

Causes and dynamic of political violence in Nigeria: Islamic views on the solutions

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ABSTRACT: *Critical examination of the causes of the political violence in Nigeria revealed that the immediate causes of the phenomenon in the country include imposition of candidates on party members. Others are, lack of democratic institutions and culture; the prevailing political mind of- set of do – or die and winner takes- all; partisanship of law enforcement agencies; lack of prompt judicial response to the cases of electoral offences, the general socioeconomic downturn that has rather remained unaddressed over the years. But is there a role any religion can play to achieve a peaceful world? The paper opines that Islam sets down capacity and integrity as the only conditions that should govern the election to the offices and enjoins upon the rulers to remain always impartial judges between the citizens. The paper concludes that if the government was to adopt and take care of the principles of equality and justice for all, this would ultimately restore the social and political peace into the country.*

Keywords: *Boko Haram, Ummah, Political violence, inequality and injustice.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, there appear to be a rise in poverty, crimes, war and hatred, both within a community or society, and between societies and cultures. Often, religion has been misused as a vehicle to instigate such events even though the issues at hand have had nothing whatsoever to do with religious ideology. Religion is not the subject of the dispute or even of the grievance. In order to create a better world, we first need to understand the causes of the problems as well as the symptoms. Through a critical study of Islam, it is possible to get an insight into religious philosophy related to social order and the means to maintain stability in our society. This paper examines the root causes, depth and scope of the phenomenon of political violence and the road to social peace in Islam in detail.

II. POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Political class continues to arm the youths, employ and deploy them to commit heinous crimes, shed blood at every critical point in our political life especially during election period; water the streets with blood of the youths themselves, innocent by-stands passersby. Politicians themselves are assassinated in broad day and in cold blood; bodies, souls and destinies and wantonly destroyed in the Manichean quest for political power. The society and the political system are caught in a spider web or maelstrom of violence and death. Every election year, conferences are organized and held to pontificate on the negative of political violence. But it does seem that the pontification stops at the venue of such conferences or on the pages of news papers reporting. (1) Political violence as a means to propagate and maintain the status quo in Nigeria is historical and structural in nature. It has been with us since the early independence years and was deployed by the existing political parties then.

The 20011 general election marked another ugly milestone of political violence in the political history and culture in Nigeria. Comparatively, it is rather difficult to determine which the most violence afflicted general elections were since the return to civil rule in mid-1999. The 1999 general election was violent-prone; so also was the 2003 and 2007 general election. The number of deaths recorded in each general election was never accurately recorded. However, what became obvious was that there was progression in the number of casualties recorded after each general election since 1999. (2)

What was also apparent was that each general election took place under different circumstances. The contending politicians and/or political forces are different in most cases even though certain individual figures featured prominently in some of the general elections. The continually deteriorating economic conditions also continue to throw up new dynamics and nuances which alter the pattern of political violence. For instance, bombing was non-existent in 1999, 2003 and 2007 general election. Thus the specificity of terrorism is new phenomenon of political violence in Nigeria.

III. The causes of political violence in Nigeria

In the North and South of the country there are potential combustible human materials to destabilize the democratic regime and the transition process that fits into patterns of ethnic competition; but most often, such conflicts pit members of the same ethnic group against each other in struggles for leadership posts. Thus conflicts spurred by competition over economic opportunities have been part and parcel of life in Nigeria. Such competition has long been managed with varying degrees of success in many places in the country, but it has always erupted at unpredicted moments into violent confrontations. (3)

Many have argued that the immediate causes of political violence in the country in both the current as well as past political dispensation include lack of internal democratic structures and processes within the individual political parties – leading to imposition of candidates on party members. Others are, weak democratic institutions and culture; the prevailing political mind-set of do-or die and winner takes-all; the weakness and alleged partisanship of the law enforcement agencies during election times; the lack of prompt judicial response to cases of electoral offences; the general socioeconomic downturn that has rather remained unaddressed over the years, among others. (4) During the military rule, the military colossi consolidated its hegemony of managing the country, breeding its ability to control, administrate, and implement state plans and counterinsurgency policy. This form of governance led to the formation of powerful civilian-military groups through which political parties and other institutions helped legitimized their hegemony. In some cases, important groups of civilians linked to the economic and political system played a significant role in managing government and developing government affairs and ultimately, in planning and developing government policies. (5)

