

Faith, Flags, and Fragile States: A Philosophical, Economic, and Political Analysis of Religion and Nationalism in Africa's Great Lakes Region

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Abstract

The Great Lakes Region of Africa has long faced a complex mix of religion, nationalism, ethnicity, and state power. Religion has often served as a source of morality, social unity, and reconciliation. At the same time, nationalism has acted both as a bonding factor against colonial control and as a cause of ethnic exclusion and political violence (Anderson, 2006; Mamdani, 2001). This article takes a critical look at religion and nationalism in the Great Lakes Region through philosophical, economic, and political viewpoints. It draws on examples from countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to show how colonial legacies, identity politics, economic gaps, and governance systems have influenced current social and political situations. Philosophically, the study questions the conflicts between civic and ethnic nationalism along with African communal ideas like Ubuntu (Mbiti, 1969). Economically, it analyzes competition over resources, youth unemployment, and the role of religious organizations in development. Politically, the article reviews how religion affects state legitimacy, conflict resolution, democratization, and peacebuilding. The article argues that religion and nationalism can promote unity, social justice, and regional teamwork, but they can also lead to exclusion, extremism, and violent conflict when exploited by leaders. The paper concludes that achieving lasting peace and development in the Great Lakes Region depends on inclusive governance, fair economic systems, interfaith partnerships, and fostering civic nationalism rooted in African humanist values.

Keywords: Religion; Nationalism; Great Lakes Region; Political Economy; Ubuntu; Ethnicity; Governance; Conflict; Africa

1. Introduction

The Great Lakes Region of Africa holds a key spot in the political and socio-economic history of the continent. This region has seen important political changes, liberation movements, ethnic conflicts, and humanitarian crises in modern African history (Prunier, 2009). Two strong social forces lie at the heart of these events: religion and nationalism. These forces have influenced state formation, governance systems, identity building, economic structure, and regional diplomacy.

Religion in the region has had mixed effects. On one hand, religious organizations have greatly helped in education, healthcare, peace efforts, and providing moral guidance (Haynes, 2007). On the other hand, religion has sometimes been used for political gain, deepening ethnic divisions, and supporting authoritarian rule (Longman, 2010). Nationalism started as a movement against colonialism, aimed at freeing African societies from European control. However, after independence, nationalism in many Great Lakes countries turned into ethnic nationalism, marked by exclusion, militarization, and violence (Mamdani, 2001).

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This article examines religion and nationalism in the Great Lakes Region from philosophical, economic, and political viewpoints. This approach helps us better understand how identity, power, and material conditions shape regional realities.

The Great Lakes Region's religious and nationalist paths are influenced by broader global and transnational processes, along with internal political and historical factors. Global religious networks, especially Pentecostal Christianity and reformist Islam, have changed moral economies, political discussions, and identity creation across borders (Haynes, 2007; Levitt, 2007). These transnational religious movements combine with local issues to create mixed political identities that are not strictly national or purely religious. Additionally, globalization has increased the spread of nationalist ideas through digital media, diaspora communities, and regional political alliances. This has strengthened both solidarity movements and exclusionary narratives. As Castells (2010) points out, identity in the information age is shaped more by networked communication, making religion and nationalism more flexible, debated, and politically engaged across the Great Lakes Region.

Furthermore, the persistence of weak state capacity in parts of the region has allowed non-state actors—particularly religious institutions and ethnic-based movements—to assume quasi-governance roles. In fragile contexts such as eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, churches, faith-based organizations, and community associations often provide essential services that the state is unable to deliver, thereby blurring the boundary between spiritual authority and political governance (Autesserre, 2010; Haynes, 2007). This situation has generated both stabilizing and destabilizing effects: while religious actors contribute to social welfare and conflict mediation, they can also become embedded in local power struggles and resource contestations. Consequently, nationalism in the region is not only a state-driven ideology but also a fragmented field of competing local, religious, and transnational loyalties that continuously reshape the meaning of political belonging (Mamdani, 2001; Herbst, 2000).

