

The Islamic Model for Conflict Management: A Panacea to Religious Crises in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is not an exception to the nations that are currently ridden with religious conflicts and crises. Recently, there is an academic campaign to the effect that the Western model for conflict resolution can no more in exclusion of others handle the fledging religious conflicts in a much pluralistic modern world. Hence, the need for alternative models for conflict management, including that of Islam. This study is an attempt to apply Islamic model for conflict management as a solution to the religious crises in Nigeria. The study involves both field and library research. The study discovered that successive governments in Nigeria have not been able to adopt a holistic and pragmatic approach characterised with equality, justice, all-inclusiveness and veto power to combat the incessant religious conflicts. The government is therefore urged to borrow a leaf from the Islamic model in its much-dedicated efforts at preventing further conflicts.

Keywords: Islamic, model, conflict, crisis and Nigeria

Introduction

From western perspective, conflict is viewed as natural and potentially positive, and not merely as a source of instability and threat; attempt to merely suppress conflict through coercive power and authoritative rules are viewed with disfavour in contrast to attempts to broker durable, mutually beneficial resolutions to problems, satisfying the interests of competing parties in a ‘win-win’ solution. (Said 2011). Muslim approaches to conflict resolution draw on religious values, traditional rituals of reconciliation and historical practices of communal and inter-communal co-existence. These mechanisms aim to empower family groups and community members to participate in matters of common concern, strong emphasis is placed on linkages between personal and group identity.

It is worthy of note that the seemingly failure of western model for conflict and crisis management in contemporary time as apparent in the middle-east unrest and other countries has given birth to pronounced campaign for alternative models, including that of Islam. More western writers are showing passionate interest in this agitation. Hence, the work of Flamur Vehapi, entitled: ‘Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam’ is fast becoming the central research source for this discourse.

Based on the foregoing, the current attempt seeks to use the Islamic model for conflict management as means of resolving the fledging religious crises in Nigeria. It is not far-fetched that Nigeria is among the nations that have shares in the negative narratives of religious crises in the contemporary time.

Religion, Conflict and Crises in Nigeria

Idowu (1973: 75) opined that religion is man's spontaneous awareness and reaction to a living power who is greater than himself, yet the living power seeks to bring man into communion with himself. At the early stage of religious development, the supernatural being revealed himself to man spontaneously through the natural phenomena in which man responded to this divine self-disclosure by depending on the supernatural powers. Anyacho (2005:1) asserted that religion is “the coming together of a group which is bound by a common feeling of dependence on a particular objects or subjects believed to be more powerful than man”. Religion is a social phenomenon. It is not a private affair; rather religious sentiments must be shared and upheld by a group of people. Apart from religion being a social phenomenon, Omoregbe (1999:3) in his view maintained that religion is an encounter between man and a transcendental being conceived as a personal being, capable of communicating with man. For him, religion takes the form of dialogue between man and the Supernatural being. Ugwu (2002:2) stated that religion is concerned with faith and practices which involve the relationship between human beings and what is regarded as the sacred.

Conflict is a natural disagreement that results from differences in attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs of individuals or groups. There is a conflict when disagreement between parties degenerate to fighting, quarrels and struggle for selfish interests. Elom (2008:119) made this view clearer when he described conflict as armed fighting; a war, struggle that occurs between opposing groups over clash of feelings and interest. Nmah (2009:28) said that conflict is a process that erupts when a group sees that another group has damaged or about to destroy something that is important to them. Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000:68) succinctly put it that conflict arises when there is competition over the control of scarce resources or advantages desired by other groups and it does not require physical violence. Conflict can take place in a society in various forms. There is conflict that requires physical violence and there is conflict that does not require physical violence between the groups.

