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RELIGIOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA:
AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

BY

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic
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ABSTRACT

The dissertation discusses religious conflict resolution in Nigeria, the biggest country in Africa in terms of population. It starts with a historical background of religions, namely Islam and Christianity in the country. It depicts their advent and from where they come, and who are the instruments in propagating them. These two religions have their majority adherents in the big cities. Meanwhile, since there is diversity of religions there must be conflicts, which sometimes do not necessarily develop into violence. However, the country is one of the countries with a highest number of religious conflicts or violence since its independence in 1960. Thus, dissertation analyzes some serious and recent religious conflicts in some major cities or states of the country. It focuses on the years 2000 to 2008, which is a democratic rule era. It traces the root causes of these conflicts and concentrates on the ways in which Islām has put in place in settling these conflicts. It also finds possible solution to the causes of these conflicts from the Islamic point of view, based on Qur'ānic injunctions, sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), Islamic history, Islamic literatures and some related items. It concludes by finding possible solutions to the problem and what is the way forward to actualize co-existence.

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APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and other Civilizations).

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Supervisor

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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**RELIGIOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA: AN ISLAMIC
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To my
Deceased Parents,
Alhaji Imam I.S.Ogunbado, Chief Imam of Oyo,
Alhaja Rāfat Asunke Ogunbado.
My deceased Sheikh
Alhaji Sanusi Alabi Adeyami, Nāib Imam of Odeomu.
(May their soul rest in perfect peace)
To my dear wife.
Alhaja Halima Titilayo and my family in general.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Conflict is not a new phenomenon, it exists since the early of human race, *Qābil* and *Hābil*, both sons of Adam, the first man on the earth experienced the conflict. The former envied the later and killed him. The former became first murderer on the earth while the latter happened to be first person to be buried in a grave.¹ It exists since then until now, between individuals and groups. It exists between the same tribe, race, ideology and country like wise; it exists in a country called Nigeria, which is the subject of the research.

Conflict is derived from the Latin word “*confliger*”. It is defined as “a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes; a situation which it is difficult to choose.”² It also refers to “as a condition in which one identifiable group engages conscious opposition to another identifiable group.”³

Conflict resolution or what could be called conflictology is defined as “the process of attempting to resolve a dispute or a conflict.”⁴ It could also be called conflict management, dispute resolution or dispute management.

What is Religion? : - According to the world book, no simple definition could be used to illustrate the numerous religions in the world. To some, religion is an

¹ Al-Qur’ān *Surah al-Mā’idah* (5). Also in the Bible Genesis iv:1-15.

² A.S. Hornby, *Oxford advanced dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 239.

³ Pandmashri Dr. S.S. Shashi, editor-in-chief, *Encyclopedia of humanities and social science* (New Delhi: Anmol Publication, 1992), 9:1091.

⁴“ Conflict resolution,” < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_resolution> (accessed 10 May, 2008).

organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, practices and worships that centre on one supreme God. To others religion involves a number of Gods or deities. There are some religions in which no specific God or gods are worshiped.⁵ It is also defined as an “organization of the life around the depth dimensions of experience-varied in form, completeness and clarity in accordance with the environing culture”⁶

“Religion” is the word from Latin “*religare*” (to bind fast) typically the term refers to an institution with a recognized body of communicants who gather together regularly for worship, and accept a set of doctrines offering some means of relating the individual to what is taken to be the ultimate nature of reality.”⁷

Nigeria is a country situated on the southern coast of West Africa; it is the most populous country in Africa in particular and in black nation in general. Nigeria is bordered by Niger in the north, Lake Chad on the northeast, Cameroon in the east, while it bordered with republic of Benin on its west.⁸ It has more than 250 different ethnic groups, which are very different from one another in terms of their languages, traditions and some of their customs. However, the largest ethnic groups are; the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo (Ibo).⁹ Most Hausa-Fulanis in the north are Muslims, and most Ibos in the south-east are Christians, while, Yorubas in the south-west are both Muslims and Christians with Muslims slightly in the majority.

Nigeria is rated as most religious country in the world in 2004 with 90 percent of the population believing in God, praying regularly attend religious services and affirming their readiness to die on behalf of their belief.¹⁰ However, conflict always

⁵ *The World book encyclopedia* (London: World Book Inc., 1992), 6:196.

⁶ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 12:282.

⁷ William L Reese, *Dictionary of philosophy and religion*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), 488.

