

**Blind Hatred and Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: Comparing the Biblical Saul and Yerima Musa in Heart of Stone**

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**Abstract**

That blind hatred has led to the destruction of many lives and properties in Nigeria is a statement of fact. Today, violence is the new “norm” in Nigeria as the circles of revenge continue to span. This paper compares the religious bigotry and intolerance exemplified by the Biblical Saul and Yerima Musa in Heart of Stone and concludes, unfortunately, that religious intolerance continues to characterise Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria with attendant consequences. No society progresses without tolerance and the accommodation of people other than yourself. Consequently, Nigeria can only reach her potentials when blind hatred and religious intolerance that has bedevilled our cooperate coexistence is jettisoned for a more humane coexistence.

**Keywords:** Blind Hatred, Religious Intolerance, Biblical Saul and Yerima's Musa in *Heart Stone*

**Introduction**

Nigeria as a nation state is a multi-ethnic society shrouded with different peoples of varying cultures, languages and religions. These linguistics and natural characteristics of the Nigerian State make it unique in a number of ways. In spite of the multi-dimensional, multicultural and multi-lingual nature of the country, the country still parades one national flag. The country operates a presidential system of government despite its multi-ethnic nationalities of desperate histories, languages and religions.

Thus far, the multi-dimensional nature of the country is laden with several religious sects. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country has been grappling with the problem of ethnicity on one hand, and chiefly the problem of religious intolerance on the other hand. These two major phenomena have, over the years, continued to coxswain religious intolerance of all kinds in different regions of the country, which have had devastating effects on the citizenry. The incessant recurrence of intolerance in most parts of the country, particularly in the North West, the North East and the North central, has affected, and is still affecting, the country negatively.

As the blind hatred in the practice of religion deepens, it gives more room for the uprising of different sects amongst across the regions of the nation. The emergence of more of such sects has multiplied ethno-religious crisis, which is why it is a truism to say that the façade of religious intolerance in the country is on the increase. The discourse on ethno-religious intolerance has dominated the scene of discourse in many decision making entities and, as such, the discussions are tailored towards finding lasting solutions, or if possible, the total eradication of religious intolerance which has caused more harm than good for the country's progress. There has been massive break down of law and order following the

activities of religious intolerance and there are religious fundamentalists who are so determined to keep perpetuating this dexterous act against the fundamental principles of Nigeria's unity in diversity.

More frontally, these forms of exacerbated civil unrest that Nigeria as a nation has been witnessing, as caused by different sects in the name of religious intolerance, date back in most African transcend religion and ethnicity. Akinola hypothesizes that, "Colonial heritage through resource exploitation, and inability of ethnic nationalities within African states to negotiate the terms of their statehood, inept political leadership, poverty and alienation, misrule and corruption and sit-tightism has predisposed African States to the intrigues; of violent conflicts" (265).

Taking off from Akinola's point of view, it is rather apt to note that all the issues raised in his compendium are the factors that have given rise to most, if not all of the religious crisis witnessed in most African countries today, and Nigeria in particular. This unholy blind intolerance has assumed diverse dimensions prominent among which include; high profile kidnapping, oil bunkering, large scale armed robbery, cattle rustling, ethnic cleansing and genocide which have given birth to a dreaded scourge tagged Boko- haram in the Nigerian space. The trend is growing and suicide bombing is becoming a more lucrative enterprise in the hands of the blind and intolerant folks.

Very fundamentally, this paper seeks to look at the role of the dramatists in exposing issues of blind hatred and religious concerns that have led to the economic doldrums of the nation thereby creating in the masses the consciousness of unity through dramatic creation. A dramatist's creation is never in a vacuum, it is for the purpose of information, instruction, transformation and reconstruction of the society. In like manner, the paper also looks at the Holy Bible and examines the character of Saul who so hated Christians and was busy killing all Christians. But in the course of his life, God arrested him and made him see that his total hatred for Christians was a blind and an intolerant one. Nonetheless, we shall give a full account of the two characters we have chosen to compare in the course of our analysis of the main subject of discourse.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

In a bid to justify this paper and put it in a more lucid and appropriate context, it is worthy of us to clarify basic concepts that make up the discourse. In this paper, we shall consider blind hatred and religion as our major concepts.

Blind hatred, as used in this paper, connotes a negative impression held against a people, religion, ethnicity and a nation in general. In Nigeria, this phenomenon has found its place of pride, following the multi-dimensional nature of the Nigerian state, different tribes, ethnic groups, etcetera, have withdrawn into their cleavages. This withdrawal prompts the blind hatred that they hold against any sect other than theirs.

