

Article

‘Are You Greater than Our Ancestors?’ Reading John 4:1–42 with the Lens of Social Identity Complexity in the Context of Ethno-Religious Solidarity, Conflict and Peacebuilding

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Abstract

This paper studies the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42 through the lens of Social Identity Complexity (SIC) theory, focusing on its implications for ethno-religious solidarity, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria. The study explores how Jesus navigates complex social identities by crossing geographical, ethno-religious, and gender boundaries, presenting a model of inclusive and boundary-crossing social identity. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the paper argues that Jesus’ ability to affirm and integrate non-convergent social identities under a superordinate identity provides a framework for promoting ethno-religious tolerance, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence. The analysis highlights the relevance of this model for addressing the ongoing ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria, where geographical and ethno-religious divisions persist. By drawing parallels between the Samaritan-Jewish conflict and the Christian-Muslim tensions in Northern Nigeria, the paper demonstrates the potential of SIC as a tool for fostering dialogue, reducing stereotypes, and building inclusive social identities that contribute to long-lasting peace.

Keywords: social identity; ethno-religious; conflicts; boundaries; resolution; peace; Samaritan; Jew; Jesus; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Ethno-religious conflicts remain a persistent challenge in various parts of the world, particularly in regions where religious, ethnic, and geographical boundaries converge to create tension. Northern Nigeria is one such region, where violent clashes between Christians and Muslims have led to deep divisions and prolonged instability. These conflicts are often fueled by stereotypes, historical grievances, and rigid social identities that emphasize differences but fail to integrate such differences into a superordinate identity that promotes tolerance and peaceful co-existence. As a result, there is a growing need for frameworks, theories, and models that promote conflict resolution, reconciliation, peacebuilding, and social cohesion in the region.

This paper, therefore, examines the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42 through the lens of Social Identity Complexity (SIC) theory, providing an



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interdisciplinary approach to conflict resolution. The narrative of John 4 offers a unique perspective on how Jesus navigates multiple social identities—geographical, ethno-religious, and gender—by crossing established boundaries to create an inclusive social identity. By examining this biblical interaction, the paper draws parallels to the ethno-religious violence in Northern Nigeria, where similar boundaries often divide communities and intensify ethno-religious violence.

Using SIC theory, this paper argues that Jesus' ability to affirm and integrate non-convergent identities under a superordinate framework of inclusivity serves as a model for addressing contemporary ethno-religious conflicts. The study explores how the insights found in this biblical narrative can be applied to peacebuilding efforts in Northern Nigeria, particularly by crossing social boundaries, fostering dialogue, reducing stereotypes, appreciating difference, and creating shared identities that transcend geographical and ethno-religious divisions. Through this analysis, the paper offers practical insights into how the lessons from John 4 can contribute to long-lasting reconciliation and peace in Northern Nigeria.

2. An Overview of Social Identity Theory and Social Identity Complexity Theory

Social identity or group identity simply refers to the concept of self that corresponds to one's knowledge of group membership along with the value and emotions involved in such membership (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Social Identity Complexity Theory is an offshoot of Social Identity Theory (SIT), which was propounded by Roccas and Brewer (2002) and was first introduced in New Testament studies by Esler (1994, 2003, 2014a, 2014b). Noting SIT's inability to account for multiple group identities or fluid identity constructions, Kok (2014) sought to fill this gap by going a step further than Esler to, for the first time, apply Social Identity Complexity Theory in New Testament studies. Social Identity Complexity Theory (SIC) refers to how individuals subjectively represent and negotiate the interrelationships or overlaps among their multiple group or social identities (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 88). Esler and Kok's appropriation of SIT and SIC, respectively, has proven fruitful in New Testament studies, on which the present study builds.

The four common ways that people subjectively negotiate their multiple social identities are: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, and merger. A brief explanation of each of these modes of social identity representation ensues:

Intersection: This mode of identity construction is a compound or hyphenated social identity. In this way, an individual simultaneously recognizes more than one social identity in a single ingroup representation (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 90).

Dominance: In the case of dominance, a person adopts one ingroup identity as the primary or dominant social identity and subjects or subordinates all other identities to it or under it (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 90). In this case, any other social group that the person belongs or can belong to is regarded as secondary intragroup variation that does not extend beyond the primary identity (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 90).

Compartmentalization: Compartmentalization occurs when a person activates multiple group identities through a process of differentiation and isolation because the person regards more than one group identity as salient (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 90). In this mode of social identity representation, one or more group memberships could be more salient than the other(s), as the context always determines what is salient. Moreover, in compartmentalization, the multiple social identities that a person contextually maintains and activates are mutually exclusive (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 91; Kok 2014, p. 3).

This means that at a time when one ingroup identity is activated, the other “dormant,” “suspended” or “non-activated” ingroups become outgroups (Kok 2014, p. 3).

Merger: In the merger mode of group representation, “non-convergent group memberships are simultaneously recognized and embraced in their most inclusive form” (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 91). The merger form of identity categorization is the most socially complex, inclusive and diversity-friendly social identity because it recognizes the inconsistencies, diversity, contradiction, and even opposition of the multiple social identities that one holds or regards as ingroup but goes a step further to integrate those nonconvergent group identities into an inclusive diversity-friendly social identities (Roccas and Brewer 2002, pp. 91–92; Kok 2014, pp. 4–5).

3. High and Low Social Identity Complexity: An Explanation

The four modes of identity categorization discussed above are arranged in a continuum from the least to the most complex; the least being intersection and the most being merger. Intersection is the least complex form of social identity negotiation because it reduces multiple and sometimes nonconvergent group identities to a single, hyphenated, exclusive social identity, thereby fostering social solidarity to a single or exclusive group only. Dominance is also low in complexity because it suppresses non-convergence and inconsistencies within a large group. Compartmentalization is on the high side of the continuum of complexities because it acknowledges and differentiates separate subgroup identities. However, compartmentalization is not sufficiently complex because it does not attempt to reconcile or integrate those different subgroup identities. The merger mode of identity negotiation is at the highest level of complexity because it not only acknowledges and affirms subgroup differences and inconsistencies but integrates them within the superordinate social identity in the most inclusive way that appreciates diversity (Roccas and Brewer 2002, pp. 91–92).

