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ARABIC LANGUAGE AND ISLAMIC VALUES: BRIDGING ETHNIC DIVERSITY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The need for national development and peaceful coexistence amongst the citizenry dominated current discussion in Nigeria. The article examined the impacts of Arabic language and Islamic values in the actualization of national development in Nigeria via the bridging of ethnic diversity. The paper critically examined factors that constitute obstacles to unity amongst Nigerians, with a view to finding panaceas to Nigeria's imminent disintegration. This study, using a qualitative approach employed both historical and contextual methods to investigate the causes of disunity where ethnic diversity exists. It examined the predisposing factors as well steps that could be taken to ensure peaceful coexistence and national development. Data were collected from a range of reliable published sources in Arabic language authored by eminent Nigerian Arabic scholars intermarried with case studies of the current situation. The study revealed that doctrinal differences, leadership tussle, tribal affiliations, and matters relating to political leadership are some of the major contentious issues. The results indicated that literacy in Arabic language and deeper understanding of Islamic values have the potentialities of serving as the vehicles in facilitating harmonious relationship and national development. The knowledge of Arabic stimulates interaction at the linguistic level both in local and international contexts and promotes unity amongst the citizenry, together with Islamic values. They jointly play an important role in peacemaking and national development. Subsequent studies must explore further, the impact of Arabic education in peacemaking amongst the citizens of diverse backgrounds and advise the educators on the need for curriculum development to improve the level of harmonious relationship amongst Nigerians. Considering the fact that the corporate existence of Nigeria is preferable to its disintegration, the study provided a list of

recommendations the actualization of which could enhance the much-desired national development.

Keywords: Arabic language, Diversity, Ethnicity, National development, Nigeria, Islamic values

Abstrak

Kebutuhan akan pembangunan nasional dan koeksistensi damai di antara warga mendominasi diskusi saat ini di Nigeria. Artikel tersebut meneliti dampak bahasa Arab dan nilai-nilai Islam dalam aktualisasi pembangunan nasional di Nigeria melalui menjembatani keragaman etnis. Makalah ini secara kritis meneliti faktor-faktor yang merupakan hambatan persatuan di antara orang Nigeria, dengan maksud untuk menemukan obat mujarab untuk disintegrasi Nigeria yang akan segera terjadi. Penelitian ini, menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif menggunakan metode historis dan kontekstual untuk menyelidiki penyebab perpecahan di mana adanya keragaman etnis. Ini meneliti faktor-faktor predisposisi serta langkah-langkah yang dapat diambil untuk memastikan koeksistensi damai dan pembangunan nasional. Data dikumpulkan dari berbagai sumber terbitan terpercaya dalam bahasa Arab yang ditulis oleh sarjana Arab Nigeria terkemuka yang menikah dengan studi kasus situasi saat ini. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa perbedaan doktrinal, pertikaian kepemimpinan, afiliasi suku, dan hal-hal yang berkaitan dengan kepemimpinan politik adalah beberapa masalah utama yang diperdebatkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa literasi dalam bahasa Arab dan pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang nilai-nilai Islam memiliki potensi untuk menjadi kendaraan dalam memfasilitasi hubungan yang harmonis dan pembangunan nasional. Pengetahuan bahasa Arab merangsang interaksi di tingkat linguistik baik dalam konteks lokal maupun internasional dan mempromosikan persatuan di antara warga negara, bersama dengan nilai-nilai Islam. Mereka bersama-sama memainkan peran penting dalam perdamaian dan pembangunan nasional. Studi selanjutnya harus mengeksplorasi lebih lanjut, dampak pendidikan bahasa Arab dalam perdamaian di antara warga dari berbagai latar belakang dan memberi saran kepada para pendidik tentang perlunya pengembangan kurikulum untuk meningkatkan tingkat hubungan yang harmonis di antara orang Nigeria. Mempertimbangkan fakta bahwa keberadaan perusahaan Nigeria lebih disukai daripada disintegrasinya, studi ini memberikan daftar rekomendasi yang aktualisasinya dapat meningkatkan pembangunan nasional yang sangat diinginkan.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Arab, Keragaman, Etnis, Pembangunan nasional, Nigeria, nilai-nilai Islam

