

Historical and Contemporary Perspective of Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Response to Historical Injustices and De-Radicalization in Kenya

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Abstract: *This paper aimed at examining historical and contemporary perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya's context. Further, the paper sought to identify the occurrence of injustices in Kenya and the numerous ways the government of Kenya can address the issue of de-radicalization. In brief, the paper covers the following aspects: the historical perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the contemporary perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue, cases of historical injustices and the various strategies used in de-radicalization in Kenya's context. The historical perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue is further sub-divided into pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial instances of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The contemporary perspective zooms into the current instances of Christian-Muslim dialogue which include both the existing social and political trends of interfaith dialogue. Multiple historical injustices are highlighted and various ways of curbing radicalization are discussed. This paper uses secondary sources of information done by scholars and researchers on the topic of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. The paper provides a platform for other researchers to conduct further investigation using empirical techniques on the interfaith dialogue in Kenya. It enables the readers to understand the different perspectives of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya and can therefore form the basis for fostering mutual understanding between the two common faiths in Kenya.*

Keywords: *Christian-Muslim Dialogue, De-radicalization in Kenya, Interfaith historical injustices, Radicalization*

1.0 Introduction

Inter-religious dialogue is a formal process in which representative members of at least two religious communities gather for a comprehensive and somber discussion of the beliefs and practices that separate the communities (Brajuvic, 2007). The inter-faith dialogue aims at increasing mutual understanding and good relation, identifying causes of tension in Christian-Muslim relations, building understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent tensions, breaking down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion and intolerance.

Kenya is a diverse country with the population belonging to different religions; the main religion in Kenya is Christianity, which is followed to by an estimated 84.8% of the total population. Islam is the second largest religion in Kenya, practiced by about 9.7% of the total population. Other faiths practiced in Kenya are Buddhism, Hinduism and traditional religions (Pew Research Center, 2013). According to Christine Nicholls (2017) the first Christians to visit East Africa were Vasco da Gama and his crew, including Roman Catholic missionaries, in 1498. In 1564 the Portuguese Viceroy of India ordered that the gospel be preached around Mombasa and three years later an Augustinian monastery was established there. In 1597 the Augustinian friars at Mombasa claimed that they had 600 African converts, including slaves, Swahilis and Bantu people from the coastal region (Hassan, 2010). The Muslim governor of Faza also helped to build a chapel, resulting in a flourishing Christian community and the Portuguese also built a chapel at Shela, Lamu. Shaheen & Sakina (2007) claim Islam was the first foreign religion to have reached East Africa at the turn of the eighth century. The first Muslims who arrived on the East African shores were seeking political and safety from the anti-Shia Umayyad dynasty. Another group of immigrants known as Zayids established themselves as a small separate community on the Benadir coast after they left Yemen.

The encounter of Christianity and Islam as religions is a major constituent of world history. The earliest Christian-Muslim dialogue recorded occurred in the court of the Christian Negus of Abyssinia where a group of Muslims pleaded for sanctuary in the country (Ammah, 2007). The percentage of Christian-Muslim relations is higher in Africa than any other part of the world, since Africa that has the largest Christian and Muslim populations on roughly equal scale.

Owing to the issues related to Christian-Muslim and interfaith conflicts, this paper provides an overview of historical and contemporary perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya's context. It further addresses the question of religious historical injustices in Kenya and provides strategies that can be adopted to curb religious de-radicalization. The paper covers the following: historical and contemporary perspective of the Christian-Muslim dialogue, cases of historical injustices in Kenya, ways of de-radicalizing of religious radicals, and the conclusion of the researcher.

2.0 Historical and Contemporary Perspective of Christian-Muslim Dialogue

2.1 Introduction

This section will discourse the historical perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue and the contemporary perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The historical perspective focuses on the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial perspective of interfaith dialogue. The contemporary perspective observes aspects like Islamic Fundamentalism, Terrorism, Establishing the Kadhi court and Incorporation of Islamic Religious Education in school curriculum.

2.2 Historical Perspective of Christian-Muslim Dialogue

2.2.1 Pre Colonial and Colonial perspective to Inter-Faith Dialogue

In East Africa, Ward (1999) mentions that the first Christian-Muslim dialogue occurred in Abyssinia which was under the rule of Negus. Ward explains that the Christian king, Negus, allowed the Muslim exiles to live in his kingdom. Bedouin and Indian Muslims extended to the islands of East Africa drift, for example, Zanzibar, Mombasa and Malindi (Lapidus, 2002). After some time, rivalry between evangelism and da'wah was experienced amid the foreign pilgrims. The British states engendered the Christian confidence joined by holistic advancement, for example, exchange, training and foundation. The French pioneer government which managed a large portion of the Arab nations did not offer such chances to the Muslims. Under the East African pilgrim governments, Muslims learned about the coming of trained Christian missionaries and left in issues of confidence and advancement.