In discussing blind hatred more succinctly, issues of esteem, control and affiliation can never be left out. This is because, when people withdraw into their cleavages, they have a serious sense of self-esteem; and as such, they are not willing to compromise this self-esteem at all cost. In this regards, they try as much as possible to live up to this self-esteem to the extent of violating the principles of nationhood. In the two characters that we will be understudying subsequently, both the Biblical Saul and Yerima's Musa in *Heart of stone*, exhibit self-esteem. Self-esteem is what gives rise to the blind hatred on the religions of other people.

Blind hatred also resulted from the issue of control which is another fundamental point that

has had a negative effect on the nation's progress. Individuals, who feel, either they should be in control or they should not be controlled, cause relational conflicts in all nations of the world. In the context of our discourse, both characters see that being in control of their religious belief is what should be their truest sense of belonging. Any contrary opinion to their belief system is a violation or an infringement on their fundamental human rights. In Nigeria, it is not just the religious aspects that sects demand total control of; the control of the country's natural resources through the instrumentality of religion has given rise to the blind hatred being practiced in Nigeria by different sects (religions).

The issue of affiliation is another serious cause of relational conflicts of blind hatred and religious intolerance in Nigeria. People of different tribes and ethnicity are so attached to their beliefs. This sense of attachment and closeness to their belief system is a motivating factor towards blind hatred and intolerant of other tribes or ethnic nationalities. Based on this, there is always the misconception about each other, which leads to suspicion and subsequent breakdown of unity amongst such groups.

Religion as a concept to be clarified in this paper is of apt impetus because it has not been easy for scholars to provide clarifying explanations to the term religion. This is so because, religion as a term connotes the belief, practice, feeling, knowledge and effects. The descriptive words are all religious variables that various sects deploy as weapons to hold firm unto their belief system. In the contemporary Nigeria, religion has taken a different dimension. The dimension taken by religion and of course those fundamentalists who hide under the guise of religion to perpetuate all manners of mischief includes ideological viewpoints, ritualistic dimensions, experimental methodologies, intellectual stand point and consequential linings.

Emile Durkheim, in "schuefer and Lamm", provides us with this fascinating definition of religion to be "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things that are set apart or forbidden" (42). Karl Max, in Ian Roberstone, describes religion as "the opium of the people, and the soul of the soulless circumstances" (22). The two definitions give us a crystal clear picture of what religion is. The first takes us to the beliefs, practices and the sacredness of religion as practiced by a people, while the later tells us that religion is opium of the people. This means that religion is part of the people and whatever people do, either good or bad, is as a result of their religious dictates and beliefs.

There are different religions in the world such as Hinduism, Jainism, Africa Traditional Religion, Bahaism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Taoism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Eckankar and many others. All these religions are practiced, in different parts of the world. In Nigeria, several of these religions are also practiced but the most pronounced are Islam and Christianity.

### **Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: An Overview**

The country Nigeria is a design of the British colonialists. To this end, there is absolutely no point arguing that the origin of religious intolerance is not part of the design. From the British era to this present day, there have been pockets of religious intolerances in Nigeria. Aiden Campbell informs that:

During the Nigerian constitutional negotiations...the British would emphasize the sharp capitalistic practices of the southerners to Northern delegates and then remind southerners of the reactionary feudal/slave trafficking vices of the Northerners (172).

Campbell's words in the above quotation provides an illuminating perception that the issues of religious intolerance were in existence even during the British rule in the country.

This shows that religious fundamentalism has been in existence for a very long time now. In the recent past, Nigeria has witnessed serious crisis of violent proportions ranging from politically motivated crisis to economic and religious ones respectively. The scenario has refused to die off as ethnic nationalities are in their cleavages perpetrating all forms of crisis in the name of religion. Religion has become the yardstick for identity politics which religious fundamentalists deploy as tools to melt all forms of injustices. Regrettably, a series of religious violence have devilled the nation. These violent crises have brought many civilians face-to-face with harsh conditions of living. This explains why Otite and Albert were quick to say that “there is a high degree of religious intolerance in Kano and this explains why there is always conflicts in the city. Religious intolerance cut across all religious groups” (25). The phenomenon level of religious intolerance, as captured, here, is quite apt and paramount to our discussion.