Okai (2008: 46) postulated that conflict can take place whenever people have contact. The organization of people in groups is a potential factor that can lead to social conflict. Okai (2008:48) insists that conflict is prevalent within and between social relations constituted to pursue common goal. For instance, there is conflict in families, ethnic groups, social institutions and organizations, political parties and states. Conflict is a universal reality in almost all the societies of the world. There is no society that has not experienced one conflict or the other. It is a common belief among proponents of conflict that conflict is

not destructive as people think; rather conflict is a vehicle for positive change. Nma (2009: 28) argued that conflict can be dysfunctional when it becomes destructive but if it is properly managed it can become functional.

In religious conflicts, it is not clear which aims are to be achieved. Gofwen (2004) regards political aims as primary; in his view, religious conflicts form a specific form of conflict between groups which differ ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance. In a similar vein, Takaya (1992) emphasizes the political import of religions: i. Religions are parochial and emotional socializers. They specialize in building one-faith exclusive brotherhood communities; ii. Religion, at some point, is politics and is the most potent and long-lasting political association. Moreover, religious creeds excite and extract the deepest possible emotional and physical loyalties from their adherents when in political competition with people of other faiths.

One significant element driving conflicts of this type is the attitude of superiority that religious persuasions as a sociological fact often adopt in their dealings or assessment of others. This attitude tends to exclude others, classifies them as ignorant and doomed and invariably, creates an atmosphere of hostility. This atmosphere of hostility tends to intensify where opposing religious persuasions see their numerical strengths as political advantage. In such a situation, the leaders think that new religions are threats to the hegemonies

enjoyed. Further, where the political, social or economic factors are unfavourable, messianic rhetoric can exacerbate the tensions.

The coming together of the three major religions in Nigeria, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion ushered in religious conflicts in the religious landscape of the Nigerian Society. It cannot be contended that since the emergence of these religions in Nigeria, there have been incessant religious conflicts that have deprived this country the opportunity of having harmonious co-existence among the adherents of these religions. Religious conflict has become a household name in Nigeria. There is hardly a day that passes without hearing of religious disturbances in some parts of this country.

It is not a gain saying that religious conflict has become a common occurrence in which many lives are lost, others are maimed and property worth of billions is destroyed almost on daily basis. Colonial masters play a vital role in the growth of ethnic religious conflicts, these colonial masters brought the Christianity with them and try to penetrate the western values in the system of Nigeria. They tried to produce the ethnic groups conflicts. British also used this to exploit the traditional culture of Nigeria. British, as usual use their divide and rule policy to sow the seed of conflicts on the basis of religious conflicts among the people in Nigeria. Another achievement at the part of British people was division of Northern and Southern Part of the basis of ethnic groups and they done this under the name of native right ordinance in 1910. Towns that have

experienced some of the notable religious conflicts in the post-independence era include; Maitatsine riots in Bulumkutu (1982); Maitatsine riots in Jimeta (1984); Kano(Maitatsine- 1980,1982, 1987, 1990, 1995) Maitatsine riots in Gombe (1985,1991); Illorin religious conflict (1986); Jalingo (1992, 2009); Shagamu (1999); Kafanchan (1987); Tafawa Balewa (1991, 1995, 2001); Zangon-Kataf (1992); Tiv-Jukun and Tiv-Kuteb (1992-93); Potiskum (1994, 2009) Kuteb-Chamba (1997-1998); Igbirra-Bassa (1986-2000);Moon-Eclipse crisis in Borno (1996); Kaduna (Maitatsine riots in Rigassa 1982, 1992, 2000) Tiv and Others in Nassarawa (2001); Jos (1994, 2000, 2001-2003, 2008, 2009, 2010); Ikulu-Bajju (2001); Yelwa-Shandam (2002,2004); Mangu-Bokkos (1992-1995); Bukuru-Gyero (1997); Maiduguri (2006, 2009) Iggah-Oyikwa (2002); Kano(2004); Numan (2004); Azare (2001); Bauchi (2010); Ibadan(2010), Wukari (2010). (Fatimah 2017).

