatic experiences.

'What else could anyone do to me again?' as the respondent asked rhetorically is a question that reflects a perspective that is also consistent with trauma theory. Van Der Kolk (2003) notes that trauma, especially when experienced repetitively over an extended period, can fundamentally alter the way an individual perceives the world, their place in it, and their responses to perceived threats. Repeated exposure to trauma can also lead to a 'burstiness' in response patterns—extreme reactions or, in contrast, extreme resilience or numbness, as seen in this respondent's case. It is also important to note that the respondents' positionality as a religious leader provides an interesting backdrop to their experiences. Faith traditions, including Christianity, offer narratives of suffering, redemption, and divine providence. Theological interpretations can serve as a means to make sense of, or sometimes even justify intense suffering. Cone (2004) explores the concept of God's presence amidst suffering in his work on black theology and the black church, suggesting that a shared experience of suffering can lead to a more profound understanding of God's purpose.

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[86] Interviewee PENT5UK (01/07/2019)

Indeed, in nearly all these cases, respondents suggest that they find comfort in the support their religious community provides and the teachings of their faiths. When pressed on how he copes with the knowledge of these experiences and how they are currently affecting his life, one Christian respondent in the UK says, 'The Christian theology of forgiveness helps you to heal so you can continue to love and to live.'[87] But for those in the UK, their mainly ethnic and religious community provides yet another form of comfort and support, which goes to the heart of how they balance their socio-cultural needs as migrants living as minorities in the UK. These migrants see themselves as foreign, poor, and marginalised people facing varying degrees of challenges related to immigration status, financial constraints, and cultural shocks (Burgess, 2011; Adedibu, 2015). As African migrants living in the UK are striving to negotiate their ascriptive and circumstantial identities as Africans to integrate into the culture of their host nation (Ejorh, 2012), the memories of their past experiences can be even more significant. Many of them, whose home communities have been ravaged and members displaced, have admitted that they have not travelled back to their home country for reasons that there is no home to travel to. Some admit that they miss home and often feel nostalgic about how things used to be before the violent conflicts. Despite the difficult, unhealed memories of past experiences, they also admit that their faith community provides more than a mere spiritual community and covering; it also provides them with a sanctuary and a form of home away from home. One Christian respondent in the UK says she 'feels safe and secure among the Christian community.' As Babatunde Adedibu argues, part of the mission agenda of African congregations in Britain is to be a migrant sanctuary meeting the emotional, cultural, and religious needs of African groups (Adedibu, 2015). In the coming chapters, I will go deeper into the specifics of how and what roles faith communities in the UK play in supporting the healing of memories of violent conflicts.

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[87] Interviewee PENT7UK (10/10/2018)

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings and analysis of the data collected from the fieldwork. It examined how the memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria influence the perceptions of identity, trust, and cooperation among these groups and their members in the UK, using a mix of dialogical approach, trauma, and social identity theories as the analytical lens for understanding. The chapter addresses the dynamics of interfaith dialogue in relation to the second research objective. The main findings are as follows:

The unhealed memories of violent conflicts in Nigeria significantly shape the experiences and interactions of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK. These memories impact their perception and engagement in interfaith dialogue by reinforcing historical grievances and mistrust. This heightened sense of mistrust often translates to a cautious and sometimes reluctance to engage in interfaith dialogue. Additionally, these unhealed memories contribute to a fragmented identity, where the trauma of past conflicts continues to influence present behaviours and attitudes.

The persistence of these memories in the UK context highlights the profound impact of unresolved trauma and identity issues on interfaith dialogue. It underscores the need to address these historical wounds to foster more effective and meaningful interfaith dialogue among migrants, thereby promoting better understanding and cooperation within the diaspora communities.

In the next chapter, I will examine how this current study helps address these gaps using the dialogical model for healing and reconciliation. The dialogical model is particularly appropriate for this study as it addresses the unique complexities of identity, migration, and historical conflict that characterise the Nigerian migrant community. By facilitating a space for dialogue, the model helps participants navigate their identities and share their narratives, which is essential for fostering mutual understanding and reconciliation.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Healing and Reconciliation
7.1 Introduction
This chapter explores the potential for healing and reconciliation among Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria and the UK through the dialogical approach. By examining detailed case studies of dialogue sessions, we illustrate how these theories are implemented in practice, highlighting their role in either facilitating or hindering effective interfaith communication.

In the context of interfaith dialogue among these communities, the study reveals two significant challenges: the persistence of conflicting narratives and the lingering impact of unhealed memories from violent conflicts in their home countries. While some community members exhibit a willingness to engage in interfaith dialogue, this engagement is often complicated by the unresolved trauma from past conflicts. This chapter employs a dialogical model focused on healing and reconciliation, specifically tailored to address the unique experiences and perspectives of the respondents. This model aims to navigate the complexities of interfaith interactions and provide pathways for overcoming the barriers posed by historical grievances. By addressing the main research question and the third research objective, the chapter demonstrates how the dialogical approach can foster healing and reconciliation among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in their home country and within the Nigerian diaspora in the UK.

Research has shown that dialogical processes can effectively reduce intergroup tensions by promoting recognition and respect for different identities (Admirand, 2016; Keaten & Soukup, 2009; Sari & Rejekiningsih, 2020). In the context of this study, employing the dialogical approach allows for a direct engagement with the lived experiences of conflict among Nigerian migrants, making it possible to achieve deeper emotional and psychological healing. This model draws from the lived experiences of the migrant groups affected by conflicts and other exemplary practices from across the global context, including the South African Truth and Reconciliation

process. This comparative analysis aims not only to highlight the universal applicability of the dialogical model but also to tailor its components—confession, forgiveness, and restoration—to the unique diasporic experiences of Nigerian communities in the UK.

The chapter underscores the profoundly personal nature of healing, a process of recovering from trauma that involves emotional, mental, and sometimes physical restoration (Lambourne & Niyonzima, 2016). Lambourne's work highlights the importance of therapeutic practices, resilience building, and support systems in recovery. Staub et al. (2005) argue that in post-conflict settings, emotional and mental recovery should be sequenced with reconciliation interventions. Staub et al. (2005) define reconciliation as the restoration of fractured relationships or communities. Reconciliation processes are complex and multifaceted, often involving truth-telling, justice, collective memory work, acknowledgement of past harms, and active efforts towards empathy and understanding. This is particularly significant in post-conflict settings where societies strive to address the legacies of violence and injustices (Staub et al., 2005). This dialogical model of healing and reconciliation is not a theoretical construct but a practical tool that depends on three main concepts: confession, forgiveness, and restoration. It is not a product of abstract thinking, but a grounded strategy informed by the specific challenges these communities face and successful precedents in global contexts such as Australia and South Africa. This model is not just a theoretical concept but a concrete pathway towards peace and coexistence. It interweaves respondents' narratives with examples of effective reconciliation efforts elsewhere, providing a clear roadmap for its implementation in post-conflict settings.

The chapter then explored the three core components of the model—confession, forgiveness, and restoration—each examined through both theoretical perspectives and empirical examples. Comparative insights from global contexts, such as South Africa and Rwanda, are integrated to highlight the model's adaptability and effectiveness. Subsequent sections address the practical implementation of the model, emphasising cultural and contextual sensitivity. The chapter

concludes by discussing the challenges and limitations of the dialogical approach, underscoring the complexities of interfaith dialogue and reconciliation in the face of historical grievances and political dynamics.

7.2 Rationale for the Dialogical Model
The dialogical model is uniquely suited to this study because it emphasises the transformative power of dialogue, which aligns with the challenges faced by Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrant communities in the UK. Unlike other models that might prioritise structured outcomes or rigid methodologies, this dialogical approach fosters an open, empathetic communication environment crucial for addressing deep-seated historical conflicts and cultural differences. Its rationale is to address the evident conflict between narrative accounts of interfaith dialogue and the lingering, unhealed memories of violent conflicts in their home countries. This model is particularly impactful from a faith perspective as it is based on the dictates of the faith that both the Christian and Muslim groups can relate to, including specific needs for healing and reconciliation.