In what follows, we will discuss how social identity complexity theory has been applied in reading John 4:1–42, highlighting the high social identity complexity of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, thereby forming the basis of the next section, which appropriates the text in the context of ethno-religious violence in Northern Nigeria.

4. John 4:1–42 and Social Identity Complexity

A critical method or theory, when applied to reading a text, “draws attention to some matters even as it diverts attention from others” (Carter 2020, p. 171). The reader’s context or presupposition often determines which issues in a text draw their attention and which ones do not. Hence, two scholars can apply the same method or theory in reading the same text and arrive at different conclusions. Consequently, Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42 has been subjected to various readings, each influenced by the theoretical framework and presuppositions of the interpreters. For example, postcolonial readings (see Jacobs 2024; Reeder 2022; Dube 2002) often portray Jesus as an imperial figure, while feminist interpretations (see Moore 2003; Neyrey 2003; Dube 2002; Webster 2003) see him as reinforcing patriarchal norms (Dube 2002, p. 71). Using a reader-response approach to read John 4 from the context of divorce and remarriage in Nigeria, Ademiluka (2023) regards Jesus as accepting divorce and remarriage, thereby a model for the Nigerian church to stop seeing divorce and remarriage as indications of a woman’s immorality but rather as indications of their victimhood under patriarchal structures. Similarly, Amoah (2017), using a contextual approach, reads the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John from her Akan ethnic and (Christian) religious context within the broader context of interreligious dialogue, and finds both Jesus and the Samaritan woman as positive models for interreligious dialogue. Okure also reads the encounter between Jesus and the

Samaritan woman from an African perspective, noting that the narrative presents both Jesus and the Samaritan woman as having shared experiences of prejudice, racism, and sexism emanating from their societal social norms, but which they, together, overcame, serving as models for dealing with social ills in Africa (Okure 2009, p. 416).

Social identity approaches to John 4:1–42 have, however, yielded conflicting assessments of Jesus, with some viewing Jesus as enforcing totalizing identities while others view him as a model of inclusive, boundary-crossing identities. Just as Dube reads John 4:1–42 “for decolonization,” the present study reads the same text “for conflict resolution and peacebuilding,” using the insights of SIC, a subset of SIT.

The application of SIT on John’s gospel has a long history and wide coverage beyond the scope of the present study to review. Therefore, to limit the scope to what is most relevant for the present study, only a brief overview of the use of SIC, an offshoot of SIT, will be presented here. More specifically, our overview will focus on recent SIC scholarly output on John 4:1–42.

In his attempt to highlight the social identity complexity of early Christianity in the Johannine tradition, Anderson (2024) applies SIC to Johannine writings and identifies seven dialectical engagements or communities within the seven decades of the development of the Johannine communities, which he prefers to call Johannine Situation. The most relevant aspect of Anderson’s thesis to the present study is his portrayal of Jesus Christ and the Johannine evangelist as advancing inclusive and merger forms of social identity negotiation as opposed to, for example, the intersection-oriented approaches of the followers of John the Baptist; the dominance approach of the religious leaders in Judea (Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots); and the compartmentalization approach of the Essenes (Anderson 2024, vol. 9, pp. 7–16).

In a merger-like move, Jesus embraced the socially and religiously outcast and unclean people, healed the unclean and those with infirmities, cast out demons, and ate at the same table with those who were regarded as sinners as well as with those who claimed to be righteous (Pharisees) (Anderson 2024, p. 9). Anderson further notes that the (re)presentation of Jesus as a controversially inclusive, integrative, and merger figure is similar in the bi-optic lenses of the Synoptic and Johannine gospels. In the Synoptic gospels, Jesus is presented as “distinguishing himself from the Compartmentalization of the Essenes, and also from the Domination-oriented endeavors of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Zealots” (Anderson 2024, p. 9).

In the way that the narrated Jesus heals and delivers women in ways contrary to Jewish practices, ministered among the Samaritans (John 4:4–42), promised to draw in other sheep beyond a provincial fold (John 10:16), and takes the gospel to the ends of the earth, the Johannine Jesus is presented in “bi-optic perspective (both Synoptic and Johannine) as merging the children of Abraham with new recipients of the Abrahamic blessing in the Diaspora—a mission that Paul, Peter, John, and others carried out more fully in later decades” (Anderson 2024, p. 9). The Johannine author, as he remembers this inclusive and integrative Jesus, also operates on a “highly dialectical level of thinking” which transcends the either-or approach to a both-and approach (Anderson 2024, p. 9).

Hunt studies three cross-cutting social identity markers in John 4:1–42, namely, genealogy, knowledge, and purity, concluding that in John 4, we find a situation where Jesus recognizes and validates the distinctive identities of the two primary subgroups (Judean Israelites and Samaritan Israelites) within the superordinate ingroup of Christ-followers (Hunt 2023, p. 4). Lewis also states that, by entering a Samaritan village and speaking with a woman, Jesus crossed ethnic, religious, and gender boundaries (Lewis 2009, p. 321). Dube, however, sees Jesus’ kind of inclusivity in John 4 as problematic, to the extent that it installs Christianity over the Jewish and Samaritan religious diversity. Dube argues that

Jesus' imperialistic show of religious and racial superiority and strategy of replacing the Jewish and Samaritan cultural centres and/or sacred sites (Jerusalem and Gerizim) with worship in Spirit and truth (vv. 23–24) devalues, replaces, and suppresses diversity and promotes “massive inclusivity, but not equality” (Dube 2002, p. 69). Such massive inclusion of races, lands, genders, and religions under a superordinate identity, argues Dube, intends to legitimate control of “the other” in furtherance of inequality (Dube 2002, p. 70). *Pace Dube (2002)*, the present study, using the lens of SIC in the context of ethno-religious conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria, sees Jesus as a model of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the way that he recognizes and appreciates ethno-religious differences yet meaningfully integrates them under a superordinate social identity. Based on an analysis of the two themes of genealogy and knowledge in John 4 with the lens of SIC, Hunt concludes that, in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, “A superordinate identity is created in which both groups have Jacob as their father, the Jewish characters seem willing to share food and drink with Samaritan Israelites, and Jesus offers knowledge that allows both to worship together” (Hunt 2023, p. 8).