The genesis of religious conflict in Nigeria has been traced by Nwaomah (2014) to the pattern of colonial system of governance. This, it is assumed, is traceable to the pluralistic nature of the different colonial administrative arrangements which later became the Nigerian state-a stage set up following the Berlin Conference of 1884. Islam had taken a firm hold in the Northern part and Christianity was the flourishing faith in the Southern part. These circumstances left the emerging nation divided into two parts with deep ideological differences

in politics and economic organization, as these are advocated by the two religions.

Some of the colonial policies which hitherto some Christians believe that they were responsible for religious grudge in Nigeria are the political autonomy given to the Emirs in the North through the ‘non-interference policy’ and ‘indirect rule’ system which coincidentally was in tandem with the Islamic principle of state and religion.

In addition, the colonial masters had at some time restricted the missionary activities of the Christians in the Northern region to areas currently known as: ‘Sabon-Gari’. (Nwaomah 2014). In contrast, Muslim writers have also emphasized the negative impact of the colonial masters on the fledging religious crises in the country. Opeloye (2003) has submitted that the colonial educational and political legacy were bequeathed to the South-west elites at the detriment of the Muslims. Sanni (2007) has also given the historical narratives for how the colonial masters tampered with the Islamic judicial system on ground inbninbo the North.

The pre-independence smokescreen of religious conflict was responsible for the incessant and subsequent crises in Nigeria. Gumi (1992) has alluded that the 1966 military onslaught on Tafawa Balewa and Sir Ahmadu Bello was an Igbo-Christian conspiracy against the Muslims. Likewise, Kukah (1993) has posited that the Hausa-Islamic agenda as apparent in the *Shari’ah* polemics was

responsible for religious crises in Northern Nigeria. Sulaiman (2016) enumerated the factors of religious crises in Nigeria as include: theological difference, fanaticism, unbridled action of the press, political tricks, poverty and others. It is worthy of concluding that arising from the foregoing, ethno-religious card has been the major brain behind the religious crises in the country beginning from the pre-independence era to date.

Conflict Management: An Islamic Model

In the dominant western conception, peace is associated with the absence of war or organized violence and justice with an absence of gross violations of human rights. (Said 2014). Since the 1990s, scholars and practitioners have applied Western conflict resolution theories and other intervention models such as cultural diversity, co-existence etc. to Middle Eastern countries. Three objectives according to Abu Nimer (2016) can be identified in the application of Western conflict resolution models, namely: teaching and exporting Western perceptions of conflict resolutions to Middle Eastern and Islamic groups; exploring alternative to learn how to control radical groups and acquiring more of the background of Islamic movements, utilizing it to legitimize new tools of conflict management frameworks of their countries. With the apparent failure of Western approaches in this discourse, most especially as they affect the Middle East, there is a much academic pressure on the Islamic approach to peace and conflict management.

The Islamic model for conflict management provides new angles of insight into universal human dilemmas, as well as important supplementation to studies to recognise contemporary Islamic activism not as backward-looking rejection of the modern world, but as deeply felt expression of cultural identity and a critique of domestic as well as international political orders. (Said 2014).

Generally, the discourse of Islamic model for conflict management falls within the framework of Islamic concept of peace. The Islamic perspective of peace according to Yasien (2004) exclusively comprises two phases namely: combating what often leads to violence and breakup of peace and resolving the subsisting grudges if conflict arises. The following five principles which are regarded as the bedrock for peace concept in Islam have much taken care of the two phases suggested by Yasien. The principles are as follows:

- i. ***Tawhid* (Uniform origin)**: it connotes that human, despite their difference in tribe, faith, ethnic and colour, belong to a uniform creator; and hence, should relate with one another on the basis of that ancient family bond. Q4:1, Q5:48 and 105 respectively stress the above principle.
- ii. ***Al-Fitrah* (Non-changeable nature)**: this concept alludes to the fact that diversity is an ultimate sign of Allah's existence and supremacy and any attempt to tamper with it is tantamount to defying the wish of,

and disrupting the plan of the Divine Creator. Q30:22, Q10:19 and Q2:213 also established the above principle.

