Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam an Instrument for Sustainable Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria

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Abstract: **Nigeria, has had her fair share of conflicts right from the Aba riots of 1929, the independence struggle of the 1950s, the election riots of the 1960s, the Kafanchan riots of the 1970s, the Matasine massacres of the 1980s, the Oodua People Congress (OPC) militancy and the Odi invasion of the 1990s, the Niger Delta militancy of 2000s to the present-day Boko Haram insurgency of the 2010s. This study is purely based on secondary source of data. The study concludes that method of peace and conflict resolution in Islamic is the perfect source of coexistence in Nigeria. The study recommends that conflict resolution in Islamic system should be welcomed by the Nigerian societies in order to live in peaceful coexistence.**

Keywords: **Peace, Conflict Resolution in Islam, Peaceful Coexistence, Causes of Conflict in Nigeria.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict can be a serious problem if it is allowed to escalate as it could create chaotic conditions, that make it nearly impossible for people to relate or live together peacefully. Thus, one school of management thought views it as a dysfunctional outcome that threatens social harmony, peaceful co-existence, economic growth and development and as such it is harmful and should be avoided as it has a negative connotation synonymous with such terms as violence, destruction and irrationality (Usoro *et al,* 2014).

Nigeria, has had her fair share of conflicts right from the Aba riots of 1929, the independence struggle of the 1950s, the election riots of the 1960s, the Kafanchan riots of the 1970s, the Matasine massacres of the 1980s, the Oodua People Congress (OPC) militancy and the Odi invasion of the 1990s, the Niger Delta militancy of 2000s to the present-day Boko Haram insurgency of the 2010s (Usoro *et al,* 2014).

Since independence, the Nigerian state has experienced series of issues that have resulted in crisis and several commissions have been set up to investigate the causes and effects of these conflicts and proffer strategies for preventing future conflicts. Conflict issues in Nigeria have revolved around revenue allocation, boundary adjustment and state creation, ethnic and religious differences, gender inequality, electoral violence, corruption, etc. These issues have thrown the nation into a state of chaos over the years. For example, the secession moves by the eastern region to create the state of Biafra was as a result of the minority apprehension of marginalisation in the Nigerian military (Olaifa, 2017).

Conflicts in Northern Nigeria have been predominantly ethno-religious. They occur both in purely religious form and sometimes with ethnicity. They are characterised by reprisal attacks. Communal and socio-economic conflicts have been endemic in the southern part of Nigeria. Kidnapping, militancy, pipeline vandalization, communal conflicts, and ethno-nationalism have constituted the crises triggers in the south (Olaifa, 2017).

Islam is literally derived from the word *Salam* means peace and happiness of here and hereafter. It is one of the revealed religion accepted by Allah, the creator of whole universe. It guides people through the revelation, from their personal deeds to the international conducts. Hence, the unavoidable conflict and consequently the notion of peace is also directed in Islam. As a result, Allah Give a complete principle in resolving conflicts, which are underlying in the Qur'an and Hadith, traditions of prophet (pbuh). Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) delivered all these rules and regulations and practiced these in his own life when needed. It proves how Islam implement the features of Islamic rules in resolving disputes as well as the perfection of Islam as the absolute religion in conflict resolution (Monjur, 2011).

Allah says in the Qur'an;

> Verily, those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, their lord will guide them through their faith; under them will flow rivers in the Garden of Delight (paradise), peace will be their greeting therein (Q10: 9-10).

In another verse Allah says:

> The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel (the evil) with one which is better (I.e. Allah orders the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to excuse those who treat them badly) then verily He, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend (Q4: 34).

The truth is if one only looks closely at the whole picture of the history of Islam will come to understand that Islam, as a faith and civilization and as a way of life, has been an instrument of peace building.

II. OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Studies on the colonial era are conclusive on the fact that right from inception as a Nation-State in 1914, Nigerian history has been dominated by conflicts and cr2isis. These have

negatively impacted on her peace, security and sustainable national development. The colonial masters and their nationalist collaborators nurtured and fostered consciously or unconsciously, disunity in this country. The colonialists deemphasized Peace, Security, Sustainable National Development, economic and cultural integration. (Mou et al, 2017).

The common runs of mankind hold the view that nothing that makes easier and quicker a destruction of human society more than injustice. Once by omission or commission it is allowed to rear its ugly head in the society, its first port of attack is the web of human relations; Second is the moral values like trust, truth, integrity, honesty, equity, peace, love, sincerity, respect for life and human dignity, for common patrimony; live and let live, etc, (Ideyi, 2008).

Economically, looking at the Nigerian society and its environment, the quest for control and distribution of economic resources is majorly the basis for many conflicts among the citizenry with the relationship between parties taking cues from this basic consideration. It is in this similar view that liberal structural theorists such as Galtung see conflict as a phenomenon that is built in human societies according to how they are structured and organised (Abbas, 2018).

