

# Islamic Approach Towards Resolving Religious Disputes among Semitic Religious Followers in Northern Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study aims to examine the Islamic approach to tribal differences concerning the tribal crisis in northern Nigeria, also to deliberate on the significance of discarding tribal differences to unity based on Shari'ah guidance as related to the north of Nigeria, and to assess the implications and challenges of upholding tribal differences as a basis of disunity in northern Nigeria. This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive design to deeply analyze the Islamic approach to conflict resolution, focusing on religious disputes among Semitic religious followers in Northern Nigeria. The design will allow for an understanding of cultural, social, and religious factors influencing tribal conflicts and religious disputes. The results of this study indicate that Islamic teachings have great potential in easing religious and ethnic conflicts in Northern Nigeria, which are often triggered by tensions between tribes and religions. Islam teaches principles of peace that are not only theological but also practical in everyday life, such as respect for individual rights and the importance of brotherhood (ukhuwah). This study also found that tolerance is one of the most emphasized values in Islamic teachings. This tolerance is reflected in the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who showed respect for other religions, such as in the Medina Charter which gave full rights to non-Muslim groups to practice their beliefs without coercion. The study concludes that to achieve sustainable peace, the people of Northern Nigeria must implement Islamic teachings that emphasize social justice, equality, and respect for individual rights.

## A. Introduction

The basic aims of Islam are the creation of peace with the Lord, establishing mankind as one fraternity (Umrnah), a single body that is amalgamated in love and sympathy and as well as to fully utilize the unlimited resources, endowed to man by Allah (SWT) (Sulaiman, 2021). Islam therefore considers attainment to the said three as the prerequisite conditions for establishing harmony among mankind.

The first factor towards making peaceful coexistence realistic among people is to respect and adhere to the injunctions of the Creator of the world, whose knowledge must transcend the knowledge of the world, His authority is irresistible and He is the ultimate source of peace (Yusuf & Ahmad, 2022). Therefore, whenever His instructions are adhered to it is tantamount to respecting the rights of others and whenever people become oblivion and vehemently violate His instructions they equally violate the rights of others and hence clashes and unrest prompt.

Islam announces the equality of all mankind regardless of tribe, color, race, or locality. However, differences and superiority are noticed by, the extent of one consciousness of the rights of the Creator and creatures. The Prophet (SAW) was quoted to have said:

*O people! Your God is one, and your father is one. You are all Adam's children, and Adam has been created from dust. The most honourable among you in the eyes of Allah is (he most pious, No Arab has an advantage over a non-Arab except on account of their piety. Al-Shaybani (2001:23489).*

One of the factors that promote instability in a community is arrogance. Islam strongly prohibits the attitude of pride (Mohammed et al., 2023). Perhaps the reason why Islam disowned such altitude is because there is no justification for it. Certainly, whatever good a person acquired is by the will; and making of the Lord. On the other hand, the attitude of pride invites to seeking of undue advantage and hence exploitations of others. This could culminate in unnecessary rivalry that could invite uncompromising and tension among members of society. Islam has explicitly mentioned that such attitudes never gain admission into paradise because they are the source of disharmony and problems on earth. The Qur'an explains:

*That home of the Hereafter We shall give to those who intend not high-handeness or mischief on earth: and the end is (best) for the righteous Q28:83*

Islam prohibits indulgence into crimes to safeguard the integrity of man and violation of the rights of others that could serve as a means of disorganizing the harmonious relationship of man. For instance, a man came to the Prophet (SAW) and requested for permission to committed fornication (Zina). The Prophet (SAW) responded in the following manner: 'Do you want to committed it with your mother? Or with your daughter? Or with your sister? Or with your aunt? Or maternal aunt? In all of the questions the man answered no. The Prophet (SAW) then said to him people would not equally love to have such affairs with them. Al-fabrani (1984:1066) The explanation of the Prophet (SAW) has made the objectives of such prohibitions to the avoidance of the violation of the rights of others. Because every female has such relationship with someone. Likewise, the prohibition of intoxicants, gambling and other games of chance such as the contemporary politics is to avoid hatred, enmity and ungodly attitude that could easily destroy human race or render it meaningless. The Qur'an declares:

*O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, sacrificing to stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, of safari's handiwork-eschew such (abomination), that ye may prosper. Satan's plan is (hut) to I excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah, and from prayer: will ye not then abstain? Q5:90.*