Hunt's thesis can be summarized thus: The narrated Jesus in John 4 has a high social identity complexity, seen in the way that he develops a superordinate social identity that successfully integrates both Jews and Samaritans into the new Jesus-following ingroup and in the way that he does not relegate any of the subgroup's claims to genealogy, knowledge, and purity but affirms the identities of both subgroups in these three aspects (Hunt 2023, p. 13). To the extent that the narrated Jesus affirms multiple or even diverse branches or claims to Abrahamic genealogies, affirms multiple sources of (religious) knowledge, and obsoletes purity practices as a marker of difference by offering a living water that cleanses from within, he creates a complex social identity for the Judean and Samaritan followers of Jesus in the new Jesus-followers ingroup (Hunt 2023, p. 13). This complex social identity that Jesus creates agrees with the “merger” mode of identity expression in which diverse expressions of identity are recognized and affirmed as belonging to the superordinate identity. Moreover, being the prototype of the new ingroup, Jesus prototypicalizes their common genealogy, epistemology, and purity, thereby recognizing differences but also projecting common identity in these three aspects.

While Hunt, using the lens of SIC, analyzes John 4 around the three themes of genealogy, knowledge, and purity, these three broad categories relegate other important identity categories in the narrative to the background. Moreover, none of these three categories of genealogy, knowledge, and purity clearly express the hyphenated ethno-religious trope that runs through the narrative. In this way, Hunt, like Penwell, seems to see ethnicity and religion as distinct categories rather than an inseparable hyphenated category in the narrative.

Using the lens of SIC within the context of ethno-religious conflict and peacebuilding, the present study analyzes John 4:1–42 under seven themes, namely, ethno-religious geography (land), common need (vulnerability), ethno-religious theology (worship), ethno-religious ancestry, ethno-religious exclusivism, prototypicality, and superordinate identity, thereby highlighting more relevant categories than Hunt's three categories of genealogy, knowledge, and purity. Moreover, in the present study, the parallels of these categories with the Nigerian ethno-religious situation are highlighted. Furthermore, the present study treats religion and ethnicity in the narrative as an inseparable hyphenated identity category, but which Jesus transcends into a merged social identity category.

Using labelling theory, Penwell (2019) studies the ethnic labelling of Jesus as a Jew by the Samaritan woman in John 4:8 in close connection with the labelling of Jesus by the Jews as a Samaritan in John 8:48. Attempting to answer the question of why Jesus is labelled as a Jew by the Samaritan woman (John 4:8) and as a Samaritan by the Jews (John

8:48), Penwell argues that the two ethnic labelling of Jesus as a Jew on the one hand and a Samaritan, on the other hand, is the Johannine author's attempt to portray a trans-ethnic identity of Jesus and to, as a result, "assert a trans-ethnic identity for the followers of Jesus" (Penwell 2019, p. 1). Noteworthy, however, is that both labels of a Jew and a Samaritan are ascribed to Jesus as a way of portraying him as an outsider in both cases (Penwell 2019, p. 1). Both the Jews and Samaritans, historically, considered themselves Israelites and the other group as non-Israelites or not 'pure' Israelites. Hence, by labelling Jesus as a Jew, the Samaritan woman was implying that he was not a (true) Israelite, just as, by labelling him as an Israelite, the Jews were implying that he was not a (true) Israelite.

Penwell's thesis that Jesus crossed ethnic boundaries and established a trans-ethnic identity for his followers in John's gospel (Penwell 2019, p. 5) is relevant to the present study. However, the present study goes further to show how not only is ethnic boundary crossed, but also religious, gender, geographical, and theological boundaries are crossed in the interest of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Moreover, the present study goes a step further from where Penwell stops to argue that the complexity of Jewish and Samaritan identities in John 4 and 8 transcends mere ethnicity; hence, an important aspect of that identity is missing if it is assigned to ethnicity alone, on the one hand, and if it is assigned to religion alone, on the other hand. In other words, while a few scholars pay attention to the religious dimension of the Jewish versus Samaritan identities in John 4 and 8, others pay attention to the ethnic dimension of it. However, none of these categories sufficiently represent the two identities. Being a Jew or Samaritan in John's gospel is neither an ethnic nor religious identity alone, but both, agreeing with Anderson's (2024) description of the Johannine dualism as not either-or but both-and. Hence, it is more appropriate to regard the Jew and Samaritan identities as ethno-religious social identities.

From this point of view, ethno-religious is both a methodology and identity categorization. It is a methodology in the sense that both the ethnic and religious dimensions of the hyphenated identity and its complexity are identified and described as intertwined. For example, the ethnic dimensions relate to geography (land) and biological ancestry while the religious dimensions relate to worship, purity, and spiritual ancestry. Nevertheless, these dimensions are inseparable in the narrative of John 4, which is why the present study reads them as ethno-religious rather than ethnic and/or religious social identities. Moreover, it is on this basis that the study finds parallels to the Northern Nigerian situation where ethnic and religious conflicts are best described as ethno-religious, due to the intertwining and inseparability of the two identity categories.

5. Reading John 4:1–42 in Context of Ethno-Religious Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria Using the Insights of SIC

In what follows, a contextual ethno-religious reading of John 4:1–42 using the lens of SIC is undertaken under the following themes: ethno-religious geography (land), common need (vulnerability), ethno-religious theology (worship), ethno-religious ancestry, ethno-religious exclusivism, prototypicality, and superordinate identity. Under each of these themes, the study highlights how Jesus' high social identity complexity becomes a model for conflict resolution, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence in the context of ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Noteworthy is that, while the study focuses on Jesus, the actions and responses of the Samaritan woman are also presented as models of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria.

5.1. “Had to Go Through Samaria” (v. 4–6): Crossing Geographical/Spatial Boundary in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

Scholars are divided as to whether the use of ἔδει δὲ αὐτὸν “he had to” (v. 4) indicates a geographical necessity (see [Morris 1995](#)) or a divine necessity (see [Hunt 2023](#), p. 5) for Jesus to pass through Samaria on his way from Judea to Galilee. Noteworthy is that the two possibilities of a divine or geographical necessity are accountable, historically and contextually. Hunt regards δει in John 4:4 as a divine necessity that heightens the importance of Samaritan Israelites in the author’s narrative ([Hunt 2023](#), p. 5). In the context of the present study’s focus on crossing nonconvergent spatial boundaries in social solidarity, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, it makes no difference whether Jesus had to pass through Samaria out of divine or geographical necessity. The fact that Jesus “had to go through Samaria” highlights the spatial nonconvergence of Jews and Samaritans, agreeing with the historical fact that Judean and Samaritan Jews lived in separate geographical spaces.

