

**ISUUM-NGI WORLDVIEW: AN INDIGENOUS MODEL OF PEACE-BUILDING IN  
NIGERIA**

**Benjamin Junnang POKOL, PhD**

University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

benjaminpokol@rocketmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

Peace has become the most urgent need and commodity in Nigeria. Gone are the days when Nigerians used to cry only against poverty but the prevailing circumstances in the country in the recent years have shown that poverty is no longer the only basic challenge but safety of life. Peace-making and peace-keeping models of restoring peace used by the Nigerian Government have failed to yield the desired result because they constitute effort in futility. The perpetual threats to life in the country are worsening by the day because they have not been adequately and properly addressed. The aim of this paper is to postulate an alternative model of peace-building. This paper examines and critiques the peace-keeping effort of the Nigerian Government as not being effective means of building positive peace in the country. The research problem stems from why all the resources pumped in restoring peace yet, nothing seems to be happening. The researcher embarks on systematic review of related literature (documentary) for data collection and philosophical tool to analyze the data in addressing the research problem. It argues that exploring an alternative indigenous peace-building model is imperative and the paper, therefore, proposes *Isuum-ngi*, an indigenous model, for more effective peace-building in the country. Postulating an indigenous model as alternative is premised on the fact that every important project needs relevant and contextual tools in order to be effective. This argument finds justification in the fact that people are more at home with cultures which they conceptualize and understand better in addressing their challenges.

**Key words:** Peace-building, *Isuum-ngi*, worldview, indigenous, Nigerian society

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria as a country is passing through crises of an unimaginable magnitude. Lives are lost in their hundreds on a daily basis to religious fundamentalists, kidnappers, armed robbers and armed bandits who have no regard for the sanctity of human life. Deadly threats to life have characterized every sphere of life in the country in such a manner that freedom of movement is no longer safe (pokol, 2021). In this entire life-denying situation, the Nigerian government seems to have failed in restoring enduring peace because all that it has been doing is peacekeeping and making, which fail to address the real issues at the grassroots and context of the people. This paper strongly argues that, all this while, the Nigerian Government has failed to utilize the relevant strategy that speaks contextual message of peace to Nigerians. What has Nigerian Government done to restore positive peace among citizens? Could there be more relevant strategies of restoring positive apart from the peace-making and peacekeeping that have pulled out the Nigerian army from their barracks? Why not try contextual peace-building models that Nigerians understand better? In view of the above scenario, indigenous peace-building model is not just an important intervention, but an emergency.

This paper, thus, postulates a more contextual alternative model for peace-building like *Isuum-ngi*, focusing on *sameness* of humanity as a natural basis for mutual respect and peaceful co-existence irrespective of social constructs like religion, tribe, race and political affiliation. By postulating *Isuum-ngi* model of peace-building, it points to the fact that there are African indigenous resources that could be used to build peace without necessarily resorting to peacekeeping or peacemaking through diplomacy or the gun.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

For better clarity of the argument of this paper, clarifying the key words used in this paper becomes necessary in order to avoid avoidable confusion in the minds of readers:

### **Peace-building**

This is used in this paper to describe a deliberate effort by church, NGO or state to strengthen the prospects of internal peace by decreasing the likelihood of violent conflict (Tobias and Klein, 2002) in the society. Peace-building is geared towards enhancing indigenous capacities of a society to manage conflict without violence. It focuses on a wide range of activities which have bearing on the social, psychological, and economic environment at the grassroots (Raiser, 2013) up the social ladder. Without intensive involvement of ordinary people at the base of their society to build strong foundation for civil society, even if negotiation between conflicting parties takes place at the official level it may not result in positive peace-building at the base (Galtung, 2006).

### ***Isuum-Ngi***

*Isuum-Ngi* is a compound and native word from the *Kadung* ethnic group of Plateau State in Nigeria. The prefix *Isuum-ngi* refers to a human being generally regardless of sex, nationality, race, gender, class, or religious affiliation. When the suffix *ngi* is added, it means humanity, the essence of being human. It further refers to the essence of being *human*; that essential image of the creator that is found in every human being. *Isuum-Ngi* is the common denominator that underlies human beings and makes them equal in essence. *Isuum-ngi* puts all human beings at the same level without any discrimination on the basis of social constructs (Lusa, 2010). It serves therefore in this paper to advocate peaceful co-existence among people in religious plural and violence-prone contexts such as Nigeria. *Isuum-Ngi* is used as a tool for reconciliation and peace-building among the *Kadung* ethnic group and sets out to counter all those oppressive elements that encourage *unity* and *oneness* of all human beings thereby discouraging those elements that undermine what it means to be human. *Isuum-ngi* advocates that discrimination is life-denying as it disempowers, deprives, denies and dehumanizes, preventing human beings from reaching their full capacity of human life and breeding violence among citizens (Chunakara, 2013).