In a country that has one of the most unequal distributions of wealth in the world the rebellion was much about the fair and equitable access to economic resources as it was about the political power. Youths face lack of social and economic opportunities; youth's unemployment in the country has become a national crisis, as many as 70 per cent of youths who graduated from universities cannot find jobs. Extreme poverty, misinterpretation of religious tenets, religious intolerance and fanaticism/bigotry, bad governance all these contributed to the political violence phenomenal emergence of Boko Haram Nigeria faces today. In actual fact, western education was not the real problem, the real problem as highlighted is the corruption and bad governance that responsible for the joblessness and unemployment of the youth in the country. Nigeria is a country where government directive are willfully distorted; services rendered to fellow citizens are systematically commercialized, or sold as commodities. (6) A typical example is the conduct of The Nigerian Immigration Service's boss Rose Uzoma that was alleged of conducting a recruitment exercise without advertisement, allotting slots to president wife, and favouring applicants from the South- East where she comes from. (7) The details of the allegation is as followed: 250 slots to the presidency, president mother 40 slots; president's wife 100 slots, interior minister, Abba Moro, 100 slots; two commissioners of the Immigration board, 30 slots each ; and the federal character commission, 250 slots. (8) If not that the country is under civilian government that is how the exercise would have been conducted giving the opportunity only to those who know that cabal. Uzoma was invited to appear before the House committee to defend the accusations she said that the service did not advertise the jobs so as not to unknowingly employ terrorists. (9) The defence itself shows that in Nigeria, government and their official make public statements, not for the benefit of all Nigerians but for the benefit of the privileged few. In fact, the negative behaviours of government officials permeate every aspect of life in the country. And this is the case since political independence from Britain, many of the administrations that have ruled Nigeria have, by their policies and utterances, criminalized the citizenry.

These observations are quite right and Nigeria leaders are not unaware of these facts. President Jonathan warned at PDP governorship campaign outing in Lokoja Kogi State capital, the president warned that the army of jobless youths currently roaming the nation's streets might revolt against the government if their desire for jobs is not met in the next four years. Similarly, former president Obasanjo suggested at a workshop in Abeokuta, Ogun State, that an Arab spring-type of revolution that has already toppled governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, could be replicate in Nigeria. (10)

President Jonathan has set a target of four to five years- apparently targeting the period of his own exists from office- for the revolution. Given the grim picture of the unemployment situation in the country and pervasive level of poverty the warnings of a revolution by the two leaders came with a tinge of irony. As former president, what did Obasanjo do to provide jobs for the teeming unemployed youths? And, as the current president, what is President Jonathan doing to stave off the revolution? His declaration is actually an admission that the government has failed to meet the needs of its citizens.

IV. THE ROAD TO SOCIAL PEACE IN ISLAM

The worst tragedy of Nigeria has been that some corrupt and unsuccessful politicians became religious leaders of innocent and uninformed masses. They exploited their emotions rather than giving them the needed guidance for spiritual development or social welfare. Unsuccessful and corrupt leaders have brought nothing but a bad

name to Islam and misery to people in the name of religion. Their slogan will come to an end as soon as people become informed about the truth. It is a sad fact that Islam is portrayed as a religion with deep moral faults, preaching violence and extremism. No true Muslim can ever condone any act of terrorism. Islam expressly forbids suicide, genocide; fratricide and any killing of innocent people. Suicide bombing and related acts of terrorism have no place in the Islamic teachings and whoever uses the name of Islam to justify such acts, commits a calumny of grossest proportions.

Luckily, the Nigerian populace is much more mature than and not as gullible as the media thinks and they refused to believe every word that was printed in the media or uttered by the politicians. Many Nigerians, Christians, even Muslims and others want to know the truth and they want to know about the teachings of Islam. This new awareness of good people of Nigeria imposes a great responsibility on us that we furnish them with honest information about the true Islam.

We start with the issue of whether Islam automatically provides its followers with superiority over others, and whether this means that tension is inevitable. We have actually seen great periods of advancement in which religious tolerance led to an environment in which society grew and was enriched. Such was the case of Islamic Spain or Al-Andalusia, in which the Islamic ruler gave equality and liberty to Christians and Jews and therefore everyone in the society came to respect each other and learn from each other. This was catalyst for what became known as Islamic science. Huge advances were made in medicine, astronomy, mathematics and technology. In fact, many of great 'Islamic' scientist were also Christians and Jews but striving under the Islamic climate of tolerance and harmony. Islamic Spain fell into decline when the rulers became family factions and created discord in their people. (11) So it was harmony and unity that enable that society to prosper, underpinned by a religious conviction and equality.