⁸ *Micropaedia. The New encyclopedia britannica*, 15th edition 1998.

⁹ *The World book encyclopedia*, 10:27

¹⁰“ World religious news,” <<http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?id=5522&sec=74&cont=3>>.February 29 2004 .(accessed 20 September, 2007).

happen among this religious people, some of the causes could be traced back to their ideology, which could be consequently categorized and called Religious conflict.

1.2 SUMMARY

This dissertation is going to have an in-depth study into historical background of religion (Islam and Christianity) in Nigeria. It will point out some serious religious conflicts in some major cities or states of the country. It is going to explore the root causes of the conflicts and finds possible solutions to the problem from Islamic point of view, which based on Qur'ānic injunctions, saying and practice of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), Islamic history, Islamic literatures and some related references.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigeria, the biggest black nation, before it becomes what it is known today, its elders (Sultan, Emir, Oba or Obi) governed each tribe or ethnic group, kingdom or empire independently. Sometimes, there were wars on boundaries or supremacy over a certain place and other times, peace prevailed. Indigenous belief was everywhere before the coming of Islam and Christianity. Colonial masters joined all these independent states, empires and groups together to suit her objectives; but neglected the linguistic, cultural and social differences that existed between them.

Alkali mentions that some people of Kanem knew Islam in 985 A.D but not fully accepted as a state religion until 1096 A.D when Mai Humay ibn Abdul – Jalili ascended the throne of Kanem.¹¹ That is to say, Islam came to the northern part in 985 A.D. while southern people especially Yorubas came to know Islam during the

¹¹ Muhammed Nur Alkali , “Islam in the central bilad al-Sudan and the emergence of the kingdom of Kanem’ in *Islam in Africa*, edited by. N. Alkali, A. Yadud. R. Motem and Haruna Salili (Lagos: Spectrum books Limited, 1993), 172.

time of Mansa Musa of Mali, who died in 1337 A.D. Yoruba land encountered Islam from the Mali traders and ambassadors present in Oyo-ile which was also known as Katunga the capital of Old Oyo Empire.¹²

On the other hands, Christianity was imported into Nigeria through the southern coast of Badagry in 1842 then processed to Abeokuta in 1857, the Christian missionary reached Onitsha, which is an important city in Ibo land.¹³

Despite the fact that Islam has been planted in northern and southern Nigeria long time before the colonial ruler advanced, Christianity has upper hand in south by the token of colonial favor but met some resistance from north.

Since then, there has been confrontation between these two religious followers; this confrontation is what we termed as religious conflict and which in some cases has elements of ethnical, political and economical reasons.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

The dissertation is based on the hypothesis that Islam has a comprehensive way to resolve the religious conflicts that exist in Nigeria. The dissertation postulates the ability of Islam as the solution to the problem. The solutions are taken from *Qur'ān* and *sunnah* together with other relevant Islamic literature.

1.5 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- ❖ The study aims to trace the root causes of the conflicts.
- ❖ To provide a historical account of religious conflicts in some important city in Nigeria like, Kaduna, Kano, and Jos.

¹² Al-Aluri Adam Abdala, *Mujaz tarikh Nigeria*, (Beirut: n.p. 1965), 147.

¹³ Doi I Abdul Rahman, *Islām in a multi-religious society. Nigeria: A case study*. (Kuala Lumpur: A .S. Noordeen), 170.

- ❖ To propose solution based on the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* .
- ❖ To show that Islam places great importance on peace at the individual, communal and global levels.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

The dissertation is predominantly based on library research where materials and data will be extracted from the books and articles. Seminar papers, proceedings, newspapers and relevant websites will be used to do the research.

The main reference on Islamic perspective of the research will be the Holy Qur'ān followed by the *sunnah* of prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) as well as the classical and contemporary works of the Muslims scholars.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a numerous of works written by Nigerians and non-Nigerian scholars on conflict in Nigeria, this may be because Nigeria is a big strategic country in Africa as a whole and in West Africa in particular. Most of the books written focus on political and ethnical conflicts rather than religious conflicts, this as I assumed is because Nigerian has been coup d'états politically since the independence in 1960, there was a bloody coup which ended the first republic and claimed the life of some prominent Nigerians, since then, numerous coups (successful and unsuccessful) had been staged. Therefore, the country is in the eye of people pondering on its problem.