Including examples from other communities demonstrates its efficacy and adaptability, providing a compelling argument for applying the finding among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. By drawing directly from the accounts of Nigerian Christians and Muslims affected by violence, this model roots its theoretical framework in the natural, tangible needs of these communities. The respondents' aspiration for peace and reconciliation highlights not just a desire to overcome past traumas but also to establish a foundation for an enduring interfaith dialogue community in their new context. The dialogical model is a sequential, three-part process designed to facilitate healing and reconciliation. This sequential, three-part process includes the three component concepts of confession, forgiveness, and restoration, addressing specific challenges faced by Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK.

Confession, in this sense, not only provides a platform for truth-telling but also lays the foundation for healing. It represents an essential call for a safe environment where all parties can share their stories, which is a crucial first step. I will elaborate on the importance of confession by providing a detailed analysis of how truth-telling sessions can be structured in the diaspora, considering the unique social dynamics of Nigerian communities in the UK. Drawing comparative insights from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) will illustrate the importance of this concept in transforming and healing conflicted situations. This approach can significantly impact Nigerian migrants by allowing them to voice their experiences and begin the healing process.

The effects of this are similar to forgiveness, which emerges both as a natural progression from the act of confession and the bridging of conflicted divides among conflicting communities. The discussion on forgiveness includes specific strategies to facilitate this process among migrants, informed by insights from academic theorists and empirical data from the fieldwork. I will discuss forgiveness's psychological and communal benefits, drawing examples from post-conflict reconciliation initiatives like the TRC. Though the TRC has been criticised for not sufficiently addressing the impact of apartheid policies on victims with high psychological distress, its emphasis is on creating mechanisms for forgiveness that are sensitive to the cultural and religious nuances and resonate with the needs expressed by the Nigerian respondents in this study. This process can help victims of these interreligious conflicts to rebuild trust and relationships within their communities.

Restoration, seen as rebuilding community ties, focuses on the tangible aspects of reconciling divided communities. This involves not only the rehabilitation of individual relationships but also the reconstruction of communal bonds severed by violent conflicts. I will discuss practical steps for reintegrating individuals into their communities, focusing on dignity, justice, and mutual respect. Drawing from existing examples within Nigeria, including the Garden of

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Forgiveness in Jos, will illustrate a roadmap for creating spaces and opportunities for reconciliation. It is also crucial for Nigerian migrant community in the UK as it supports rebuilding their community in a new environment, ensuring that cultural and religious ties remain strong despite past conflicts.

7.3 Strength and Comparative Advantage
The dialogical model offers several critical advantages over traditional interfaith dialogue and healing models, especially within complex socio-political contexts like those experienced by Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities. Unlike other models, such as the conflict resolution model, which focuses primarily on negotiating specific outcomes, the dialogical approach emphasises understanding and reconciliation. This approach facilitates a more nuanced exploration of interpersonal and intergroup dynamics critical in interfaith contexts. It provides a platform for individuals to express and address their traumas and grievances in a supportive setting.

A significant strength of the dialogical model is its integrated approach to addressing conflictual situations. Unlike conventional models that mainly focus on dialogue or therapeutic processes, this model incorporates confession, forgiveness, and restoration into a cohesive framework. This integration ensures that the process includes tangible steps towards reconciliation and community rebuilding. Such an approach is particularly beneficial in settings with deep historical conflicts, where dialogue alone might be insufficient.

Another advantage of the dialogical model is its cultural and contextual sensitivity. Specifically designed with a deep understanding of the experiences, culture, and religious dynamics of Nigerian migrant communities, this model adapts more effectively to their needs and expectations than more generic models. The model enhances its acceptance and effectiveness within these communities by respecting and incorporating local traditions and practices.

Moreover, the dialogical model's empirical foundation, enriched with direct accounts and experiences of those affected by violence and conflict, sets it apart from theoretical models

developed in academic settings without adequate community input. By reflecting the real, articulated needs of Nigerian Christians and Muslims, the model ensures that its strategies are not only relevant and practical but also directly responsive to the issues these communities face.

The model's adaptability to the diaspora and home country context is crucial. Unique among many dialogue and healing models, the dialogical model adeptly adjusts to both diaspora contexts in the UK and local contexts in Nigeria. This dual adaptability allows for consistent application and support for individuals and communities irrespective of geographical location. It also ensures that the model maintains its efficacy across borders, supporting a transnational network of Nigerian Christians and Muslims seeking reconciliation and peace. This adaptability underscores the model's comprehensive approach to fostering lasting interfaith dialogue and healing across varied environments.

7.4 Scholarly Insights

The effectiveness of this model in addressing the complex dynamics of interfaith dialogue, healing, and reconciliation is further supported by the work of some established academic scholars. These studies enhance the model's theoretical foundations and provide a solid framework for its practical application in the context of Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria and the UK diaspora. This is particularly important in understanding key concepts such as healing, forgiveness, and restoration.

First, as Ricoeur (1992) argues, narratives are crucial in shaping identities and experiences within communities and contribute to fostering understanding and reinterpreting each other's stories, thereby fostering empathy, and reducing prejudice. The dialogical model aligns well with Ricoeur's observation, particularly as it promotes the sharing and recognition of diverse narratives. This structured dialogue can effectively bridge the gaps between Nigerian Christians and Muslims, fostering a more profound comprehension and promoting healing. This notion of healing brings me to the second area of engagement – forgiveness and reconciliation, advanced in Desmond Tutu's *No Future without Forgiveness* (Tutu, 2000). Tutu's work on forgiveness

within the framework of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provides invaluable insights into the transformative power of forgiveness in post-conflict settings. He argues that true reconciliation is predicated on the heartfelt forgiveness of those involved, suggesting that forgiveness is a crucial step towards healing and societal restoration. This resonates with the dialogical model, which focuses on forgiveness not only as an enhancement of the dialogic process but also as a powerful catalyst encouraging participants to move beyond past grievances towards mutual understanding and reconciliation.

The third area of engagement is restoration and community rebuilding, as renowned by John Lederach's work in peace studies. In *Little Book on Conflict Transformation,* Lederach (2003) emphasises the importance of restoration and sustainable peace through community-building practices. For Lederach, conflict resolution should transcend immediate solutions and foster long-term relationships and structures that support peace. Engaging Lederach's emphasis on structural restoration enriches this model's approach, extending beyond mere dialogue and forgiveness. It includes actionable measures to reestablish trust and cooperation between Nigerian Christians and Muslims in the diaspora. Engaging with these scholarly perspectives enriches the theoretical and practical applications of the dialogical model. It makes it more robust and responsive to the needs of the communities it aims to serve.

7.5 The Dialogical Model of Healing and Reconciliation
The dialogical model, extensively explored in contemporary academic literature, emphasises the multiplicity of voices and the dynamic interplay of speaking and listening as foundational to understanding and learning. This model is rooted in the belief that dialogue is not merely an exchange of ideas but a transformative process that fosters more profound understanding and mutual respect among participants. It promotes an interactive learning environment where each voice is valued, and every participant is both a speaker and a listener, facilitating a co-construction of knowledge. The dialogical approach is particularly effective in educational settings and conflict resolution, where understanding diverse perspectives and collaborative

problem-solving are crucial. This model highlights the importance of context and the relational nature of dialogue, acknowledging that meanings are constructed socially and are subject to change through interaction.

Central to this model is the notion that dialogue is not merely an exchange of ideas but a process that facilitates more profound understanding and mutual respect among participants. It becomes particularly potent when individuals engage in confession—openly acknowledging their misdeeds or misunderstandings—which sets the stage for forgiveness and subsequent restoration of relationships. This model fosters an interactive environment where each voice is not only heard but also valued, allowing participants to construct knowledge and resolve conflicts collaboratively. By recognising the dynamic and contextual nature of dialogue, the dialogical model illustrates how meanings are socially constructed and continuously reshaped through interactive processes, thereby promoting a more integrated approach to learning and reconciliation.

