



Kinship as Panacea for Christian/Muslim Relations in Yorubaland: A Focus on Iwo Land

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Abstract

Despite the heterogeneous composition of Nigeria as a multilingual ethnic and multi-religious society, there are indices which over the years have fostered peaceful and harmonious coexistence, across the different lines of ethnicity and religion. One such aspect is kinship ties in the midst of raving ethnic bigotry, religious intolerance and violence. Studies have shown that kinship ties without reservation have played a mediation role in fostering peace and ensuring harmonious coexistence especially among people of different religions. The present study investigates the mediating role of kinship ties as a panacea for harmonious Christian – Muslim relations in Iwo land, Osun State Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative method of data analysis, the study adopted the interview approach. Twenty-five persons: fifteen Christians and ten Muslims were purposively selected and interviewed. Tracing the antecedents of the two Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Islam in Iwo, the study finds that though Iwo Land is predominantly a Muslim territory, it has enjoyed peaceful and harmonious coexistence among the two religions. Despite the different areas of conflict, which include marriage, chieftaincy, land acquisition, the *ebi* commonwealth among the populace has guaranteed peace among the people. Some other factors such as a proper understanding, joint efforts in condemning social vices among others have also contributed to the relative harmonious atmosphere among the religions. It concludes that the commonality and communality in Iwo Land revolves around the kinship ties in the land.

Keywords: Kinship ties, panacea, interreligious relations, peaceful coexistence, Yoruba land.

Introduction

Nigeria as a multi religious society is a reflection of the combination of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam which comprehensively reveals the type of religious diversity in the country. At a time when people of different races, tribes and cultures are being drawn together to celebrate the humanity we all share, some regions in Nigeria are being polarized by religious sentiments (Akinade, 2014). This has sadly often led to conflicts (usually characterized by violence) (Akinade,



2014), which has tainted the image of Nigeria as an infamous example of religious intolerance (Akinade, 2014). This has further led to Nigeria being seen as a land 'flowing with human blood' on account of constant and repeated religious violence. Considering media reports which flood the nation every now and then, it is easier for persons' to hold an erroneous perception that no part of the country is spared of this overwhelming menace. However, it is never in doubt that religion has to some extent been used as a major tool for violence in some regions of the country. Religion has caused crisis and conflicts in many countries around the world especially in the Middle East and Africa, where there is a great number of both Christians and Muslims adherents living side by side.

In discussing Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria, there is the necessity of understanding the Religio-Cultural differences prevalent among the ethnic identities in Nigeria especially between the North and South (Lateju, 2012). The answer may be sourced in the perceptions of the culture and religions as practiced in the two zones. Hausa/Fulani perceive religion and culture as one entity and to them adaptation of the Arab culture is regarded as the best and is comprehended in their dressing, lifestyle and family life (Lateju, 2012). Moreover, the presence of people from other tribes in the north appears to have brought a threat to them since such persons were coming with a different culture and religion. The migrant in Hausa/Fulani North were not obliged to follow or uphold their values, thus increasing the activities of Islamic extremist groups like *Boko Haram* (Lateju, 2012) as a protest to such attitudinal context. Because of this, Christian-Muslim relations in the north are threatened. This is not the same in the south as religion and culture in that area are two different concepts; the people uphold their culture as well as practice Christianity or Islam (Lateju, 2012) and generally live in harmony.

Various scholars have given definitions for religion, for example, Bolaji Idoju (1966) a renowned religious studies scholar, defined religion as being a means of communion and communication between the Creator and man. Accordingly, Schilbrack (2002) defined religion as a cultural practice, which has a mode of belief systems concerning the supernatural that contains a body of practical reality with symbolic representation. Both definitions agree on the fact that religion has to do with having a relationship with the supernatural, which also means that religion can be regarded as the search for one's significance in life and the essence of being created, where adherents draw their strength, motivation, moral support and guideline for living their daily lives. Nigeria is faced with various challenges ranging from disunity, instability, injustice and corruption, because of the religious consciousness of the nation. There is often a link between the challenges faced by citizens and their spiritual sphere. Christians and Muslims strained relationships have had great impact on the nation's socio-political atmosphere for some years now (Boer, 2004). This is one important factor that has led the researcher to investigate the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Iwo land as a solution for inter-religious intolerance in the relationship of the two faiths. Inter-religious harmony is fundamental in maintaining political and national stability. The misunderstanding between religious adherents, and significantly between the Christians and Muslims, is an inevitable issue that could become a great challenge to the government, religious leaders, and the society needs to preserve social harmony among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

Iwo is the third most populous town in Osun State (Osun Fact File, 2017) according to the official website of the state; citing the 2006 census, it has a population of about 191,348 people (Osun Fact File, 2017). It is certain that this number must have greatly increased after 17 years (2006-2023). We would estimate that there are no fewer than half a million residents in Iwo town. Iwo is regarded as an epicenter of religious activities. The researchers realized this fact during the interviews conducted among Christians and Muslims in the town (Asalu, 2022). This is reflected



by the number of houses of worship of Muslims and Christians as well as shrines of those of the adherents of African Indigenous Religion.