Strict Jews such as the Pharisees who abhorred the Samaritans normally avoided any route through Samaria on their way to or from Judea to Galilee, even though shorter, and would take the longer route through the River Jordan. Josephus reports the strong hostility between the Jews and Samaritans to the extent that Jews would only pass through the Samaritan region out of necessity or urgency; otherwise, they would take the longer route through the Jordan River to avoid passing through Samaria (Josephus, Vit. 269, cited in [Morris 1995](#)).

In the context of the narrative, it seems, therefore, that John states that Jesus “had to go through Samaria” in order to explicate and heighten the tension between the Jews and Samaritans, thereby paving the way for his readers to see the ultimate significance of Jesus’ multiple boundary-crossing actions in the narrative, starting with crossing a geographical boundary. In other words, the use of δει “necessary” in the context of Jesus going through Samaria on his way from Judea to Galilee heightens the geographical and ethno-religious nonconvergence of the Jewish and Samaritan identities, preparing the way for the readers to remember Jesus as one who crosses this wide and heightened geographical and ethno-religious social chasm but much more, he integrates these nonconvergent identities in the superordinate identity of his followers, as will be discussed further below. [Pace Dube \(2002, p. 68\)](#), who sees Jesus as the highest authoritative traveller operating on the hierarchical construction of geographical spaces in John’s gospel generally and in John 4 specifically, the present study sees Jesus rather crossing exclusive and divisive ethno-religious geographical boundaries in the interest of conflict resolution.

Geographical or spatial nonconvergence and ethno-religious conflicts are as much a reality in the complicated ethno-religious relationship between Muslims and Christians and between different ethnic groups in parts of Northern Nigeria ([Akano and Bamigbose 2019](#), pp. 251–52; [Akinfenwa 2016](#), p. 51; [George-Genyi 2017](#), pp. 158–59; [Olowo 2021](#), pp. 40–45) as it was a reality in the complicated relationship between Jews and Samaritans. In some Northern Nigerian cities and communities where Christians and Muslims have historically lived together, they have now separated geographically due to the incessant conflicts and the danger associated with living in an area dominated by people of different religions or ethnicities. For example, in Kaduna city, the city is so divided that the area where Muslims are the majority is called Mecca, while the area with Christians as the majority is called Jerusalem ([Mijah 2018](#), p. 10). The situation is similar in Jos city, where a series of ethno-religious conflicts have led to Christians moving towards the south of the city and Muslims moving towards the north of the city. Muslims are the majority in areas like Angwan Rogo and Naraguta, while Christians are the majority in areas like Tudun Wada and Kabong. The situation is equally similar in parts of Bauchi state. For example,

due to recurrent ethno-religious conflicts in Tafawa Balewa town of Bauchi state, Muslims have had to move to other towns like Bununu and Mararraban Liman Katagun while Christians have also moved from those areas to Tafawa Balewa town. In all of such cases, it is considered generally dangerous for a Christian to be in a Muslim-dominated area and dangerous for a Muslim to be in a Christian-dominated area. In other words, in areas where one of the religions is the absolute majority, it is generally considered unsafe for adherents of the other religion to live or pass through. As a result, many cities in Northern Nigeria continue to be divided along ethno-religious lines, further heightening the geographical nonconvergence of Christian and Muslim identities in the region.

This is what makes Jesus' crossing a geographical boundary that led to reconciliation between Jews and Samaritans relevant to our context in Northern Nigeria. Whether out of divine or geographical necessity, the fact that Jesus "had to go through Samaria" for ethno-religious reconciliation to begin challenges those committed to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria to consider it a necessity to take the risk and go to communities that are dominated by members of the other religion or ethnic group, which is the first step to having an honest conversation that will lead to mutual understanding, tolerance, and reconciliation.

To bring about peace, Christians and Muslims committed to peace in Northern Nigeria would need to take the courage to go to and/or through the so-called 'no-go areas' as Jesus did, especially when there is relative peace, to start conversations and rebuild trust. If people committed to peace go to or through the 'no-go areas' peacefully without threats or weapons and engage each other in frank conversations as Jesus and the Samaritan woman did, it can be a significant step towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Some less risky ways to go to such 'no-go areas' are to go through Governmental Organizations (GOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for humanitarian services, which do not easily evoke suspicion or violence. Hence, NGOs and GOs working in the area of conflict resolution and peacebuilding can play a significant role in leading people to go to typical 'no-go areas' and start hard but meaningful conversations and dialogue. Jesus' next action after crossing the geographical boundary also serves a conflict resolution and peacebuilding purpose, as will be seen in the next section.

5.2. "Give Me a Drink" (v. 7): Common Need, Initiative and Vulnerability in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

It is one thing to encourage peacemakers from the two conflicting groups to go to each other's 'no-go areas', it is another thing to know how to start the conversation that will lead to mutual trust and reconciliation. Jesus's approach in initiating a conversation with the Samaritan woman, therefore, serves as a model for conflict resolution in three ways.

First, it serves as a model for conflict resolution in the way that Jesus acknowledges his own need and vulnerability, which simultaneously acknowledges that his 'enemy' (a Samaritan) has something to offer him that will meet his need. That Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water, he recognizes his need and the woman's ability to meet it. Approaching each other in dialogue and acknowledging that one ethnic group or religion alone does not have all the solutions to their own needs and the needs of the entire Northern Nigerian society but would need what the other group has to offer, is a good strategy to build mutual trust from the beginning of the conversation.

In Northern Nigeria, each part of the divided cities, as described above, has something to offer to other parts of the city, which could be in terms of economy, education, transport, and other social amenities. For example, in Jos, a large number of the bus drivers between Terminus and Bukuru areas are Muslim youths. Hence, once there is a crisis and the buses are not coming to the Bukuru area again, the Christians in that area face difficulties with transportation. Similarly, a large number of the traders with wholesale goods in Terminus

are Christians from the Igbo ethnic group. Whenever there is an ethno-religious crisis and they close their shops, Muslims in Jos North face difficulties buying household accessories. This shows that each group has something to offer and needs what the other group has to offer. Hence, a dialogue could start with one group asking the other for help. The Christian group can start by asking the Muslim group, “Would you mind extending your transport services to the Christian-dominated areas?”. This is a hard question, but one which necessitates a hard and frank conversation. The logical answer from the Muslim youth would be, “How about the danger of us going into the inner parts of your community?” “What about our safety?”. This leads straight to hard talk about the problem of insecurity and the measures to be taken to ensure the safety of both sides while they try to meet the needs of each other.