INTRODUCTION

Religious crises, criminality and insecurity have in the recent years manifested in every facet of our national lives and these have adversely affected peaceful coexistence amongst the citizenry. The need for peaceful co-existence amongst the citizens of different linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic and political backgrounds dominates current discussions in Nigeria. The issue has inevitably received the attention of various stakeholders, including the ‘*Ulamā*’ (Arabic and Islamic scholars). Recent happenings definitely pose greater challenge to them to be more vocal on the need to reflect

divine commandments on peaceful co-existence, love, honesty and brotherliness, which will eventually engender peaceful coexistence in their various activities¹.

Permit us to draw little illustrations from Arabo-Islamic sources, the terrain with which we are reasonably familiar in the process of addressing the topic of this paper, which appears so secular but could not be totally divorced from religion. There are significant issues worthy of attention. The first is that basic diversities on earth are created by God Who has provided facilities for managing them to humankind's advantage. He appoints human being as a khalifah trustee² provides him with intellect³, revealed the scriptures⁴ and sent prophets as teachers, guides and exemplars⁵ to interpret the scriptures. It is apposite to note that religious affiliations, featuring various faiths and spiritual practices come as integral part of the characteristics of ethnic diversity. Allah says in the Qur'an : O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has fear of Allah⁶ This Qur'anic quotation stated above shows the divine purpose behind ethnic diversity. The Qur'an views diversity from a positive and beneficial light, projecting it as an asset and not a liability. By embracing ethnic diversity, Nigeria can unlock its full potential and become a beacon of peace, stability, and development in Africa. This paper attempts to examine what the term ethnic diversity connotes and how we can utilize the diversity to achieve peace and national development.

It is our argument in this paper that commendable steps should be taken to ensure harmony amongst the adherents of various religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria, using the instrumentality of Arabic education and Islamic teachings to stimulate love, good neighbourliness and religious tolerance, all of which constitute the ingredients for peaceful coexistence and national integration. Unity amongst the *Ummah* serves as a necessary step to be pursued and actualized for the actualization of national development.

Furthermore, the Islamic perspective on ethnic diversity is not only descriptive, but also prescriptive in establishing an ethical framework for human interaction. The concept of ta'aruf (knowing each other) implied in Q.S. al-Ḥujurāt:13 has the profound implication that diversity is not a cosmic coincidence, but a divine design that aims to enrich the human experience through the

¹ M.A. Folorunsho. Yoruba '*Ulamā*' as Peace-Makers: Fostering Peaceful Coexistence through the *Minbar* and Beyond. In Folorunsho, M.A., Makinde, A.K, Jimba, M.M.M., Oguntola-Laguda, D. & Imam, Y.O. (2020). (Eds), *Religion, Peace-Building and National Integration* (pp.195-206), Ile-Ife: Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, (2020),196.

² Qur'an 2: 30

³ Qur'an 67:23

⁴ Qur'an 3:184

⁵ Qur'an 2:285

⁶ Q. 49:13

exchange of culture, knowledge, and noble values. In the context of Nigeria which has more than 250 ethnic groups with diverse languages and traditions, this principle has become very relevant as the foundation for building social cohesion. In addition, the concept of ummah wahidah (one ummah) in Islam emphasizes the unity of humanity over primordial differences, while the principles of 'adl (justice) and ihsan (virtue) provide a moral foundation for the creation of inclusive governance. Thus, the Arabo-Islamist approach not only offers theological legitimacy for respect for diversity, but also provides an applicative conceptual tool to address the challenges of social disintegration that often plague pluralistic societies such as Nigeria, so that the transformation of diversity from a potential conflict to a force for national development can be realized in a sustainable manner.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining historical analysis with contemporary case studies to interpret how Arabic language and Islamic teachings relate to the causes of disunity and potential pathways to unity among citizens of diverse backgrounds, particularly in Nigeria. Qualitative designs are appropriate when the aim is to develop contextual, meaning-based understanding from non-numerical materials and naturally occurring texts rather than to test hypotheses experimentally.⁷ The historical component follows established guidance that historical inquiry reconstructs and explains past developments through the critical selection, contextualization, and corroboration of sources.⁸ The case-study component is used to generate an in-depth, contextual account of contemporary instances relevant to national cohesion, consistent with the view that case studies are especially valuable for understanding complex social phenomena in their real-life settings.⁹