It is beneficial to consider comparative analyses from other global contexts to further enrich our understanding of the dialogical model's effectiveness in healing and reconciliation. For instance, the Rwandan approach to reconciliation post-genocide, which involved community-based Gacaca courts, offers a poignant example of how confession and forgiveness can be structured to rebuild national unity (King, 2011). Similarly, the reconciliation efforts in Northern Ireland, as exemplified by the Good Friday Agreement, underscore the indispensable role of political commitment and international support in maintaining peace within deeply divided societies. As documented by Darby and Mac Ginty (2020), the success of the Good Friday Agreement was largely contingent upon sustained political will and robust backing from international actors, which facilitated dialogue, compromise, and the establishment of lasting institutions (Darby & Mac Ginty, 2020). These examples not only provide additional insights into the complexities of reconciliation but also allow us to draw valuable lessons on the successes and pitfalls of different

approaches. By examining these varied contexts, we can better adapt and refine the dialogical model to suit the unique challenges faced by Nigerian communities.

Drawing on international examples and understanding the critical importance of varying reconciliation methods, we focus on examining the first component of the dialogical model—confession. The narratives from respondents in Nigeria and the UK underscore a profound need among victims and survivors to voice their experiences fully and authentically. Just as the Rwandan Gacaca courts and the processes under the Good Friday Agreement provided platforms for truth-telling and acknowledgement, so too must any approach adopted in Nigeria ensure that the voices of those affected by conflict are brought to the forefront. This segment will explore how creating a secure environment conducive to open dialogue is indispensable for the confession process, laying the groundwork for meaningful healing and reconciliation.

For Nigerian migrants in the UK, many of whom carry unhealed memories of violent conflicts from their home country, the impact of the dialogical model is particularly significant. The migration experience often exacerbates feelings of isolation and dislocation, making the need for communal healing even more pressing. By implementing a dialogical model that prioritises confession and open dialogue within migrant communities, we can facilitate a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. This approach not only aids in processing and healing traumatic memories but also helps bridge cultural and religious divides that might persist within the diaspora. Providing Nigerian migrants with a platform to share their stories and listen to others can replicate the positive outcomes seen in Rwanda and Northern Ireland, promoting reconciliation, and fostering a more cohesive community in their new environment.

7.5.2.1 The Garden of Forgiveness in Jos
Over the years, Kaduna and Jos have emerged as the epicentre of Christian-Muslim conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in the post-2001 war in which more than 3,000 residents were killed. While the Human Rights Watch report exposed the alarming level of atrocities, describing it as a conflict

that has spiralled out of control, the scale of which cannot be ignored' (Human Rights Watch, 2002:2).

In February 2019, Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa led a peace and forgiveness campaign with the support of Simon Lalong, the Governor of Plateau State, that led to the establishment of a Garden of Forgiveness in Jos, the capital of Plateau State (see Figure 4). This garden symbolises a significant practical step towards communal healing in the state. The state meant the garden to symbolise and provide a safe space for reconciliation and peacebuilding exercises, and in so doing, situates it at the intersection of two warring communities in Jos. This location serves a practical purpose and symbolises the bridging of divides and the potential for coexistence and mutual understanding. Governor Lalong used the event of the inauguration of the garden to apologise to residents of the state for past violence, offering a profound public acknowledgement of communal grief and a commitment to reconciliation. During his speech, the governor stated, 'I stand on behalf of the good people of Plateau to ask for forgiveness from all the children who have lost their parents because of our intolerance of each other' (Anyanwu, 2020). Public forgiveness is critical in modelling the forgiveness process, acknowledging past wrongs, and setting a tone for the community's journey towards healing the past.

The empirical data from interviews underscore the importance of such symbolic acts in the healing process. Respondents highlighted how faith and the desire for communal peace drive their acceptance of such gestures. For instance, one respondent, a Muslim cleric in Nigeria, reflected on the impact of the garden, noting, 'When you forgive, it is first for yourself and your own healing because you can then move on. The fact that it sometimes helps the perpetrators also to heal is an added advantage.'[88] His insight reveals the multiple natures and benefits of forgiveness, which benefit both the forgiver and the forgiven and potentially lead to broader communal healing.

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[88] Interviewee MUS2NG (10/10/2019)

Moreover, the Garden of Forgiveness serves as a continual reminder and a physical space for individuals and groups to engage in the active reconciliation process. Governor Lalong's declaration of February 7th (the day of the inauguration of the garden) as a day of forgiveness further institutionalises this commitment, allowing the community to engage annually in reflection and reconciliation efforts. This detailed engagement with the empirical data from interviews provides a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of forgiving others and yourself in a conflicted situation. The Garden of Forgiveness in Jos exemplifies how physical spaces dedicated to reconciliation can facilitate healing processes, supported by leadership's commitment to acknowledging past wrongs and fostering an environment conducive to healing.

Figure 4 Entrance to the Forgiveness Garden in Jos (credit, Becky Pam of RealityInfo/BecksBlog)

7.5.1 Confession

In my analysis, the narratives revealed that many conflict victims desire healing and reconciliation. However, they also believe that the complete narratives of their experiences of violent atrocities have remained untold. It is essential to bridge this gap and create a secure environment where all parties, including victims and perpetrators, can openly share their stories. Such environments foster healing by enabling individuals to express their grievances and experiences while ensuring they are genuinely heard.

One Muslim respondent in the UK expressed the need for an open dialogue: 'We as a country need to encourage all involved to express their long-suppressed feelings, admit their faults, and, where necessary, accept and take responsibility for their actions.'[89] This approach aids individuals who have suffered immensely, providing them with a platform to discuss their experiences and to feel acknowledged by their listeners. Unfortunately, a recurring issue is the perceived indifference of leadership, which often undermines the motivation to engage in such discussions. Imam Ashafa from the IMC noted that 'for people to talk about their pain and know that they are been heard, listened to, and believed, that is profound for healing. A large part of what we do here at the IMC is to listen. Moreover, many people's stories are memories that continue to hunt or hurt them. If not managed properly, the result is what you see on the street – more bloodshed. These are activities of very broken people.[90]

The significance of confession and being heard can be paralleled with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). One significant example is the experience of Reverend Fr. Lapsley, a prominent social activist who suffered an amputation of both his hands and the loss of sight in his left eye from a letter bomb from emissaries of the apartheid system. During the TRC, Reverend Fr. Lapsley testified in an open court, highlighting the cathartic effect of sharing his pain in a formal and acknowledged setting. He noted, 'to be heard by the legitimate representative of our democratic state. That was the extra difference from all the other times I told my story. It was not a perfect state, but a morally legitimate state that said to me, 'It happened to you, and it was wrong,' and that played a significant part in my journey of healing.'[91]

It is important to understand how the dialogical model's components—confession, forgiveness, and restoration—are not isolated actions but interconnected processes that feed into one another to foster healing. Each component plays a crucial role in mending the fabric of communal

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[89] Interviewee NAS6UK (04/09/2019)
[90] Interview with Imam Ashafa (31/10/2019)
[91] Excerpts from Reverend Fr. Lapsley interview at Pepperdine University (21/3/2013)

relationships and building sustainable peace. By examining these components in succession, we can see how they collectively contribute to the overarching goal of reconciliation.

 As evidenced by interviews with the leaders of the migrant faith groups in the UK, the practice of confession significantly influences the dynamics of interfaith healing. They mention the challenges and opportunities of dealing with people from other faiths, highlighting the need for open communication for healing. As one Christian leader mentioned, 'speaking to therapists and finding the right platform to talk to people is part of healing.'[92] Another Muslim leader emphasised, 'Confession allows individuals to unburden themselves, which is crucial for personal recovery and for fostering understanding across different faiths.'[93] These approaches not only facilitate personal recovery but also enhance the ability to engage positively with individuals of different faiths. A Nigerian Christian migrant leader further shared, 'Our community-led reconciliation initiatives often start with sharing personal stories of struggle and forgiveness, which helps bridge the gaps between us.'[94] This is similar to the perspective shared by the Muslim leader, 'Inclusive dialogue has allowed us to address deep-seated divisions and build a stronger, more cohesive community.'[95] Turning from theory to practice, we see the dialogical model's principles echoed in the lived experiences of Nigerian migrants, as illustrated by detailed accounts of their engagement in community-led reconciliation initiatives. These narratives reveal the profound impact of cultural and religious identities on the healing process and underscore the importance of inclusive dialogue in overcoming deep-seated divisions. One Christian migrant in the UK recounted, 'Participating in these initiatives has shown me the power of open communication in healing not just individuals but entire communities.'[96]