Secondly, Jesus’ request (“give me a drink”) is not just a request for water, but a polite request (NLT “please give me a drink”) that seems to demand more than water but a conversation. The fact that in v. 10, Jesus said if the Samaritan woman had known who he was, she would have asked him for living water, suggests that when he asked her for a drink, he intended more to start a conversation than to ask for water, even though the physical water could quench his physical thirst. The Samaritan woman’s answer with a question (“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”) shows how Jesus’ request led straight to the real issue that Jesus would later address, namely, the sharp difference or even enmity between Jews and Samaritans. By telling Jesus, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan, how can you ask me for a drink?”, the Samaritan woman was implicitly asking, “What happened to the enmity between us Samaritans and you Jews? What about the purity laws that make us see each other as impure?”. Hence, Jesus’ request and the Samaritan woman’s question, which led to a frank conversation (see [Amoah 2017](#), p. 332), serve as models for initiating and advancing frank conversations between two ethno-religious groups that have geographical, ethno-religious, and epistemological boundaries separating them.

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman started on their common and basic needs ([Amoah 2017](#), p. 330), thereby teaching Christians, Muslims, and people of different ethnic groups in Nigeria the value of initiating a conversation on our common needs as a viable strategy for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. One thing was certain: both the woman and Jesus had a need—water. The woman had come to fetch water, and Jesus needed water to drink, suggesting that both of them were thirsty. Today, both Christians and Muslims are thirsty and even hungry for peace and development in Nigeria. This is one thing that unites us—a common thirst for long-lasting peace and security. Hence, the conversation around this need should be honest, as Jesus and the Samaritan woman’s conversation was, where the distinctives, stereotypes, and theological convictions of each side were clearly presented and, eventually, a superordinate identity was constructed to integrate the two subgroups. Peace and conflict resolution efforts in Nigeria should, therefore, involve such frank but respectful discussions where non-convergences, stereotypes, and opposing theological convictions between Christians and Muslims and between conflicting ethnic groups such as the Jukun versus Kuteb ([Mijah 2018](#), p. 10; [Fakuade 1999](#), pp. 69–79) or Jukun and Tiv people of Taraba and Benue states ([Ishyaka et al. 2023](#); [Odigbo 2018](#)) are not downplayed but recognized and integrated into a superordinate identity.

Thirdly, the fact that the tension between the Jews and Samaritans centered around purity in multiple ways suggests that when Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink, he disregarded the existing prejudices or stereotypes around purity, which is why the woman reminded him (v. 9) of the issue of purity that separates them ([Hunt 2023](#), p. 9). That Jesus ignored his Jewish purity laws and asked the Samaritan woman for water, and his disciples equally ignored their Jewish purity laws and bought food from Samaritan

people (see v. 8 “his disciples had gone to the city to buy food”), against the backdrop of the fact that “Jews did not share vessels with Samaritans,” indicates the border-transcending sense of social identity of Jesus and his disciples (Hunt 2023, pp. 5–6).

By identifying himself as the one who gives ‘living water,’ Jesus equally implied being a source of purity himself who provides continual purification instead of one that is done to cleanse specific impurities from time to time. By providing continual purification, Jesus affirms and includes diaspora (Samaritan) subgroup identities with their various purity practices. Moreover, he renders obsolete the hierarchy of purity that existed between the various sub-groups and was used for status evaluation (Hunt 2023, pp. 9–11).

Stereotypes around the theme of purity are as much a problem among religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria as it was between the Jews and Samaritans. Apart from both Christians and Muslims each claiming to have the true religion or worshipping the true God while the other religion does not, many Muslims in Northern Nigeria have a tendency to regard Christians generally as polytheistic and morally lax when it comes to sexual purity, dressing, drinking alcohol, and the like, while many Christians also have a tendency to regard Muslims generally as legalistic, hypocritical, hateful, with terroristic tendencies or sympathetic to terrorists, and the like. The presence of strict Sharia law in certain parts of Northern Nigeria has further strengthened the stereotype among Christians against Muslims as legalistic and hypocritical and has further strengthened the stereotypes among Muslims against Christians as too liberal and licentious. These stereotypes have further deepened the divide and continue to fuel conflicts between Christians and Muslims.

Another stereotype emanates mostly from the media. The fact that many of the film actors and celebrities in Nollywood (the Nigerian entertainment industry) identify themselves as Christians yet act in movies, dress, or behave in ways that are considered ‘immoral’ by many Muslims, many Muslims associate the lifestyles of such celebrities with all Christians. They regard those ‘immoral’ celebrities as representing the Christian faith, partly because they do not see the Christian community publicly condemning such ‘indecent’ dressing or ‘immoral’ behaviours. Conversely, the fact that many terrorists also identify as Muslims has further strengthened the stereotypes against Muslims as generally having a tendency for hate and terrorism or at least sympathetic to terrorists who identify as Muslims. The many videos of terrorists, such as Boko Haram members, citing Qur’anic verses and claiming to be working for Allah and so advancing the course of Islam have further emboldened the stereotypes against Muslims as people with terroristic tendencies. Just as many Muslims see Christian movie stars as a true representation of Christianity or Christians, many Christians also see Muslim terrorists as a true representation of Islam or Muslims.

Such stereotypes also exist among ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups are generally seen as being morally lax when it comes to sexual immorality, while others are generally regarded as people with hot temper or other vices. For example, the Hausa/Fulani people are generally stereotyped as backward while the Yoruba are generally stereotyped as treacherous (Ogionwo 1980, p. 101; Ikòtún and Adú 2014, pp. 6–8). This is why many families reject the idea of their children marrying someone from an ethnic group that has such stereotypes.

