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Israel's Genocide on Amalek (I Samuel 15) and Jos Crisis in Nigeria: A Socio-Religious Discourse

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Abstract

The issue of genocide has been an ugly occurrence in human society of all times. Genocide particularly in Jos, Plateau State Nigeria in recent times has been given religious interpretations. Religion which should be an agent of peace in a pluralistic society as Nigeria has today become almost an agent of discord. This work examined the issue of genocide in Jos in the light of the Old Testament Israel's genocide on Amalek. The study showed that most of the evils of our time attributed to religion are not entirely religious issues as

popularly acclaimed, only that religion has allowed itself to be used by some people as a means of achieving their political and economic interests. The paper discussed the effects of genocide on human society such as danger to public health, social insecurity, and prolonged enmity, violation of fundamental human rights, psychological trauma and economic crisis. This study concluded that there should be a sharp distinction between state matters and religious matters in Nigeria. Frankness in dialogue and sincere reconciliation are imperative to curb future genocide re-occurrence in Nigeria.

Introduction

Genocide has been a menacing trend to the human society globally. It breeds insecurity to human life and property. Genocide is a term coined by a Polish Jew, Raphael Lemkin as he tried to warn the rest of the world concerning Hitler's planned Holocaust in the 1930s. Prior to the declaration, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill described Genocide as a crime without a name. Genocide was described by Raphael Lemkin as a crime that went beyond murder to the annihilation of a people. Genocide is derived from a hybridized word *geno* and *cide*. The Greek root *genos* means birth, race, stock or kind, and the Latin *cidium*, means cutting or killing. Hornby (2000) defines genocide as "the murder of a whole race or group of people" (p. 494). It is hard to trace the origin of genocide, but Kurman (2009) said that since 1951 genocide has been a crime under international law. In its totality, it is a crime against humanity and, a crime against God the creator of man.

It has been observed that religion which should be an agent of peace in a pluralistic society as Nigeria has today become almost an agent of discord. It is a known fact that most genocide attempts globally and particularly in Nigeria have religious interpretations. Really religion has a way of influencing the society. This work examines the issue of genocide in Jos, Plateau State in the light of the Old Testament Israel's genocide on Amalek. This is to show that most of the evils of genocide attributed to religion are not entirely religious issues as popularly acclaimed though religion and its jaundiced interpreters have grossly manipulated the society.

Genocide in the Old Testament

The Jews have Judaism as a national religion. The history is contained in the Old Testament (Hebrew) Scriptures. Yahweh would often instruct the Jews through their leaders or prophets to exterminate nations or tribes who stood against their socio-political interests. This has attracted them enmity globally.

In the book of Genesis, the Bible records many events that resulted in loss of lives. Most of them were conventional wars many of which could qualify as genocide with the present definition of genocide. In Genesis 6-8, God carried out genocide on the entire human race sparing only Noah, his three sons and their three wives with prescribed animals and birds that entered the ark. Robinson (2006) observes that this was the largest and most thorough act of genocide in human history from the perspective of Judaism.

Another genocide event recorded in the Bible happened in the Sea of Reeds or Red Sea (Gen.14). The genocide was against Pharaoh of Egypt and his army. It consummated the earlier plague where God sent an angel to kill all the first born in Egypt both man and animals. The people of Israel invaded the land of Canaan after wandering in the wilderness for about 40 years (Deut. 7-20; Josh 6, 8, 10, 14). The use of religious reason as an excuse for socio-political interest is obvious. They claimed that God gave the land to their fore-father Abraham. They had to wipe away the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Peruzzites, Hivites and the Jebusites. In the words of the author of Deuteronomy 20:16, God commanded the Israelites: "You shall save alive nothing that breathes". The city of Ai was destroyed by the Israelites during Joshua's time (Joshua 8.24). Also under Joshua's leadership the city of Makedah with the people were destroyed (Joshua 10:28). The city of Libnah was also destroyed (Joshua 10:29). In Judges 19-20, tens of thousands of people were killed in genocide against the tribe of Benjamin by the rest of the tribes of Israel for not exposing the base fellows who raped to death the concubine of a Levite at Gibeah.

