

## **Re-Occurrences of Religious Crisis in Northern Nigeria: A Way Forward**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper set to study the wave of religious crisis with emphasis on the Islamic religion. This is because majority of the people inhabiting the area are Muslims and the crisis erupt from the Muslims. Why are these crises re-occurring and what solid measures would prevent their eruption, for a peaceful and secured society.*

## **Introduction**

There are two types of religious conflicts and in broad term, the crisis that occur between followers of different religions (known as inter-religious conflict) and the one that erupts between followers of the same faith (called intra-religious conflict). All of them happened and continue to happen in Nigeria and specifically in Northern Nigeria. This paper is concerned with the one happening between followers of the Islamic religion in Northern Nigeria. We will take a historical account and analysis of such crisis and proper solution to prevent future occurrences of such conflicts.

## **Pre-colonial Northern Nigeria**

The pre-colonial northern Nigeria belonged to the former Borno and Sokoto caliphates, where the Muslim dominate. The middle belt, where the Idoma, Igala, Jukun, plateau people and Tiv reside non-Muslims were in majority. Amidst the Muslims were found also, the Kingdoms and chieftains of Pabir-Bura, Bade, zuru that were not wholly islamised like Borno and Sokoto. In this mixed society, the people lived peaceful to some extent. They lived with their various governments, and undergoing considerable transformation and changes before the final onslaught from the European powers.

Islam reached Kanem-Borno in the eleventh century, to Hausaland in the thirteenth, but Christianity reached Northern Nigeria with the coming of the British colonial power in the nineteenth century. Even though, it was recorded that, there were wars of conquest in Kanem-Borno, and the prominent Sokoto jihad, religion, per se was not a debatable issue by then. It was rather, political and economic matters that usually precipitated hostilities and chaos in the region.

## **Northern Nigeria from independence and growth of religious groups**

The European colonial masters met with stiff resistance in Sokoto, where the Sultan Attahiru I lost his life in Satiru in march 1903 . To reach compromise and to have peace installed, the agreement of non interference with Islam was concluded between traditional rulers and the British colonial masters. The rulers hence assumed an autocratic position under indirect rule for the convenience of the British colonial power not for Islam.

With the attainment of political independence the whole country came under a secular constitution. But what kind of secularism was adopted? A real secular state does not exist, that is an atheist, state which has no concern for religion. The 1979 suspended Nigerian constitution provides for freedom of religion, association, and speech etc. Thus, interpretations varied, while others saw in it multi-religious society, others reading that government has no say in religious matters. For the Christians, secularism was already instituted in the Church following the renaissance, give God what is God's and unto Caesar what is Caesar's. This division between the spiritual and the mundane, will not have a place in an Islamic set up. This is because Islam has a say in virtually everything, from the social, political and economic matters.

The power therefore enjoyed by the leadership in the North was swept by the new structure and arrangement. When the traditional rulers loose political control, religious matters passed to the ulama in th collaboration with the rulers. The ulama class in northern Nigeria belonged to the sufi brotherhoods or Tariqa - the Qadriyya and Tijjaniyya. And they take serious to God's call, preparing inward activities over out-wardness. The sufis are spiritualists than legalist, though a combination of both is honourable among the ulama. The members of the two brotherhoods relate warmly, nay with suspicion. But once the goal is same there should be no rancor.

In the 1970s with the local government reform which had as its immediate impact reduction in the powers of the emirs, many groups and dissents appeared. People started to organize public lectures, many mosques were built. But giving unlimited freedom, the structures that held the North in unity was seen to disintegrate. Apart from the brotherhoods, who believe in Qur'an, hadith and the saying of the ulama, we also have the Qur 'aniyun who believe only in the Qur'an then, in the late 1970s the Muslim students society influenced by the 1979 revolution in Iran became a recognizable force in the quest for the establishment of Shari'ah. Around the same time, the Jama'atu Izalatul Bid'ah wa ikamatissunnah was established. The later called for Qur'an and Hadith only. The emergence of these groups led to abuses fighting leading to skirmishes between them. The most prominent was the Maitatsine crisis of 1980. It started in Kano under the leadership of Muhammad Marwa alias Maitatsine. He was called Maitatsine because of the curse he showers on his opponents more especially the ruling class. What was seen as a "child play", gradually spread to various parts

of the north, Maiduguri; Jimeta - Yola, Gombe etc. This conflict was destructive, causing lost of several lives and properties worth millions.

Muhammad Marwa who hailed from Marwa town in Cameroon was first deported from Kano during the reign of the Emir Sir Muhammad Sanusi in late 1950's. After the deposition of the Emir, Marwa came back and continued with his nefarious activities. His followers were largely the Qur'anic pupils (almajirai) who engaged in the memorization of the Qur'an. The fact that, they do not further their education to other fields and knew only the Qur'an is a major problem. At the place of their abode the Yan Awaki quarters, a government was established within a government. This is because they obey only Marwa, violate Nigerian laws, abuse people for using modern things even trousers or shirt with button etc. He finally declared himself a prophet, when attempt was made to arrest him for prosecution, it was vehemently resisted. The fighting with police was to their advantage. The then president and Commander in Chief, Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari drew the army to quell the riots.

The followers of Muhammad Marwa that escaped from Kano continued with his mission in Maiduguri in 1981, where the prominent sergeant Akuya and host of other policemen lost their lives. Musa Makaniki and cohorts launched similar offensives in Jimeta-Yola, 1984 and Gombe in 1985.