Thus, according to Islam peace can be achieved by being tolerant and having respect for other religions. One would think that modern day skill in communication would allow for more awareness and tolerance between difference religions. However, it appears that while many people today have ceased to believe in any form of religion. Other has become intolerance of any form of religion. (12) Religious prejudices stem from intolerant and ignorance. While there is nothing in human blood to hate either people their beliefs. There is nothing inborn, nothing innate in man to cause him to dislike or to feel hatred or to have intolerance and prejudice against others. The sheet of human nature is clean. It is wrong education, wrong information that is infused into him; and that is the root of intolerance.

Even though the Holy Qur'an points out that Islam is the ultimate and superior religion: "This day I perfect your religion for your benefit and completed my favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. (13) However this claim does not give Muslims the right and power to belittle other religions and treat people as inferior human being. Even though there are many who claim superiority over others by virtue of being Muslims it does not fulfill the criterion for winning Allah's favour on the Day of Judgment. Paradise is not abode for Muslims only. Paradise is the abode of all righteous people. (14) The Qur'an says: Surely those who believe in Muhammad as a messenger of Allah, and the Jews and the Sabians, and the Christians- who believe in Allah and the last day and do good deeds, on them shall come no fear, nor shall they grieve. (15)

Allah is strict in admonishing Muslim not to adopt a superior attitude in the following verse: "And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied its due reward; and Allah well knows those who guard against evil". (16)

Where religions have been manipulated to teach superiority of a race or religion, this leads to conflict. This is not because religions are different (often the moral teachings are remarkably similar) but because the instigators use difference to create an unjust hierarchy in society, and to deny rights and opportunities to certain element within their societies. Thus, it appears that Christians, Muslims and Jews are at war with each other, but actually the perpetrators have used religion to create division in the society, and religions have become a convenient tool in their hands. They could equally have chosen colour, tribe or even preferred football teams to create the same havoc.

To understand whether Islam ever allows its followers to abuse worshippers of another faith or to give others a lower status, let us take a closer look at the Holy Qur'an, we read:

O mankind, we have created you from a male and a female; and we have made you into tribes and sub-tribes that you may recognize one another. Verily, the most honourable among you in the sight of Allah, is he who is the most righteous among you. (17)

Here, the Qur'an describes the variety of 'tribes and sub-tribes' as a means of distinguishing and testing people and remove any thought of superiority of anyone race over others. This is backed up by the sayings of the Holy prophet (SA) which include the following quote:

For the white to lord it over black, the Arab over non-Arab, the rich over the poor, the strong over the weak or men over women is out of place and wrong. (18)

We all agree that despite the fact that successful governments have guaranteed for the people of this country freedom of religion, there exist religious intolerance arising from bigotry, ignorance, blind fanaticism and imagined fear of one religious system dominating the other. This attitude has frequently brought religion into content, hatred and ridicule. It is therefore not only in the interest of national unity, but the dignity of religion itself that religious leaders should try to effect a change in the attitude of their followers by encouraging the close study of other people's religious beliefs from their original sources.

It is also essential that the spiritual and worldly powers concentrate on their issues and challenges. Politics is for politicians, and spiritual matters are for the clergy. It is often the case that when religious clergy start to gain political power and to distort the boundaries between politics and religion that unrest ensues, particularly in a multi-religious society like ours. Even sects of the same religion can be set against each other, though there is no religious difference to cause such hatred.

V. ISLAMIC MORAL VALUE

The most valuable contribution made by Islam in the cultural sphere is through the definition of moral value and standards. To begin with, Islam has abolished all privilege and class distinctions. Righteous conduct is the only badge of honour. The Qur'an says: "We have divided you into tribes and nations for greater facility of identification and intercourse, but the most honoured among you in the sight of God is he who led the purest and most righteous life" (19)

If the purity and righteousness of a person's life become the sole criteria of honour among mankind, as we are taught they are in the sight of Allah, we shall very soon achieve a much needed moral and spiritual revolution in Nigeria and in its outlook. All other standards would then adjust themselves in subordination to this. For, again, it is obvious and at various places the Qur'an recognizes, that all factors in human life have their uses and their value and that they can all serve a beneficent purpose if they are properly regulated and adjusted. Islam is a faith that insists upon the acceptance of life on a positive and constructive basis and disapproves and even condemns the rejection, negation, or stultification of life. It seeks to inculcate a consciousness of the capacity and dignity of life and recognition of the far-reaching consequences of human action and human thought. (20)

Allah says:

O you who believe, fear God and let every soul look to what it sends forth for the tomorrow. Fear God! Verily God is well aware of what you do. Be not like those who forget God and whom He has consequently caused to forget their own soul. (21)

It is disregard of the morrow that has falsified our standards of values. Allah says:

They say, there is nothing but this our present life; we live here and we die. Time alone destroys us. They have no knowledge concerning it, they do but conjecture... say, if it is God who gives you life, then causes you to die; then He will gather you together unto the Day of Resurrection about which there is no doubt. But most men know not. (22)

The Qur'an is as insistent upon belief in the life after death as it is upon belief in the Existence and unity of God. It warns that without this belief, human life would not be in balance. It is only through achieving this balance, neither transgressing nor falling short of measure set up by God that life on earth can become beneficent. (23) It is only a life which is in balance in the perspective of today and of tomorrow, that embraces both the foreground of the here and the background of the hereafter, in accordance with the measure set up by God, neither transgressing nor falling short of it, that can be truly beneficent. It is only men who lead such lives who will always stand with truth and justice and conduct themselves with equity. In their hands and under their control, all powers and all forces will only be instruments of beneficence that will be employed for fostering human welfare to the greater glory and praise of God. (24)

It may be asked, is this not merely a counsel of perfection. It certainly is a counsel of perfection; nothing else would be adequate. But it is not merely a counsel in the sense of being only academic speculation. What has been said here by way of illustration and that which is expounded in the Qur'an in greater detail as the way of beneficent life in all spheres, spiritual, moral, political, is all eminently practicable and can easily be put into effect.

Though, Sahr`iah does not prescribe any definite pattern to which an Islamic State must conform, nor does it elaborate in detail a constitutional theory. (25) Islam provides only, the ethical and moral basis for the government. It places a burden of responsibility on the rulers to provide for their subjects' material and spiritual needs. Above all, it charges them with ruling with absolute justice. (26)

According to Islam and overriding concept of there being no compulsion in matter of faith, religion does not need to be the predominant legislative authority in the political affairs of a state. (27) The Medina covenant states: "And the Jews of Bani Araf will be one nation with the Muslims; for Jews will be their religion and for Muslims will be their religion." (28)

This clarified the point that in a Muslim state, though Muslims and non-Muslims would be two nations religiously, they would be one nation politically. This is because of the freedom of religion and Islamic Law (Shari'ah) would not be imposed on any citizen. Allah says: "There is no compulsion in matter of faith." (29) The word "Deen" used in the Holy Qur'an according to Arabic language connotes religious tenets, social system, political behaviour and selected way of life chosen by a people under specific conditions. (30) Thus, religion has no right to interfere in areas exclusive to the state nor has the state any right to interfere in areas commonly shared by them. Rights and responsibilities are so clearly defined in Islam that any question of clash is obviated. Unfortunately there is a tendency among many secular states to sometimes extend the domain of secularisation beyond its natural borders. The same is true of theoretic state unduly influenced by a religious hierarchy. (31)

A complete disregard for any religious or moral restraint becomes a key factor in a society being torn apart from the chaos within. It leaves legislation as the only basis of control thus replacing the self-discipline derived from individual accountability to a supreme being with an ever increasing set of complex laws that seek to keep a check on the consequences of the moral decline that takes root. (32) Therefore, indeed, many factors that have contributed to the decline of moral values in the contemporary society, such as excessive love for worldly things, individualism, decline of religion, promotion of sex and violence in all forms of Media. However, this decline is further aggravated when secular governments promote godlessness in the form of right to a carefree society in which religious and moral value are completely ignored. (33)

There are many actions of man, which are simultaneously crimes under secular law and sin attracting punishment in the hereafter under religious laws, such as murder, theft, damaging property, slandering, fabricating lies, embezzlement and numerous other social vices, which are condemned by all religions alike. (34) Secularism and religion even moving within their own orbits can cooperate with each other in eradicating such evil which disturb the peace and tranquility of society. The maintenance of social and moral help is the joint responsibility of State and religion must play an active role in promoting peace and harmony in society Secular or otherwise. (35)

Muslims thus should live peacefully under any state that provides freedom of religion. Islam makes it clear that citizens have a primary role in promoting peace in their society. There are no exceptions to this general principle. Provided the state does not dictate matter of faith, individuals are required to obey the laws of the land and serve their country diligently. Once a government is elected whether in an Islamic state or otherwise it is binding on every Muslim to obey it. (36) On this Allah says:

O ye, who believe, obey Allah and obey His messengers and those who are in authority among you. And if you differ in anything, refer it to Allah and His messenger if you are true believers in Allah and the last day. This is the best and most commendable in the end. (37)

The verse tells us that if it is an Islamic state, the ruler must rule according to the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an and that of the practice of the Prophet of Islam. However if the Qur'an and tradition of the prophet of Islam are silent on any particular aspect it should be left to those in whom is vested the authority to manage the affairs of the country. But in a secular state like Nigeria, this must be thrashed out in accordance with the laws of the country.