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[92] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[93] Interviewee NAS2UK (10/05/2019)
[94] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)
[95] Interviewee NAS2UK (10/05/2019)
[96] Interviewee PENT7UK 10/10/2018)

Studies show that there are two main purposes that the act of confession serves in the healing process: it is a step towards forgiveness from both a higher power and those wronged, and it initiates the process of self-forgiveness for perpetrators. Charles Hauss (2010), in his research on the role of confession in conflict resolution, argues that without confession and subsequent forgiveness, communities and individuals cannot achieve long-term peace and reconciliation. Hauss posits that confession allows individuals to confront and articulate their wrongdoings, which is a crucial step toward making amends and rebuilding trust (Hauss, 2010). Charles Taylor's work on the politics of recognition also argues that identity and self-worth are significantly shaped by the recognition or lack thereof from others. In the context of confession, when perpetrators acknowledge their wrongdoings, they not only seek forgiveness but also reclaim their moral identity, which can be transformative for both the individual and their community (Taylor, 2021). Also, in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu discusses the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, highlighting the therapeutic power of confession for both victims and perpetrators. Tutu notes that by confessing their atrocities, perpetrators can begin the process of self-forgiveness, which is essential for psychological healing and social integration (Tutu, 2000). These dual functions of confession facilitate a comprehensive approach to addressing guilt and fostering both personal and communal healing.

In both Christianity and Islam, confession or its theological equivalents play a critical role in maintaining a healthy relationship with the divine and also in the spiritual healing and restoration of believers. In Christianity, particularly within the Roman Catholic tradition, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not just about seeking divine forgiveness but also about reconciling with oneself, aligning with one's inherent virtuous nature. Similarly, in Islam, *Tawbah* (repentance) allows individuals to unburden their souls and return to their innate state of purity. In both contexts, confession acts as a foundational step in the journey towards reconciliation and peace.

It enables individuals to confront and forgive themselves for their past actions, facilitating a path to inner peace and societal healing.

7.5.2 Forgiveness

Forgiveness is often conceived as a passive virtue but actively serves as a bridge in mending disaffected relationships and healing societal divisions. Enright et al. (1991) highlight this proactive nature of forgiveness, framing it as a transformative journey rather than a mere emotional concession. This transformation occurs when an aggrieved party chooses to let go of resentment despite profound and undeserved suffering and instead relinquishes their right to seek revenge (Tutu, 2000). It is also an act of redemption. Within Christian doctrine, for example, divine forgiveness is seen as essential for human redemption, a process described as reciprocal: forgiving others as a prerequisite for receiving forgiveness (Matthew 6:14). This principle is fundamental to the Christian ethos of love, hope, and reconciliation, which, as Wright (2010) argues, anchors the doctrine in everyday Christian life. The act of forgiving can also significantly reduce feelings of anger, depression, and stress while enhancing hope and self-esteem (Worthington, 2013). This perspective also aligns well with beliefs within Islamic theology. For example, the Qur'an depicts Allah as 'Al-Ghafur' (the Most Forgiving) and 'Ar-Rahim' (the Most Merciful), linking the forgiveness concept as a means to attain redemption of the soul (Quran 24:22; 3:133-134). The Quran advocates forgiveness as a means to attain redemption: 'Let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you?' (Quran 24:22).

This ethos is reflected in the personal testimonies of study participants, where one respondent not only shared their experiences but also expressed faith, significantly influencing their capacity to forgive, allowing them to cope with past injuries and move forward. As one Christian respondent notes during the interview, 'the Christian theology of forgiveness helps her to 'cope and heal so you can continue to love and live the life'[97] underscoring the profound impact of

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[97] Interviewee PENT7UK (10/10/2018)

forgiveness on personal well-being and interpersonal relationships. Other empirical data from the interviews reveal a deep-seated connection between forgiveness and societal healing. Participants express a range of emotions and psychological states that highlight the complexity of the forgiveness process. For instance, another respondent captures a dual benefit of forgiveness—facilitating personal liberation from past trauma while potentially aiding in the healing of the transgressor, 'When you forgive, it is first for yourself and your own healing because you can then move on. The fact that it sometimes helps the perpetrators also to heal is an added advantage.'[98]

During the interviews in Nigeria and the UK, respondents acknowledged the role faith plays in their ability to forgive; 'the Christian theology of forgiveness' helps her to 'cope and heal, so you can continue to love and live the life.'[99] While some refer to the biblical injunction to live in peace with all people, others refer to the scriptures in Hebrews 12 14-5 as the verse that helped to heal properly:

> Exercise foresight and be on the watch to look after one another. See that no root of resentment (rancour, bitterness, or hatred) shoots forth and causes trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it.

> If I were to go this new way, the first thing for me would be to forgive and reconcile myself and the situation. Now, I see the Muslims as friends; I see them the same way Jesus Christ will look at them. Jesus will love them because he loves everyone. Even if we disagree on our theological issues or our practices, the fundamental commandment that Jesus gave was vital. First, 'love the Lord your God with all your strength and heart, and your neighbour as yourself.' 'Do unto others as you will have them do unto you.' So, with this in mind, I had a turning point. Now, I love Muslims with passion and with the love of Christ. Even if I do not know what they are doing, I still feel it is obligatory for me to love the Muslims.[100]

Imam Ashafa also echoed a similar view. According to him,

> The teachings of his Imam on 'turning your enemies into your friends' helped liberate me from the hate and resentment that I harboured for the Christians. Mohammed forgave the wrongs of his enemies. He conquered Mecca not by the sword but by his magnanimity

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[98] Interview with Pastor James (1/11/2019)

[99] Interviewee PENT7UK (10/10/2018)

[100] Interview with Pastor James (1/11/2019)

and compassion. So, to be a true Muslim, you must embrace the culture of forgiveness. The fact that it sometimes helps the perpetrators heal is an added advantage.[101]

It is evident, therefore, that when people live by their religious values, be they Christian or Muslim, they encounter the crucial aspect of forgiveness. However, individuals often struggle to uphold this value in practice, mainly due to the essential question of whether forgiveness requires the relinquishment of emotional engagement on the victim's part (see Hauss, 2010; North, 1987). Joanna North addresses this point in her *Wrongdoing and Forgiveness*. According to the author, 'if we are to forgive, our resentment must be overcome not by denying ourselves the right to that resentment, but by endeavouring to view the wrongdoers with compassion, benevolence, and love while recognising that he has wilfully abandoned his right to them' (North, 1987:50). Besides, forgiveness is not just a doctrinal command but a universally recognised pathway to healing and reconciliation. In *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*, philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2016) argues that when anger is allowed to fester, it can be toxic. Forgiveness, therefore, becomes an antidote, a way to acknowledge wrongdoing without letting it define the relationship between the wrongdoer and the wronged (Nussbaum, 2016). Modern psychology also defines forgiveness as a crucial factor in improving interpersonal relationships. Everett Worthington (2013), in *Five Steps to Forgiveness,* showed that forgiveness can lead to reduced anxiety, depression, and major psychiatric disorders, as well as releasing a heavy burden.

These insights demand a deeper exploration of forgiveness, not as a mere spiritual command but as a universal pathway to reconciliation and peace. The notion that forgiveness liberates the forgiver and, potentially, the forgiven highlights its role as an antidote to lingering resentment and a catalyst for social interactions. This understanding is critical in comprehending the complex interplay between individual healing and societal reconciliation, providing a more

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[101] Interview with Imam Ashafa (30/10/2019)

nuanced framework for the discussions in this chapter. One symbolic example of this functioning role of forgiveness in the Nigerian context is the Garden of Forgiveness in Jos, Nigeria.