The Muslim student's society was not engaged in conflict with Muslims but always at loggerhead with government on the issue of Shari'ah implementation. As pointed above, the youths were influenced by what happened in Iran. The M.S.S. at ABU had many of its members expelled for engaging the radical socialist/communist supporters in campus. Ibrahim al- Zak-Zaky led a group of brothers in calling for Shari'ah implementation. Other youths from MSS saw the need to form an umbrella of graduates of MSS thus, the Muslim ummah came into being. This group had intellectuals like Ibrahim Suleiman, Usman Bugaje, Salihu Abubakar, at the fore front. None of these groups is fighting Muslims. But the Izala group came to fight fellow Muslims over interpretation of some verses. There were many instances of fighting in mosque as who is to be an Imam, or rather the Izala will prefer to have its own mosque instead of the established traditional mosque on minor issues. The group of al-Zak-zaky became not only tilted to Iran but embraced the shiite doctrine, so there were reported clashes in Zaria recently in 2010.

To crown it all, a more radical and impatient group, Yusufiyya, followers of Muhammad Yusuf popularly addressed by the press as Boko- Haram came up. This group not only rivalled all of the above, but showed that they were slow and pro-status-quo. The sect was given various names; Khawarism, shi'ism, Qur'aniyyun. The leader of the sect attacked anything western. He advocated for Islamic government and need for Muslims to return to caliphal system of government irrespective of their location worldwide. They are to isolate themselves from the societal vices (sins) and away from the government which is characterised by western education and therefore sinful). According to Yusuf, it is prohibited for any Muslim to participate in western education or to work under the government which he termed "Taghut" (i.e. idol). Apart from attacking western education, he discussed and criticised Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory.

The theories of rain-formation in geography were also criticised for attributing rainfall to evaporation. He quoted (Qur'an 23:8) to buttress his argument the ideas, preaching and thought of the leaders of the sect regarded non-members as unbelievers. That is those who deny the truth or wrong-doers. The followers gave unflinching loyalty to the leaders over and above anything including their parents and wives. Some people even ascribed this loyalty to the use of witchcraft or medicines. They were provoked by the men of "operation flush" which ultimately led to violent clash. The people of not only Maiduguri where the crisis started are facing the consequence but the whole country is in jeopardy. The rise of this group and the subsequent security problems being faced in Northern Nigeria is like a "set up". The fact that, the leader and a former commissioner of religious affairs Buji Foi were extra-judicially killed, and many of those arrested were either killed or discharged for want of evidence points to a cover up.

The crisis which this group has brought could not be matched with Maitatsine or the pre-colonial Rabih's attack on Borno. This crisis led the government to draw the armed forces under the Joint Task Force (JTF), the colossal amount of money voted for security runs into trillions! Thus the Yusufiyya or Boko-Haram affairs has taken a new dimension. As few of the surviving followers of Yusuf continued their attacks on individuals, men of the armed forces and government establishments, other elements drew in. These include, politicians using thugs to eliminate opponents or rivals, armed robbers, and some Christian elements.

Northern Nigeria is now under trauma, continued backwardness politically, socially, economically and even religiously. The state of insecurity brought about by the factors above,

has led deteriorating condition of life and human right abuses. In order to check the activities of the nefarious groups, the JTF mounted thousands of check points, and even total closure of some roads. By mounting such road blocks and check points, apart from unnecessary delays it led to unabated 'open' corruption. The men of the armed forces have engaged in extortion from the masses. There were reported cases of human rights violation, and uncountable deaths. In Borno and Yobe, there are many detention centres where on daily basis nothing less than 10(ten) people are dying of hunger, torture, disease and suffocation. Whenever suspects were arrested, they were killed under such conditions or their 'god-fathers' order for their release. Uptil now, no effort has been made to trace the sponsors of these nefarious activities. As per as the symptom is being treated not the disease, this crisis will not end at the nearest future.

### **Conclusion**

The paper looked into Northern Nigerian society at pre-colonial time, colonial and post-colonial periods. The Northern Nigeria society lived in peace and to some extent in harmony with individuals and neighbours. The paper observed that freedom (unlimited) introduced by independent Nigeria has given many groups and individuals the opportunity to revolt and also clash with fellow Nigerians both Muslims and non-Muslims. These crisis or conflicts had a long devastated effect not only on the North but the country at large. The conclusion one draws from this is that individuals are left in pool of ignorance, while the government itself being ran without direction. The government and people must be in same direction not parallel one. Nigerians are religious while the government wants to be secular. Its secular position seems undefined. So, if justice and equity is practised all will be going at the same path, unmolested and will lead to peace harmony and sustainable development and no one, no matter how placed should be above the law.

### **Recommendations**

As a matter of fact, the paper posed these recommendations for the government to implement:-

1. Government should implement the recommendation of the various committees and commission set up to investigate religious crisis in Nigeria.

2. There is the need to provide effective educational structure and programme. The education we acquire must be of benefit to Nigerians here and hereafter, through the integration system.
3. Traditional methods of conflict management, like using rulers and religious leaders must be employed.
4. Those employed must be paid adequately and the unemployed be provided with stipends as a security measure
5. Regulatory boards and commission be set up to check excesses or contradictory views
6. The Prophet of Islam, whom Muslims emulate, lived side by side with Jews, Christians and pagans. The Muslims, Christians and others need to be educated to live in peace. The recent Egyptian example should serve as a lesson. At Tahrir square Christians, guarded Muslims to pray and vice-versa.
7. Justice and equality will go a long way in providing final solution to all our intra and inter-religious conflicts.

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