Samuel Azariah, quoted in Dogara Gwamna, paints this picture of religious crisis around the globe thus:

In many ways, what we witness today in parts of Africa, Asia and Europe is a re-enactment of a similar tide of religious violence that once swept across Europe when the emotional power of religion was aroused and manipulated to intimidate, harass and persecute the people. Despite the enlightenment that education and modernization have brought, it is unfortunate that we witness yet, again, the negative impact of religion in our societies, perhaps today more than ever before religious symbols and idioms are been manipulated to promote hatred, intolerance and violence (44 - 45).

The case presented above is indeed a strong one, owing to the fact that religion is a weapon that has been deployed by so many people to perpetrate evil in the society. Very fundamentally, religious fundamentalists use hate speeches to lure their followers into supporting their ploy. A preponderance of the people (converts) that are used in fighting religious crises are largely the uneducated who know little or nothing about the gimmicks of their religious leaders. Salawu notes that “over the years, many events in Nigeria have led to the politicization of mistrust, intolerance and acrimonious relations between the mainly Muslim North and Christian South of Nigeria” (349). This shows that there has been an insertion of religious discrimination and incompatibility in the structures of the Nigerian State and this has continued to stir up religious violence.

It is very disheartening to note that, in spite of the interrelationship that exists amongst families and the different shades of belief systems practiced within these families, there are still traces of violence among them. Ali Mazrui makes the case that “Many African families are multi-religious in composition without strain one brother could be Muslim, another Roman Catholic, a sister protestant and the father a practicing member of a African Traditional Religion” (94). With this picture, one would have expected that there will be absolute tolerance of one another, yet the reverse is the case.

To sum up these discourses, it is worthy of note that in Nigeria, blind hatred and religious intolerance are constantly promoted by the divisive interplay of politics, *ethnicism*, tribalism, lack of adequate distribution of the natural resources found in the country, loop sided political appointments, hegemonic tendencies and religious bigotry. All these factors had consequently led to the uprising and militancy of various ethnic and religious movements in Nigeria. The failure of Nigerian leaders to provide credible and responsible leadership in terms of governance in order to forge national integration that would promote unity and progress has continued to masturbate and promote ethnic and religious intolerance.

### Heart of Stone's Musa: Blind Hatred and Religious Intolerance Examined

*Heart of Stone* is a play written by Ahmed Yerima, the play dramatizes how the character, Musa, is caught in the complexities of religious conflict of beliefs and intolerances found in the Nigerian nation, particularly in the Northern parts of the country. Musa, as a character in Yerima's creation, represents a young adult Muslim adherent and fundamentalist whose indoctrination, brain washing and convictions about the Islamic faith is overwhelming. This strong blind belief becomes a force towards genocide adventures against innocent Christians. Surprisingly, Musa and his cohorts' suicidal attempts on innocent Christians cuts across all sects because his Kith and Kin are also involved in a wedding solemnization of his ex-fiancée, the groom, guests, including the ministers, at the event all perished. Musa, Kaka Patu and Amina are the only ones who escaped the bomb incident. Amina and Kaka Patu escaped following their unplanned absence from the bombing scene. Musa is eventually arrested, but he later ingests himself with a rat poison in the cell and dies instead of been executed by the firing squad as already condensed by the law.

In one of his speeches about his blind hatred and intolerance about the Christian faith, Musa says the following:

Yes...us Muslims. All their songs...all their prayers insult us. They brand us as the children of the most evil spirit, the devil. Shetani! They want hell fire to burn us to smithereens. And yet they want us to be one, to be friends. They say we worship the same God. How can? I swear, I will not go for the wedding if this is the kind of songs they will sing at the wedding. Even their prayers are so militant, aimed at us described as blind 'gambani' beggars' children of the devil...(54).

Musa's lines are crystal clear that his hatred for the Christian faith knows no bounds. Amina tries to make Musa believe that it is only a song but Musa reprimands her by asking that,

"A song, eh? Satan don fall gutter, march am march am. That is me. That is us. The song is saying that all Muslims are siblings of Satan, who should be trampled upon. We? Who did we ever hurt? I mean we who are the peace-loving cursed docile illiterates? Us! "(54).

The above explanations as provided by Musa to Amina further justify his deep and blind hatred for the Christian faith. Musa sees nothing good neither with whatever the Christians do nor say. So long as he (Musa) is concerned, the Christians are not part of the world and should not be interacted with on any account.

Musa is engaged to Gladys and everything is set for the marriage between the two young folks, but because of blind hatred against a particular religion and intolerance, Musa breaks the engagement simply because he is a Muslim and Gladys a Christian. This scenario is captured in the conversation that ensues between Kaka Vero and Musa:

**Vero:** When Gladys came home one rainy night crying, saying that you had broken off your engagement to her because she was your sister, I knew the reason was that you had become the pure believer and suddenly we had become filthy *kaffirs* to you, yes?