- iii. ***Al- 'Adl (Justice)***: injustice is a key cause of conflict and dispute and failure to curb it, is a clear index of continuing grudge in a given society. Hence, Dan Fodio (2003) asserts that a society can live with unbelief, but it cannot live with injustice. Q4:58, Q16:76 and 90 and Q5:8 and 42 all established the virtue of justice in Islam.
- iv. ***Al- 'Afwu (Forgiveness)***: there is no way the co-existence of human can thrive with no traces of negative encounter. Such encounter invariably leads to conflict. Islam stresses that without forgiveness, overlooking, magnanimity, amnesty and forgetting the past, conflict is unminimizable and unresolvable. Hence, in Q64:14 and Q42:43 preference is given to the aforementioned attitude above anger, reprisal, revenge and retaliation.
- v. ***Ar-Rahmah (Clemency)***: this is the yardstick adopted by Islam in relating with other occupants of the earth regardless of their affiliations. Q10:57, Q12:111, Q16:89 and Q21:107 all described the message of Prophet Muhammad as represented by Islamic faith as a blessing, mercy and comfort for human and the world.

It is worthy of note that conflict management has to do more with the second phase of peace initiative in Islam. Hence, it is relevant to the circumstance

where a dispute rears its ugly head. The models adopted by Muslims in taming a fledging crisis and conflict in a given society include, but not limited to the following:

- i. ***Al-Qital (Veto power)***: the circumstances of conflict occurrences differ in term of the suitable model for each of them. Some crises do not need settlement through negotiation and bargaining; rather resorting to the above may likely jettison the uncompromised principles that tie down the community together. In a situation where one of the two conflicting parties is unequivocally committing injustice to the other, Islamic model for conflict management requires that the third party should join the oppressed to prevent the atrocity of the oppressor. The wisdom behind this decision is geared towards weakening the influence of the oppressor which may likely in future extend to other yet to be identified members of the society. Hence, in this regard, the community is willing to uproot the cause of conflict. The provision of this model in Qur'an states thus: "But if one of them oppresses the others, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of Allah." (Q49:9).
- ii. ***As-Sulh (Settlement)***: The purpose of *Sulh* is to end conflict and hostility, so that parties can conduct a relationship in peace and amity. It is a form of legal contract. (Funk 2004). In general, there are two

types of *Sulh* processes: public *Sulh* (treaties between two countries-to suspend fighting and to establish peace-for a specific time period) and private *Sulh* (when both the crime and guilty party is known and the purpose is to make sure that revenge will not take place leading to another conflict). The most common condition is to forget what happened and to initiate new and friendly relations. In this model, negotiation is made between the two conflicting parties; such that either of them will need to sacrifice his/her stand for the sake of actualizing peace and reconciliation. In the settlement of Hudaibiyyah between the Makkan pagans and Muslims led by Prophet Muhammad, the latter had to accept the one-sided decisions such as rejecting the converts from Makkah while the apostate Muslims were not to be rejected by the pagans, and also agreeing to declaration that Muslims should desist from observing the pilgrimage rite in that year. What a stupid arrangement, some companions protested. But Prophet Muhammad was more foresighted than them.

- iii. ***At-Tahkim* (Arbitration)**: Conceived as an instrument of dispute resolution in a region that continues to be one of the most troubled spots on earth, the *Tahkim* emerged as a cheap mechanism employed among tribes to put an end to conflicts. The model as entrenched in Q4:35 can even be used to facilitate reconciliation to marital misunderstanding. The arbitrator, whose most important qualifying

merit was justice, was presumed to be a wise and fair person appreciated for his/her superior moral qualities and with a wide knowledge of tribal customs. (Mousalli 2015).