It was heroic and a source of religious pride for Yahweh to exterminate those people and nations including elders, women, children and youths. But in the eyes of a pious man it is evil; social analysts call it social injustice. Lewis (1980) said "Needless to say, this concept of war raises profound questions for Christians and not what Jesus would have condoned" (p. 43). If the Jewish 'Yahweh' would command them to exterminate the heathens (Gentiles) and the Christian God urged them to make sure the whole world turned Christians and the Islamic '*Allah*' commanded them not to allow unbelievers or infidels to live, then the society would become grossly uninhabitable for any person.

Israel's genocide on Amalek (I Samuel 15)

In I Samuel 15, King Saul was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites – the nation that had mercilessly ambushed the Hebrew stragglers when they

had left Egypt on the way to Canaan (Deut. 25:17-19). The order was very clear; everything that breathed was to be destroyed. The war was devoted to God. Before attacking the city of Amalek, Saul warned the Kenites to escape because these nomadic Midianites had shown kindness to Israel during the Exodus. According to MacDonald (1995), "This action showed that Saul was not just interested in carnage; rather, he was executing the vengeance of the Lord on a wicked people" (p. 307). Saul thoroughly defeated the Amalekites and put everything to the sword except the king and the best of the spoil.

I Samuel 15 also talks about the third and final rejection of Saul as the king of Israel and the right choice of David, a man after God's heart. King Saul made the first mistake in chapter 13 where he offered sacrifice showing his pride, and second mistake in chapter 14 where he starved his army and sentenced his son Jonathan to death, showing his melancholy. Saul's third mistake was his disobedience to the command of Yahweh not to spare any living thing in Amalek. Describing I Samuel 15, Weavers in Laymon (1971) said "It presents the prophetic view on Saul and his kingdom" (p. 163). This chapter is sub-divided into five segments, thus:

Verses 1-3: The prophet of God, Samuel reminds King Saul of the divine origin of his throne, and through the same authority is mandated to carry out a holy war (genocide) against the people of Amalek.

Verses 4-9: Saul gathers an army of twelve thousand at Telaim in uncertain location which might probably be somewhere south of Judah. The Kenites, Moses in-laws are spared.

Verses 10-21: Yahweh informs Samuel of Saul's disobedience. Samuel felt disappointed and tried all night to intercede. Saul was busy mounting victory stele at Carmel south of Hebron near Amalek's boundary. The animals already cursed are not even worthy to be sacrificed to Yahweh.

Verses 22-23: The sin of divination is a sin of rebellion. The three terms used here thus, rebellion, divination and iniquity are all associated with pagan cults.

Verses 24-35: Saul admits his sin partially, still blaming it on the people showing his leadership weakness. He asked for a favour from Samuel to accompany him in worship at least to cover him before the curious elders which Samuel did after some persuasion. Samuel then kills Agag himself in verse 32. Commenting on this, Weavers in Laymon (1971) further said that possibly Samuel's killing of Agag was originally a separate tradition from

that ending with verse 23. Samuel finally went back to Ramah and, Saul to Gibeah as they never saw each other again.

Israel's relationship and encounter with Amalek

Israel is made up of twelve tribes who were all sons of Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to Israel after an encounter with a strange being (Gen.32:28). Jacob deceived his father and took away Esau's birthright in Gen. 27. On the other hand, the Amalekites were a group of nomads who dwelt in the wilderness, south of Judah. In Genesis 14, the first mention is made of Amalek as one of the people subdued by Chedorlaomer king of Elam. In Gen. 36.12, Eliphaz son of Esau's son had a concubine Timna who bore him Amalek. According to Halley (1964), the Amalekites were a wandering and roaming people mainly in northern part of Sinai peninsula.