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Religion

Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and ethical values founded on the power of the spiritual world and spiritual traditions. In the Great Lakes Region, the presence of different religions such as Christianity, Islam, and the traditional religions of Africa plays a critical role in the public sphere (Mbiti, 1969). Religion in the view of Émile Durkheim serves as a device of social solidarity and collective conscience (Durkheim, 1912/1995). Religion plays a significant role in the communities of Africa.

On top of providing cohesion and unity to a society, religion also serves as a source of political power in African states after the colonial period. The concept of legitimacy in politics suggested by Max Weber can be used to explain how religion affects political life since the power of the church Religion can also contribute to development through faith-based organizations providing vital services such as education, medical care, and aid to people. Faith-based organizations can fill the void caused by weak governments in terms of services to citizens, which usually happens in poor and strife-torn regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Haynes, 2007). Thus, religion can function as both a stabilizing force in society and an informal mechanism of governance.

Nevertheless, religion can serve as an object for political manipulations and conflicts. The period of conflict can lead to religious identity being used to mobilize people into fighting for their beliefs, as happened in Rwanda and Burundi (Longman, 2010). It means that religion does not necessarily cause conflicts; it depends on external circumstances.

2.2. Nationalism

Nationalism implies loyalty to a certain nation or group. Benedict Anderson describes nations as "imagined communities" created socially by people sharing certain narratives and symbols (Anderson, 2006). There are two types of nationalism prevailing in Africa: civic nationalism associated with citizenship and constitution, and ethnic nationalism based on one's ancestry or tribal identity. adds strength to both tradition and charismatic forms of leadership (Weber, 1978).



Figure 1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

However, in the African postcolonial setting, nationalism first appeared in the guise of an ideology of liberation against colonial exploitation and racial discrimination. According to Fanon (1963), nationalism as part of independence struggles had an emancipatory dimension but was susceptible to degenerating into ethnic chauvinism in post-independence societies. Such a trend is observable in various Great Lakes nations, where liberation movements evolved into exclusive political ideologies and strategies.

Colonialism has also affected the nature of nationalism in the region due to its administrative structures, which created rigid ethnic divisions. In his work, Mamdani (2001) shows that the indirect rule regime in pre-colonial Africa had been used to establish clear ethnic boundaries. Nationalism in postcolonial nations, such as Rwanda and Burundi, thus has contributed to cycles of violence and exclusive citizenship regimes.

In addition, contemporary nationalism in the region is highly influenced by globalization and regionalization trends, as witnessed in the attempts to transcend nationalism by institutions such as the East African Community. The quest for greater regional integration poses challenges for domestic nationalist politics, especially with regards to sovereignty issues (Herbst, 2000).

2.3. Political Economy Perspective

The political economy paradigm focuses on the interplay between economies, political power, and sociopolitical organizations. Authors like Claude Ake (1981) state that African political problems cannot be studied without considering economic dependency, inequality, and poor institutional performance. The perspective is important in studying cases where economic marginalization, competition for resources, and political inefficiency interact with religious and nationalistic divisions.

The situation in the Great Lakes Region is characterized by an abundance of natural resources and poor governance frameworks. Resource abundance leads to conflicts in the region due to the existence of what scholars call a “resource curse.” Natural resources like coltan, gold, and diamonds are abundant in eastern Congo and contribute to conflicts within this area (Autesserre, 2010).

Dependency theorists, including Walter Rodney (1972), state that global capitalism and past exploitation processes have led to Africa's underdevelopment. Foreign economic interests and exploitation in the Great Lakes region have been observed as exacerbating conflicts due to poor governance and financing of armed conflict groups in some instances (Prunier, 2009). Furthermore, economic disparities and unemployment among the youth have been noted as major contributors to the dynamics of instability and ideology. The larger the pool of unemployed youths, the higher the likelihood that they will be recruited into militant groups or engaged in political conflicts under the guise of religion or nationalism (Honwana, 2012). Hence, the significance of political economy in conflict dynamics cannot be overlooked.