7.5.2.2 Navigating the Complex Interplay of Confession, Forgiveness, and Healing

The interplay between confession, forgiveness, and healing represents a crucial axis in the dynamics of reconciliation, heavily influenced by diverse religious and cultural perspectives. This complexity is profoundly portrayed through the empirical data collected during the interviews, where respondents articulate ambivalent views about how these elements interact within their communities. On the one hand, respondents in Nigeria and the UK perceive confession as a precursor to forgiveness, a concept strongly supported by theological insights from both Christian and Islamic traditions. For instance, one respondent emphasised, 'Confession is vital as it initiates the healing process by acknowledging guilt, which then allows for genuine forgiveness to take place'[102] echoing the biblical and Quranic teachings that advocate for an open acknowledgement of one's misdeeds as a pathway to redemption (Tutu, 2000; Quran 24:22). Yet, on the other hand, the interviews also reveal a more complex reality where the act of forgiveness does not always follow confession. Respondents highlighted scenarios where forgiveness was granted without a formal confession, suggesting that forgiveness can also be an internal process aimed at personal liberation from bitterness and resentment. For example, a respondent reflected, 'Forgiveness for me was about letting go, not necessarily receiving an apology. It is freeing myself from the burden of anger.[103] Studies, such as Nussbaum (2016), further corroborate this, arguing that forgiveness is an antidote to sustained anger, capable of transforming personal and communal relationships.

This also affects restoration, which is this triad's third component. Some respondents feel that restoration is the most challenging. I will discuss this perspective in the next section. However, some respondents indicated that while forgiveness could be granted, the complete restoration of

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[102] Interviewee PENT7UK (10/10/2018)
[103] Interviewee PENT7UK (10/10/2018)

trust and previous relational dynamics might require a longer and more involved process involving continuous dialogue and mutual efforts toward understanding and empathy. As one interviewee put it, 'Restoration is a journey that requires more than just forgiveness; it involves rebuilding trust and often, redefining the terms of our relationship.'[104]

The point just made underscores the importance of the perpetrators in the forgiveness process. Empirical data from interviews provide profound insights into the emotional and psychological journeys of individuals striving to forgive in the absence of direct confession or acknowledgement from those who wronged them. One poignant example from the interviews highlights the challenge of forgiveness when the perpetrator remains unknown or unrepentant. As the respondent profoundly says, 'We do want to forgive, but we do not know whom to forgive,'[105] capturing a common issue in post-conflict scenarios where victims desire closure and healing through forgiveness but face obstacles due to the anonymity or absence of the perpetrators. The interviews reveal that forgiveness in such contexts often becomes a personal journey more than a relational reconciliation. Forgiving, then, becomes a process that serves primarily as a means for personal peace and healing rather than restoring a relationship with the offender.

7.5.3 Restoration
The third part of this dialogical model is restoration. Restoration is a complicated process that goes beyond the immediate relief efforts within the context of post-conflict reconciliation, targeting the long-term restoration of victims' dignity and reintegration into their home communities. This process requires mutual recognition, repentance, and a robust commitment to both justice and mercy, facilitating transformation not only of the individual but also of the relationships and structures within which they operate (Volf, 1996). Lederach and Hampson

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[104] Interview with Pastor James (01/11/2019)
[105] Interviewee MUS2NG (10/10/2019)

(1998) emphasise that true restoration involves rebuilding relationships and communities over time, and it requires sustained effort and resources.

The practical implications of restoration are broadly highlighted through direct experiences shared by individuals affected by conflict. One example involves a respondent who, despite residing in the UK for nearly 25 years, still feels the acute impact of his home community's destruction. He states, 'Now I am a pastor; I have lived in this country for nearly 25 years and have not gone home. This is now my home, not only because my home community was completely wiped out during the crisis and my family members were killed but also because of the memories of those experiences.'[106] He captures the profound and lasting impact of conflict on individual lives and further underscores the challenge of physical and psychological restoration. His comments highlight the need for a creative process that allows for the reconfiguration of relationships and the reintegration of individuals into communities from which they have been estranged, as discussed by Miroslav Volf in his work on *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996). Another respondent in the UK recounts a similar story, 'We hid in the bushes to see our houses being burned and people being killed. When you remember some of those things, it is difficult even to want to return to the village'.[107] This narrative underlines the importance of creating a process in which victims of violent conflict can narrate their experiences and, in doing so, validate their suffering while also reclaiming their dignity (see Couture, 2010). Such efforts contribute to the broader restorative justice paradigm, which emphasises healing over retribution and is essential for achieving lasting peace and reconciliation within post-conflict societies (Tutu, 2000).

Volf (1996) states that this restorative process often requires significant changes in both victims and their communities, leading to a creative process of reconfiguration of relationships and

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[106] Interviewee PENT5UK (01/07/2019)
[107] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

community integration. The practical aspect of this theoretical approach is echoed in the respondent's experience, as he discusses the difficulty of even wanting to return to his village. Moreover, restoring dignity and community integration is not a linear process but involves a dynamic interaction between the individual's needs and the community's capacity to reintegrate and accept them. As described by another respondent, 'Part of healing is to be able to confront those fears and one day be able to return to that community.'[108] He not only reflects the individual journey towards healing but also the communal responsibility in supporting this process.

 Similar examples can be drawn from other contexts, particularly in the role of storytelling and acknowledgement in the healing process, as highlighted by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. According to Tutu, the TRC highlights the therapeutic power of narrative in the restoration of dignity and community integration. He believes that the TRC served not just to recount events but to restore and affirm the dignity of many victims and initiate a healing process across the nation. Tutu famously noted, 'In telling our stories, we are healing ourselves and our country, and telling our story is, indeed, part of healing and restoration' (Tutu, 2000:55). One crucial factor in both the TRC and experiences of the respondents in this study is the role religion plays in helping the restoration process.

7.5.3.1 The Role of Religion in Restoration
 The respondents' experience indicates that religion and religious teachings play a crucial role in how various actors in conflict situations assess and deal with their need for restoration. Both Christianity and Islam offer frameworks that not only advocate for but also mandate acts of justice, mercy, and the restoration of community ties as essential elements in the healing process. For instance, in Christianity, the ministry of Jesus Christ is often viewed as a model for restoring the broken relationship between humans and the divine, which also extends to interpersonal relationships among Christians (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Some Christian respondents shared

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[108] Interviewee PENT5UK (01/07/2019)

experiences that underscore these theological values' role in navigating the complex journey of healing and forgiveness in conflict settings. Pastor Wuye, who lost one of his arms in one of these conflicts, admitted the difficulty of dealing with the pain of his amputation. However, he also noted, ' My faith was crucial in accepting what happened and working towards forgiveness. The teachings of Christ reminded me that reconciliation was not just a personal relief but a communal necessity.'[109] His comment highlights the dual importance of how religious beliefs can scaffold the emotional and psychological processes involved in restoration and the practical application of spiritual teachings in real-life conflict resolution. The faith basis of his comments not only fulfils his religious commitment to the divine but also serves as a vital basis for re-establishing peace and normalcy within communities torn apart by conflict.

 In Islam, the principle of *'Tawbah'* (repentance) involves a restorative dialogue between the believer, Allah, and the community. This dialogue aims to mend the rifts caused by injustice or sin and to restore a state of 'fitrah' or innate purity (Esposito, 2004). The practical application of this religious provision in a real-world scenario is further captured through the experiences shared by the respondents. For instance, one Muslim respondent from a conflict-affected region in Nigeria, who is currently leading a community of 'peace-based activism' reflects on this, arguing that the *Tawbah* has not just been about seeking personal forgiveness but about restoring the fabric of our community torn by years of mistrust and violence. This is why our community sessions often involve open discussions where members openly acknowledge past grievances and work towards mutual understanding and healing.'[110] Such teachings underscore that restoration is not merely metaphysical but includes tangible acts of justice and mercy as integral to healing processes (Volf, 1996). That restoration is not merely a return to a previous state but involves a significant transformation of relationships and societal structures.

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[109] Interview with Pastor James (1/11/2019)
[110] Interviewee MUS2NG (10/10/2019)

The practical application of these principles can be seen in the individual narratives of victims of the conflict. One respondent, reflecting on his experience, shared a compelling narrative: 'As a pastor, I have seen firsthand how embracing these teachings helps individuals confront their past and foster reconciliation within the community. It is about transforming pain into a narrative of healing and hope.'[111] They are underscoring the practical application of religious principles in facilitating the recovery of individuals and communities alike. These examples illustrate the dynamic role that religious beliefs play in the restoration process, offering a theoretical framework and practical guidance for individuals and communities striving to heal from the memories of conflicts and rebuild their lives.