Likewise, numerous books were written on ethnic conflicts. Some authors are fair with their pen while some are bias in their judgments; they need to write on ethnic conflict in Nigeria since the country has more than 250 ethnic groups with three dominated groups, which are Hausa–Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo. However, only few

address the religious conflict but on surface level, and they do not provide solution or resolution from Qurān and *Sunnah* which this research will look into or to take care of.

Matthew Hassan Kukah and Toyin Falola (1996) in their book entitled *Religious, Militancy and Self Assertion*; try to portray Islamic politics and militancy in Nigerian context. They cover the main area in Nigeria and talked about some conflict between Muslim and Christian in some important states like Kaduna, also the role that people play in politics under the umbrella of Islam. They name one of the chapters, “The *sharī‘ah* in politics” as well as talk about old and new caliphates referring to Sokoto caliphate in the North. The authors also depict some suspicions of Islam and Christianity in the country.

However, the book does not depicts the current religious violent or conflict as it was written in 1992, almost fifteen years ago, there are lot of conflicts staged after their publication. In addition, it does not give solution or root it to Islam, which this dissertation is going to do.

Furthermore, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria*, is a book written by Larry Diamond. He focuses on conflict, which he calls “class” as it appeared in the title. However, political conflict is what he elaborates deeply. He gives some detail accounts to crisis of that occurred and leads to the failure of the first republic as he suggests. He digs the origins of the crisis, which he elaborates in the second chapter and sub-titles it as follow, “The balance of culture groups”, “The colonial legacy,” “The political class,” and “The pattern of conflict and the emergence of political conflict”.

He also demonstrates the crisis of census that happen in 1963-1964 and federal election of 1964; he also gives the western election of crisis and the National crisis of no confidence of 1965.

Nevertheless, all what he deals with in his book are about political conflict or crisis but this dissertation wishes to deal with religious conflict in Nigeria. His book may be consoled as a reference book because sometimes religious conflict may lead to political conflict and vice versa especially in Nigeria.

In addition, *Conflict Resolution: Building and Bridges* is a book co-authored by Neil H. Katz and John W. Layer (1993). The authors group the book into only four chapters, after introduction they deal with the nature of conflict whereby they demonstrate some sources and consequences of conflict, as well as emotion in conflict. The authors dedicate chapter two to positive attitude towards conflict and later proceed to “a conflict resolution models” where they elaborate models and stages in resolving conflicts.

However, they particularize their book on the resolution of conflict in the school. They mention ideological conflict during their discursion on type of conflict but do not deep in its explanation. The resolutions that they mention are all in secular or western views, but on the other way round, this dissertation intends to provide resolutions from religious point of view. Nevertheless, the book can not be overlooked and could be used as reference since it also deals with resolutions.

Moreover, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relation* is another book written by Stephen Ryan (1995). The book talks about the approaches to ethnic conflict as well as international dimension of ethnic conflict. The author’s way of approach the resolution in part two of the book is fantastic; he elaborates dynamics of ethnic conflicts and glues its resolution under three distinction which are interrelated

strategies he calls them peace-keeping, peace building and peace making, he also specifies a topic to peace-building and conflict transformation where he excellently demonstrates ways of building peace.

However, the author only deals with ethnic conflict and not religious conflict, furthermore, all the solutions or resolutions he suggests are in western or secular point of view, he does not give anything relating to religious point of view which this dissertation is trying to figure out.

What is more, Ruth Charlton (2000) writes a book entitled *Dispute Resolution Guidebook*. In fact, it is really guidebook as it exhibits choices in dispute resolution in a very comprehensive way. The author goes on vividly displays the skills which the dispute resolver should possess as well as in part three of the book shows particular disputes like disputes over wills and estates, commercial family as well as personal injury, he does not leave out the workplace conflict likewise the community and neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, the excellence of the book does not give or guide toward religion alternatives, that is to say, it is too general in some aspects and where he gives specific disputes religious disputes are missing. Be as it may, Religious alternative or religious conflict is what this dissertation is about and will be transplanted into Nigerian soil.

By the same token, Michael Palmer and Simon Roberts co – authored a book entitled. *Processes ADR and the primary forms of Decision Making*, they outline the nature of disputes and their processes in the introductory chapter. The authors dedicate chapter two to the debate about civil justice and movement towards procedural innovation. Chapter three and four talk about negotiations and mediation

respectively, chapter seven and eight also explain lawyers' response to alternative dispute resolution and trajectory of ADR respectively.