Data were collected through documentary analysis of publicly available materials, drawing on reliable published primary and secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, relevant book chapters, and scholarly books. Documentary analysis was conducted as a systematic procedure for identifying, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing documents to generate data and interpretations

⁷ Katrine Hammarberg, Margaret Kirkman, and Sheryl de Lacey, "Qualitative Research Methods: When to Use Them and How to Judge Them," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 16 (2016): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-016-0134-5>.

⁸ Michael Rowlinson, John Hassard, and Stephanie Decker, "Research Strategies for Organizational History: A Dialogue between Historical Theory and Organization Theory," *Academy of Management Review* 39, no. 3 (2014): 250–274, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2012.0205>.

⁹ Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (2006): 219–245, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>

relevant to the research questions.¹⁰ This study is limited to publicly accessible documents and therefore does not include private community interactions or confidential oral discussions. Methodologically, the study is non-experimental and relies on extant documentary sources rather than field instruments; accordingly, its claims are supported through source critique and corroboration across materials.

To strengthen reliability and validity (trustworthiness), the study applied established qualitative strategies including careful source authentication, attention to credibility and confirmability through cross-checking information across multiple documents, and transparent documentation of inclusion decisions.^{11,12} Where possible, triangulation across different types of documents and authorship positions was used to reduce single-source bias and improve the robustness of interpretations.¹³

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Arabic in Nigeria: Brief Historical Background

The history of Arabic language is traceable to the advent of Islam in Nigeria. According to Malik (1995:424)¹⁴, Islam is a major vehicle through which Arabic language and literature travelled to all nooks and crannies of the world. Hence the history of Arabic in Yorubaland began with the history of Islam in this area. Arabic was not just a faith language; it grew to become a community organization, literacy, and civic conditioning tool¹⁵. The main factor responsible for the spread of this language outside Arabian Peninsula is Islam. Being the language of the Qur'an and the Islamic branches of knowledge, Arabic has inseparably been interwoven with Islam. It should be noted that

¹⁰ Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

¹¹ Lorelli S. Nowell, Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules, "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>.

¹² Andrew K. Shenton, "Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects," *Education for Information* 22, no. 2 (2004): 63–75, <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>.

¹³ Nancy Carter, Denise Bryant-Lukosius, Alba DiCenso, Jennifer Blythe, and Annette J. Neville, "The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research," *Oncology Nursing Forum* 41, no. 5 (2014): 545–547, <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>.

¹⁴ .S.H.A.Malik, The Impact of Arabic on the Linguistic and Cultural Life of the Yoruba People, in Owolabi, K. . (Ed.) *Language in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Group Publishers, 1995), 424.

¹⁵ K.K. Busari & M.A. Folorunsho, Arabic as a Catalyst of Yoruba Consciousness: Tracing the Influence of the Arabic Language on Yoruba Political Activism, *alsinatuna: Journal of Arabic Linguistics and Education*, 10(2) (2025).253

wherever Islam spread, encouragement was given to the learning of Arabic by the establishment of both Qur'ānic and advanced schools for the study of the Arabic language and Islamic literature especially the theological and legal literature which formed the bases of both spiritual and temporal life of the converts. Islam had become influential throughout West Africa, cementing Arabic as a scholarly and religious lingua franca¹⁶. The case was the same with regard to the history of Arabic in Yorubaland. In other words, Arabic is as old as Islam in Yorubaland.