That is to say conflict emanates as a result of deep-rooted structural dysfunction which looks in to problems such as the inequality in the distribution of income, endemic corruption, injustice, poverty, illiteracy, high unemployment rate, hunger, disease, inflation, exploitation and tax havens on citizens, high rates of crimes, overpopulation and general economic underdevelopment (Abbas, 2018).

Causes of Conflict in Nigeria

The causes of conflict between individuals, groups, organisations, communities and nations stems from a common thread which runs through them - notably differences. It might be difference in opinions, beliefs, perceptions, views, interests, needs or goals. Given the Nigerian scenario, the very characteristics of her populace, geological landscape and type of leadership (colonial, military or democratic) abound with diversities which provide grounds for differences and hence conflicts. Yet, some identified causes of conflict in Nigeria are here highlighted. Prominent among the root causes of Nigeria's conflicts is the fact that Nigerian States are endowed with varying.

(1) Natural Resource

Natural resources which are exploited for the Nigerian Federation at different times, with varying adverse consequences for the environment in which these resources were and are exploited. The lack of commensurate control of the revenue yields from these resources by the producing communities has resulted in many conflicts (Usoro, 2014).

(2). Poverty

Poverty is of two forms: material poverty and spiritual poverty. Poverty simply defined as a lack of what a human person needs to live a normal, true and genuine life. It is seen as a disease because it distorts person's worth and destroys his dignity and pushes him or her to live a miserable life hence conflict arose (Ideyi, 2008).

In spiritual poverty, a victim lacks love for others, does not have regard for others' interest, is always concerned with his own interest and prepared to ride roughshod over others to achieve his or its selfishness. Lying, dishonesty, blackmailing, conspiracy, greed, murderous impulse, etc, are his or its constant companions. In Nigeria where poverty is accommodated and crowned as a king, courtesy of bad managers of the country's abundant resources, the bitterness it arouses in the people has made the country vulnerable to conflict eruptions with enormous costs in terms of lives and property (Ideyi, 2008).

(4). Media

The Nigerian press is a source of worry, as they are not left out in conflict generation. Popular perception is that journalists have sometimes been paid to blackmail those in position of power or having political influences. They report misleading information without investigation and sensational stories. They also censor or exaggerate their reportage, thereby triggering reprisal or contributing to the escalation of conflicts (Usoro, 2014).

(5). Religion influence

Today, more worrisome in Nigeria is religious extremity which derives from differences in value systems. These extremists are presumed to have ties with world known terrorist organisations like Al Qaeda, Taliban and others. Nigeria has had over fifty religious conflicts from 1977 to date and this is the most recurring form of conflict today. However, it is pertinent to state here that conflict might often not be as a result of one factor but rather might be as a consequence of interplay of many factors (root causes) (Usoro, 2014).

IV. PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ISLAM: LESSON TO NIGERIAN SOCIETIES

Islam is a very broad religion which is a complete code or way of life for all humanity, it would not be wrong to say that it is a religion which has universal applicability. However, some people understand Islam in a narrow sense; they consider Islam to be only for them, and when they follow the teachings and perform the duties of Islam, they think they are complete as an individual believer. Islam encompasses every dimension of life; social, political, economic, educational, cultural, and societal, etc. It is of great importance to offer greater philosophy of peace conflict and resolution in Islam for a betterment of societies in Nigeria.

The Shariah explicitly addresses the rights of the society, of neighbours, of women, of children, of the poor, and even of animals. In addition, peaceful coexistence with people of all backgrounds is mandated by Shariah. As for Conflict Resolution, the Qur'an, as the basis for Shariah, says,

> "Whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers" (Q42:40).

In another verse Allah says,

> "And speak good words to all people" (Q2:83).

Allah Continue to say in the Qur'an

> Believers, if an evil-doer brings you news, ascertain the correctness of the report fully, lest you unwittingly harm others, and then regret what you have done (Q49:6)

Looking at Shariah from such a perspective, one can deduce that Shariah is more than "Islamic law," it is a way of life, and its "guiding principles are based on mercy and compassion and its core objectives are designed to achieve welfare and justice, on an individual as well as collective level (Vehapi, 2013). The Islamic ethical framework for peaceful co-existence provides a security oriented common platform for socio-political and cultural interaction in multi-religious, pluralistic societies (Gul dar, 2013).