Amalek was the first to attack Israel at Rephidim when Israel left Egypt (Exod.17:8). Cook in Tenny (1967) commented that "Moses felt their fury in the improved attack upon the Israelites at Rephidim, for which God declared continual war and ultimate obliteration" (p. 32). In Numbers 14.39ff, the Canaanites together with the Amalekites were used as agents of punishment against the Israelites for disobeying God and his servant Moses who was their leader. In Judges 3-13, the Moabites with their king, Eglon, took the Ammonites with the Amalekites to defeat and subject Israel to eighteen years of servitude. Amalek joined Midian and the people of the East to torment and wage war against Israel with a type of genocide based on starvation (Judges 6).

In I Sam 15, Saul the first king of Israel was commissioned to carry out genocide on Amalek, but he spared Agag their king and other attractive animals. Ironically, Saul solicited to be slain by an Amalekite in 2 Sam 1.8-9. In I Samuel 27:8, David invaded the ancient inhabitants by the land from Shur to Egypt including the Amalekites. The Amalekites were finally exterminated by the Simeonites led by the sons of Ishi in the time of Hezekiah (1 Chron. 4.43). It is obvious that the Amalekites and Israel have been at daggers-drawn from the time of their grand fathers, Esau and Jacob. We can observe that genocide does not just happen. It could be as a result of prolonged enmity, lack of frankness in dialogue, forgiveness and spirit of vengeance, all of which are humanly motivated. Genocide is not in God's character, and even when he does so he uses natural forces like the deluge and this is his exclusive reserve. Care should therefore be taken by 'men of God' who declare 'holy war' out of acclaimed revelation from the Bible or

Quran. Unlike Nigeria, Isreal was at that time a theocratic state where everything was essentially interpreted with excessive religious bias.

Genocide trends in Nigeria

The British colonial masters amalgamated the southern and northern protectorates to form the entity called Nigeria on January 1st, 1914. Soon after that, agitations for secession among over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria started. Though the people have been brought together under one rulership, there existed vast differences in history and traditions, tribe and culture, religion and politics. The struggle for national identify gave rise to clashes, conflicts, and violence and genocide tendencies.

May 30, 1967 to January 12, 1970 witnessed a devastating, intense, horrific civil war between Biafra and Nigeria. The reasons for this war that developed into genocide are enormous. The major reason is tribal incompatibility of the three major tribes Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Agitations resulted to the first military coup on January 15, 1966 followed by counter attacks of bloodshed. At a time the Igbo people became the genocide target. The genocide claimed the lives of about 3 million Biafrans out of which one million suffered from malnutrition and another three million became refugees. The mutual hatred is still there but it hides under the cloak of religion. Religious sentiments have often fanned the flame of those crises as an unconscious agency in the hands of political warlords. Since religious claims are not empirically verifiable, it has become an escape root for perpetrators of genocide.

The duty of religion is not to fan the flame of violence. There are opportunists in every field of human endeavour, who hijack the system from the blind spot of the religious leaders without their sensitivity. The players in this fearful game are so clever that one could hardly discern their ulterior motives. Religion seems like the only institution which justifies the destruction of human life. Obilo (2002) said that "Religion has been a source of war between nations, especially the one hundred years war between France and England" (p. 101). One of the reasons to prove that most of the violence is not religiously motivated but religiously activated is the recent Jos crises. Asherkade (2010) said "The recent bloodshed has been happening in central Nigeria, in towns which lie along the country's religious front line. It is Nigeria's middle belt where dozens of ethnic groups vie for control of fertile lands" (p. 1). In Nigeria, genocide is often given a religious colouration. The major reason behind Jos crisis is ethnic control. Asherkade further said that the attackers ask people, who you are in Fulani; a language used mostly by

Muslims and killed those who did not answer in Fulani. So long as religious groups in Nigeria remain insensitive to the ulterior motives behind the acclaimed religious crisis, genocide could hardly be checked.