Galadanchi(1993:17)¹⁷ claims that Arabic language predated Islam in West Africa pointing to the existence of commercial connections between the people of West Africa and the Arabs prior to the introduction of Islam to this area. This submission confirms the vital role played by commercial interactions in the spread of Arabic in West Africa. The language entered Yorubaland together with Islam and its efflorescence in the area was due to the spread of Islam, through the activities of traders, preachers and mendicants (Folorunsho:1996:288)¹⁸. Sequel to the spread of Islam to Yorubaland, the rudimentary knowledge of the Qur'ān, *hadīth* and the *sharī'ah* began to be taught to the adherents of the religion. Three stages were designed for the teaching and these included the Qur'ānic *'ilmī* and advanced stages. Arabic and Islam were taught simultaneously as a pupil who began to read the Arabic alphabet did so with the intention of reading the Qur'ān. In a recent work, Folorunsho and Busari (2025:96-104)¹⁹ have provides some details about this and to avoid a digression from the main thrust of this paper , we will avoid repeating the details here

Ethnic Diversity Defined

Ethnic diversity refers to the presence of various ethnic groups within a community, organization, or society. We are indebted to Musa²⁰ who cited Litvin²¹ as having dimensionalised diversity into fourteen characterisations out which six constitute primary dimensions while eight are considered fluid. The first set of dimensions are age, ethnicity, gender, physical attributes/abilities, race and sexual orientation while the second set incorporates education, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs and work experience

¹⁶ K.K. Busari, Analysis of Phonological Adaptation of Arabic Loanwords in Yoruba Language, *Alsinatuna: Journal of Arabic Linguistics and Education*, 9(2) (2024),169

¹⁷ S.A.S.Galadanchi , *Harakat 'al-lughah 'al-'arabiyyah wa ' ādabihā fi Nijiriya*, 1804-1966,(Riyād: Shirkah 'al-'Aykān,(1993),17

¹⁸M.A. Folorunsho,Arabic Literary Activity among the Osogbo Muslims in Nigeria. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*.16(2),(1996),288

¹⁹M.A. Folorunsho and K.K.Busari, Efflorescence of Arabic Literature in Nigeria: Appraisal of the Contributions of Shaykh Dawood Tijani, *Journal of Arabic Literature*,6(2), (2005),96-104

²⁰ I. Musa, Diversity as a Mechanism for National Integration and Development, in Imam, Y.O. *et al. Religion,Peace Building and National Integration*, (Ile-Ife, Obafemi Awolowo University,2020),19

²¹ D.R. Litvin, D.R. The Discourse of Diversity: From Biology to Management. *Organization* 4(2), (1997),187

Ethnicity encompasses cultural differences, involving various traditions, customs, values, and beliefs. It also encompasses linguistic diversity, featuring multiple languages, dialects, and communication styles. Of the characteristics of ethnic diversity also are affiliation to national or geographic origins, featuring ancestral homelands and migration histories. Religious affiliations encompassing various faiths and spiritual practices also come as part of the features of ethnic diversity. Racial and physical characteristics involving skin colour, hair texture and physical features also fall within the characteristics of ethnic diversity.

Furthermore, Irobi²² traced the origin of ethnicity as an attempt to classify people not according to their current nationality but according to commonalities in their cultural and social background. Yusuf²³ described an ethnic group as a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language.

Benefits of Ethnic Diversity

According to Musa²⁴ the effective management of diversity is an emergent issue in many societies where prejudices based on race, religion, gender, status and interests have continued to threaten peace and development. Ethnic diversity serves as a stimulant for the promotion of creativity and innovation as each group within the diversity strives to contribute its own quota to the development of the larger society. It enhances social cohesion and community building and promotes cultural understanding and empathy. Significantly, it supports economic growth and global competitiveness.

Furthermore, cultural enrichment and innovative thinking serve as its additional benefits while it enhances economic growth through diverse perspectives. Social cohesion and community building which are the essential parts of the ingredients of peace and national integration are also included in the benefits of ethnic diversity. Through ethnic diversity, we can break down stereotypes and biases, build inclusive communities and drive social progress and equality and celebrate our shared humanity.