Method

The study applied a qualitative research method in gathering data which involved participant observations, interviews with selected religious leaders, and adherents of Islam and Christianity. A total number of (25) twenty-five people were purposively selected and interviewed and the sample comprised of (15) fifteen Christians and (10) ten Muslims. The interviews were both structured and unstructured in order to enable respondents to state their opinions on the issues being investigated. In addition to the participant observations and interviews, the research also made use of relevant literature grounded in academic journal articles related to the study. The internet was an additional source of useful information.

Christianity in Iwo

The history of Christianity in Iwo began with the establishment of a small Baptist church in Iwo by the First Baptist Church in Awe a nearby town situated in Oyo (Okedara, 1996). The Christian faith was not profoundly entrenched in the land as most of the indigenes were divided between African Traditional religion and Islam religion. Thus, the coming of Baptist Training school was another step in introducing the Christian faith to Iwo community. The Baptist training school was transferred from Ogbomosho to Iwo in 1922 (McCormick, 1981).

In discussing the establishment of the Baptist College which began in 1896 in Ogbomosho, Oroniran and Okedara (2013;1996) have suggested that the Baptist Training School was the forerunner of the College with the preachers' class kicking off two years later. Charles Edwin Smith held the position of principal while Nathaniel David Oyerinde was the only student (Duval, 1928). Oroniran (2013) went further to state that according to Cecil Roberson, the Baptist Training School grew out of the Preacher-training plan of C. E. Smith for the members of the old Oke-Osupa Baptist Church in Ogbomosho. Going by this account, it is apparent that this school was founded with the intent of raising indigenous leaders and teachers and that the process would ultimately impact the growth of the Christian faith in Iwo and neighboring communities.

On the movement of the college from Ogbomosho to Iwo, Mary McCormick and Okedara (1981; 1996) noted that Iwo was chosen based on two reasons: first because of the availability of timber and secondly, because the town of about sixty thousand people was yet unreached with the Christian message. Subsequently, Iwo was to be the extension of the Gospel ministry and the plan was to develop a full-rounded programme (McCormick, 1981). The way Baptist work became established in Iwo according to Okedara, was that each missionary was given a section of the mission work to cater for. For instance, Dr. MacLean was to train builders and other craftsmen, while Mrs. MacLean, was to take care of the education aspect of the mission work (Okedara, 1996).

For a start, Dr. MacLean led his students in erecting a large workshop equipped with machines in order to aid the learning of necessary skills. Some other buildings were put in place by the industrial students. Since the focus of the Baptist mission was to give a full-rounded education, it was meant to touch every aspect of human life. Okedara stated that the students were encouraged to also participate in church work with each student given an office to oversee in the church, such as the office of the treasurer (Okedara, 1996). The engagement of the students of the Baptist College came along as a smart move in the spread of the Christian faith in Iwo land. The establishment of the Baptist mission became the bedrock upon which other churches blossomed thereby influencing the spread of the Christian faith among indigenes of Iwo. This



college later became the first University in Iwo which was established by the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The establishment brought about the awakening of the educational spirit in Iwo, as there has not been any other University in the town before Bowen University was created. This avenue helped indigenes to send their children to Bowen University which in turn boosted the economic life of such families after their children had been employed in various organizations. Among others, the University did not only advantaged conversion of souls but provided an opportunity to impact the social life of the people and the advancement of civilization in general terms.