Causes of crisis in Jos, Plateau State

Jos is the capital of Plateau state with the title 'Home of Peace and Tourism'. Tourism, quite understandable for the tourist centers like the largest museum in Nigeria, wild life park, holiday resort boating, Naraguta pottery, and leather workshop, Shere Hills and Lanmingo Dam. But for peace, that was long before now, hence the incessant social disorder which has reeked Jos in nearly two decades now. Remarkably, in 1994, 2001, 2008, 2010 and 2011 respectively, there have been many cases of attempted genocide and deadly riots. There were remote and immediate causes of the Jos crisis (genocide). Some of the immediate causes of the recent Jos crisis have been traced to:

- (i) The agitation by the Hausa community of Jos for the reinstatement of their traditional rulership.
- (ii) The Plateau state Christians are vociferous in their warning of the Hausa aim of not only to rule but to Islamize, not only Jos but Plateau state and in fact the entire Nigeria.
- (iii) Ethnicity is another cause of recent Jos crisis. Jos lies on the borders between Nigeria Muslim dominated north and Christian dominated south. Access to land and resources is often determined by whether one is a native of the historical Christian city or a settler from elsewhere which are mostly Muslim from the north.
- (iv) Politicians who are short-sighted stir up violence by playing ethnic and religious sentiments using some jobless young men to loot, destroy and kill those of other political groups.

However, there are remote causes of the carnage. Egwu in Ostien (2009) traces Jos crisis back to the British colonial era 1900-1960. From the 19th century the indigenous tribes have been fighting Hausa incursions. Late 19th century witnessed a successful resistance against Jihadist penetration from neighboring Bauchi, the nearest outpost of the Sokoto Caliphates. The Hausa and other northern Muslims finally occupied part of the Plateau as iron miners, farmers, leather workers and even nail and hair cutters. They also carried the Qur'an with them. With time the settlers became very wealthy, acquired properties and started seeing themselves as superiors to the primitive looking indigenes. The British rule gave the Hausa settlers power to

rule by way of accomplishing the principal aim of jihad, they appointed twelve successive Sarkin Jos who were of Hausa/Fulani origin.

The residents of Jos have been living in peace with both the indigenes and with one another since the founding of Jos as an urban centre in the early part of the 20th century. It is traditionally believed that Jos is founded on land belonging to Beron, Anaguta and Afizere ethnic groups. These groups are the ethnic minorities and over the years, they seem to also have been overwhelmed by the rapid growth of the city and the inflow of immigrants from outside both the traditional areas and Plateau state. Some of the immigrants have become assertive based on their prolonged stay and contributions to the growth of the city. According to Auwal (2010):

The agitation by especially the Hausa-Fulani for political power, prominence and traditional rulership, but most fundamentally for indigeneship of Jos, against the resistance by the indigenous ethnic groups on the other hand, created the initial background to the heightening of tension in the city. (p. 52).

This competition has often led to violent confrontation between the Hausa-Fulani settlers (non-indigenes) and the indigenes, as were the cases in 1994, 2001, and the years immediately following (Best, 2007).

Religious discourse on genocide in human society

The socio-religious effects of genocide on human society are mainly negative. The effects include the following:

- (i) **Danger to Public Health:** During and after any act of genocide against a people, the health of the people suffers a great deal. The target groups are basically caught off from food, clean water and medical attention. The people are subjected to a high profile environmental pollution. For example, records show that out of the three million people who died during the Biafra genocide by Nigeria, about one million was as a result of malnutrition. The then head of state Yakubu Gowon made a statement that starvation is a veritable instrument for warfare. Jos witnessed this in no small measure.

- (ii) **Social Insecurity:** When genocide is carried out, there is bound to be social insecurity by both the offensive and the defensive sides. The difference is that the attackers are always better equipped because

most often they had the government backing. For example, in the case of Igbo people during the Biafran war, the federal government of Nigeria was the agent of genocide. Since genocide according to Breslow (2002) is a particular type of mass violence perpetrated against a large population, there are bound to be other social vices channeled against the targeted people. Such social vices could be mass and systematic rape, torture, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, assaults, bullying and all forms of harassments. Jos crises threw up all these vices.