²² E. Irobi, *Ethnicity and Nation building in Contemporary Africa: A Perspective for Nonkilling*. Global Nonkilling Working Papers, (2013).

²³ M.K. Yusuf, On the Origin of Ethno-religious Tone in Nigerian Media: Re-examination of *ìwé ìròhìn* period to 1914. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* (Nigerian Chapter), 3(12), (2016), 1-8.

²⁴ Musa, Diversity as a Mechanism for National Integration, 18

Oluwadele, Adediran and Olaogun²⁵ described Nigeria is a typical example of countries desperately searching for solutions to its ethnic and cultural diversity. It is a multi-colored political entity, multi-religious, multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual, than most African countries. This diversity is a significant factor in the country's political and economic realities

Challenges

In spite of the multiple benefits derivable from ethnic diversity, some of which we have identified above, there exist some challenges. Of these challenges are communication barriers which render inter-ethnic relations abysmal. The multiplicity of spoken languages in social, political, or economic spheres has been a significant challenge that fosters ethnic and cultural divisions²⁶

Nigeria has its lion's share of ethnic and cultural diversity problems that seems to defer solution. If these problems are not managed, the quest for political and economic development in the country will always be frustrated by ethnic and cultural jingoism. The leading cause of violent identity conflict in Nigeria is that most minority groups have remained permanent minorities. In contrast, the majority groups are the permanent majority, a trend that has serious implications for inter-ethnic and religious relations among the diverse ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria²⁷

Cultural misunderstandings also feature as part of the challenges of ethnic diversity, where the cultural and linguistic differences of a particular ethnic group attract mockery or antagonism to them from another group. Egungun festival, for instance has its adherents who are in the minority in Yorubaland. To the non-Yorubas who have no adequate information that majority of the Yorubas are Muslims who practice Islam in its puritanical form, the festival is seen as evidence of polytheism and idolatrous practice amongst the Yorubas, not minding the fact that only a minority amongst the Yorubas are actually involved in this practice.

Furthermore, prejudice and discrimination as well as unhealthy competitions could not be ruled out, especially where power imbalances occasioned by political marginalization rear its ugly head. While lamenting the spate of these challenges, Musa²⁸ observed:

In Nigeria, the ceaseless agitations for restructuring, strict adherence to the principles of rotational leadership, quota system, true federalism and the like, have, on several occasions, put Nigeria on the edge. The corporate existence of the country has been undermined severally by allegations of marginalization or domination by ethnic or religious groups. The diverse ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and economic realities in Nigeria make the country susceptible to conflicts. All of these bring to the fore the need

²⁵ L.B. Oluwadele, A. Adediran A., S.M. Olaogun, Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria: A Panacea for National Development or Decapitation? *Integrity Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 4(4), (2003).

²⁶ Oluwadele, Adediran A., Olaogun, Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria, 23

²⁷ Oluwadele, Adediran A., Olaogun, Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria, 23

²⁸ Musa, Diversity as a Mechanism for National Integration, 18

for a clear understanding of diversity as a phenomenon with positive and negative potentials. Mismanagement of diversity has a high potential for precipitating conflicts and crises while its effective management is capable of engendering peace, progress, harmony and development.

Ethnicity Diversity for Peace and Development: Arabo-Islamic Perspective

Religious crises, criminality and insecurity have dominated happenings of our national lives and these have adversely affected peaceful coexistence amongst the citizenry. The need for peaceful co-existence amongst the citizens of different linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic and political backgrounds dominates current discussions in Nigeria. These unpleasant happenings could be curbed by a deeper study and understanding of Arabic language which will make access to an abundance of literary texts written in Arabic where teachings on harmonious relations could be tapped easy. Arabic works on ethics provide enough provisions for peaceful coexistence where we have ethnic diversity and knowledge of the language becomes an essential tool to actualize these. Religious discrimination, which cuts across various ethnic divides is one of the issues militating against peaceful coexistence. 'Al-'Ilūrī²⁹ denounced this attitude and opined that peace and unity could be achieved in the nation as a whole if the negative attitude of self-purification and condemnation of others as infidels plaguing the citizenry is replaced with mutual respect and religious tolerance.