Such stereotypes that intensify ethno-religious conflicts are what peacemakers among Christians and Muslims and different ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria need to, like Jesus, ignore, go to, converse with, and live with people who are generally stereotyped. As the disciples of Jesus were surprised or even suspicious (of Jesus’ sense of purity as a Jew or awareness thereof) when they found him speaking with a Samaritan woman, such actions of peacemakers in Northern Nigeria can trigger suspicion of their purity or even rejection among their people. Nevertheless, it is worth the effort, since it gradually dismantles those

stereotypes, builds mutual trust, and paves the way for sustainable conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence, in the same way that Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman dismantled mutual stereotypes, rebuilt mutual trust, and led to conflict resolution among Jews and Samaritans.

5.3. *"Are You Greater than Our Ancestor Jacob?" (v. 11) Conflict Resolution Within a Shared but Complicated Ethno-Religious Ancestry*

Locating the destination or audience of John's gospel to a socially complex rather than a homogenous group in the area of Ephesus (Hunt 2023, pp. 2–5), Hunt notes that mentioning Jacob, the patriarch most revered by the Samaritans, several times at the beginning (vv. 5–6) but also in the middle of the narrative (v. 12, 20) is significant in the author's rhetorical construction of the importance of the Samaritan Israelite's identity as a subgroup of the Jesus-followers identity (Hunt 2023, p. 5), further showing how the remembered Jesus recognizes but also validates each subgroup within the Jesus-followers ingroup. The reference to Jacob and Joseph at the beginning of the narrative (v. 5), therefore, reminds the two subgroups (Judean and Samaritan Israelites) of their shared genealogy and historical belonging (Amoah 2017, p. 331). Moreover, such a shared genealogy and belonging as represented in the mention of Jacob and Joseph in John 4 challenges readers who would think of these two subgroups simplistically as mutually exclusive towards a more complex consideration of their social identities (Hunt 2023, p. 5). In this way, Jesus is remembered as an inclusive rather than divisive figure, therefore having a high social identity complexity.

Jesus' claim to being the Christ (v. 26) also has implications for his high social identity complexity. By affirming that he is the Christ, Jesus is equally answering the Samaritan woman's question in v. 12 as to whether he is greater than their ancestor Jacob. While this claim and the effect of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, namely, the whole town of Samaria coming to him and believing in him, could suggest that Jesus "absorbs all Jacob's descendants into a dominating identity" (Hunt 2023, p. 6), therefore operating from a dominance mode of social identity negotiation, Hunt sees it rather as suggesting a more complex and inclusive merger of the two subgroups, such that Jesus encourages the unity but simultaneously affirms the Samaritan Israelite identity (Hunt 2023, p. 6).

In the context of Northern Nigeria, each ethno-religious group lays claim to some ethnic and/or religious ancestry and regards preserving the legacies and heritage of those ancestors as part of the reasons to fight and defend their land or religion. However, whether it regards pre-colonial, colonial, or post-colonial periods, or it regards ethnic and religious ancestry, the ancestors of contemporary Northern Nigerians lived more peacefully with one another than what is obtainable today. It is common in Northern Nigeria to hear elders share experiences of how the region was more peaceful about 50 years ago, with minimal cases of ethno-religious violence and terrorism compared to the present situation.

Before Christianity and Islam came to Northern Nigeria, people in Northern Nigeria had a shared religious ancestry regarding African Traditional Religions (ATR). This, however, does not mean that ATR was homogenous. ATR was diverse, but with similar characteristics across the continent, having its own resources and mechanisms for conflict resolution (Akano and Bamigbose 2019, pp. 253–55; Ottoh 2022; Magoti 2019). Moreover, in present-day Northern Nigeria, both Christians and Muslims lay claim to spiritual ancestry related to Abraham, Moses, David, and the like. This shared but complicated ethnic and religious ancestries among ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria can form one of the topics for frank dialogue towards conflict resolution in the region, where the convergence and non-convergence of this shared but complicated ancestry can be discussed. In conflict resolution meetings and dialogues in Northern Nigeria, it is important to clearly discuss and describe the shared or distinct religious and ethnic ancestry of the two conflicting

parties, yet integrate each group's claims to ancestry within a broader social identity of the ethnic group, religion, or region.

5.4. True Worshippers of the Father (vv. 21–24): Crossing Ethno-Religious Theological Boundaries in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

Contextually, when the Samaritan woman said “our father/s (ancestor/s)” (v. 12, 20), she used it in an exclusive sense of Samaritan Israelites excluding Judean Israelites (including Jesus). However, Jesus shifted the reference from an exclusive use of “father” to an inclusive use of “the Father,” because both Samaritan and Judean Israelites referred to God as their Father (cf. Exod 4:22; Deut 32: 6, 18) (Hunt 2023, p. 5). In this way, “Jesus adds that identity to the superordinate group to which they both belong” (Hunt 2023, p. 5) without denying the ethnic ancestry that the woman held on to. In other words, Jesus shifted the focus from an ethnic claim of ancestorship or fatherhood that excludes “the other” to a creational and salvific one that includes everyone, indicating his high social identity complexity. Keener equally notes that, in John 4:21–22, Jesus calls for “a higher worship that transcends geographical (hence also, in this context, ethnic) particularities” (Keener 2003, vol. 1, p. 611; Hunt 2023, p. 6). Such readings as Keener’s have been criticized, especially in postcolonial readings (e.g., Dube 2002, p. 64; Hunt 2023, p. 6) for their leaning towards a “dominance” mode of identity negotiation where subgroup identity and differentiation are reduced or even suppressed rather than integrated into the superordinate larger group identity. Nevertheless, SIC readings of John 4 such as Anderson and Hunt’s, as discussed above, have convincingly argued and demonstrated how Jesus operates a “merger” or integrative mode of identity negotiation rather than a “dominance” mode, thereby addressing the objections raised by postcolonial readings. By saying that a time has come when Jews and Samaritans will neither worship in the temple at Jerusalem nor at Mount Gerizim (John 4:21), Jesus meant that “both forms and places of worship will be transcended by a new and universal spiritual order” (Lewis 2009, p. 322). Jesus’ inclusive approach to negotiating complex social identities becomes, therefore, a model for peacemakers in Northern Nigeria.