Musa responded quietly "Yes Mama" (54). This shows the level that Musa despises the Christian faith. Musa sacrifices his love for Gladys simply because she belongs to another faith (Christianity).

Vero goes further to explain Musa's high level profile hatred and intolerance for other religions in the following words:

**Vero:** When the prayer started, and you looked down at the kneeling couple and you walked out, I knew that knowing a little about how related we were,

was dangerous for the soul. I will not rest well in my grave if I don't tell you....When you became a teacher in a Koranic school and suddenly, we became dirty pigs... unbelievers in your sight. From the day I saw you as a little boy join a group of Almajiri to force a car driver to stop and with your mouths you drew fuel from his car after beating him up for refusing to recite the *Fatiha* and as I watched, it first appeared like a play to me, but in a frenzy of madness, you all ran towards our church, poured the petrol under the doors while the other wild boys broke the church windows and threw in burning rags into it..... Our eyes met, in one flash, I saw those red beady eyes of stones ..... (55).

The above words are further words that Kaka Vero recounts Musa's actions and inactions against the blind hatred for the Christian faith. Musa replies quietly "... it was what we were told to do. The *ustaz* had said Allah had decreed it...." This further affirms the fact that Musa's blind hatred for non-Muslims is immense. Musa recounts his experience in the Koranic school and about the Islamic faith in the following words when asked by Sani his supposed spiritual leader:

**Musa:** He grew up and as he grew, so did his perception about life. He started to see and feel things differently. He no longer believed those little stories about right and wrong how Allah lived in Heaven and how piety guaranteed us a ticket in paradise. He became amazed at the capacity of man to be evil, and wondered if god indeed lived with us on earth anymore. He grew up Mallam, seeing the dark hearts of men ..... (56).

Sani noticing the anger in Musa's words and tone asked quietly "you are angry" Musa in response says:

"Why even those who call themselves spiritual fathers, leaders of the *Jama'a*, those who wrapped their head with well-shaped *Rawani*, with well-manicured fingers and beard, and know the holy Quran by heart, you see why do not spare them in the judgment of death? (56).

This shows that the blind hatred that Musa has on Christians transcends just the Christians Faith alone which is manifest in Nigeria just like the Boko Haram sect, does kill both Christians and Muslims. The hatred has dominated their thinking and is ruling their existence. Musa says these lines as his closing remarks: "It is better for me to die with you as my Koranic school teacher in my head. Rather than see pretension stand before me you see why we kill even our own? (56). This, in a nutshell, reviews that the blind hatred is a deadly one and has no regards for any sect or religion. Today, we see the blind hatred manifesting itself in most parts of the country, particularly the North West, North East, North central, and it is gradually circulating to all parts of the country.

Musa as a character in *Heart of Stone* represents the blind hatred and religious intolerance that has in the recent years dominated the country in different parts. The play, *Heart of Stone* the presentation of Musa, is a clarion call by the playwright that citizens should desist from such acts of religious intolerance which have had a devastating effects on the country's progress. The play serves as a mirror through which the masses can pick up cues from the Musa's character represented whose blind hatred is examined to forge harmonious coexistence amongst religions of the country.

#### **When Paul was Saul: His Blind Hatred and Religious Intolerance Examined**

Saul, which is Paul's given name, was born into a Jewish family in Tarsus (Turkey) around the year A.D. 8; he was also a Roman citizen and a trained Rabbi. The meaning of the Hebrew name is "Ask For" (Browning in Holman Dictionary 1450). No wonder, he asked for the lives of Christians so he could kill. According to Jerome, Saul's family moved to

Tarsus from Gischala in Galilee. Saul's family was of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:3), and he was named for the most prominent member of the tribe-King Saul (Many speculate that Saul's father or grandfather was honoured with citizenship because of some special services rendered to a military proconsul (Quarles in Holman Dictionary 1254).

The difference between Paul and Saul is beyond "P" and "S". The two names speak of the Judaist or pharisaic Saul and the Christian Paul; the best and the brightest. The Saul of Tarsus; a child of the best upbringing, a student of the vaunted teacher, Gamaliel; a Roman citizen; trained in the best Jewish schools; groomed, perhaps, to even become chief priest. This pious man was bent on the destruction of the believers in Christ. He was probably an active Jewish missionary winning Gentiles as he travelled through lands and seas to proselytize.