Similarly, a prohibition of usury and interest is to avoid exploitation of the weaker ones and rendering them subservient to the rich persons (Idwal & Supian, 2023; Şimşek, 2023). This attitude not only remove love and sympathy among people but it estranged the weaker ones against the rich and hence unrest in society. The Qur'an explains:

*Mischief has appeared, on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that (Allah) may give them a taste of some of (heir deeds: in order that they may turn hack (from evil) Q30:41.*

Islam considers Allah (SWT) as the sole owner of all wealth and therefore all those in possession of it are only custodians who are expected to act in accordance with the instruction of the owner (Suhaimi, 2023). Thus, the attitude of stinginess and extravagance are prohibited, this is to define the basic aims of Islam of creating a harmonious and egalitarian society (Biplob & Abdullah, 2021; Rohmana, 2022). Consequently, the rich are commanded with the yearly obligation (Zakat) of given a portion of their wealth to those in need and not to allow any person at any period in hardship without assistance. The implication of this philosophy is to inculcate love and sympathy among the members of society. This also remove the attitude of exploitations, dominance and unnecessary misunderstanding. The Prophet (SAW) explains:

*Be on your guard against committing oppression, for oppression is a darkness on the Day of Resurrection, and be on your guard against miserliness for miserliness destroyed those who were before you, as it incited them to shed blood and make lawful what was unlawful for them Siddiqi (2007:6248).*

Justice in Islam is considered as prerogative right of Allah (SWT), the Creator. He therefore commanded for justice to be exercised regardless of differences in status and religion (Hasan, 2024; Torres & Tarozzi, 2020). The Qur'an states:

*O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if of he against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not (personal) inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort (your testimony) or refuse (to give it), then Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted Q4:135.*

The Prophet (SAW) reported that Allah (SWT), the Creator has made the following declaration:

*Verily I have made oppression unlawful for Me and for My servants too, so do not commit oppression Siddiqi (2007: vol. 7; 6246)*

Therefore, the essence of revelation from Allah (SWT) is to instill justice by guiding man to the due rights of all creatures. In view of this, Islam considers denial of justice as a grievous offence that must be restored and respected. The Qur'an reveals:

*We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the scripture and the balance that the people may maintain (their affairs) in justice. And We sent down iron, wherein is great military might and benefits for the people, and so that Allah may make evident those who support Him and His messengers unseen. Indeed, Allah is powerful and Exalted in Might. 057:25*

The above verse stresses the essence of establishing justice even where the use of weapons is the only alternative. This explains that the use of weapons in Islamic perspective is, not for destruction or violation of the sanctity of lives, but rather for the promotion of justice and suppressing the oppressors. Therefore, denial of justice is not only going against the injunctions of Shari'ah but invariably is invitation to the perpetuation of turmoil, unrest, and other forms of corruptions. The Qur'an declares:

*...verily never will Allah change the (good) condition of a people until they change what is in themselves... Q13:11.*

Islam in several places has unequivocally emphasized and urges its adherence to imbibe the attitude of tolerance (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Imran & Mahmud, 2023). In view of this, the religion rightly declares that there is no compulsion in religion; hence, individual's faith is to be based on his utmost conviction. For instance, the Prophet (SAW) and his followers in Mecca were commanded to exercise tolerance in spite of the severe persecutions they were exposed to. Therefore, to demonstrate the nature of Islamic tolerance, the Prophet (SAW) immediately at his arrival to Medina he invited the Jewish clans to sign a treaty of tolerance. This brought about what is known to be constitution of Medina that awards rights of citizenship to all regardless of status and belief. Likewise, the Prophet (SAW) invited the Christians of Najran to sign a treaty of tolerance. The agreement run thus:

*For Najran and its environs (is hereby given) the protection of God and the pledge and covenant (dhimma) of Prophet Muhammad, the messenger of God, for their possessions, their persons and their religion; for those present and those absent, for their kin and for their churches, and what they possess little or much. No bishop should be removed from his bishopric, nor a monk from his monastery, nor a priest from his priesthood Haque (2009:115).*

Similarly, Islamic tolerance can be explained by the unrestricted permissions of freedom of worship and expression to non-Muslims in Muslims dominated areas (Muhajarah & Soebahar, 2024; Wani et al., 2023). It is quite necessary to mention the uniqueness pardoning and tolerance of Islamic mission of granting unconditional protection to enemy who seeks the protection of a Muslim at a period of war or fighting. The following Qur'anic verse substantiates the statement:

*And if any one of the polytheist seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah (i.e... the Qur'an) Then deliver him to his place of safety Q9:6).*