3. Philosophical Views of Religion and Nationalism

3.1. Religion and Social Control

Traditionally, religion has played an important role as a basis for the control of morality and social order in Africa. Religious organizations created educational, health, and social services programs that formed the pillars of community development (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). In the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide, churches were engaged in activities intended to restore trust in social relationships and unity within the nation (Longman, 2010). Churches and religious groups took an active part in post-conflict trauma healing. Nevertheless, in times of war, religion did not always serve the cause of moral justice, as evidenced by the collaboration of religious leaders with political elites and militia in the Rwandan genocide (Mamdani, 2001).

Religious practices in the Great Lakes area serve as existential and moral orientations in situations of state vulnerability and unpredictability. Using the concept of collective conscience by Durkheim, rituals reaffirm common moral principles and ensure social cohesion regardless of the lack of state control (Durkheim, 1912/1995). Religious organizations in the rural areas of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo replace governmental agencies to offer conflict mediation and social support services.

In addition, religion plays an ever-growing role in political ideology as a platform where contending views of morality are leveraged to legitimize policies. As Gifford (1998) states, African Christianity in public sphere is characterized by conflicting positions of prophetic and political morality. Depending on their compatibility with state rulers, religious establishments can oppose corruption or perpetuate authoritarian regimes.

Lastly, current research demonstrates the growth of charisma and Pentecostalism movements, which alter the moral structure via messages of prosperity gospel and spiritual warfare. Such churches redefine poverty and disparity in terms of spiritual states and hence influence the political stances and economic expectations of citizens (Haynes, 2007).

3.2. Nationalism and Identity Formation

In Africa, nationalism was primarily adopted as an ideology of resistance to colonialism. Leaders like Julius Nyerere called for African socialism and building a nation state based on collective citizenship as opposed to tribalism (Nyerere, 1968). However, despite the good intentions of nationalism, colonial boundaries forced various ethnic groups that had separate identities into one national boundary (Herbst, 2000). Ethnic nationalism played a significant part in the violence cycles between Hutu and Tutsi communities in Rwanda and Burundi.

As Frantz Fanon (1963) cautions, nationalism after colonialism may lead to ethnic chauvinism if not based on social justice and citizenship inclusiveness. This applies to the Great Lakes Region. Nationalism in the region is also highly influenced by challenges in state formation and institutional weakness. As Mamdani (2001) argues, colonial indirect rule transformed ethnicity from purely sociological categories to administrative categories. These in turn were politicized into political identities in postcolonial states leading to “political identities of rule and rebellion” whereby citizenship becomes a question of ethnicity.

Furthermore, nationalism may serve as a mobilizing force when there is an economic crisis and political uncertainty. During economic hardship and social inequalities, political leaders might appeal to ethnic or nationalist identity as a means of power consolidation or avoidance of responsibility (Bayart, 1993). The above assertion can be seen in the case of certain regions of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, whereby the groups have used nationalist discourse to justify their territorial claims.

Finally, nationalism on the African continent is currently facing external pressures arising from migration, globalization, and the process of regional integration like the East African Community (Castells, 2010). Such phenomena pose a threat to the conventional idea of sovereignty and identity as they promote supra-nationalism and, at the same time, increase local identity concerns. Thus, in the Great Lakes Region, nationalism is not only a domestic affair but rather a global and regional one.

3.3. Ubuntu and African Humanism

Ubuntu, which refers to the communitarian philosophy of Africans, is another perspective of looking at nationalism and co-existence. Ubuntu emphasizes interconnection, dignity, and shared responsibility (Tutu, 1999). According to John Mbiti, “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108). Ubuntu continues to be highly pertinent in efforts towards peace-building and reconstruction within the Great Lakes region.