While the nature of the God(s) that Christians and Muslims in Nigeria worship differ in some ways (e.g., in the concept of the Trinity in Christianity and its nonexistence in Islam), the two religions each have a ‘shared’ view of God as one, supreme and almighty God. In the same way that Jesus shifted the discussion to a concept of God’s fatherhood of both the Jews and Samaritans, conflict resolution discussions in Nigeria can explicate the shared fatherhood of God as the creator of all people, thereby emphasizing the common humanity of Christians and Muslims and people of all ethnic groups. In this case, true worship is worship that is not determined by specific geographical location or mode (e.g., Churches, Mosques, or shrines), but by maintaining a positive and tolerant attitude towards all humanity as God’s children.

Moreover, the fact that Jesus shifts the focus of the discussion on identities from the past to a uniting identity in the now and the future (v. 23) (Hunt 2023, p. 7) is instructive for the Nigerian context. It is observable that dwelling so much on the past rather than investing more in the future is one of the factors responsible for continuous ethno-religious violence in Northern Nigeria. Laying claims to different ethnic and religious ancestry in the past as a reason to exclude ‘the other’ means dwelling in the past, while discussing current realities and the way forward for peaceful co-existence under a superordinate identity means focusing on the now and the future. Inspired by the example of Jesus in John 4, conflict resolution talks in Northern Nigeria can acknowledge past realities and causes while primarily focusing on the present and future. These discussions can aim to find overarching identities that effectively integrate the various group identities in Northern Nigeria. Such a superordinate identity should affirm subgroup differences

while equally upholding broader regional, national, and human identities that promote peaceful coexistence.

5.5. *“Salvation Is from the Jews”? Conflict Resolution in the Context of Ethno-Religious Exclusivism*

While Jesus’ statement that the Samaritans worship what they do not know but the Jews worship what they know, as well as his assertion that “salvation is from the Jews” (v. 22) could be construed as ethnocentric and exclusivist, if not even offensive, in the way that Jesus ascribes superior knowledge to himself (and his fellow Jews) and ignorance or inferior knowledge to the Samaritan woman and her people (Dube 2002, p. 67), Hunt and Brandt think that it possibly refers only to who within the two subgroups has access to which texts and information rather than an ethnocentric and exclusivist claim. Specifically, they argue that the statement possibly refers to the superior knowledge of ‘the Jews’, found in their texts beyond the Pentateuch, giving them access to more knowledge about the Messiah beyond what the Samaritans had (Ezek. 47:1–12) (Hunt 2023, p. 7; Brant 2011, pp. 85–86).

I think, however, that the statement is directly connected to Jesus’ legitimate claim to being the Messiah (v. 26). “Salvation is from the Jews” is stating the fact that the Messiah will or has come from the Jewish subgroup rather than the Samaritan subgroup. Both the Jews and Samaritans had a shared expectation of the coming Messiah. However, the Messiah comes from (but not only for) the Jewish subgroup. Stated differently, salvation is from the Jews, but it is not for the Jews alone. Realizing that Jesus was a prophet (v. 19), the Samaritan woman said in v. 25, “I know that the Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” It seems, therefore, that the Samaritan woman and her people later believed in Jesus because they realized these facts: that the Messiah had come from the other subgroup (Jews) and that part of his tasks was to reconcile the Jews and Samaritans.

Amid conflicting truth claims regarding whose place and pattern of worship is more sacred than the other between Jews and Samaritans, the Samaritan woman left room for the coming Messiah to explain what the truth is (v. 25). Interestingly, at the end of the narrative, it does not matter anymore from where the Messiah comes. What mattered was that he provided the explanation that the Samaritan woman and her people had long waited for, and reconciled the two subgroups by constructing a superordinate identity of Jesus-followers that recognizes and affirms the legitimacy of each subgroup yet integrates them in the superordinate ingroup in the most inclusive way. This has implications for Nigeria. It does not and should not matter if the reconciliation and peace initiative comes from the Muslim or Christian side. What should matter is that in the end, there should be peace and reconciliation between different ethno-religious groups that are in conflict with each other.

With reference to the theme of knowledge in John 4, Hunt notes that Jesus affirms the Samaritans’ knowledge that the Messiah is coming and will teach them to know all that they need to know about worship, and equally affirms the Judean’s knowledge of the Messiah (“salvation is from the Jews”), enabling him to construct an ingroup identity that integrates the two subgroups (Hunt 2023, p. 7). In this way, “John’s Jesus presents an inclusive superordinate group of worshippers in spirit and truth, who still carry the identity-defining memories from different subgroups” (Hunt 2023, p. 7). To further stress how the author presents the social identity of Jesus as highly complex in John 4, Hunt states that the Johannine author presents a Jesus who validates both the Samaritan and Judean identities, “revealing Jesus’ identity in both ‘Jewish’ and Samaritan terms” (Hunt 2023, p. 8). Similar to the Jewish and Samaritan situation, claims of superiority of their own religion and ethnicity over others among both Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria has

been identified as one of the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria (Akinwumi and Balogun 2016, p. 69). We will discuss below how Jesus' model of constructing and projecting a superordinate social identity that integrates subgroup identities can be appropriated in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

5.6. *The Samaritan Woman as a Prototype of Conflict Resolution*

The lessons for conflict resolution and peacebuilding drawn from Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman extend beyond the actions of Jesus; they also emerge from the responses and actions of the Samaritan woman herself as a border-crosser (Mehring 2024, pp. 6–13). Her response, open-heartedness, honesty (Ustinovich 2024, p. 100; Mehring 2024, p. 9), and the invitation to her people are vital models of intergroup conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Carter affirms that the Samaritan woman is presented as a prototype of joining the new Jesus ingroup in the way that she progressively gained an understanding of who Jesus is, recognized him as a prophet (4:19), and most importantly, as the Messiah, thereby sealing her ingroup membership (4:25–26, 29), then by inviting others to do the same (4:49). Through her testimony and invitation, other people in her city believed in Jesus after listening to him and confessed him as 'Savior of the world,' recognizing his and his ingroup's universal and transnational identity, thereby affirming their ingroup membership (Carter 2020, p. 181). Her action of sharing the news of her intercultural and boundary-crossing encounters with her people and inviting them to experience what she had experienced becomes a model for peacemakers in Northern Nigeria. Just as the encounter that led to conflict resolution between Jews and Samaritans started with Jesus and the Samaritan woman before extending to the whole city, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria can be effective even if it starts with only a few people from different sides of the divide who are willing to cross geographical borders, ignore divisive purity laws and stereotypes, engage in frank but respectful conversations, and invite others to join.

