**PEACE CO-EXISTENCE AMONG THE SAHABAH (COMPANIONS): A ROLE MODEL FOR NIGERIAN SOCIETIES.**

 **BY**

 **USMAN JIBRIL MIKA'IL**

**abutahir1428@yahoo.com****. 08032861969**

 **AND**

##  HAMZA ABUBAKAR HUSSAIN

**sabongarintulu@yahoo.com****. 08034639099**.

 **DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**,

**FEDERAL UNIVERSITY KASHERE, GOMBE, GOMBE STATE.**

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**ABSTRACT**

The *sahabah* (Companions) of the Prophet (SAW) were the first building blocks of the Muslim Community (*Ummah)* who exemplified their best Islamic practices in socio-economic and religious life. One of the cardinal objectives of Islam is to ensure unity and brotherhood as well as mutual respect and peaceful coexistence with the followers of other religions. Islam believes in and preaches the unity of human origin as all mankind are descendants of Adam and Hauwa, the first man and woman on earth respectively. It therefore condemns tribalism in all its forms and encourages justice and fair treatment of mankind regardless of one's tribal inclination. Thus, the early Muslim community in *Madina* lived by this principle as it donated any form of tribalism and ethnicity. The community comprised of people from different ethnic group and/ or of dialectical origin. Among them were different clans of the *Quraish,* the *Aws*, the *Madinan* Jews, Salman al Farisy, Suhaib Ar-Rumiy, Bilal bn Rabah al-Habashiy etc. Beside this tribal difference, the community also lived side by side with the followers of other religions such as the Jews and the Pagan Arabs, yet they lived a peaceful and harmonious life within the community. Most of the Nigerian societies have similar features with this madinan community but could not live in peace and harmony the way the sahabah (companions) did. The question now is that why did the madinan community live in peace and harmony but most of the Nigerian communities failed? What are the factors that help the companions to succeed and the factors that cause the Nigerian societies to fail? This paper aims at studying this community and its virtue and relates it to Nigerian pluralistic society with the hope that it can provide a lasting solution to Nigerian ethno-tribal and religious imbalances.

**Introduction**

The early day of Muslim in Madina remains an unforgetful period in the history of Islam. It is one of the significant periods in the Islamic history as it sets a model for the subsequent generation to come. The Sahabah (Companions) of the Prophet (peace be upon him) exemplified the best type of Islamic practices and belief in Islam. Thus Allah, the Exalted described them in the Qur'an as the best human generation." You are the best nation produced (as an example) for mankind" (Q3:109). The Muslim community in Madina comprised of people of different cultural, geographical and ethnic origin. Some of them are from Aws and Khazraj were in unmutual rivalry before the coming of Islam yet they became united under one umbrella, living in harmony and mutual respect to each other as a result of Islamic unique values which fosters unity and brotherhood among its adherents as well as mutual respect to the entire humanity.

 Nigerian societies today share some features with the early madinan Muslim society in the sense that the societies comprise of members of different cultural and ethnic origins. In spite of the differences, they have to live together as brothers and sisters as well as neighbors. However in recent years many of the Nigerian societies suffer different types of violence. This paper tries to analyze the values that help the sahabah (companions) to achieve peace and unity in diversity and how such values will be relevant to the contemporary Nigeria.

**ROLE OF *SAHABAH* IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN *MADINAH***

When the enmity of the *Quraish* exceeded all limits in their persecutions and torture of those who embrace Islam, Allah, The Exalted (subhanahu wa ta'ala) gave the permission to Muslims to migrate to *Madinah* where Islam had already found its way through the first envoy of the Prophet (SAW) Mus'ab Ibn Umair (Radiyallahu anhu) may Allah be pleased with him (Mubarakfury 73). Emigration to *Madinah* could never be attributable to attempt to escape from oppression only, but it also constituted a sort of co-operation with the aim of erecting the pillars of new society in a secure place (Khalid 82), Hence it was incumbent upon every capable Muslim to contribute to the building of this new homeland, immunizing it and holding up its prop.

In *Madinah,* the Meccans and the Medinites Muslims fraternized with each other. There was nothing in common between them except the new faith. Blood was still dripping from the word of the *Aus* and *Khazraj*, they had not yet removed from their clothes the stains of blood received in the battle of *But'ah* (Mubarakfury 84). In circumstance like these, Islam sowed the seed of affection for one another in their hearts and brought about a fraternization that would not have been possible among real brothers at any price because it sow the seed of mutual brotherhood and create good rapport among them, it further established a social regime based on denunciation of the prohibited and all interdictions.(Abu Ammar 310).