A whole-community approach is needed to address two key issues to achieve restoration and reintegration into the community. The first is to address the Indigenous-Settler dichotomy that limits many Nigerian citizens, home and abroad, from fully participating in the cultural, political, and economic life in their communities. In some Nigerian communities, the distinction between 'indigene' and 'settler' transcends mere residency status, becoming a crucial marker of group identity that significantly influences social, economic, and political interactions. This dichotomy dictates who is considered a full member of the community, with implications for participation in cultural, political, and economic life. The labels of 'indigene' and 'settler' thus serve not only as descriptions but as potent tools for inclusion or exclusion. The indigenous-settler dichotomy also often exacerbates community tensions, leading to conflicts with devastating effects on social cohesion. For instance, disputes over land and political representation frequently arise from perceptions of entitlement or disenfranchisement based on these labels, undermining efforts towards community belonging and development.

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[111] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

This issue has a significant impact on Nigerian migrants in the UK. Migrants from Nigeria often carry these deeply ingrained societal divisions with them, which can affect their interactions within the diaspora and their integration into the broader UK society. The pre-existing tensions and perceptions of identity and belonging can hinder the formation of cohesive support networks among Nigerian migrants, impacting their ability to advocate for their rights and access essential services collectively. Furthermore, these divisions can exacerbate feelings of isolation and marginalisation, both within the Nigerian community in the UK and in their interactions with the broader population, complicating their overall integration and well-being.

Interviews with respondents in the UK reveal the profound effects of this dichotomy in everyday interactions and decision-making. One respondent, a long-term resident in a state where he is considered a 'settler', shared his experience: 'No matter how long you have lived here, as a settler, you are always on the periphery. It affects everything from your voting rights to job opportunities.' His experience captures the pervasive impact of this status on an individual's life, reflecting the deeply entrenched nature of these labels in some Nigerian communities. The ingrained nature of these distinctions challenges the effective implementation of what the Nigerian constitution accounts for as 'the federal character.'

> The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or any of its agencies (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

However, as described by another interviewee, 'Even though the federal character is supposed to make us one Nigeria, in reality, it feels like many Nigerians are divided along lines drawn by who is an indigene and who is a settler.'[112] The data do not provide evidence of how this dichotomy plays out among Nigerian UK diaspora communities. However, nearly all

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[112] Interviewee MUS2NG (10/10/2019)

respondents in the UK who referred to this issue also complained about how it affects citizenship rights, including those of their families and relatives at home.

The second issue concerns the rehabilitation of combatant youths. In addressing the aftermath of conflicts, significant attention must be given to the rehabilitation of young individuals who are often manipulated into perpetuating violence. If effectively reintegrated, these youths represent both a vulnerable group and a potential source of renewal for communities.

Empirical evidence from interviews highlights the challenges and successes of these rehabilitation efforts. One respondent, involved in youth rehabilitation programmes, shared, 'Many of these young people were coerced into conflict roles that they did not understand. Our goal is to help them see a life beyond the conflict, to educate them, and reintegrate them into society.'[113] This testimony underscores the need for comprehensive rehabilitation programmes that include educational and psychological support to restore these youths' roles as productive community members.

The rehabilitation process often involves community acceptance and support, which are critical for successful reintegration. This dual approach is essential because it addresses the needs of both the individuals and the community, ensuring that both parties are ready for the transition. Another interviewee in the UK noted, 'The community has to be ready to accept these youths back. We work on preparing both the individuals and the community, facilitating dialogues that address fears and prejudices on both sides.'[114] These initiatives highlight the importance of mutual readiness—preparing the youth for reintegration and the community for acceptance.

Reintegration efforts can also be impactful for the Nigerian migrants in the UK, who based on their memories of violent conflicts have been unable to resettle in their home country. The dialogical model can create a supportive environment that fosters healing and reconciliation by

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[113] Interviewee MUS4NG (13/10/2019)
[114] Interviewee PENT6UK (04/09/2019)

facilitating dialogues that address mutual fears and prejudices. These dialogues are crucial for rebuilding trust and understanding, which are often eroded by conflict. In the context of Nigerian migrants in the UK, such initiatives can help bridge the gap between Christian and Muslim communities, promoting social cohesion and reducing the likelihood of conflict in the diaspora. The insights from these interviews provide a tangible perspective on theoretical concepts, illustrating how rehabilitation involves not only detaching youths from conflict but also empowering them as agents of positive change within their communities. This approach can similarly empower Nigerian migrant groups in the UK, helping them to heal and reconcile by fostering a community-wide effort towards acceptance and support.

7.6 Challenges and Limitations

To effectively navigate the complex interplay of politics in Nigeria's healing and reconciliation processes, it is essential to understand the underlying political dynamics and their implications for the dialogical model. The presence or absence of political stability significantly impacts the healing and reconciliation processes. As Alesina and Perotti (1996) observe, stable political environments nurture effective reconciliation efforts, while instability disrupts and hampers these processes. Nigeria's political landscape is characterised by frequent changes, policy shifts, and unstable leadership, which pose a significant challenge to sustained healing initiatives. The historical manipulation of ethnic and religious diversity by political figures, as described by Falola and Heaton (2008), further fuels polarisation, making reconciliation efforts more arduous. Political elites often exploit ethnic and religious divisions for electoral gains, deepening societal rifts and complicating reconciliation. However, Nigeria's political system often appears closed, with elites monopolising power and marginalising opposition, thus impeding reconciliation efforts. This is further complicated by the widespread distrust in political institutions, as highlighted by the Human Rights Watch report on the 2001 Jos conflict, which further undermines reconciliation. Governmental inaction and negligence contribute to the escalation of violence, reflecting a broader issue of irresponsibility and disengagement from the people's

needs. This distrust is a significant barrier to effective reconciliation, as the government lacks the necessary legitimacy to lead these efforts.

 The dialogical model can also face considerable challenges due to the deep-seated societal and cultural barriers within Nigerian communities in Nigeria and the Nigerian migrant communities in the UK. The persistence of conflicting narratives and the enduring unhealed memories of violent conflicts significantly influence interfaith dialogue. Despite some willingness to engage in interfaith dialogue, the path to meaningful interaction is often fraught with complexities arising from these unhealed memories. These historical grievances and mistrust hinder the potential for genuine dialogue and cooperation. As Falola and Heaton (2008) note, manipulating ethnic and religious identities for political gains exacerbates polarisation and complicates reconciliation efforts. As highlighted by the Human Rights Watch report on the 2001 Jos conflict, the widespread distrust in political institutions illustrates the critical barriers to effective reconciliation posed by political instability and governmental irresponsibility.

 Moreover, implementing the dialogical model in Nigeria presents numerous practical challenges due to entrenched mistrust. For example, a 2012 peace talk in Kaduna aimed at fostering reconciliation between religious communities, though it recorded some success, also encountered setbacks due to deep-seated mistrust and the absence of key stakeholders in the negotiation process. This underscores the critical need for inclusivity and transparency in orchestrating such initiatives. While some successes of interfaith youth forums in Plateau State offered hope, these forums also highlighted the need for ongoing assessment and adaptation of the model to address specific local challenges. The practical steps for reintegration, focusing on dignity, justice, and mutual respect, are essential but difficult to achieve without continuous community engagement and support.

 Besides, the dialogical model's core components—confession, forgiveness, and restoration— are interdependent processes that collectively contribute to healing and reconciliation. However,

the complexity of these processes poses significant challenges. Confession requires a secure environment where all parties can share their stories, a challenging feat in deeply mistrustful communities. Forgiveness, although beneficial, is often difficult to achieve, especially when perpetrators remain unrepentant or unknown. Restoration involves not only the rehabilitation of individual relationships but also the reconstruction of communal bonds severed by violent conflicts. Besides, forgiveness can also be an internal process aimed at personal liberation from bitterness and resentment rather than necessarily receiving an apology. Restoration is considered the most challenging component, requiring sustained efforts and resources to rebuild trust and redefine community relational dynamics.