Fostering Peaceful Coexistence through the *Minbar*

Prior to the advent of Islam in Arabia, Arabs utilized *Khitābah* (oration) as a medium for the dissemination of messages. With the advent of Islam, the same channel was employed in spreading its messages, though with remarkable difference in focus and contents. Oseni³⁰ provided an insight into its development and usage of *Khutbah* from the pre-Islamic era up to the introduction of Islam to Arabia in the early 7th century C.E. as well as the Umayyad era. With the evolution and spread of Islam, *Khutbah* (sermon) came to take the place of oration as a channel for the dissemination of religious speeches and messages.

The desirability of utilization of *Minbar* as well as other related platforms of Islamic proselytization in engendering peaceful coexistence amongst the Nigerians, cannot be underestimated. An Imam should be able to make his impact felt on religious understanding through his sermons which are expected to promote religious harmony. *Minbar* should be utilized as a channel for the promotion of peace, especially when Muslims are provoked to resist bigotry and injustice.

²⁹ A.A 'Al-'Ilūrī. *'Al – Islām 'al – Yawm wa Ghadan fīNayjiriya*, (Cairo :Maktabat Wahbah, 1985),103

³⁰Z.I. Oseni, A Thematic Study of the Religious Speeches of an Umayyad Viceroy; Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf, *Hamdard Islamicus*, 17(1) (1994),35

Most of the issues that generate chaos and instability both within intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic groups, respectively, could be curbed through objective *Minbar* sermons

Promoting Peace and Development through Literary Productions

Nigerian ‘*Ulamā*’ have used their literary productions, especially the ones having peaceful coexistence as motif to project the ideals of Islam. While stressing the significance of the literary productions in facilitating peaceful atmosphere, Folorunsho³¹ observed that contentious issues like tribal discrimination and squabbles, process of selection of political leaders, feminism are some of the potential catalysts for breakdown of peace in the society. One of the issues militating against peaceful coexistence, according to him is tribalism. ‘Al-’Ilūrī³², (1985:96) identified the prevalence of inter-ethnic hostilities and the desire of one tribe to dominate the other politically and economically as the norms amongst the Africans. He opined that, as a matter of priority, tribalism is an evil to be removed to secure suitable atmosphere for peaceful coexistence amongst the citizenry.

Racism or tribal discrimination negates the purpose of human creation as enshrined in the following quotation from the glorious Qur’ān which reminds not only the Muslims but all mankind as follows:

O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has fear of Allah (Q. 49:13)

Eradication of Inter and Intra Religious Barriers

Of the points of attraction to us in this paper is the proliferation of religious organizations with affiliation to specific ethnic backgrounds. Rather than being a blessing one observes that the rise serves as stimulus for disunity and bickering in some cases. Inter and intra-religious bickering accounts for a significant factor militating against peaceful co-existence and national integration. According to Adebayo³³

³¹ M.A. Folorunsho, Unifying the ‘*Ummah*: A Review of ‘Al – ‘Ilūrī’s Viewpoints in ‘*Al – Islām ‘al – Yawm wa Ghadan fī Nayjiriya*, *Journal of Islam in Nigeria*, 3(1)(2018),123

³² A.A ‘Al-’Ilūrī. ‘*Al – Islām ‘al – Yawm wa Ghadan fī Nayjiriya*, (Cairo :Maktabat Wahbah, 1985),96

³³ R.I.Adebayo, Engendering Religious Tolerance for Nation Building: The View of Dawood Adekilekun Tijani, in Oyeweso, S., Adebayo, R.I. and Folorunsho, M.A. (Eds), *Heritage of Islam in Nigeria: Essays in Memory of Dawood Adekilekun Tijani (1942-2006)*, (Osogbo: College of Humanities and Culture, Osun State University.(2016),461

Religious intolerance and bigotry go beyond different religions, as there are instances of intra-religious misunderstanding and conflicts. In the pre-colonial Islam of Nigeria, the Shaykh of Borno was not in good term with Sokoto Mujahidin to the extent that El-Kanemi criticized the basis of the Sokoto jihadists as he was not convinced of the attack of the jihadists on his territory on the basis of the social ills in the land which had not made them Kuffār. These and many other instances are indications of intolerance which breed disunity and rancor within the rank and file of adherents of religions generally and Muslims specifically.