Although, there are other models adopted by Islam such as appointment of Justice of peace and third-party mediator, the aforementioned constitute the basic elements of Islamic model for crises management and resolution.

Panacea to Religious Crises in Nigeria: Lessons from the Islamic Model

Some of the subjects of religious misunderstanding in Nigeria in recent time include and not limited to: use of Hijab for Muslim female students in secondary and higher institutions of learnings, the polemics over *Shari'ah* implementation for Muslims in some parts of the country, the religious identity of political candidates in the Southern and Northern regions of the country, forcing of Christianity on Muslim students in some Christian universities in the South-west, reading religious meanings to the attacks of Fulani herdsmen on farmers, demolishing the worship places in some states for ulterior motives and using Islamization agenda as a frame-up by the Christian elites against the sitting president etc. In view of the foregoing, there is no doubt that the model of crisis management suitable for each subject varies.

As for the Hijab saga, it falls within the general principle of the constitution where religious freedom is preached; any attempt to jettison that principle through reconciliation that will not accord Muslim females their due right will invariably lead to another ferocious crisis, the end of which cannot be predicted. Hence, it is recommended for the government to use its veto power to enforce the use of Hijab for interested students against the opposition of their foes whom as it appears are only oppressing the *Hijabians* by depriving them not only their constitutional right; but a right that has been pronounced by several judicial courts recently. The hypocrisy of the government via keeping silent on identifying the oppressor from the oppressed in the case of Hijab saga is the brain behind the continuous thrive of the crisis in our institutions of learnings. Hence, the suitable Islamic model in this regard is that the government should enforce the freedom of religious practise that will cut across religious boundaries in the scheme of the state affairs. Such veto-power remains the available weapon after the failure of long settlement, appealing and conciliation. The same model goes for the agitation by some Muslims to adopt *Shari'ah* in their domains.

As for the case of using religious identity of political candidates to cause religious troubles, it is apparent that the model of *Sulh* can be adopted to settle this. This assertion is based on the fact that although there are few elements of sincere and devout religionists in this struggle, the sole beneficiary of the

conflict remains the political gladiators who do not subscribe to any faith in principle. Hence, it is more of mundane benefit than religious devotion; such issue is always subject to temporary pact and agreement, and sacrificing one's favour at the expense of over-all benefits.

Using educational institutions as vehicle of forcing one's faith on students and staff as it obtains in some faith-based universities in Nigeria is one of the causes of religious grudges. In fact, in some rare cases, staff are being harassed on account of religious identity. The government has been using appealing form of settlement to calm the situation but to no avail. It is our considered opinion that legal instruments aimed at condemning religious harassment in all parastatals remains the available form of veto-power at the disposal of the government.

The Fulani-herdsmen crisis, though more of a tribal conflict has been tainted with religious coloration by the Christian Association of Nigeria and some Christian elites in the country. There is no doubt that the successive governments have made numerous attempts at resolving the quagmire including the proposition of distinct settlement for cattle; the crises incessantly continue claiming the lives of cattle rearers, farmers and livestock. It is apparent that all the attempts of the government are being sabotaged by various interest groups which invariably points to the fact that the government in the bid to save more lives needs to take a drastic decision in form of veto-power that will assure the security and stability of the nation. Hence, it is recommended within the

framework of Islamic model for crises management that the government should go for using its power to enforce peace and harmony in the face of unrepentant recalcitrant war mongers.

It can be deduced from the fore-going that the suitable model for some of the religious conflicts in Nigeria, which is central to the adoption of veto-power is actually being hindered by two major factors namely: the democratic nature of Nigeria's system of governance and the inaptitude of the constituted authority whom the masses perceive as not having the desired sincerity and honesty to pursue the peace requirements in the country. Consequently, the address of the two impediments are conditional to finding a lasting resolution to the religious conflicts in the nation.

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