Colonization likewise accompanied Christian minister extension in Africa (Mugo, 2005). English pioneer government is blamed for utilizing strategic administration styles of controlling the religious talk in Africa (Gellar, 2006). The British administration picked religious Muslim pioneers into the support framework while ousting, detaining or just barring others (Levtzion, 2000). This suggests progression of Islam amid provincial circumstances ended up in clashes with the frontier powers. The Berlin Conference (1884-1885) prompted the division of Africa into states enabled religious flexibility (Förster, et al., 1988). Christian teachers could openly fly out unlimited to British, French, Belgian and Portuguese states (Mahmood, 1996). Before the finish of the nineteenth century, the greater part of the Islamic states in Sub-Saharan Africa had vanished (Insoll, 2003). The pilgrim governments were pluralistic or multi-religious individuals.

2.2.2 Post colonial perspective to Inter-Faith Dialogue

Christians and Muslims political engagement originate before Kenya's freedom in 1963. Salim (1973) noticed that the Coast Arab Association (CAA) primarily framed by Arab Muslims, showed up on the Kenya political scene in 1921. The affiliation's fundamental motivation was to appeal to the 'apparent' Christian-ruled British frontier government to incorporate Arab-Muslims in the Legislative Council. Salim (1973) additionally takes note of that the British provincial government respected the weight and distributed two seats in the administrative chamber despite the fact that the CAA had asked for two seat on the official and four seats on the authoritative board. In 1958, African Muslims shaped African Muslims Society (AMS) with a motivation to be included in national legislative issues (Kenya National Archives, OP/7/497). The AMS, as a political association got a mishap when the provincial specialist declined to recognize religious portrayal on the political field, Ndzovu (2009).

Daniel Arap Moi's time (1978-2002), religion step by step became the dominant focal point in Kenyan legislative issues. For example, President Moi once in a while looked for the help of Muslim groups and in such events he respected their requests by promising Muslims flexibility

of inner voice. In different occurrences, Muslim groups denounced Kenyan government: they saw as Christian-overwhelmed - favoring more to Christians than Muslims (Mazrui and Ibrahim, 1994). In the 1990s, Kenya African National Union (KANU) became a political party of all Kenyans paying little respect to one's religious association. The political changes of the 1990s lead Kenya to a multiparty State. The survey of the Kenyan Constitution to permit multiparty prompted arrangement of a few political gatherings comprehensive of Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), among others. The IPK was viewed as a danger to KANU thus denied legitimate enlistment. The KANU government rather built another political gathering under the name United Muslims of Africa (UMA) as an option to IPK (Maupeu et al, 2005)

2.3 Contemporary Perspective of Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Contemporary patterns of Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya tend to move from overlooking religious contrasts to understanding those distinctions keeping in mind the end goal; to live peacefully with each other. This change in perspective from overlooking religious contrasts to understanding them is being engendered through two regions: change in the hearts and minds by supplying constructive data and facts; and societal-compassionate activities. Some contemporary perspective of Christian-Muslim dialogue include: Islamic Fundamentalism, Terrorism, Establishing the Kadhi court and Incorporation of Islamic Religious Education in school curriculum.

East African nations including Kenya have been blamed for filling in as the rearing ground of fundamentalist Islamic gatherings (Rabasa et al, 2006). The Al-Shabab operating in East Africa is an Islamic fundamentalist group that is intolerable to other religions and secular laws. The Al-Shabab has launched a series of attacks in East Africa and mostly in Kenya (Anderson & McKnight, 2014). The Kenya National Muslim Advisory Council (KENMAC) blames some Muslim religious leaders for advancing radicalism by encouraging young people to battle in the Kenya Al-Shabab war in Somalia (NTV Media, 25.12.2011). Carelessness of the Kenyan security department has encouraged the development of Islamic radicals. Islamic fundamentalism has created mistrust and suspicion of the Muslim citizens. Despite the fact that most Kenyan Muslims criticize fundamentalist gatherings, most Christians view all Muslims as radicals that need to be detained.

The Anti-Terrorism Bill (2003) was passed by Members of the Kenya Parliament consisting of both Muslims and Christians. The Bill at first was opposed by the Association of Muslim Organizations in Kenya (Amok) on the grounds of the Bill's definition of terrorism. The director general of Amok stated, "It is too general while we think the definition should be specific. If left without changes, a rogue police officer can abuse the law and arrest someone for making noise on the streets and press terrorism charges" (Standard Digital, 2012).

Islamic Religious Education (IRE), being taught in Kenyan primary and secondary schools, is one of the contemporary issues that encourage positive relationship between Muslims and the Kenyan government. The Ministry of Education has set since 1980s a complete curriculum for

IRE programme from primary to secondary levels in line with Christian Religious Education (CRE) curriculum. The ministry has also trained and employed hundreds of Muslim teachers to teach IRE and Arabic subjects to Muslim pupils and students across the country. An Islamic Teachers Training College was established in Mkindani, Mombasa whose sole purpose is to train Muslim teachers how to teach IRE and Arabic subjects (Alio, 2015).