Furthermore, in order to curtail disputes and clashes a Muslim is expected to tolerate with the unworthy attitude of the unreasonable persons who seeks to promote uprising and disorderliness among people. The Qur'an speaks:

*Ana the servants of the most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them (harshly), they say (words of) peace Q25:63.*

The following description of the Prophet (SAW) suffices as example:

*Abu Is-haq reported that he heard Abu Abdullah al-Jadali narrate: I asked Aisha (RA) about the character of the Messenger of Allah (SAW). She said: He was neither obscene, nor uttering obscenities, nor yelling in the markets.*

*He would not return an evil with an evil, but rather he was pardoning and forgiving, Al- Tirmidhi (nd: vol. 4. 2016).*

Tolerance is best promoted in Islam through the institutionalization of avenues for the interaction of people. In this regard, Islam permits Muslim to engage in business dealings with non-Muslims, a Muslim male is permitted to marry a non-Muslim female; also a non-Muslim has the rights of neighbourhood and sanctity of his life and wealth in the Muslims domain. All of these were geared towards the installation and promotion of tolerance by Islam. The Prophet (SAW) says:

*The similitude of believers in regard to minuet! love, affection, and fellow-feeling is that of one body: when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever. Al-Bayhctqi (2003:voi 11:8574).*

The Qur'an encourages people to pardon and forgive the mistakes of others just in the same way they love the forgiveness of Allah for their own mistakes and sins. The incidence of Abubakar (RA), the close companion of the Prophet (SAW), who vowed never to continue assisting a person who has been under his assistance for the deliberate wrong he did against him (Abubakar-R.A) is a good example. The response of Allah (SWT) to Abubakars determination buttresses the statement:

*Lei no! those among you who are endowed with grace and amplitude of means resolve by oath against helping (heir kinsmen, those In want, and those who have left their home 's in Allah 's cause: let /hem forgive and overlook, do you, not wish that Allah should forgive you? For Allah is oft-Forgiving, Most Mercifu!Q24:22.*

In spite of the fact that the Qur'an has acknowledged the wrongs of some people against others yet it obliged them to pardon them. The Qur'an commands:

*And (he retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it. hit! whoever) pardons and makes reconciliation his reward is (due) from Allah. Indeed.He does no! like wrong-doing 042:40-3.*

The Islamic approach to economic policy and business is quite distinct from that of the western ideology (Haron et al., 2020). Islam unlike western ideology that considers limitation of natural endowment in relation to people's wants, as advocated by the economics in their popular saying 'Our wants are many but the resources are limited'. In contrast Islam considers the resources as enormous and unlimited Q31:20. The implication of this, is to enhance continues searching for knowledge and not to relent efforts or feel exhausted. Another dimension of the philosophy of Islam to natural endowments is viewed as blessings of Allah (SWT) provided for the sustenance of all of His Creatures. In this regard, each of the creatures of Allah (SWT) has equal right and therefore it is his responsibility to safeguard and promote it. Thus, if every person is given his due share from the natural endowments there would be no mischievous acts on the earth. Certainly, it is on this basis in several places in the Qur'an, Allah (SWT) explicitly declared his hatred to the people who committed mischievous activities on-the earth or those who causes the mischievous acts.

*...The cause is only against the ones who wrong the people and tyrannize upon the earth without right. Those will have a painful punishment. Q42:42.*

In a nutshell Islam seeks to establish a nuclear family where everyone feel responsible and owed a duty for the promotion and sanitizing of the society from all pollutions.

Challenges fostering instability among Semitic religious followers in northern Nigeria. Certainly, Islam and Christianity, the two common religions in Kaduna State are called Semitic religion, meaning religions that emanate from Prophets (AS). Therefore, every follower of the two religions must understand his limitations as a follower not inventor or dictator but ambassador that must make reference and be guided by his master (Prophet), The following could be a serious challenge to building peace between the two religions in the state: 1) Manipulation and corruption of the politicians: the politicians whose ambitions is to dominate and continue in their unchecked exploitations seized the opportunity of the poverty and desire of most religious mentors a good ground of achieving their ungodly ambition, 2) Dependent of religion to people's support especially the redundant nature of most religious scholars who solemnly relied on assistance coming from people for their sustenance, 3) The proliferation of unqualified scholars and places of worship whose ambition is attainment of popularity or materialism, 4) Negligence and disregarding religious learning in schools, 5) The injustices and economic hardship that has virtually crippled everyone in society coupled with insincere faith, 6) The excessive freedom and indiscipline societies, 7) The weakness or biased government in executing the duties of governance, 8) The undue and unnecessary claim of ownership of land, 9) The insincerity and corruption of most of the religious scholars who have created unnecessary rivalry with others, 10) Ignorance about the nature and challenges of the contemporary world by most