Islam identifies diversity among human beings as a sign of God, beauty of creation, and rejects any discrimination among communities based on religious, racial, linguistic and national grounds. Muslims should believe in all the revealed books, that is, the Torah, Psalms and Gospel as the books of God revealed to Moses, David and Jesus (AS), respectively. They should believe in all prophets like Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as messengers of God. Islam contains many injunctions for social behaviour, communal responsibilities, settling disputes and resolving conflicts with the aim of establishing peaceful coexistence. Islamic history evidently shows that Muslims and non-Muslims lived together peacefully in Medina, the first Islamic State and in its successive states in the early history of Islam. The Charter of Medina declared by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in 622 A.D. aimed at governing a multi-religious pluralistic society that allowed religious freedom for all and set the best ever example in history for the coexistence of different religious groups. Different communities with different religions that had shown enmity towards one another for several decades became parties to this pact and started to together peacefully. With this document, the tribal structure based on blood and kinship was abolished and people of different cultural, ethnic and religious groups formed a single society. Many other such treaties concluded by the Prophet (SAW) aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence. The four pious Caliphs (632-661 A.D.), the Umayyads (661-750 A.D.), the Abbasids (750-1258 A.D.), the Fatimids in Egypt (969-1171 A.D.) and the Muslims in Spain (711-1492 A.D.) strictly followed the policy of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and set a good number of examples in the history of Islam of fostering peaceful coexistence (Islam, 2018).

From what has been discussed above it may appropriately be concluded that Islam is basically a unifying and pacific Religion which teaches mankind how to agree to live together and co-operate with one another even while disagreeing on religious matters and belonging to different racial stocks and school of thought. Thus, the ethical teaching of Islam aims at making people live in peace and harmony not only with themselves, their neighbour and society, but also with the environment and the universe.

3.1 Principles of Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam:

(1) The Role of Tazkiya (purification)

In this regard, it is significant to mention the importance of tazkiya as a goal in itself and as a preventive measure in case of conflict. The focus was on the parties who are engaged in a conflict, whether individuals or groups. However, in the Quran and the teachings of Islam we see insightful emphasis on the spiritual and psychological aspects of the people's interactions, to the extent that some scholars regard the restraint resulting from Iman (faith) as the main motive of being just and a well-disciplined Muslim. (Abdullah *et al*, 2016).

(2) Al-islah (reformation, reconciliation)

On numerous occasions, the Quran commends *sulh* as the superior moral course of action to be taken by disputing parties. *Sulh* means reconciliation or settlement; the active form is islah, meaning to make good, proper, or right, or to reconcile and settle. In general, the Quran equates the word sulh, or one of its variant forms, with the notion of an inherent good that is often juxtaposed against corruption and mischief (ifsad). Seeking to spread strife and prevent the resolution of conflicts is often equated with the sin of corruption and immorality. At one point, the Quran formulates a general normative principle by pronouncing: "Reconciliation is best, even though people are often swayed by greed (from reaching an amicable resolution) (Abdullah *et al*, 2016)

(3) At-Tahkim (Arbitration):

At-Tahkim is 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, qualities and with a wide knowledge of tribal customs. (Ahmed).

(4). 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. 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 (Ahmad).

3.2 Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) As a Natural Peacemaker:

Studying the concept of conflict resolution in Islam without pointing out the character, of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is pointless. For Muslims, in its degree of importance, after the Qur'an, comes the way of the Messenger of God, in handling conflict situation during his lifetime. The Qur'an says:

> O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination (Q4:59).

Fourteen centuries ago, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said to his followers, "Shall I inform you of a better act than fasting, alms and prayers? Make peace between one another: enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by roots. Muslims from all corners of the world agree that "there are many lessons that can be learned from the exemplary conduct of the Prophet in conflict resolution during his lifetime (Vehapi, 2013).

As far as the Prophet's (PBUH) role in conflict resolution in Islam is concerned, the Qur'an reminds Muslims that they have no faith until they make the Prophet a judge amongst themselves and find no resistance against his decisions on those matters and accept the Prophet's rulings with full submission (See, Qur'an, 4:65).

The Charter of Medina:

The first ever written constitution in the history of the world set the best example for the establishment of peaceful coexistence among different religious groups not only in the history of Islam but also in that of mankind. It was executed for 10 years (622-632 A.D.) under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and aimed at governing a multi-religious pluralistic society. Different religious communities (Jews, Pagans, Christians, and Muslims) that showed enmity towards one another for several centuries became parties to the pact and started living together in a single society, peacefully. Remarkably, 45% of the total population in Medina at that time comprised non-Muslim Arabs, 40% comprised Jews and only 15% comprised Muslims. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) executed the charter as a leader of minority. The charter had 47 clauses and it formed a sovereign nation-state with a common citizenship for every individual of all communities. The charter protected the fundamental

human rights of all citizens, including equality, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion (Islam, 2018).