In terms of philosophy, ubuntu serves as a normative critique of nationalism, stating that identity is relational rather than static or ethno-centric. This concept runs completely against the tenets of ethno-centric nationalism where inclusion is based on ancestry or grievance history. The concept of ubuntu has been applied in reconciliatory efforts such as post genocide Rwanda through processes such as restorative justice (Tutu, 1999).

In addition, Ubuntu philosophy is compatible with theories of governance that promote deliberation, consultation, and social harmony. The Ubuntu philosophy rejects adversarial forms of politics that tend to escalate ethnic differences. From this perspective, Ubuntu philosophy makes its contribution to democratic theory in emphasizing relational ethics rather than competitive individualism (Metz, 2011).

Lastly, the importance of Ubuntu cannot be overlooked when considering regional integration in the Great Lakes Region, especially concerning cross-border cohesion and peace. As conflicts in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda have shown, the maintenance of peaceful relations needs much more than mere structures. Moral principles that cut across national borders are essential for sustaining peaceful relations among people.

4. Economic aspects of religion and nationalism

4.1. Colonial economic systems and inequities

The economies of the colonized in the Great Lakes region were designed not only to be exploitative, but also to be structurally hierarchical by ethnicity and religion, resulting in a situation termed “decentralized despotism” by Mamdani (1996). The idea behind such an economic arrangement is that the colonial government would rule indirectly through a chosen group of “native authorities,” creating inequity of access to land and taxes, and even the administrative apparatus.

Besides, the colonial mission schools became an avenue for socioeconomic advancement for Africans, which, however, varied from place to place. For instance, Iliffe (2007) states that colonial education systems produced an African elite that would subsequently dominate the post-colonial bureaucracy, furthering perceptions of exclusion among those left behind.

These inequalities were not addressed after independence but rather persisted and influenced the political and economic development of postcolonial states like Uganda and Rwanda, with access to resources and opportunities in government and development reflecting past inequalities between ethnic and regional groups. According to Bates (1981), distributive conflicts came to constitute one of the major sources of political instability in Africa.

4.2. Resource competition and violent nationalism

In addition to being rich in natural resources, the political economy of the Great Lakes Region is also known to have transboundary mineral economies which support the operations of formal and informal armed networks. As mentioned by Autesserre (2010), local conflicts pertaining to issues such as land, mining and territoriality are often transformed into international disputes because of weak governance systems in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Moreover, the economic transformation of conflict minerals into economic gains has resulted in the emergence of “resource wars” in Le Billon’s (2001) sense, where minerals not only cause conflict but are used to sustain the conflicts. In this process, ethnicity becomes an excuse for economic gains under the disguise of a nationalistic ideology.

Moreover, the regional spillover effects of resource-driven conflict have destabilized neighboring states, including Rwanda and Uganda, which have been implicated in both peacekeeping and contested resource extraction activities. As Reno (2011) argues, war economies in Africa blur the distinction between state authority and illicit economic networks, thereby sustaining cycles of violence and undermining state sovereignty.

4.3. Religious Institutions as Economic Actors

Religious institutions in the Great Lakes Region are taking on the role of hybrid socio-economic players that combine spirituality and service provision for economic development. As Clarke (2006) puts it, faith-based organizations tend to be among the most trusted institutions in fragile states, giving them an advantage over state institutions in terms of resource mobilization and community engagement. This makes them key institutions for local development in countries like Uganda and Burundi.

But along with growing economic influence comes the question of accountability and class differentiation within religious institutions. Scholars note that prosperity theology has brought about a transformation of religious spaces from purely spiritual into market-like institutions with commodification of spiritual goods and services (Gifford, 2015). It is possible to see a threat to the moral superiority of religion and the appearance of class differences between members of congregations.