Islam in Iwo

Iwo land is a town in Osun State, known for agriculture and for Islamic learning. There is no written record giving the exact date of the origin of Iwo. There are various accounts that suggest Prince Adekola Telu was the founder of Iwo (Amao, 2010). Adekola Telu was the first son of Queen Luwo in Ile-Ife from Obaloran Compound in Ile-Ife (Amao, 2010). Prince Telu led his people out of Ife in the 14th century to settle in Iwo. His journey met with a lot of obstacles and hindrances as he was not aware that he would eventually be the founder of Iwo land because his aim was mainly to establish his own kingdom which was the reason he left Ile Ife in the first place. While on his way after leaving Ife, he settled first at Ogundigbaroan outskirts of Ibadan near the present site of Asejire dam (Amao, 2010). Telu and his followers lived there for many years, but were forced to relocate because of the swampy nature of the land and the fact that it was not suitable for agriculture. Amao (2010) believes that the outbreak of smallpox epidemic was responsible for their relocation. Amao (2010) stated that Telu consulted the Ifa Oracle for guidance and direction, and he was graciously directed by the oracle to move to a place called "Igboorita" meaning a forest near a crossroad. Other accounts suggest that when the Oracle was consulted, they were asked to move where they heard sounds of parrots (Hammed, 1985). These accounts are closely related and show that Prince Telu and his followers settled at Igboorita. From this ancient settlement, they were close to the present day Iwo town where Prince Telu died of old age and was buried. After the death of Telu, his Son Ogunfenumodi succeeded him. The actual numbers of Obas /Leaders of Telu's people at Igboorita is not exact but about four Obas were buried at Igboorita according to Amao (2010).

They heard the voices of parrots at Igboorita and that was why they first settled there but had to move to the final destination following the oracle's instruction. As they progressed to the location the Oracle gave them Amao (2010) noted that Jikanmu died at the riverbank which was named "Adeeke" which means "where the king died". The body of Jikanmu was conveyed to where the Oracle had instructed them to go and was buried at the palace in Iwo. Parin was later made the king and became the first Oluwo of Iwo. Amao (2010) points out that one of the major reasons for the expansion of Iwo is its geographical location. According to him, Iwo is located at the transition from the wooded forest to a grassy savannah which makes the land suitable for the cultivation of cereals and root crops, and it is thus attractive to farmers and people in the agro business. Amao (2010) furthermore asserted that, the name "Iwo" became known as the new founded kingdom. However, the name "Iwo" has various stories explaining how it was decided. Examples of such accounts attest that "Ejeki a lo wo" meaning "let us go and see," and "Ejeki a maa woo" meaning "let us wait and see," (Amao, 2010) are part of the historical narratives confirming the origin of "Iwo," which has remained its name from inception.

There are many schools of thought as regards the introduction of Islam into Iwo land. Oral traditions have different opinions on the exact date this occurred. Iwo people, before the coming of Islam and Christianity, worshipped local deities such as Oro, Ifa, Ogun and others and had social norms which guided the way they lived their lives. Various accounts support the fact that



Islam came to Iwo through Hausa traders (Amao, 2010) who were known to travel everywhere with their religion and that was an important reason why Islam was able to rapidly spread in Yoruba land. Islam in Iwo is dated to the 15th century almost the same year the first mosque in Yoruba land was built 1655 CE (Lateju, 1999). Iwo has been notable as a center for Islamic training for over a century, which is responsible for its nickname “Ilu Afa,” meaning a town of Islamic Clerics (Lateju, 1999).

Areas of Conflict in Christian / Muslim Relations in Iwo land

According to Clagett Smith (1966), he defines conflict as a situation in which the conditions, practices or goals for the different participants are inherently incompatible. In the same vein, Joseph Litterer (1966) opines that conflict is a type of behaviour which occurs when two or more parties are in opposition or in a battle as a result of a perceived relative deprivation from the activities of or interacting with another person or group. Situating these definitions together, one can deduce that conflicts arise mostly as a result of differences in values, thirst for power, dominance and struggle over scarce resources between different parties. To the researcher, religious conflict is perceived to be the struggle between different religious groups, which is as a result of differences in values, traditions, practices, names and goals. It can also be a result of competition for status, power or scarce resources.

An understanding of the essence of religion would help religious adherents live peacefully with themselves. The Yoruba people are a group of people rich in culture and values, and this also can account for their hospitality. At the advent of Christianity and Islam, people in Yoruba land were not hostile; they received the Clerics who brought these religions with openness as they do with people from other tribes. One of the areas of conflict is marriage. Marriage is of great significance in Yoruba land because this stage of life signifies growth and is highly celebrated. There are cases and instances where Christian and Muslim parents frown and reject the notion of interreligious marriage between their children (Lateju, 2012). When a thing like this occurs, the elders in the community are often called upon to settle the matter, and more often than not, the families agree to accept the counsel of the elders.