According to the treaty, everyone enjoyed freedom to adhere to any religious belief and practice his own justice system. It considered Muslims, Jews, Christians and heathens as one society working for the welfare of all. The charter abolished the tribal structures which had formerly been based on blood and kinship and brought belligerent tribes of different religious, ethnic and geographical origins together. It acknowledged religious freedom as a fundamental right, being the first document to incorporate it in the constitutional history of the world. The treaty extended protection to life, property, belief, liberty and religion to all. It offered equal rights and responsibilities to all citizens. "The charter replaced the traditional tribal kinship with a new social order and created a nation state with a new social fabric. This epoch-making innovation brought an end for all times to the chaos of tribalism and laid the basis for a wider institution, viz a State." Medina has been marked as the first practical example of peaceful coexistence between different religions and groups in Islam. "Peace was achieved in Medina, through the principles of coexistence in Islam, including tolerance, love, reason, and a belief in God, whether the God in the Bible, the Qur'an, or the Torah (Islam, 2018).

3.3 Covenant with the Christians of Najran:

Another enlightened example of tolerance is the covenant of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with the monks of the monastery of St. Catherine and all Christians. The Prophet (PBUH) gave full freedom to the Christians of Najran to offer prayers in their own way in the Mosque of Medina. After several rounds of negotiation, the treaty of Najran was signed which conferred on the non-Muslims both religious and administrative autonomy. Relevant portion of Prophet's (PBUH) letter to the Christians of Najran is as follows:

The lives of the people of Najran and its surrounding area, their religion, their land, property, cattle and those of them who are present or absent, their messengers and their places of worship are under the protection of Allah and guardianship of His Prophet (PBUH). Their present state shall neither be interfered with, nor their rights meddled with, nor their idols deformed. No bishop shall be removed from his bishopric, nor any monk from his priesthood, and they shall continue to enjoy everything great and small as heretofore; no image or cross shall be destroyed, they shall not be oppressed or suppressed. They shall not be punished for any past crime. No tithes shall be levied on them nor shall they be required to furnish provisions for the troops, nor shall troops be quartered on them. Whatever has been written in this pact, Allah and Muhammad His Prophet (PBUH) are guarantors of it (Islam, 2018).

This document displays how Islam guaranteed religious liberty and rights of other groups. By this accord, the Prophet (PBUH) extended strict security to the privileges and immunities of Christians. He undertook himself and guided

his followers to protect the rights of Christians, to defend their churches and the residences of their priests. They were not to be unfairly levied, no bishop was to be driven out, no monk was to be expelled, no church was to be pulled down, and no Christian was to be converted forcefully. The Christian women who married Muslims were entitled to enjoy freedom to observe their own religion. If Muslims be engaged in hostilities with the Christians of another territory, no Christian resident living in Muslim state be treated with contempt. Any Muslim who violates this covenant, will be accounted disobedient to God and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Islam, 2018).

- After the conquest of Mecca, when the Prophet (PBUH) entered into the city, he forgave them in these words, "No blame will there be upon you today. Allah will forgive you; and He is the most merciful of the merciful.
- It was narrated that, "A funeral procession passed by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and he stood up for it. People said to him: It was the funeral of a Jew. He said: Was it not a human life? (Islam, 2018).

IV. CONCLUSION

Blind following is one of the major problem in Nigerian societies, people tent to engage in conflict on what their community leaders, party and group leaders ask them to do. Qur'anic verses clearly stated that change is not an easy thing. The verses in Surah *Ibraheem* (14), for example, show that people are hesitant to leave what they are used to without. "some clear authority."

The verses that hold particular significance for our purposes are:

When they do aught that is shameful, they say: "We found our fathers doing so"; and "Allah commanded us thus"; Say: "Nay, Allah never commands what is shameful: Do ye say of Allah what ye know not?" (Q7:28)

The above leads one to understand that Coexistence of diverse socio-religious groups and tolerant attitude of a group towards the other(s) is one of the fundamental ingredients for the establishment of peace and security in the society. Nigerian societies will only realize its full potential, and the key to achieving that is to effectively communicate with each other in a place where they had a difference, with that peaceful coexistence will rain within the nation. From the above discussion, it becomes very clear that the teachings of Islam very much promote the principles of peaceful coexistence.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Nigerian societies should adhere to Islamic Shari'ah legal standards of conflict resolution.
(2) Use strategic communications as mention above to improve community understanding in order to joint

hand and fight against conflict in their communities and within their tribes only by that they will have peaceful coexistence.
(3) The government and the media should empower civil society organizations to create public information campaigns in order to facilitate a national dialogue, which would humanize the conflict and help shift the views of all Nigerians toward a mindset of civilian protection.
(4) Every society should maintain its unique identity and characteristics. So, there should not be any discrimination based on creed, clan, race, language, culture or any other grounds.
(5) Nigerian societies should respect religion of each other as "Islam guarantees the protection of the houses of worship of Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims living in the Muslim state and their right to worship according to their faith only then peaceful co-existence will rain.

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