Further, religion-based organizations tend to function as brokers between foreign aid agencies and the local populace, hence affecting development priorities. As per Haynes (2007), this position enables them to wield considerable influence in shaping the development and humanitarian governance agenda. Nevertheless, such positions may foster dependence whereby religion-based organizations emerge as guardians of economic opportunity.

4.4. Youth Unemployment and Radicalization

Unemployment among the youth in the Great Lakes Region is more than just an economic problem; it is a structural problem that combines identity politics and political activism. Honwana (2012) identifies "waithood" as the name for a state where young people are in transition into adulthood, marked by unemployment, alienation, and political disenfranchisement. This is a condition that enables recruitment into armed forces and political militias. In fragile countries such as Democratic Republic of the Congo, young people experiencing unemployment often participate in informal economies that involve mining, smuggling, and armed protection services. According to Blattman and Annan (2016), economic considerations are what compel the involvement of young people in militia activities, even though the narrative involves nationalism and religion.

In addition to this, the spread of extremist and nationalist propaganda through technological means has been accelerated by digital technologies. The Internet allows for speedy diffusion of identity-related narratives which view economic deprivation as a function of ethnicity or religion. As observed by Castells (2010), networked communication systems are not only facilitators of mobilization but also polarization.

5. Political Analysis of Religion and Nationalism

5.1. Colonialism and the Politicization of Ethnicity

In addition to the classification of ethnicity as part of administration, colonial states also utilized missionary educational systems to favor particular ethnic groups that were given literacy skills and access to bureaucratic jobs. The outcome was an "educated elite hierarchy" that would emerge as politically significant in post-colonial states where ethnic groups would compete for state power (Iliffe, 2007). In the cases of Rwanda and Burundi, Hutu and Tutsi ethnicity were constructed as a consequence of colonial missions and ethnographic research on race (Newbury, 1988).

Moreover, colonial policies of taxes and labor exploitation politicized flexible social classifications by creating unequal distribution of economic burdens among ethnic groups. As Mamdani (2001) points out, the colonial state recognized and constructed ethnic identity for its own use. Moreover, the elites after colonialism continued to adopt the same identity structures and even replicated them in their government systems, including military and public servant recruitment. This shows that identity politics during the colonial period did not cease after independence, but rather developed into postcolonial fights on citizenship, affiliation, and access to state assets (Young, 2012).

5.2. Religion and Political Legitimacy

Religion is used as an ideational asset during elections, whereby the elites identify themselves with the leading religious organizations for popularity among the masses. Rituals of prayer days, presidential blessings, and inauguration of religious figures enhance the morality of political leaders (Haynes, 2007). For example, in Uganda and other countries around the Great Lakes region, the interaction of religion and politics blurs the demarcation line between spiritual and political authority.

Furthermore, the rise of Pentecostals and evangelicals has also shaped the realm of politics by portraying good leadership and prosperity of the nation through the prism of spirituality. This has led to the development of "theology of political legitimacy," whereby the outcome of governance is seen as a reflection of God's will or displeasure (Gifford, 2004).

This has also meant that religion is a medium through which political dialogue takes place in situations whereby the formal structures do not exist. Churches and mosques are used as forums for interaction between political elites and social activists, thus creating parallel governing bodies that help in dealing with issues of legitimacy during elections.

5.3. Nationalism, Conflict, and State Fragility

Nationalism in the Great Lakes region has been characterized by an inseparable relationship with the security dilemma approach, whereby a feeling of threat from surrounding states or ethnic factions leads to the use of violence and authoritarian governance. The case in point is the regional conflicts around Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whereby the issue of nationalism has been used to support interventionist policy measures (Prunier, 2009).

Secondly, nationalism linked to resource control has made state power into a competition among different actors who seek to control rich regions in terms of minerals and other natural resources (Autesserre, 2010).

Lastly, the refugee movements that result from nationalist conflicts have also been a source for the regionalization of insecurity. Displacement by people from Rwanda, Burundi, and eastern DRC is an indication of the way in which nationalist issues in vulnerable nations manifest themselves in regional structural dynamics (UNHCR, 2023).