This infant community, which consisted of the emigrants from Mecca and the helpers from *Madinah*, was the nucleus of a splendid Islamic nation and the common wealth of Islam. (Abu Ammar 298). It was born at a time when the world wavered precariously between life and death. Its birth tipped the scales in favours of life.(Abu Ammar 299). To strengthen this community was indispensable for the survival of mankind, for this reason Allah, The Exalted (SWT) laid stress on forging the brotherly bond between the *Ansar* and *Muhajirrun* and gave the warning. Allah, The Exalted says:

 And those who disbelieved are allies of one another, if you

 do not do so, there will be *fitnah* ( disbelieve and oppression)

 on earth and great corruption (Q8:73)

The religious training of the companions continued in *Madinah* after the migration of the weak Muslims to *Madinah* under the tutelage of the Prophet (peace and benediction of Allah be upon him (SAW) who explained to them the real conception and purpose of religion as well as mutual brotherhood which should be sowed among them.

The Medinan community formed a total framework for state, society, and culture. It epitomized the *Qur'anic* mandate for Muslims as individuals and as a community *(umma)*to transform the world itself through action in the world.(Abu Ammar 300). This aspiration and ideal has constituted the challenge for the Islamic community throughout much of its history.

**TRIBAL DIVERSITY AMONG THE SAHABA**

The companions are a rare generation which will never be seen again now or letter. Their image is shown in order to come closer to them and imitate them and also do exactly as they did. Islam's appreciation for diversity comes from the Sahaba (RA). For instance Bilal bn Rabah, Ummu-Ayman, Wahshy bn Harb, Zaid bn Harithah were of Ethiopian origin, Salman al Farisy, Fairuz al Dailamy, Munabbih bn kamil and Salim Mawla Abu Hudhaifa were all from Persia, Suhaib Ar-Rumy was from Rome etc. Yet these differences did not influence their relationship with other members of the community. They were accorded full status of the companions and some of them were assigned sensitive responsibilities among them. Bilal was the chief mu'azzin (the person in charge of call to prayer) throughout the life time of the Prophet peace be upon him. Salman al Farisy was cherished by different groups of the companions, as one them during the battle of the ditch, the Prophet peace be upon him declared that salman is part of the Prophet's household (Ahl-al bayt) (Rida). This is enough to justify that the companions of the Prophet assessed themselves based on merit and not on tribal or physical background. It was worth mentioning that the Prophet (SAW) has proclaim that no Arab is superior over a non-Arab, and no white is superior over black, superiority is by righteousness and fearing of Allah (SWT)(Tabarany Hadith 14444).

Allah, The Exalted (SWT) explain in details in the Glorious Qur'an thus:

 O Mankind We have created you from a single male and female and created you into in to various nations and tribes, that you may know one another, verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that who has At *Taqwa*, verily, Allah is All-knowing, All-Aware.(Q49:13).

However, respect for diversity originates from the Glorious Qur'an, while describing many of Allah's signs for mankind, the Qur'an states;

 And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of you language and colour, verily in that are indeed signs for men of soundknowledge.(Q30:22).

 The variation of languages, colour and race should not hinder the basic essence of creation on earth, all mankind are from Adam and Eve (Hauwa). Therefore the basic unity of mankind on earth should remain unaltered, "because they feel in the same way, and all are equally under the care of Allah the Almighty, then the variation of old language die and the new evolved." (Ali1056). Therefore Mankind's are not only destined to exist as diverse people but that they should welcome this and actively try to understand people who are different from themselves.

**UNITY IN DIVERSITY AMONG THE *SAHABA***

The *sahaba* are considered the best generation of the Islamic nation. They came from all different walks of life exactly as you would find in a small town today. The unity among the *sahaba* is not based on ethnicity, economics or geography. It is rather based on love, sympathy and coherence among all individual, and through that unity justice is achieved without any prejudice and the criterion for preference, nobility and honour is righteousness. The relationship most be established purely for the sake of personal interest that they might hope to gain through their relationship, thus this unity requires mutual advice for the sake of Allah the Almighty and it should be an essential pillar of the brotherhood. If one finds something good in his brother, he should advice and helps him in that good thing and if he detects a shortcoming in his brother, he should advise him confidently and exhort him to repent and return to a more correct behavior and attitude.

Islam is the religion for all mankind regardless of race, colour and ethnicity, and Allah, The Exalted (SWT) has commanded Muslims to convey it to all people and this could only be achieved if the strength of the Muslims is based on faith and unity. Racism is one of the severe diseases of human society in the first generation of the Muslim community (*ummah*) likewise at this age. (Ash Shinqitiy 672). When Allah, The Exalted (SWT) sent His messenger and Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) (SAW), the same kind of racism under the name of tribalism was prevalent in *makkah*, the *Quraish* considered themselves in particular and Arabs in general superior to all the other people of the world. Allah's messenger came with a unified message that unites the Muslim community (*ummah)* under one banner without any kind of discrimination which provided a principle of organization and motivation.

The message of Islam is for the entire human race, therefore one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam is the eradication of racism. This is the secret that made Islam and Muslims prevails over nations in the past.

The C7ompanions of the Prophet (SAW) demonstrated a high sense of unity even though they are diverse in their tribal inclination.