Avoidance and Curbing of Hate Speech

Hate speech can be described as a form of expression aimed at persecuting people by vilifying their racial, ethnic, religious or other identities. One of the important factors that are responsible for religious crises identified by Akinmameji and Omidiwura³⁴ is provocative statements expressed by some religious leaders or groups. Some religious leaders or groups are of the habit of antagonizing or abusing another religion in their preaching and sermons. There is the need for Nigerian government to be proactive in enacting a law which criminalizes hate speech and offers appropriate punishment for such, it is our view that Arabic scholars have greater role to play in producing Arabic writings and preaching against this ugly habit which is always accompanied by violence.

Hate-speech, which has become a recurring phenomenon in many parts of the globe, is a manifestation of lack of understanding of diversity and the way its resources can be harnessed for the benefit of all. Our religious leaders must rise to the task of using faith facilities to teach the message of unity and harmony rather than the hate speeches that have pervaded the places of worship. There is indeed, the message of oneness in all the monotheistic religions³⁵

Building the Bridge of Religious Harmony

Religion which is expected to be a veritable instrument of unity and development in Nigeria has been turned to an instrument of polarization, disunity and instability. Going through the history of crises in Nigeria, a large percentage of instances of these are attributed to religion. Insecurity of life and property, social ills, political instability, all are attributed to religion in Nigeria to the extent that some thinkers submitted that elimination of religion from Nigeria scene will be a means to ensuring stability of the nation³⁶

³⁴ Akinmameji, A.J. and Omidiwura, S.O., The Place of Inter-religious Dialogue in Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigerian Society, in Azeez, A.O,et.al. (Eds), *Religion, Education and Peaceful Co-Existence*, National Association for the Study of Religions and Education.(2018),19

³⁵ Musa, Diversity as a Mechanism for National Integration,19

³⁶ R.I.Adebayo,Engendering Religious Tolerance for Nation Building,460

A major cause of religious bigotry in Nigeria is unhealthy rivalry between the Muslims and the Christians. Giving a succinct description of the nature of the rivalry, Adebayo³⁷

Experience has shown that adherents of religions are not tolerant enough to allow some religious injunctions to prevail for the benefit of mankind. As such, they agitate for what they feel could benefit them individually and raise unnecessary dust on what they feel is of no direct benefit to them.

Condemnation of Aristocracy

Monopolization of political powers by certain groups or individuals in the country; and ascending positions of authority by heredity are classified under the issues that must be rectified to facilitate inter-ethnic cohabitation. Islam frowns at aristocracy in whatever form it takes. To justify this 'Al-'Ilūrī³⁸, in his well-researched Arabic writing entitled *'Al – Islām 'al – Yawm wa Ghadan fīNayjiriya* reiterated that the Prophet entrusted the leadership of the 'Ummah to 'Abūbakri (d.634C.E) instead of 'Alī (d.661C.E) who was closer to him in affinity. 'Umar (d.644C.E) also selected a committee of six learned Muslims with the mandate of picking his successor amongst them by consensus, while he refused to include his son Abdullah who was equally a leading scholar during that period. 'Uthmān (d.656C.E) who was accused of favouritism by the appointment of his relatives thwarted this policy of justice and transparency in the selection of leaders. Aristocracy was bought by Mu'āwiyah, Yazīd and subsequent administrators in the early days of Islam. The evil inherent in this practice was the emergence of leaders who were not sufficiently competent morally and intellectually.