- (iii) **Prolonged Enmity:** History has shown that it is almost impossible to completely exterminate an ethnic group or a whole race. For example, the Bible records in 1 Samuel 15 that Amalek was utterly destroyed. King Agag who was spared by Saul was later killed by Samuel. Yet David who succeeded Saul had to fight with Amalek in chapter 27. For the fact that the present definition of genocide traces the act from the intention, the remnants of the targeted victims will never be happy with those who attempted to wipe them even in the generations to come. This was the reason for Israel's genocide on Amalek in 1 Sam.15. Genocide could only lead to prolonged enmity. Lewis (1980) said "The attack on the Amalekites is not defensive but punitive! The reason lay far in the past when Israel first tried to enter its new land, and Amalek opposed them" (p.43). only God's intervention can finally stop the intermittent crises in Jos because of prolonged enmity between the warring groups.
- (iv) **Violation of Fundamental Human Rights:** The rights to freedom of movement, ownership of property and religion is violated by the act of genocide. When a person or group of persons deliberately violates the right of others and, the law enforcement agents do nothing about it in time, it may lead to revenge and, eventually anarchy. In Jos, there have been attacks and counter attacks since 1994, resulting to lawlessness, social unrest and genocide attempts. When attacks cease dangerous silence ensure. For the victims of genocide, Kaplan (2006) said that Children who are victims of genocide have been shown to have problems in their mental and physical developments.

- (v) **Psychological Trauma:** The psychological trauma of eye witness of bloody genocide is perhaps for a life time. For example, reporting on the Jos crisis Asherkade (2010) said,

In the bloody streets of Nigeria women waited and moaned loudly as their butchered babies and children were tossed into dump trucks like garbage. Even smaller bodies that were tangled, dismembered, and beheaded were dislodged from the trucks and fell lifeless into mass graves. (p. 17).

- (vi) **Economic Crisis:** The economic effect of genocide is very adverse. It affects the government because the revenue expected from the region of the targeted group will cease. The global economy suffers set-backs each time there is crisis in oil producing countries. Smith (2004) said that the outcomes of genocide are not only the mental and physical effects on the survivors, but also the financial strains of host countries that are directly affected when it involves housing the refugees and assisting the various groups concerned.

It is difficult to offer a satisfactory discourse religiously on Jos crises because of the multifarious religious views of adherents but we can safely observe some points from Israel – Amalekite Old Testament point. Israel unlike Nigeria operated theocratic system of government then. Its theology was not different from its history. For Israel it was God who dictated what they did as interpreted by their covenant laws. Israel's search for a homeland at this point could be likened to Nigerian's fight for independence in the sixties. Their fight against the Amalakites cannot be read without some notes of desperation on Israel's side.

Democracy and theocracy are different if not divergent systems of government. Even though God is present in both; but while revelation reigns supreme in theocracy consultation/consensus characterize the other. In matters of revelation subjectivism is higher than it is in consultation/consensus. It took only Samuel to declare a war against Amalek based on his interpretation of what God said. Considering Samuel's high standing in Israel, he could not have misinterpreted God based on the system from where he was operating. This system made his standing in his society high and the war he declared a holy one. Our interest is not the ethics of that war but it should be noted that everything about that war is incomprehensible if taken out of its operational scope or transported to our own system.

From this backdrop Jos upheaval is condemnable. Nigeria as a country is democratic. Even during military era wars were declared not by one person but the ruling council. The point is not only that Jos incessant violence was wrong but that the government that it was its duty to protect its citizens has been acting as if it is an accomplice. Many describe it as sectarian violence but it has all the trappings of war in that zone.

Many Samuels of our different religions in Jos are known not to hear rightly from God. The wars and violence they orchestrate come from selfish interests. The danger and harm they cause in the name of religion cannot go unpunished if not because of the system we operate: a system that guarantees the safety of those behind the genocide in the name of religion. The narrative concerning Amalek, like many OT narratives could have been to teach some lesson – that God is capable of punishing those who obstruct people of God from realizing their God – ordained objective. For how can we interpret the continued existence of the Amalekites after they had been destroyed? The only living things spared by Saul were done in by Samuel himself. If God had intended their complete annihilation as the narrative said we could not have heard about them again.