Kadhi Courts are subordinate civil courts which exclusively deal with limited civil cases that relate to Muslim parties under supervision of The High Court. Those civil cases are: marriage, inheritance and divorce (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). The president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta and the prime minister of Zanzibar, Mr. Shamte, and the Sultan of Zanzibar signed an agreement in October, 1963 whereby the Sultan of Zanzibar surrendered his claim of sovereignty over the coast to Kenya in return Mzee Kenyatta guaranteed the continued existence of the Kadhi Courts among other guarantees (Tayob, 2013). The Kadhi courts are still operational in Kenya and thousand of Muslims go to the courts to settle civil cases.

3.0 Historical Injustices

The Christian-Muslim relation is affected by political and societal issues. As noted in the historical and contemporary perspective of the Christian-Muslim dialogue, there have been cases of political and societal discrimination based on religion. Alio (2015) states that there has been a number of human rights violations against the citizens of the North Eastern regions carried out by state personnel. From 1963 to 1968, Kenyan security personnel imposed state of emergency on the whole Northern Frontier District (NFD). During the state of emergency in 1960s, most of the young Kenyan nomadic tribes men left the district due to the injustices and killings. The victims estimate the number of those who were shot dead during the state of emergency to be 2,700 pastoralists of Somali and Borana descent (Anderson, 2014). In 1980s, President Moi's government was accused of committing a massacre in Garissa, the incident occurred when Kenyan government forces, acting on the principle of flushing out a local gangster. Human rights organizations estimated incident claimed over 3000 lives (Hassan, 2010). This heinous incident was followed by another cruel one which took place at Wagalla air strip in Wajir District in the same province on 10th February, 1984. Kenyan security forces, responding to inter-clan fight rounded up and detained over 5,000 men, confined them at the Wagalla airstrip, stripped them naked and held them without food and water for four days. The exact number of the deaths is unknown but eye witnesses confirmed that the death toll rose to 5000 (Mahmood, 2011). For years the Kenyan government denied that the massacre had taken place and insisted that only 57 people were killed in a security operation to disarm the area's residents. It was not until October 2000 that the government publicly acknowledged the wrongdoing committed by its security forces (BBC, 2000).

Muslims feel disregarded in a Christian-commanded political situation in Kenya. The presumption that Muslims are politically impaired has caused much doubt in issues of Christian-Muslim relations in the nation. For instance, in 1958, African Muslims Society (AMS) suggested to be included in national legislative issues (Kenya National Archives, OP/7/497) and was turned

down by the provincial specialist who declined to recognize religious portrayal on the political field (Ndzovu, 2009).

4.0 De-radicalization Strategies in Kenya

Unemployment, poverty and political relegation are key factors contributing to the Islamic radicalization of Kenyan youths. The situation must be addressed through economic empowerment and inclusive policies that empower and involve the Kenyan youths (IRIN, 2013). ISS report (2011) found that Islamist militants were exploiting sub-standard socioeconomic condition of Kenya to provide basic services and win the general support of ordinary people. The Muslim Youth Centre (MYC) became a radical group by having an extreme interpretation of Islam and prepares members to travel to Somalia for 'jihad'. According to Buluma (2013), Al-Shabab announced a merger with MYC in 2012.

According to Osman (2014), not only does Kenya's fast growing cities provide opportunities but they also come with hardships youth experience including; job shortages, high costs of living, family separation and lack of social structures. The difficulties of urban life are a source of youth frustration and may render young people vulnerable to radical influences. Counter-radicalization programs make special efforts to reach young people struggling to survive in large cities. Such counter-radicalization programs include; equal and fulfilling youth employment opportunities and youth involvement in policy making (ISS, 2011).

The government of Kenya should develop an effective intelligence service that identifies and provides operative counter intelligence on threats on national security as it depends on the police service to effectively neutralize the threats (Osman 2014). The government of Kenya can also cripple radicalization by establishing counter-terrorism laws that limits the chances of youths being contacted by radical groups. This involves maintaining a strong hand-grip on social media activities. The Kenyan religious groups and leaders also play a significant role in countering terrorism and youth radicalization. Religious groups and leaders representing different faiths have an essential role to play in promoting inter-religious or intra-religious dialogue, tolerance, and understanding and cooperation among religious communities (Badurdeen, 2018).

5.0 Conclusion

Christian-Muslim dialogue is significant in ensuring peace and prosperity of the country. Interfaith dialogue should be encouraged since it promotes the investigation of shared characteristics and shared convictions between religions which in turn reduces pressure, promotes love and acknowledgment among individuals from the two beliefs. Muslims and Christians need to join their powers and open entryways of exchange and collaborations as they react to helpful necessities influencing their social orders.

Social influence of Christian-Muslim encounter in Kenya has its share on the relations between the two faiths. Socially, Christians and Muslims work together in a number of occasions as they

offer compassionate activities. For instance, during the 2007/2008 Post-election Violence (PEV) in Kenya, Christians and Muslims provided food and other items to the displaced irrespective of their religious background. Social support influences Christian-Muslim relations such that people are able to provide physical needs to the poor. In light of social influence in interfaith dialogue, both faiths extend their support to each other. Thus, in such spirit, there is a need to develop a more concrete relationship between Christians and Muslims that touches not only social and physical aspects but all spheres of human development.

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