Shaykh 'Al-'Ilūrī is a model for the Arabic writers in Nigeria³⁹ for the utilization of his rich Arabic literary productions on issues of national significance as we can see from his *'Al – Islām 'al – Yawm wa Ghadan fīNayjiriya* cited in this paper. This work, amongst others has revealed the social significance of Arabic language in Nigeria. Other prominent Arabic writers of Nigerian origin included Wazir Gidado of Sokoto, Abdullah bin Fūdī, Shaykh Mustafa Zughlūl As-Sunūsī and numerous other prominent Arabic writers of Nigerian provenance⁴⁰. Contributing to literary

³⁷ R.1. Adebayo, The Imperative for Integrating Religion in the Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria: A Muslim Perspective, *Centrepoin Journal*, 15(1)(2012),14

³⁸ 'Al-'Ilūrī. *'Al – Islām 'al – Yawm wa Ghadan*,96

³⁹ R.I.Adebayo&A.T.Surajudeen, An Appraisal of Sheikh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilori's Educational Philosophy: A Way of Reclaiming the Islamic Identity in Nigeria, *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 2 (3), (2012),188

⁴⁰ T. O. Yusuf, R.A.Abdul Azeez,I.R.F. Hammed. & M.A. Folorunsho, Insight into the Stylistic and Thematic Features of the Arabic Literary Writings of Nigerian Provenance. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSLCS)*, 8(4), (2025),411

productions by these Arabic scholars in Nigeria was primarily motivated by the need to disseminate literacy in Arabic and projection of Islamic values⁴¹

From the foregoing, it becomes expedient to provide the following recommendations, to actualize peace and development, through the instrumentality of ethnic diversity.

1. The issue disunity amongst the citizens has inevitably received the attention of various stakeholders, including the '*Ulamā*' (Arabic and Islamic scholars). Recent happenings definitely pose greater challenge to them to be more vocal on the need to reflect divine commandments on peaceful co-existence, love, honesty and brotherliness, which will eventually engender peaceful coexistence in their various activities
2. Government and concerned stakeholders should establish an inter-ethnic council to provide platforms that different ethnic groups will use to foster communication and promote dialogue. Nigerian Muslims belonging to different political parties should play politics with the fear of Allah, hoping that they will render their political activities before Allah on the day of judgment. Hence, for the sake of the unity of the Muslim Ummah, they should shun politics with bitterness and hatred towards another fellow Muslims
3. Multi-ethnic states must consider involving every ethnic group in decision-making for political sustainability and effective ethnic development. Governments should use their educational systems and mass media to promote awareness on the need for peaceful coexistence and national development
4. Religious leaders must utilize the themes of love and brotherhood in the scriptures to teach the message of unity and harmony rather than the hate speeches that have pervaded the places of worship.

CONCLUSION

National integration and development are achievable where citizens of different political, religious and cultural backgrounds coexist and live peacefully. Various stakeholders, including the scholars of Arabic and Islam have addressed the issue at various levels of Islamic proselytization. Yoruba '*Ulamā*' have used their literary productions, sermons on the *Minbar* as well as other activities at different platforms to actualize peaceful coexistence. It is our argument in this paper that even with the commendable steps being taken to ensure harmony amongst the adherents of various religious groups in Yorubaland, more attention should still be given those issues that stimulate love,

⁴¹ R.A.Abdul Azeez, M.A. Folorunsho & W.O.Bello, Elements of Protest in the Arabic Verses of Yoruba '*Ulamā*'. Sri Lankan Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies,8(1),(2025),24

good neighbourliness and religious tolerance, all of which constitute the ingredients for peaceful coexistence and national integration.

Ethnic diversity connotes the presence of various ethnic groups within a community, organization, or society. Of the features of ethnic diversity also are affiliation to national or geographic origins, featuring ancestral homelands and migration histories. Religious affiliations encompassing various faiths and spiritual practices also come as part of the features of ethnic diversity. In spite of the multiple benefits derivable from ethnic diversity, some of which we have identified paper, there exist some challenges which are not so difficult to tackle. If well utilized, diversity can serve as a catalyst for the achievement of peace and national development.

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