If Muslims partake in the election of a government and such government invariably becomes tyrannical or oppressive, there is no justification for such Muslim to embark on coercion to change the government, rather all constitutional means must be applied to effect the change having rest assured in the words of Allah as thus: "Allah, Lord of Sovereignty, He gives sovereignty to whomsoever He pleases, and He takes away sovereignty from whomsoever He pleases." (38)

The truth is that according to the Holy Qur'an it is forbidden to go to war against a government which does not interfere in any way with Islam or its practices, nor uses force against us in order to promote its own religion. (39) Allah says:

Allah forbids you not, respecting those who have not fought against you on account of your religions and who have not driven you forth from your homes, that you be kind of them and act equitably towards them; surely Allah loves those who are equitable. (40)

Allah only forbids you, respecting those who have fought against you on account of your religion, and have driven you out of your homes, and have helped others in deriving you out, that you make friends of them, and whosoever makes friends of them, it is these that are the transgressors. (41)

VI. RULE OF LAW

According to Islam, no one is above the law, as far as the treatment of the accused is concerned, all persons are entitled to fair and equal treatment. Dignified behavior and deportment and respect for dignity of others have been outstanding characteristics of Islam system. (42) All these principles were not theory but actually put to practice in the history of Islam. Muhammad the prophet of Islam was reported to have castigated

some people who used a beloved- close relation of his to plead to him not to inflict the rule of law upon a prominent woman in their community who committed crime by saying as follows:

O people! People before you perished because when a lowly person committed an offence, they inflict the letter of the law upon him, but when an elite commits the same offence, they overlook his offence. By Him (God) in whose hand is my soul, if my daughter Fatima were to have committed theft, I would not hesitate to have her hand cut off. (43)

It is on that strictness that caliph Umar removes a judge when he was a defendant in a case before the judge and the judge rose from his seat as a sign of respect for the caliph i.e. (Head of state) in the course of the case. Umar the caliph saw this as a sign of partiality though in his favour to remove the judge as unfit to perform judicial functions. (44)

It is the same equality before the law which causes a judge to reject the witness of caliph Ali (another head of state) for being Ali's close relation when a dispute arose between caliph Ali and the Jew and the judgment was given in favour of the Jew for lack of sufficient evidence on the part of caliph Ali. (45)

According to Islam, the state machinery alone is inadequate to suppress, discourage or minimize crime. Once criminal tendencies are permitted to grow and flourish in homes and societies in general, the best government can do is to wipe out the symptoms from time to time the root cause of evil is far too deep for the long arm of the law to reach. It is primary job of families, religious leaders of the public opinion in every society to eradicate evil. (46)

VII. CONCLUSION

Politics according to the teaching of Islam is not do or die affairs, The Holy Qur'an dictates the moral basis of politics and states that no one has any inherent, personal, intrinsic, or independent claim of sovereignty. Allah is the King of kings, Master of masters. He bestows sovereignty and kingdom upon whomsoever He deems fit and takes away kingdom upon whomsoever He pleases. So when power falls to the lot of anyone, it bestows upon him only a mandate, not a right, of absolute ownership. No matter what form authority takes, no matter in what shape the instruments of control are fashioned, empires, kingdoms, democracies or dictatorships. Whatever usages or laws are established by such agencies, they remain answerable and accountable to God for putting them into operation. If their laws create unrest, discord, strife, and unhappiness or if they fail to make a positive contribution to the common objective of human civilization these agencies expose themselves to indictment before the throne of the Divine Maker and Master of the universe.

Thus government has a duty to act fairly and to give opportunity and equality to all, whilst also gaining the respect of the citizens through their own conduct. There are danger signs when people in authority abuse their power. That is often what leads to rebellion and disorder. Conflict often stems from inequality and injustice. Where people in a society are turned into an underclass for various reasons, they may easily turn to crime in order to rectify the social wrong that they perceive through being part of that under-privileged group. Any society which becomes too polarized (extreme differences between the rich and the poor) is bound to be prone to crime and corruption, and this is what we see across the world. Islam teaches equality and balance between people of different backgrounds, and balance such that society should not allow itself to become too polarized. If the government was to adopt and take care of the principles of equality and justice for all, and ensure that no party is allowed to become deprived or lose hope, this would ultimately restore the social and political peace into the country. If we allow society to polarize too far, social unrest is inevitable. It is often poverty or injustice that leads people to turn to violence and crime as a means to get their message heard or to seek revenge even though they may cloak it under a religious banner.

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