5.4 Religion and Peacebuilding In recent years, the approach towards religious peacebuilding in the Great Lakes Region has seen a trend of the use of transitional justice practices, such as truth-telling, reconciliations, and forgiveness among community members. Religious peacebuilding initiatives rely strongly on the Christian and indigenous moral foundations that promote restorative justice over punitive justice (Appleby, 2000).

For example, Rwanda has employed religious peacebuilding measures after the genocide by collaborating with religious organizations in order to rebuild trust through community discussions and healing from the trauma of violence. However, the process of religious peacebuilding has been criticized for its depoliticization of structural violence, because it promotes personal forgiveness (Longman, 2010).

In addition, inter-faith dialogue forums are very important in solving problems of cross-border extremism and hate speech, especially in areas where militia groups operate in the eastern part of DRC. Inter-faith dialogue forums play a vital role in promoting social cohesion and early warning mechanisms for conflict prevention (Haynes, 2007).

6. Contemporary Challenges in the Great Lakes Region

The political economy of the contemporary era in the Great Lakes Region of Africa is defined by a combination of structural weaknesses and fast-changing global trends. This situation continues to have implications for religion and nationalism in that it fuels identity politics, delegitimizes governance systems, and complicates the search for solutions for peace and stability. Youth unemployment, ineffective democratic processes, insurgency from outside the region, refugee movements, religious radicalization, corruption, and hate speech on social media platforms are some of the major challenges in the region.

6.1. Youth Unemployment and Politicization

Unemployment amongst youth continues to pose a significant socio-economic challenge in the region, in nations like Uganda, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The author Honwana (2012) contends that Africa's youth tend to be "waithood generations" who experience stagnation between education and gainful employment leading to dependency and socio-economic frustrations. This state of affairs provides an ideal environment for politicization whereby elites use unemployed youth through ethnicity or nationalism discourse.

In conflict regions, notably eastern DRC, unemployed youth is typically enrolled into rebel organizations which articulate their cause through survival of ethnic identity or national liberation. These rebel groups employ religious themes or nationalistic discourse in order to justify violence hence merging socio-economic hardship with ideological mobilization. It has been suggested by Collier (2007) that poverty and unemployment create high opportunity costs of peace, hence the economics of violence become very rational.

6.2. Poor Democratic Institutions and Weak Governance Structures

Poor democratic institutions continue to pose structural problems within the Great Lakes Region. Several states are faced with poor separation of powers, limited civil liberties, and electoral politics that are competitive and distrusted. According to Herbst (2000), many African states evolved in situations of poor institutional penetration, hence making their governance structures centralized, often dependent on patronage systems.

In cases like Rwanda and Burundi, the supremacy of executive powers has reduced political pluralism, while in other cases such as the DRC, fragmentation of institutions has made it difficult for the central government to control peripheral parts of the country. Poor democratic institutions lead to religion and nationalism acting as replacements for lack of confidence in institutions. Religious figures receive more legitimacy than institutions in case of failure, while nationalism is employed to justify discriminatory governance (Gifford, 1998).

6.3. Cross-border Insurgencies and Instability in the Region

Cross-border insurgencies continue to be the hallmark of insecurity in the Great Lakes region. In many cases, insurgent armed groups cross into neighboring countries through porous borders especially in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Eastern DRC. Such porousness of the borders facilitates the flow of arms, combatants, and ideological discourse which links ethnicity to nationalistic claims.

According to Prunier (2009), the trend towards regionalized conflict, especially during the Second Congo War, resulted in the regionalization of local issues in terms of interstate political struggles. Many insurgents use the religious or nationalist perspective to justify their activities as protecting oppressed peoples or holy lands. This combination of ideology and armed violence makes conventional peacebuilding mechanisms that depend on diplomacy difficult.