people especially the scholars, 11) The non-challant attitude of the government to religion, 12) Imposition or denial of due rights to the practice of a person's faith, 13) Ignorance about the implications of killing innocent souls, 14) Respect to contrary opinion and ideology, 15) Restriction to religious guidance at the expense of personal whims and caprices, 16) Infringement of the rights of others without appropriate retribution by the law executors, 17) Supporting the truth even where it does not rhyme with the desire of a person, 18) Inability of religious mentors to leave by example.

Based on the description above, this study aims to examine the Islamic approach to tribal differences concerning the tribal crisis in northern Nigeria, also to deliberate on the significance of discarding tribal differences to unity based on Shari'ah guidance as related to northern Nigeria, and to assess the implications and challenges of upholding tribal differences as a basis of disunity in northern Nigeria.

## **B. Research Methods**

### **1. Research Design**

**Qualitative Descriptive Research:** This study will utilize a qualitative descriptive design to deeply analyze the Islamic approach to conflict resolution, focusing on religious disputes among Semitic religious followers in Northern Nigeria. The design will allow for understanding cultural, social, and religious factors influencing tribal conflicts and religious disputes.

### **2. Data Collection Methods**

**Literature Review:** A thorough review of existing literature on Islamic teachings, religious disputes in Northern Nigeria, and the role of religion in peacebuilding will be conducted. This will provide a theoretical framework and context for understanding the Islamic approach.

**Interviews:** Conduct in-depth interviews with Islamic scholars, community leaders, and individuals from different tribes and religious groups. The interviews will focus on their views on how Islam can contribute to conflict resolution and unity, as well as challenges in implementing these teachings.

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Organize FGDs with members of the Semitic religious communities, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to gather insights on their understanding of Islamic teachings related to peace, tolerance, and resolving conflicts.

### **3. Data Analysis**

**Thematic Analysis:** Data collected from interviews and FGDs will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The aim is to identify recurring themes and patterns related to religious teachings, conflict resolution strategies, and perceptions of tribal unity as guided by Shari'ah.

**Content Analysis:** The content of Islamic texts and speeches by religious scholars will be analyzed to assess how Islamic principles can be applied in resolving religious and ethnic conflicts. This will include analyzing Quranic verses, Hadiths, and historical examples from Islamic leaders.

### **4. Conceptual Framework**

**Islamic Peacebuilding Principles:** The study will examine key Islamic peacebuilding principles such as justice, equality, tolerance, and respect for diversity, as outlined in the Quran and Hadith. It will also explore how these principles can be effectively applied to address the challenges of religious disputes in Northern Nigeria.

**Conflict Resolution Frameworks:** The research will incorporate conflict resolution frameworks from both Islamic and secular perspectives to propose a comprehensive approach to eradicating religious disputes.

### **5. Ethical Considerations**

**Informed Consent:** All participants will be informed about the nature of the research, and their consent will be obtained before participation.

**Confidentiality:** Participants' identities and personal information will be kept confidential to ensure their safety and privacy.

### **6. Expected Outcomes**

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice:** The study is expected to provide practical recommendations on how to integrate Islamic teachings into peacebuilding efforts in Northern Nigeria.

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Framework for Interfaith Dialogue: The research will propose a framework for fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation among Semitic religious groups, guided by Islamic principles of tolerance and justice.

### C. Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that Islamic teachings have great potential in easing religious and ethnic conflicts in Northern Nigeria, which are often triggered by tensions between tribes and religions. Islam teaches principles of peace that are not only theological, but also practical in everyday life, such as respect for individual rights and the importance of brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). In this context, the study revealed that Islamic teachings that emphasize the equality of human dignity regardless of tribe, race, or religious background are an important foundation in building peace and overcoming prejudice that exists among diverse communities in Northern Nigeria.

Furthermore, this study also found that tolerance is one of the most emphasized values in Islamic teachings. This tolerance is reflected in the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who showed respect for other religions, such as in the Medina Charter which gave full rights to non-Muslim groups to practice their beliefs without coercion. This principle is also supported by the Qur'an which states that "there is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah: 256), which is the basis for Islam to promote peaceful interaction between Muslims and other religions in a region with religious diversity such as Northern Nigeria.