Therefore, while the dialogical model is adaptable to diaspora and home country contexts, its effectiveness hinges on cultural and contextual sensitivity. The model must be tailored to the specific experiences, cultures, and religious dynamics of Nigerian migrant communities. Generic models may fall short in addressing the unique challenges faced by these communities. Including local traditions and practices enhances the model's acceptance and effectiveness.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the multiple processes of healing and reconciliation among Nigerian communities, both domestically and within the UK diaspora, and highlights the dynamic interplay of individual and collective narratives in overcoming historical grievances and fostering inter-community dialogue. This journey towards reconciliation is not merely a path to be trodden but a complex interaction of memory, identity, and political dynamics that shapes the prospects for lasting peace.

In synthesising the insights garnered from both theoretical frameworks and empirical examples, it is evident that healing in post-conflict settings is an intricately layered process, influenced heavily by the ability of individuals and groups to engage in open and honest dialogue. The dialogical model introduced in this chapter offers a structured approach to unpacking and addressing the deep-seated traumas and conflicts that plague Nigerian communities. By focusing

on the three core elements of confession, forgiveness, and restoration, this model not only provides a sequence to the reconciliation process but also underscores the importance of each step in fostering comprehensive community healing.

The practical applications of this model, illustrated through the examples from other global contexts such as South Africa, demonstrate its potential effectiveness. However, the unique challenges faced by the Nigerian context—particularly the political exploitation of ethnic and religious identities—require a tailored approach that considers the local socio-political nuances. For successful implementation, reconciliation strategies must be not only adopted but also adapted to meet the specific needs and circumstances of Nigerian communities. Moreover, the role of political leadership and policies cannot be understated. As discussed, the effectiveness of reconciliation efforts is contingent upon the commitment and integrity of political leaders. Therefore, The Nigerian government must prioritise establishing a transparent, accountable, and inclusive political environment that supports reconciliation initiatives and addresses the root causes of conflicts. Only through such committed governance can the cycle of violence be broken and a new chapter of unity and peace be written.

Besides, given the emphasis on personal narratives and the healing of intergroup relations within the Nigerian migrant community, the dialogical model serves not merely as a methodological choice but as a necessary framework to achieve the more profound objectives of this study. It supports the goal of transforming interfaith relations from mere tolerance to active engagement in coexistence and mutual respect. Thus, while the path to reconciliation is fraught with challenges, the dialogical model presents a viable framework for navigating these complexities. It emphasises the critical need for a multifaceted approach incorporating truth-telling, justice, and collective memory work. By continuing to refine and adapt this model in response to evolving circumstances and leveraging both national and diasporic insights, Nigerian

communities can move closer to achieving the elusive goals of peace and reconciliation, ensuring that future generations inherit a legacy of unity rather than division.

CHAPTER EIGHT
Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has investigated the effects of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria on interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and the UK. It explored how the memories of these conflicts shape the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of these migrants towards each other and their participation in interfaith activities. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach using ethnography, interviews, and participant observation as data collection methods. The study focuses on two case studies of Nigerian-led Christian and Muslim groups in the UK: the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the Nasrul-lahi-li-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT).

The key research questions focus on how the memories of violent ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria affect interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christians and Muslims in their home country and the UK and how a dialogical model can facilitate healing and reconciliation among them. It identifies a gap in the literature on interfaith dialogue. For example, studies in this field tend to focus on procedural methods and theoretical frameworks while neglecting participants' individual experiences and narratives, especially those from conflict-affected countries. Central to the study is the proposition of a dialogical model, which is distinct in its emphasis on participants' individual experiences in interfaith dialogues. This model fosters healing and reconciliation as essential outcomes for dialogue processes.

The theoretical backbone of this analysis is supported by a mix of trauma theory and social identity theory integrated with a dialogical approach, thus offering a multidimensional perspective on the issue. Trauma theory has been applied to understand the profound psychological impact of violent ethnoreligious conflict on participants. It helped explore how these traumatic experiences shape their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards each other and provided insights into the coping mechanisms they use to deal with their traumatic memories.

This aligns with the work of Volkan (2014) on trauma and identity in large-group psychology. Similarly, the use of social identity theory, as posited by Tajfel and Turner (2004), helped analyse how these group identities are shaped and influenced by their religious affiliations and experiences of conflict. This theory helped the understanding of the social identities that affect their interfaith relationships, including levels of trust and cooperation with people of other faiths. Lastly, the dialogical approach, drawing on the principles outlined by scholars like Bakhtin (2010), was used as a practical framework for improving experiences for the affected parties and their interfaith dialogue with people of other faiths. The dialogical approach emphasises the importance of listening, empathy, respect, and mutual understanding in promoting interfaith harmony and peace. The approach also emphasised addressing differences and acknowledging emotions to achieve healing and reconciliation.

This study contributes to the academic discourse on interfaith dialogue among faith groups in their home communities or as migrant communities. Among its main findings are that memories of violent ethnoreligious conflict in their home country have emerged as a crucial factor shaping interfaith dynamics among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK, and there is a complex interplay of memory, emotion, and identity characterises these memories. As Schacter (2008) argues, memories of conflict are not simply recollections but play an active role in shaping the emotional landscape of the people. Feelings such as fear, anger, resentment, mistrust, and defensiveness are deeply ingrained in their psyche and significantly influence their willingness to engage with people of other faiths. These reactions are not just a passive reflection of past experiences but an active factor in shaping current interfaith interactions. They also play a crucial role in constructing and articulating religious and social identities among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. The sense of solidarity within the group is encouraged and often juxtaposed against a perceived outgroup, leading to a tangible sense of distinction. This distinction is not static but is constantly negotiated and redefined in the diasporic

context. This process significantly impacts how religious teachings and doctrines are interpreted and applied, steering the community towards an exclusivist or an inclusivist approach to interfaith dialogue. Notably, the tendency towards exclusivism or inclusivism in relationships between people of different faiths is not just a matter of how they understand religion; it is deeply connected with people's experiences and memories of the conflict. These experiences shape not only individual attitudes but also the collective approach to religious otherness, thus influencing the broader landscape of interfaith dialogue.

The study also explored the nature and extent of interfaith engagement and dialogue among the Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in the UK and the motivations and challenges for such activities. It was found that the RCCG and NASFAT had different levels of attitudes toward interfaith dialogue. It shows that some respondents support interfaith dialogue to promote social cohesion, deep understanding between different faith groups, and the overarching goal of community development. These motivations are essential in understanding the underlying drive for such interactions in a multicultural and multi-religious context. However, the study also shows significant challenges hinder the effectiveness and depth of interfaith dialogue. Chief among these challenges are trust deficits, fear of losing religious identity, and deep-rooted theological differences between two faith groups. These challenges symbolise the complexity of interfaith discourse, particularly within diaspora communities struggling to maintain their cultural and religious identity in a foreign context.

Furthermore, the study observed that religious violence in their home country exerts considerable impacts on the emotional states, memories, and worldviews of Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants in the UK. These altered psychological states and perceptions, in turn, play a crucial role in shaping the nature and quality of interfaith dialogue among these communities and their members. However, the study shows that the participants demonstrate different coping strategies and reactions in the face of these conflicts and their memories. These range from

forgiveness and healing to the pursuit of justice and reconciliation. Each of these responses, varying in nature and intensity, continues to shape the landscape of interfaith dialogue. The study's findings emphasise the complexity of interfaith dynamics in the context of migration, mainly when influenced by the backdrop of conflict in the home country.

To address the impact of these memories, the study concluded with a dialogical model presented as a practical approach to promoting healing and reconciliation among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. This is particularly applicable to those respondents who continue to be burdened by unhealed memories of the violent conflicts in their homeland. This model is based on fundamental principles: mutual recognition, connectedness, the imperative to listen and learn, addressing differences, and a cooperative ethos in problem-solving. At the heart of this model is the encouragement of migrants to engage in a multi-layered dialogue process that includes confession, forgiveness, and restoration. It involves sharing individual experiences and narratives related to the conflicts and encourages mutual recognition and empathy for each other's suffering and trauma. This model emphasises exploring shared values and aspirations rooted in the respective faith traditions. A critical component of this model is the focus on the impact of the conflicts, which facilitates a deeper understanding of their effects on dialogue partners and resolution. In addition, the dialogical model helps unite these people to work together to improve their communities in their new homes. The study contributes to studies in interfaith dialogue by providing a holistic and nuanced understanding of interfaith relations among faith groups from conflict-affected countries and the factors that impact it. It also offers valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners aiming to develop effective strategies that foster interfaith understanding and harmony in multicultural societies.