Conversion to either faith persuasion is another area of conflict among Christians and Muslims. While converts are often seen as backsliders in Christianity and always prayed for, in Islam, the issue is quite serious and in some cases some people receive death threats or are actually killed, this development is more prominent in Northern Nigeria (Akanji, 2021). In spite of the areas of conflict among Christians and Muslims, it is imperative to note that the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Yoruba land is distinct due to the rich cultural values and communal spirit implanted in the hearts of the Yoruba's despite the differences in their religious affiliations. More importantly, is the issue of Kinship which we shall discuss later in the study.

Chieftaincy titles which involve a very important person in the society, causes conflicts among rivals especially when they belong to different religious groups. This is usually settled as the elders in such communities are invited to peacefully sort out the issues, and sometimes the struggle continues for some time until one of the parties involved surrenders to the other. Chief Asalu (2022) one of the respondents, explained how he faced many challenges when he was among those considered to be made the Chief in his family. He went further explaining that most of his family members are Muslims, and wanted a Muslim to be installed as the Chief instead of him, a Christian. The respondent explained how he strived to become the first Christian Chief in his family.

Acquisition of land, in Iwo being a predominantly Muslim community, makes it difficult for Christians who wish to buy land in the heart of the town, standing on the point that when Christians



purchase lands they could easily decide to erect Church buildings, which is frowned upon by the Muslim community. One such instance was described by one of the respondents, who explained that when Winners Chapel purchased a land in the metropolis of Iwo legally, they were denied access to the land and were instructed to find another piece of land to erect the Church structure, which caused tension among Christians and Muslims in Iwo with Muslims saying that no Church building should be found inside the town that Iwo town is a land predominantly occupied by Muslims (Oni, 2021).

Kinship as Panacea for Christian / Muslim intolerance in Yoruba land

Daniel Bitrus (2008) asserts that 'family' as a network of relationships, binds various relatives together for mutual fellowship and support. Irene Goldenberg and Herbert Goldenberg (1985) assert that a family is far more than a collection of nuclear families of individuals occupying a specific physical and psychological space together. They see it as an accepted social system, with assets which are all personal, one that has developed a set of principles, rules, roles, a power structure, forms of communication, cooperation and problem-solving that allows various tasks to be performed effectively (Goldenberg & Goldenberg 1985).

The level of interaction between Christian and Muslim in Yoruba land is perceived to be cordial because of "Ebi commonwealth social theory" which Akinjogbin (1979) explains as the close tie of family relationship shared among the Yoruba people. According to this theory, the feeling of belonging together is not imposed by force, but by a common acceptance of being related by blood. Akinjogbin explains that religion and culture are two different concepts to the people living in the southern part of Nigeria (1979). The people maintain their culture as they embrace Christianity and Islam. Contrary to what some Muslims in the North feel about Islam in the south, Muslims in the south practice their faith with all genuine intention fulfilling all the rights according to the injunctions of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* without allowing any traditional/ cultural rights to affect them (Lateju, 2012). "Ebi" is therefore regarded as the basis of Yoruba social organization which strengthens all forms of close ties. This is apparent in the way Yoruba people practice Christianity and Islam as they remain united in their communities despite having different beliefs.

The concept of Yoruba kinship in Iwo town has helped to keep religious conflict at bay, this is because both Christians and Muslims come from the same household and they see themselves as brothers and sisters, which makes it difficult for them to fight among themselves and when they do fight, they find a common ground to settle the stressing issues.

Additional Factors for promoting harmonious Christian/Muslim relations in Iwo Land

As it has been noted above that family ties have helped the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Iwo, and the following are what has been discovered as the solution to Christian – Muslim intolerance apart from kinship in Yoruba land.

a. Understanding each other's faiths

Some people have thought that to be a good Christian or a good Muslim, you must condemn non-Christians and non-Muslims. This is a great mistake, Jesus said: "Judge not and you will not be judged, condemn not and you will not be condemned Luke 6:37" So also the Prophet of Islam Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "A just Muslim is he/she from whose hands and tongue mankind is safe", You are a better Christian and a better Muslim if while holding to your own faith, you show charity in your attitude to other religions. Good is good no matter where it may be found. To be able to see no good points in others religion only means ignorance, and selfishness. Every Muslim and Christian should be a student of the Bible and Quran, having the understanding of



the Holy Book of another religion will help to know what they believe, what they see as sacred and their doctrine thereby reducing the occurrence conflicts. Listening to the other with an open mind means more than keeping silent when the other speaks. It means attending to and sympathetically considering what is being said, drawing insights from other religions where possible, trying them out in relations to one's own faith. Christians and Muslims should therefore strive to urgently develop an open-mind approach and be objective to issues that can promote mutual understanding and harmonious living between them.