Anyway, both authors are right to write their book in that perspective since both are professor of law. Nevertheless, this dissertation does not want to look into the conflict with the same tool they use, rather, it wishes to invent another device though Qur'ān and Sunnah to resolve the ideological dispute in Nigeria.

Similarly, *Mitigating Conflict: The Role of NGOS*, edited by Henry .F.Carey and Oliver P. Richmond. The book is a compilation of many articles written by various writers. Main ideas of the articles revolve round the searching for the peace through the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A contributor, Karin Aggestam titled his article as "*Conflict Prevention: Old Wine in New Bottle*," he traces the causes of conflict and he says that "the primary goal is not to resolve all outstanding issues of disputes but rather to control and remove the imminent causes to violent escalation." He later points out the roles of NGOs in conflict prevention. In addition, another article of the same book illustrates the mandates of HINGOs but specifies it on African conflict, he also points out the way the UINGO can prolong the conflict, he elucidates the criticisms of AINGOs in African and later give his recommendations.

Nevertheless, none of the articles is about religious function in conflict resolution while this dissertation is focusing on that dimension. Anyway, its significant cannot be overruled since NGOs can compromise of some religious organization.¹⁴

Along the same line, *Conflict Management and Resolution in West Africa: the case of ECOMOG in Liberia (1989 -1997)* is a thesis submitted as a fulfillment of master degree in department of Political Science (IIUM), by Alieu K. Jamueh. He

¹⁴ Karin Aggestam; Conflict prevention; "old wine in new bottle" in *Mitigating conflict: The role of NGOs*, edited by Henry K. Carey and Oliver P. Richmond (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 13.

examines and analyses the causes of the civil war in Liberia. The war that occupied the world media in general and African media in particular between 1989 -1997. He justifies the intervention of West Africa State (ECOWAS) as most appropriate; since the war is in Africa; African people are the best to resolve it. He explains how ECOMOG helped to resolve the war, and finally speculates on the future of ECOMOG and gives suggestion that it (ECOMOG) should serve as role model for other sub–regions in Africa as well as the whole world.

However, Alieu bases his dissertation on civil war, and in particular country, which is Liberia. Religion is not among the factors or causes of the said war in his analysis. On the contrary, my dissertation focuses on religious conflict and the way to curb this malady through the Islamic perspective.

In addition, Abdullahi Ayoade Ahmad was another political science student at (IIUM) that did his dissertation on political crises in Liberia and Sierra-Leone. He assesses the role of Economic Community of the West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) headed by Nigerians. He focuses on the step taken by Nigerians, as a third party in resolving the crises and gives the outcome of the intervention as a triumphant and remarkable in the history of Liberia and Sierra –Leone. Intervention ends war in formal and establishes full transitional government in later.

Meanwhile, Abdullahi like Alieu focuses on general conflict or civil war as well as the role of ECOMOG in resolving wars (Liberia and Sierra–Leone). Contrarily, this dissertation focuses on the role of religion in solving the religious conflicts that is rampant in some cities or state in Nigeria.

All in all, this literature review shows that numerous works had been done on conflicts resolutions, but most of these way-outs are non religious perspectives. Majority of the books reviewed are based on civil or social conflicts, little focus on

religious which this dissertation is focusing and aim to bring solution from Islamic point of view. Nevertheless, the efforts of those books will not be overlooked; they can serve as reverences in one way or the other.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter is divided into four segments, the first segment deals with the introduction of Islam in the north, starts with the Kanem-Bornu Empire, which is generally accepted as a gateway of Islām in to the present Nigeria. It elaborates the establishment of the empire, its founder and how Islam began. The section also talks about the origin of Hausa, Hausaland and the establishment of Islām in the vicinity. Second section throws light on the introduction of Islām in the south; it begins with the Yorubaland, which is the largest ethnic in the south then talks about the same issue in Iboland or Igboland. Third segment deals with the introduction of Christianity in the North. The last part elucidates the introduction of the Christianity in the south. It is known from the part that Christianity was shipped into the country through the coast in the south.

2.1. SPREAD OF ISLĀM IN THE NORTH

Islām in Kanem-Bornu.