**ETHNIC MULTIPLICITY IN NIGERIA: A BLESSING OR A CURSE**

Nigeria is one of the world's richest country as it has been endowed with varieties of natural and human resources. It is the most populous nation in the African continent with a population that is estimated as to be at about nearly 174,507,539 as at July 2013. (Atom 45) The nation's population is a mixture of multiple tribes and ethno cultural groups who share different but similar historical background and experience.

There are about 389 ethnic groups in the country. The variety of customs, languages and traditions among Nigerians result in the cultural diversity and multiplicity among Nigerians. The variety of customs, languages, and tradition are brought together for national unity and progress.

The most numerous groups in the north are Hausa's and Fulani who are the overwhelming majority of whom are Muslims. Other tribal group in the north includes Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe and many more. In the south, the leading groups are Yoruba's and Igbos. The Yoruba population is largely divided between Muslims and the Christians with the few of the population still in the traditional beliefs and practices. Majority of the Igbos are Christians while a sizable number of them converted to Islam. In addition to these leading tribal groups, there are others who enjoy similar popularity in their areas.

Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Ijaw, Calbari and others constitute part of the southern population. This cultural diversity has a significant potential in taking the nation to a higher height only if it is properly harnessed. However, it is unfortunate that Nigeria as a nation has failed to utilize this unique gift by Allah (SWT) unlike the *Madinan sahabah* community, Nigeria/Nigerians turns this blessing of her to be a curse against its progress and development. Instead of it using this diversity as a source of straightening their strength, they turned it to be a cause of persisting conflicts, instead for Nigeria to learn from each other, they engage into un-mutual rivalry and suspicion. This rivalry often makes people acting contrary to the teaching of their respective religions. Allah (SWT) in the Glorious Qur'an calls on the faithful to be just in every matter towards everybody irrespective of one's faith, colour, language or status thus, "Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression". (Q16:90).

The Companions of the Prophet (SAW) made best uses of their tribal diversity for rapid development, unity and progress and true brotherhood which was unique throughout the history.

One of the distinct features of the companons generation is that they lived tightly by the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). Both the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* are explicit in teaching against tribalism and nepotism among Muslims. The result was the establishment of unity of humanity and universal brotherhood in line with Allah's saying:

 Oh Mankind! We have created 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 who has *At Taqwa*. Verily Allah is All knowing, All Aware. (Q49:13)

The above verse explains the main purpose of creating mankind in tribes and nations which for them to identify one another and compete among themselves in attaining *At-Taqwa* (piety righteousness and fearing of Allah (SWT). The essence is not for them to indiscriminate one another because the merit does not lie in a particular tribe, colour or nation but in one's real self. The Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said; There is no merit for an Arab above a non-Arab or vise-visa except by the level of *at-taqwa*.(Tabarany 650)

In a number of his traditions, the Prophet (SAW) taught his companions and the Muslim *ummah* at large the negative effects of tribalism in any nation. Therefore tribalism and tribal sentiment do not have any place in Islam. In fact, giving consideration based on tribal identity causes a Muslim to lose his Islamic identity. The prophet (SAW) said in a hadith: " He is not of us he who invites (others) to tribalism ….. He is not of us he who died in the cause of tribalism."(Baihaqy 360)

Unfortunately most of the Nigerian today uses their tribal differences as a cause of distinction, preference and discrimination. Consequently the nation records huge amount of lost of lives, property and security for this ugly culture. The nation over the years suffers the recurrent communal clashes from the north to the south, the west and the east, most of which are originated as a result of tribal sentiments.

**LESSONS FOR NIGERIANS FROM THE SAHABAH COMMUNITY**

The way and manner of in which the companions of the Prophet (SAW) built their community and the harmonious nature of their relation to each other are of great significance for multi-ethnic nation like Nigerian. Their life style and attitude towards tribal sentiment is capable to rid Nigeria of its incessant communal clashes as a result of this menace. There is need for objective assessment of every citizen irrespective of where he/she comes from or what language does one speaks. Let every Nigerian equal right in everything without giving any consideration to one's tribal or ethnic background. Furthermore if Nigerians today despite the ethnic diverse will respect and understand each other like how the *sahaba* did there will be noconflict, misunderstanding and violence among the inhabitant of our dear country Nigeria.

**CONCLUSION**

The study attempted to examine the ethnic diversity among the companions of the Prophet (SAW), how they leave together in mutual respect despite their tribal differences in peace, harmony and respect for each and every one. Today in Nigeria tribal diversity which is a blessing for humanity to know and understand each other has become a curse to the Nigerians because of ignorance of the history of our righteous predecessors, how they leave with each other in mutual respect and high sense of brotherhood, respect, honour and motivation. Islam rejects all man made distinction even if they are given religious colouring, the only unifying factor in Islam is the identity of ideas which solely depends on the choice of man and not upon the accidents and hazards of birth, race, colour or geographical location. All men are equal in Islam even if one does not choose to follow the religion of Islam, he has the right to live in peace and tranquility in Muslim state or Muslim majority areas as an honoured citizen with all rights and privileges.

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