b. Joint efforts to fight social vices

Muslims and Christians should condemn all social vices like stealing, cheating, thuggery, corruption and others. In the community they have laid down punishments for those found guilty of such acts by either Muslims or Christians. Both adherents should regard these vices as the worst foes against the preservation of the highest cultural values of mankind. Once both Muslims and Christians can agree on this, it would be much easier to lay aside their rivalry and work together towards achieving the purpose which religion came to accomplish.

c. Religious leaders should be people of peace

The religious leaders should stop playing 'hide and seek' games, and this is because they have been chosen to raise the flag of peace which they must do with all seriousness. Religious leaders need to serve as spoke-persons for their adherents and lay down rules and principles based on teaching of faith, which their members are expected to follow. Consequently, these leaders should not be aggressive and should often be at the forefront of seeking peace at all times. When there are issues in the community, these leaders are often consulted to know how solutions could be brought to tackle those issues, and if people are not peace motivated they could further escalate the issues in the community.

d. Mutual Love

Christianity and Islam both preach love. Love is not hidden. All Christians and Muslims need to demonstrate this love and let it envelop their being. There should be a practice of sincere love to make our society a better place to live in. Love is often expressed with words of mouth, but it needs to be encouraged in our society which would help promote tolerance and mutual respect. Northern Muslim brethren should purge themselves of all egoism and emulate southern Muslims who live peacefully with their Christian brethren and even attend each other's social and religious functions.

e. Adherents should be faithful to their Religious injunctions

God demands faithfulness from us as human beings. Adherents of the two religions, Christianity and Islam, should be faithful to their God and not just be a member of a religious organization 'on paper or by mouth' but in especially character. In the Quran 2 vs 208 it says "O believers enter into Islam wholeheartedly and do not follow Satan's footsteps. Surely he is your sworn enemy", James 4 vs 7 says "Submit yourself therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you". The two passages thus admonish the adherents to be steadfast in their faith, and by following these guidelines given in both religions, would help adherents be the best versions of themselves and they would then also serve God faithfully.

f. Avenues for Interfaith Dialogue

Dialogue among Christians and Muslims is necessary and should not be contested. For the purpose of peace and unity, this task must be accomplished. Interfaith Dialogue creates the



avenue in which one is able to examine one's own faith and practices in the light of another, and this invariably helps people to know how both religions view themselves and also to have intelligent discussions among them.

Finally, we must admit that too often both Christians and Muslims are strangers to each other. Very few have taken a real interest in the 'otherness' aspect. Now we must break down this barrier of differences in order to achieve meaningful relations and strive for continuous harmony and acceptance of diversity.

Conclusion

Yoruba ethnicity is playing a major role as regards how Christians and Muslims relate with each other in Iwo. The Yoruba culture places a lot of value on issues of family and it precedes every other factor that has to be considered when it comes, since there is the presence of Christians and Muslims in several Yoruba families. The cultural value that is placed on the notion of family has made it mandatory for people who hold on to these faiths to come together in unity, seeing themselves as family first before they consider their religious differences, which is not strong enough to cause a rift as the value placed on family kinship is superior to that of faith. When it comes to communal living, each individual is expected to perform their duties when it comes to family functions irrespective of one's faith. Also, the societal structure has a role to play in the manner in which Christians and Muslims relate to each other in the community, since the society is structured in such a way that both Christians and Muslims live side-by-side. It becomes mandatory for them to live peacefully with one another, and participate actively in discussions that concern everyone, especially when it has to do with security and community development issues.

Furthermore, similarities in the tenets and doctrines of both faiths have made it possible for adherents to live with each other amicably. Another factor that has helped in establishing peaceful communal living among adherents of these faiths is the fact that they have lived together for a long time and have had interactions with each other which help to solidify their relationships, and they have had to put aside their religious differences in order to accommodate each other as friends and neighbours.

Religious tolerance and mutual respect have affected the way people from both faiths relate with each other generally positively. The relative peace that is achievable in the land has led to the establishment of various organizations like Bowen University, King Riverside Hotels and Resort various commercial banks, among other businesses in the locality and they have been able to thrive overtime because they are patronized by people irrespective of their religious stance. Also, business owners have not had reasons to be afraid of putting their business out for fear of destruction in the face of religious crisis. Thus, peace that is achievable on the religious scene has made Iwo a place that entices business owners and people who have interest in establishing organizations and companies that would be of great help to people living in that community.

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