The Samaritan woman's statement that when the Messiah comes, he will explain everything to them (v. 25) is significant for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In that statement, she recognizes her limited knowledge of the truth about worship and indicates her open-mindedness to accept the truth when confronted with it, when the Messiah comes. And her open-mindedness led her to accept Jesus' teaching that true worship is non-geographical, thereby challenging her claim to Gerizim as the more sacred place of worship compared to the Jews' Jerusalem temple.

In any ethno-religious conflict resolution, coming with an awareness of one's limited knowledge, an open mind, and readiness to have a dialogue (Olowo 2021) and have the other perspective explained in such a way that may challenge one's ethno-religious perspectives and claims to sacredness and superior knowledge makes reconciliation and peacebuilding easier. This is one of the legacies of the Samaritan woman, which makes her also a model of ethno-religious conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

5.7. *Projecting Superordinate Social Identity as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism*

All the different and often nonconvergent identities between Christians and Muslims and between different ethnic groups in Nigeria necessitate finding a superordinate social identity that recognizes these distinctions but integrates these subgroups successfully, thereby reducing inter-group competition and conflicts and promoting tolerance and peaceful co-existence. In social identity theory, one way of reducing intergroup conflicts is to coalesce subgroups in or under a superordinate group identity without undermining or eliminating group differences within the overarching group (Carter 2020, p. 182). "The superordinate identity recognizes differences but reduces competition and conflict by em-

bracing difference within a larger superordinate identity” (Carter 2020, p. 182). Carter finds in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman a scene where a superordinate identity of the Jesus ingroup is formed, but simultaneously, differences in territory, ethnicity, gender, and religion are recognized and maintained. Noting how these various group identities are maintained but subsumed and subordinated to Jesus as the superordinate identity, Carter sees imperialism in such a construction of superordinate identity because it subordinates land, ethnic, gender, and religious identities to Jesus as the only revealer and supreme revelation of God. This, to Carter, is imperial and imperializing (Carter 2020, p. 182). However, as discussed above, Jesus’ strategy of constructing a superordinate social identity has been seen both positively and negatively, depending on the reader’s presupposition and lens from which the text is read.

The present study, using the lens of SIC in the context of ethno-religious conflict resolution and peacebuilding, takes a more positive view of Jesus’s strategy of minimizing intergroup conflicts by integrating subgroup identities under an inclusive superordinate identity. A superordinate identity that recognizes and appreciates different intergroup identities but reduces competition and conflict is appreciated in reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives. Referring to general intercultural dynamics in the New Testament, Kahl (2024) affirms that in the early church, the ethos of the Christ-believing communities appreciated (cultural) differences and did not leave room for any cultural superiority, to the extent that joining their community “did not require one to leave his/her culture behind but only those cultural aspects or attitudes that aim at disrespecting or hurting others” (Kahl 2024, p. 289). In the case of his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus becomes a model of appreciation of difference but equally of establishing an overarching social identity that recognizes and appreciates ethnic, religious, gender, and status differences but minimizes competition and conflicts, serving as a model for Nigeria today.

In a multi-religious and multi-ethnic region like northern Nigeria, it is impractical to construct a superordinate social identity around a single religious figure, such as Jesus or Muhammad, because both Christians and Muslims interpret the identity of these figures through the lens of their own faith traditions. This is one of the nonconvergencies of the two religions that need to be recognized and not downplayed. In this case, the lesson to be learned from Jesus is the idea of constructing and projecting a superordinate identity in which Christians and Muslims and people of various ethno-religious groups in northern Nigeria can relate to and belong along with others. Since constructing such a superordinate identity around one person is futile, the best alternative superordinate social identities in northern Nigeria would be regional, national, and human identities. However, the risk in promoting regional identity needs to be noted. If a regional identity is highly promoted alone without national identity equally promoted, it has a tendency to engender inter-regional discrimination and hatred. Hence, any attempt to promote regional identity as superordinate identity is to be done simultaneously with national identity, thereby showing regional identity as one of the subgroup identities within a national superordinate identity.

This suggestion is at the backdrop of the observation that one of the factors responsible for incessant ethno-religious violence in northern Nigeria is the weak sense of a national superordinate identity and resultant patriotism, resulting in “Nigeria without Nigerians” (Bamidele 2015). The larger groups, such as regional and national identities, seem to be so weak that they are not capable of standing as superordinate social identities and integrating subgroup identities. This problem is well noted by Bamidele (2015), who argues that there is Nigeria but there are no Nigerians in the sense that there are no adequate number of Nigerians who connect with or regard Nigeria as a superordinate social identity that integrates their smaller group identities such as regional, religious and ethnic identities. Therefore, as a viable long-term strategy for conflict resolution and

peacebuilding, GOs and NGOs, religious organizations, civil society organizations, the entertainment industry, media, and all stakeholders need to commit to projecting and promoting the Nigerian national identity and extend human identities as superordinate social identities that recognize and integrate all regional, religious, and ethnic identities in Nigeria.

6. Conclusions

Using the lens of SIC to read John 4:1–42 in the context of ethno-religious conflict resolution and peacebuilding in northern Nigeria, this study concludes that Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4 offers a valuable model for resolving ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria. By acknowledging and integrating non-convergent identities into a more inclusive superordinate social identity, Jesus demonstrates a path toward reconciliation that appreciates differences and similarities simultaneously within the larger overarching identity. This model of inclusive identity, rooted in SIC theory, presents a framework for addressing the ongoing challenges of ethno-religious violence in northern Nigeria.

In the context of northern Nigeria, where ethno-religious violence is often exacerbated by stereotypes, geographical segregation, and competing claims to ethnic and religious superiority, the paper suggests that fostering a national and human superordinate identity could help reduce intergroup tensions. Such an identity would recognize and validate the distinctiveness of both Christian and Muslim identities as well as ethnic identities, while promoting shared national and human identities that unite people across religious and ethnic lines.

To achieve this, the paper emphasizes the need for deliberate efforts from religious leaders, GOs, NGOs, the entertainment industry, and civil society to promote dialogue and build bridges across divided communities. By modelling the inclusive and boundary-crossing approach of Jesus, peacebuilders in Nigeria can work towards sustainable solutions that encourage tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence.

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