In order to understand Saul of Tarsus, it is important that we put him into historical context. Only a few short years had passed from the crucifixion of Christ when a self-righteous religious zealot assisted in the systematic murder of one spirit filled deacons of the early church, deacon Stephen. In Acts, Luke punctuates Saul's involvement in this heinous and heartless murder with the chilling comment: "Now Saul was consented to his death" (Acts 8:1).

Even before that fateful day when young Saul, the Pharisee, gloated over the brutal death of the innocent disciple, Stephen, the spirit of Jesus Christ was pricking his heart. God had designs for this bright young man, and in His sovereignty, He was prepared to knock Saul off his high horse. There can be little doubt that Saul was familiar with the man of Galilee called Jesus. He was however consumed by the study of Torah and Talmud- the Jewish holy books. There was talk of this back woods preacher and the stir he was creating throughout Israel. Uncountable reports emerged of the so-called Messiah from every corner of the land, leading to the imaginable debates between Paul and co-scholars regarding the authenticity of the *messiahship* of Jesus and His miraculous displays.

Likely, Saul was one of the unnamed lawyers who must have confronted Jesus with questions in the gospel accounts. It is also conceivable, that Saul could be one of the pious Pharisees trying to console a weeping Mary and Martha at the death of their brother, Lazarus. Whether present or not, he must have heard of the resurrection of Lazarus after being rotten in the grave. Saul could have been in attendance at the infamous midnight trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Perhaps he was outside in the courtyard of Caiaphas warming himself next to fire (<https://www1.cbn.com>). May be he heard the servant girl accusing a gruff-looking Galilean of being a follower of Christ. He may have been amused at the unrefined manner in which this fisherman called Peter cursed and raved the third time he was accused.

Though Saul approved of the barbarous stoning of Stephen, it is entirely possible that Saul's heart was pricked when he heard him say, "Lord do not charge them with this sin". It is not in record of how long the Lord was at work in the heart of Saul, but it was possible the Holy Spirit was goading him and Saul was kicking hard. After the death of Stephen, Saul was fanatical about destroying this new sect, Saul launched a holy war against the Church, scattering the believers. He made havoc, entering homes, sending many to prison-even putting some to death. He was beginning to attain the notoriety that he had always craved. If Saul was going to rise to the level of prestige and power that he believed was his destiny, he would have to prove himself worthy. When information came that these followers of Christ had spread into Syria, Saul requested permission to go to Damascus. With great pleasure, the high priest granted his letters to take to the Synagogues of Syria.

### **Saul Became Paul**

As Saul and his learned colleagues came near Damascus, suddenly they were flooded with glorious light. It was like looking into the sun from only a yard away. As Saul fell to the ground, a voice emanated from the ray of light, terrifying and soothing at the same time. "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?"... "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting..." Saul began to tremble. This became his turning point; and he asked for the first time, "Lord, what do you want me to do?". This is a mark of surrender and readiness to serve! Jesus replied, arise and go into the city..." Saul obeyed and in the blindness that resulted from the intense light, he was led into the city. There he met with Ananias, who was sent to prophesy (Acts 9:15). This former Pharisee accepted Jesus Christ by conversion, became a dynamic minister of the gospel to the Gentiles, forsook his Jewish name, Saul, and forever adopted the Greek name for which he remembered... Paul.

### **Conclusion**

From the discourse above, we have seen the shared negative impact created by the theory of blind hatred among religious groups in Nigeria. This can be addressed by measures aimed at building trust or a greater sense of community. Hatred in the name of religion is one of the most disturbing phenomena caused by human action.

Government should protect human rights and freedom of religion by creating a space where religious minorities are able to inform others about the tenets of their beliefs. Interreligious tolerance can be strengthened by rule of law, checking religious fanatics via formulation of formidable legislations. Religious leaders should be committed enough to the course of orientation and sensitization of their followers on the significance of peaceful coexistence. Beside this, public preaching should wear peaceful toga in place of condemnation and needless criticism. Religious groups should understand the core principles of common humanity. Tolerance, understanding, face-to-face dialogue and reconciliation championed by ecumenical groups or faith-based organizations are important to religious coexistence via treaties.

Why the hate if one can love? Why the killing if one can also sustain? Why the bitterness if one can also be compassionate? Why the destruction if one can also build? Life is an opportunity given by God, benefit from it, life is a beauty, admire it, life is a dream, realize it... life is a duty complete it (Unknown). Hatred paralyzes life, love releases it. Hatred confuses life, love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it (Luther Jr, Facebook). The life God gives is a sacred entity that must be respected, preserved and accounted for.

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