Based on the above Jos crises are censured. God is not the author of genocide in any religion and those who cause genocide know this but capitalize on the selfish faulty reading of the related passages of their holy writ to manipulate the people. Unfortunately for the nation of Nigeria and its people especially the masses, many of those behind genocide have the support of the political bigwigs.

All said and done, the Hebrew differs remarkably from Nigerian. The theology of the Hebrews is anchored in their history and their history is their theology. This extends to their law which flows naturally from their theology. It is God that appears in history and gives the law guiding them for their daily activities. God is not absent in Nigeria but the nation unlike the Hebrew has separate secular legal code. It is this code that defines relationships between communities living together and punishes genocidal offences; not the religious code of any faith or denomination.

Efforts to curb Jos Crisis in Nigeria

Efforts by both government and religious groups to curb the crisis in Jos have not yielded the desired results. During the Ibrahim Babangida regime, he created Jos North and Jos South local Government Areas and, subsequently Jos East from the existing Jos south. This move however, was observed by

some political and religious analysts as a way to favour the Hausa Muslim settlers to have full control in northern Jos since there are very few natives there. Some said that there was no basis for the creation of Jos north if not to carve a safe haven for the Hausa settlers' community. Some others see the situation as the game of interest.

Recently, the Goodluck Jonathan led administration responded to a call by Nigerian Bar Association on Africa Union to prevail on the federal government to prosecute the perpetrators of the recent Jos, Plateau state crisis. According to Anaba (2011), the response was through Mr Pius Otey of the Ministry of Justice who said, "There is a demonstrable political will on the part of government to take all necessary steps to restore peace permanently to Plateau State" (p. 1). The Nigerian government also in Banjul cautioned African Union (AU) not to interfere in its internal matters. Many people saw this as a political statement and express their worries by the fact that the Advisory committee set up by Mr President has long submitted their reports and yet the violence continued. Reacting to the situation, Joana (2011) said:

What is internal about a perceived genocide? The situation in Jos has to be investigated and the Nigerian government is clearly unwilling to carry out an unbiased investigation. Mr. Pius should know that once genocide is established, the AU owes humanity a duty to intervene in order to forestall further murders. (p. 1).

Religious groups have also made some efforts to bring peace in Jos. Asherkade (2010) reported that religious leaders have commanded their fellow Christians not to attack Muslims, to instead instigate peace talks with them. Muslims have returned their peace talks with time to conquer territory with Sword. To show how some religious agents are unwilling to allow peaceful resolution, Asherkade went further to say, "Anyone who doesn't abide by the Muslim faith is destroyed with machetes and other weapons. Their homes are set on fire on any given day as Muslims run around screaming *Allahu Akbar*" (p. 3). To achieve a lasting peace is not to talk through the pages of newspapers. Many have been killed and their relations are bearing the heavy pain that cannot just be erased easily. Frankness and forthrightness in an honest dialogue by the active involvement of governments and religious and political leaders are needed.

Conclusion

Having examined the issue of genocide in I Samuel 15 as it concerns both the Old Testament Israelites and contemporary Nigerian society particularly in Jos Plateau State, we conclude that;

- (i) There should be a sharp distinction between state matters and religious matters if a country like Nigeria is to move forward.
- (ii) Religions and religious leaders should emphasize those aspects of their beliefs that encourage tolerance for peaceful co-existence.
- (iii) Nigerian citizens and their leaders should first of all see themselves as Nigerians before their religious inclinations.
- (iv) Forgiveness, and sincere reconciliation are imperative to curbing future genocide re-occurrence in Nigeria.
- (v) There should be less emphasis on religion, quota system and zoning in national issues, but let the head that fits the crown wear it, if we must maintain an orderly and egalitarian society.
- (vi) The government should beef-up the security of life and property of the citizens.

Conclusively, every person, organization and institution in Nigeria should rise and condemn this crime against humanity called genocide. There is a saying that what goes around comes around. This is because when genocide occurs in any part of the country if one is not directly affected he may be indirectly affected sooner or later.

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