Kanem is former empire in Africa, which located in the areas near Lake Chad and north of the present Nigeria. The empire began in 9th century.¹⁵ Another source says that Kanem is a mediaeval sudanic state based on the north of Lake Chad and dominating the E-trade across the Sahara to Fessan.¹⁶ The empire takes its name after its founder, Muslim reformer called Shaykh (Shehu) Muhammad al-Amin al-

¹⁵ *The Columbia encyclopedia*, (Columbia University Press), 5th edition, 1447.

¹⁶ *The Cambridge encyclopedia*, David Crystal edi. (Cambridge University Press), 4th, 596.

Kanami.¹⁷ The empire captures the attention of the Arab geographers and historians as early as 9th century A.D. The earliest written account available on Kanem is the one written by Al-Yaqūbī who believes that inhabitants of Kanem were the black sharan normads. He writes:

The blacks who went westwards migrating towards the Maghrib split up the country forming a number of kingdoms, the first of that is Zaghāwa who inhabit the place called Kanem. Their dwellings consist of huts and reeds. They have no use for towns. Their kings entitled *kā-karah*. Among the Zaghāwa is a type called Hawdin who have a king from Zaghāwa.¹⁸

In addition, some Arab geographers maintain that in 750 A.D Umayyad Dynasty collapsed and simultaneously Abbasid came to the throne, so some refugees of the former (*Banu Humay*) who ran away from the persecution of the later move toward the south, found their way to Kanem and established a new dynasty there. Doi also records this account and adds that indigenous people of the Kanem and Bornu mingled with the early Umayyad Muslims who came and lived with them; they mixed through marriages and became one.¹⁹ He also affirms that Kanuri were the metropolitan people of Kanem-Bornu, who lived around Lake Chad, Kanuri rulers had treaty with the neighboring rulers who had to pay tax and obey the rule of the Kanuris.²⁰ An account states that the first ruler of the Kanem was Dūgū and a descendant of Saif ibn Dhi Yazan 800 A.D. Nevertheless, Trimingham denies this opinion and says that none of the early rulers had Arabic name and the legend was perhaps obtained from another dynasty.²¹ Most of the sources agree that the empire

¹⁷ Mervyn Hiskett, *The Course of Islam in Africa*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press n.d), 104.

¹⁸ Al- Yaqūbī, *al-Tarikh* (Beirut, n.p 1960). The same quotation was quoted by Trimingham in “*A History of Islam in West Africa*” and Alikhali in his article in “Islam in Africa.”

¹⁹ Doi, 57.

²⁰ Ibid.,56.

²¹ J.Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 115.

was established in 9th century,²² though their may be slight difference in the time of coming of Islam in the discussing area.

Introduction of Islam into Kanem-Bronu came to existence in two dimensions. One, the Umayyads and itinerant Arab traders who came for trading or coincidentally for the sake of other mission introduced Islam into Kanem. Al Umari says that Al-Hādi al-‘Uthmānī a descendant of Umayyad was the first to introduce Islam into Kanem.²³ Two, Kanem scholar or traders who traveled to Muslim world like Egypt , Saudi Arabia, Libya and so forth came in contact with the religion and brought religion on their way back home.

May be as it may, by 11th century, Islām was known in the empire but limited numbers of people were practicing it. Moreover, it was not fully accepted as a religion of the state as it would be later. Both Doi and Fafunwa agree that Umme-Jilmi the ruler of Kanem between 1085-1097 was a devoted Muslim. Fafunwa emphasizes that he was the first ruler to accept Islām from a Muslim scholar known as Hamed Muhammad Mani.²⁴ He aimed to perform Pilgrimage and died in Egypt on his way to Mecca.²⁵

Moreover, in 1097 A.D. Mai Humay ibn Abdul-Jalil (Hume son of Dūnama I) ascended the throne of Kanem as their king. By this time, there had been significant number of Muslim population, which can influence political situation of the empire. Hence, Mai Humay, a very devoted and pious king who also continued his father’s interest and love for Islām declared it as the state religion.²⁶

²² *The Columbia encyclopedia*, 1147 and *The Cambridge encyclopedia*, 598.

²³ Trimmingham, 115.

²⁴ A.Babs Fafunwa, *History of education in Nigeria*. (Ibadan: NPS Education Publishers Limited, 1979), 46.

²⁵ Doi, 59

²⁶ Muhammad Nur Alkali, “Islam in the central bilad al-Sudan and the Emergence of the Kingdom of Kanem” in *Islam in Africa proceedings of the Islam in Africa conference*. Edited by Nura Alikali,