6.4. Displacement of Refugees and Reworking of Identities

One of the greatest refugee communities in Africa exists in the Great Lakes Region. Conflict in the region, especially in the DRC, has caused continued displacement through borders. Host communities in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania have therefore come under pressure due to this. Memories of nationalism, ethnic identity, and religion continue among refugee communities.

According to Mamdani (2001), the process of displacement is both the outcome and cause of violent politics and has a role in shaping the identity politics of refugees through redefining social belonging. Religion becomes a source of humanitarian help for displaced communities, further increasing its social and political power. However, displacement causes competition over scarce resources, causing sometimes xenophobic nationalism.

6.5. Religious Extremism and Ideological Fragmentation

While there is no major problem with religious extremism in the Great Lakes Region, such as those that plague other parts of the world, there have been cases of extremism within smaller communities, which are becoming increasingly connected with the rest of the world through globalization. Religious extremism, unlike in other regions, is less concerned with doctrine and more with politics.

According to Haynes (2007), religion becomes politicized when it collides with socio-economic and identity-related problems. Religion can then be used to marginalize certain individuals, recruit followers to rebel groups, or challenge the state's authority. Extremist elements become more pronounced when political leaders exploit religious rhetoric selectively to serve their own interests.

6.6. Corruption and the Erosion of State Legitimacy

Corruption continues to be an endemic problem that affects governance, service provision, and the legitimacy of state institutions within the region. Bayart's (1993) "politics of the belly" accurately captures the use of state resources that results from patron-client relationships where the lines between the public and private realms are indistinguishable.

Where corruption reduces state capacity and creates exclusion, as is the case in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), it increases resentment and legitimizes the ethnic and nationalist sentiments. Where the state appears to operate on exclusionary terms, citizens will seek legitimacy elsewhere, possibly in religious institutions and ethnic organizations.

6.7. Digital Hate Speech, Misinformation, and Polarization

There have been many developments in the digital world that have impacted the political scene in the Great Lakes Region. While technology can be used as an instrument for political organization, it can also be utilized to promote hate speech, misinformation, and extremist ideologies. Castells (2010) suggests that communication networks change the dynamics of power by allowing quick and decentralized information flows.

In unstable environments, technology is frequently used to propagate racist stereotypes, nationalist rhetoric, and xenophobic messages. In cases of political tension, misinformation can incite violence through the Internet, especially in regions where there is poor regulation.

6.8. Globalization, Social Media, and Transnational Identity Politics

Globalization has further facilitated the flow of religion and nationalism around the world, turning local identities into global identity politics. The movement of people and the rise of online technologies have helped the spread of political beliefs such as conservative religious and ethnic nationalism. According to Castells (2010), globalization brings about both unification and division, as it brings societies together on economic and technological levels but also promotes identity politics, creating tensions in society. This dual aspect of globalization can be seen in the Great Lakes Region in terms of interactions between global religions and nationalism and local issues.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the role that religion and nationalism have played in shaping the political, economic and social trajectories of Africa's Great Lakes Region. Rather than being inherently integrative or divisive forces within society, these two concepts are influenced by various factors including the historical legacies of a nation, its institutions, its economic systems, its struggles with resource management and the actions of those people who seek to use these concepts within their country. Though both concepts have the potential to bring a society together through the promotion of certain values and ideals, they can also be utilized to promote division and violence against others. Also, concepts like Ubuntu and civic nationalism aim to promote the idea of unity and peace among all people within society. So, peace and development within the Great Lakes Region will require the creation of accountable and inclusive institutions, the availability of equitable economic opportunities for all citizens, the participation of youth from all areas of society, the responsible actions of religious leaders within the region, interfaith relationships and the strengthening of regional cooperation between nations. Overall, then, this study contributes to the efforts of building peace and stability within the region and offers a foundation upon which future studies on the topic can be conducted.

Compliance with ethical standards

The author does not have any conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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