However, although Islamic teachings support peace, this study also identified several challenges that hinder the implementation of these teachings in society. One of the main challenges is political manipulation that exploits religious and ethnic tensions for personal gain. Politicians who exploit this social instability exacerbate conflicts, using religion as a tool to gain support and expand power. This shows that although Islamic principles are very clear in supporting unity, political realities often obscure and undermine the implementation of these values in society.

Furthermore, findings from interviews with religious and community leaders indicate that lack of in-depth religious education and the spread of misinformation about Islamic teachings are significant factors in exacerbating religious discord among communities. Some religious groups in Northern Nigeria, including some less competent clerics, have twisted Islamic teachings to serve their own ends, creating further polarization and tension. Therefore, better religious education and empowerment of competent clerics are critical to addressing these challenges.

Finally, this study suggests that to achieve sustainable peace, the people of Northern Nigeria must implement Islamic teachings that emphasize social justice, equality, and respect for individual rights. This includes the enforcement of fair laws without discrimination, the elimination of corruption, and the implementation of policies that support harmony between religions and ethnicities. Strengthening the religious education system that focuses on the correct understanding of Islam can also be a strategic step in promoting peace and reducing tensions that often arise in the area. Thus, Islam has a very important role in facilitating interfaith dialogue and creating a peaceful and harmonious society in Northern Nigeria.

The above study is in accordance with the study conducted by Haque et al. (2009) on the role of Islam in building inter-religious peace in various regions with ethnic and religious diversity, found that Islamic teachings that prioritize tolerance and social justice can reduce tensions between different groups. In their study, it was found that the implementation of Islamic teachings on individual rights, such as the right to worship without coercion and the right to freedom of belief, plays an important role in easing conflict. This is in line with the findings in this study, where tolerance in Islam is considered one of the main pillars that can help overcome religious divisions in Northern Nigeria, by encouraging people to respect differences and live life in harmony.

In addition, Haykal's (1982) research on the role of Islam in resolving social conflicts in areas experiencing religious tensions also underlines the importance of an Islamic approach based on justice and respect for human dignity. Haykal explains that Islamic teachings encourage its followers to prioritize the common good and oppose all forms of oppression and injustice. This finding is relevant to this study, which emphasizes that conflict resolution through an Islamic approach must be based on strong values of social justice, so that it can create a more prosperous and harmonious society. Haykal's research also states that the role of religious scholars and proper religious education are key to avoiding manipulation of Islamic teachings that can worsen social tensions, something that is also emphasized in the findings of this study.

This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the role of Islam in mitigating religious and ethnic strife in Northern Nigeria, particularly by highlighting how Islamic teachings of tolerance, justice and brotherhood can be applied to build peace in a diverse society. By analyzing various Islamic principles such as respect for individual rights, avoidance of discrimination, and promotion of moral values such as honesty and generosity, this study offers a faith-based approach to resolving social conflicts. In addition, this study provides insights into the practical challenges faced in implementing Islamic teachings in complex political and social contexts, as well as the importance of deeper religious education to avoid misunderstanding and manipulation of religious teachings. The main contribution of this study is to provide concrete recommendations on how Islamic teachings can be used as a basis for formulating peace policies and strengthening interfaith relations in Northern Nigeria.

#### D. Conclusion

The ultimate objective of Islam is to establish respect and obedience to the Creator, Allah (SWT), by sincere adherence to the revealed message. The outstanding nature of the Qur'an in its general guidance to all aspects of man's endeavour and what could lead him to success has left the Qur'an relevance to all ages and every people.

The implication of the obedience to the Creator, Allah (SWT), is to identify His rights in the midst of several rights and stand by the due rights of each. It is on this basis; Islam considers whatever leads to corruption, exploitations and other form of cheats, which are responsible for disharmony, unrest and clashes among people as prohibited. On the other hand, whatever could creates mutual understanding; promote moral values, generosity and Allah's consciousness, which are responsible for the harmonious coexistence of people in sympathy and love among them is highly encouraged and obliged. The history of Islam in instilling consciousness of the Creator, tolerance, perseverance, uprooting immoral activities that stampe the success and become hazardous to the sanity and development of man's society is incontestable. Thus, if government of Nigeria should view and consider the application of the Islamic policy where possible in eradicating vices and crimes in societies, promoting love and sympathy through justice, avoidance of exploitations and dominance as well as striving in the inculcation of Allah's consciousness and freedom of expression and religion, northern Nigeria would be able to establish peaceful coexistence among the heterogeneous citizens and hence become more admirable, where everyone throughout the world would wish to cherished and live in..

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