This thesis has effectively demonstrated the intricate interplay between theoretical frameworks and ethnographic data in understanding the complexities of interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. Through the lens of trauma theory, we have

explored how past conflicts continue to shape present-day interactions. Social identity theory has provided a critical understanding of how communal identities influence relational dynamics within these migrant groups. Lastly, the dialogical approach has shown promise in fostering effective communication and understanding across religious divides.

The synthesis of these theoretical engagements with detailed ethnographic observations has not only addressed the initial research questions but also contributed significant insights to the field of interfaith dialogue. By analysing how these theories operate in real-world settings, this study has highlighted the potential for theoretical models to inform practical interventions and policy formulations to improve interfaith dialogue. Moreover, the findings underscore the necessity for continuous dialogue and engagement at multiple community and institutional levels to address the underlying issues of identity and conflict that pervade migrant communities.

As we look towards future research, interfaith dialogue's dynamic and evolving nature must be further explored with even greater integration of diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. This will ensure a more comprehensive understanding and facilitate the development of more effective strategies for community cohesion and interfaith cooperation. However, some areas would require further research. They include the following:

8.2 Recommendations for Further Research
Understanding how interfaith dialogue among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK can be promoted or hindered requires a comprehensive examination of the roles played by media, education, and civil society. Each of these domains significantly influences interreligious communication and understanding.

The media is a powerful force in shaping public narratives and perceptions. Both mainstream and social media platforms have the potential to perpetuate stereotypes or promote mutual understanding. A thorough media content analysis is essential to assess its impact on interfaith dynamics. This involves examining how different forms of media represent Nigerian Christian

and Muslim communities, the frequency and nature of coverage of interfaith issues, and the portrayal of conflicts and cooperation. Identifying biased or stereotypical representations can help develop strategies to foster more positive and inclusive narratives. For example, research by Samuels (2016) highlights how media framing can influence public perception and social cohesion. By promoting balanced and accurate reporting, the media can be crucial in enhancing interfaith understanding.

The education sector plays a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and values of individuals through its curricula, pedagogical methods, and overall environment. Analysing how these educational elements either promote or hinder interfaith understanding among Nigerian migrants is necessary. This includes evaluating the inclusivity of educational materials, the sensitivity of teaching methods to cultural and religious diversity, and the overall academic environment's support for interfaith dialogue. For instance, studies by Banks (2015) emphasise the importance of multicultural education in fostering inclusivity and respect for diversity. By integrating interfaith topics into the curriculum and encouraging open discussions, educational institutions can cultivate an environment that promotes mutual respect and understanding.

Civil society, encompassing non-governmental organisations, religious groups, and community initiatives, significantly influences interfaith relations. Investigating how these institutions either bridge or exacerbate divisions between religious communities provides insights into effective strategies for promoting interfaith dialogue. This analysis should focus on the initiatives and programs implemented by civil society organisations and their impact on fostering interfaith cooperation and understanding. For example, organisations like the Interfaith Network for the UK demonstrate the potential of collaborative efforts in building bridges between different religious communities. Civil society can help mitigate conflicts and promote social cohesion by supporting initiatives that encourage dialogue and cooperation.

A detailed and integrated examination of the roles of media, education, and civil society is central to improving interreligious communication and understanding among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria and the UK. This comprehensive analysis can inform policies and practices to enhance interfaith dialogue and promote social cohesion within diverse communities. By addressing the influences of these key areas, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions that support positive interfaith interactions and contribute to a more harmonious society.

The media, education, and civil society are critical in shaping interfaith dialogue. A nuanced understanding of their impacts can guide the development of effective strategies to foster interfaith understanding and cooperation among Nigerian Christian and Muslim groups, both in Nigeria and the UK. Concerted efforts in these domains can create a more inclusive and cohesive society.

Word Count without Bibliography: 60,722 Words

Appendix 1: Interviewee Information

S/N	Interviewees	Interview Date	Setting	Gender	Age Range	Religion	Religious Group	Designation
United Kingdom								

1.	Interviewee PENT1UK	09/09/2018	Bradford	Male	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Leader
2.	Interviewee PENT2UK	17/12/2019	London	Female	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Leader
3.	Interviewee PENT3UK	04/05/2019	London	Male	20-45	Christian	Pentecostal	Member
4.	Interviewee PENT4UK	09/12/2019	London	Female	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Member
5.	Interviewee PENT5UK	01/07/2019	Bradford	Male	30-45	Christian	Pentecostal	Pastor
6.	Interviewee PENT6UK	04/09/2019	Manchester	Male	61-75	Christian	Pentecostal	Pastor
7.	Interviewee PENT7UK	10/10/2018	London	Female	45-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Member
8.	Interviewee PENT8UK	11/09/2018	Birmingham	Female	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Member
9.	Interviewee PENT9UK	09/08/2019	London	Male	61-75	Christian	Pentecostal	Member
10.	Interviewee PENT10UK	12/6/2019	London	Female	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Member
11.	Interviewee PENT11UK	09/12/2018	Birmingham	Male	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Leader
12.	Interviewee PENT12UK	17/41/2019	Manchester	Male	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Pastor
13.	Interviewee PENT13UK	11/06/2018	London	Female	20-45	Christian	Pentecostal	Member
14.	Interviewee PENT14UK	15/07/2018	London	Female	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Leader
15.	Interviewee PENT15UK	04/05/2019	Bradford	Male	61-75	Christian	Pentecostal	Pastor
16.	Interviewee NAS1UK	01/03/2019	London	Male	46-60	Islam	NASFAT	Imam
17.	Interviewee NAS2UK	05/03/2019	London	Male	20-45	Islam	NASFAT	Imam
18.	Interviewee NAS3UK	14/09/2019	London	Male	61-75	Islam	NASFAT	Lay Leader
19.	Interviewee NAS4UK	09/11/2018	London	Male	20-75	Islam	NASFAT	Lay Leader
20.	Interviewee NAS5UK	04/02/2019	London	Male	46-60	Islam	NASFAT	Imam
21.	Interviewee NAS6UK	02/08/2019	London	Male	46-60	Islam	NASFAT	Imam
22.	Interviewee NAS7UK	01/03/2019	London	Female	46-60	Islam	NASFAT	Lay Leader

			Northern Nigeria					
1	Interviewee PENT1NG	27/10/2019	Abuja	Male	20-45	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Leader
2	Interviewee PENT2NG	14/10/2019	Jos	Male	20-45	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Leader
3	Interviewee PENT3NG	02/10/2019	Jos	Male	20-45	Christian	Pentecostal	Pastor
4	Interviewee PENT4NG	04/11/2019	Kaduna	Male	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Lay Leader
5	Interviewee PENT5NG	23/10/2019	Kaduna	Male	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Pastor
6	Interviewee MUS1NG	15/10/2019	Abuja	Female	20-45	Islam	Unspecified	Member
7	Interviewee MUS2NG	10/10/2019	Abuja	Female	20-45	Islam	Unspecified	Member
8	Interviewee MUS3NG	25/9/2019	Jos	Male	46-60	Islam	Unspecified	Lay Leader
9	Interviewee MUS4NG	10/10/2019	Jos	Male	20-45	Islam	Unspecified	Member
10	Interviewee MUS5NG	29/10/2019	Kaduna	Female	20-35	Islam	Unspecified	Member
11	Interviewee MUS6NG	13/09/2019	Abuja	Female	46-60	Islam	Unspecified	Member
12	Interviewee MUS7NG	26/10/2019	Jos	Male	46-60	Islam	Unspecified	Member
13	Imam Mohammed Ashafa	30/10/2019	Kaduna	Male	46-60	Islam	Unspecified	Imam
14	Pastor James Wuye	01/11/2019	Kaduna	Male	46-60	Christian	Pentecostal	Pastor
15	Anonymise Respondent	11/10/2019						
16	Anonymise Respondent	06/11/2019						
17	Anonymise Respondent	23/10/2019						

Appendix 2: Nigerian Map Showing the states visited.

Nigerian Map Showing the states visited (Credit Google Images: 12/10/2020).

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