## **Worldview**

Worldview is often defined as the complex of beliefs and attitudes of a group concerning their origins, organization, structures, nature, religion, and interaction in the universe with particular reference to human beings (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987). A worldview tries to answer questions about the origin and nature of humanity and its place in, and relationship with, the universe (Uchendu, 1965). Balcomb (2013) defines worldview as “the templates that govern the social construction of a symbolic universe or paradigms in which a certain kind of knowledge is allowed.” He goes on to note that “the worldviews of a culture often constitute the essential identity of that culture.”

## **Indigenous**

This is used to refer to African indigenous and cultural values and norms not foreign embedded in worldviews that have potential to support peaceful co-existence in society. How people view the world determines how they relate to it and to each other. A worldview tries to answer questions about the *origin* and *nature of humanity* and its place in, and relationship with, the universe (Pokol, 2015, Metuh, 1987). Uchendu (cited in Balcomb, 2013) defines worldview as “the templates that govern the social construction of a symbolic universe or paradigms in which a certain kind of knowledge is allowed.” Uchendu goes on to note that “the worldviews of a culture often constitute the essential identity of that culture and provides the people with values that promote life.” A worldview can also be understood as the expression of an ethnic group’s understanding of itself in relation to its Creator, how it facilitates its corporate and harmonious existence with others in society, and how to keep it alive from generation to generation (Balcomb, 2013). African worldviews, whichever one is talking about, are rooted in *community* well-being resulting into determining the quality of human life and relationship (Mbiti, 1969). It is from the above understanding that indigenous serves model of peace-building serves as alternative to peace keeping and making in this paper.

### **Nigerian society**

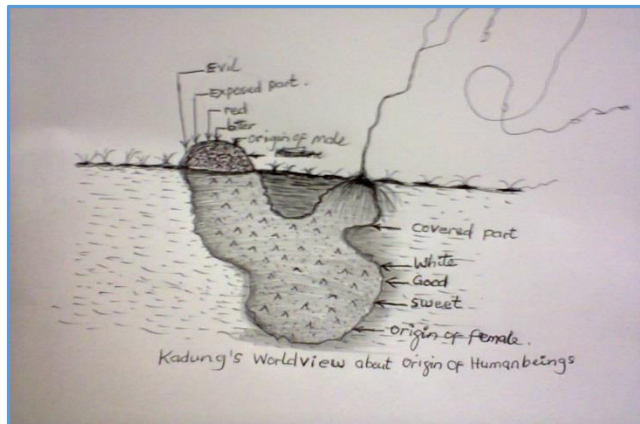
Nigerian society is used in this paper to refer to the different networks of relationships that bind Nigerian citizens together in time and space. This time and space include pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial existence in socio-economic, religious, political and cultural relationships that either promote life or destroy it.

### ***Isuum-ngi* as a worldview**

The *Kadung* ethnic group believes that human beings and all other creatures originated from one wild yam plant. From this plant, they share a common origin, common essence, and are moving forward toward a common destination (Lusa, 2010). This further demonstrates the inherency of community through which common ground can be found and defined. While woman and man originated from the tuber of the Yam plant, other creatures originated from its vine and leaves (2010). They believe that the yams grew so large that part of its tuber got exposed to the sun. The exposed part of the tuber eventually changed colour and taste and eventually metamorphosed into male and female human beings. That both of them emerged at the same time may imply that they inherently metamorphosed as a single community and not as an individual. This means that the community does not originate from the human being but is an undergirding principle of humanness. Consequently, human-ness does not exist without the community and the community does not exist without human-ness. Where there is conflict and injustice there is no human-ness; and where there is no human-ness there is no community.

The exposed part of the yam plant produced a male human being, while the covered part produced a female human being (Lusa, 2010). The two parts of the same yam tuber that are regarded as the origins of man and woman are also regarded as origins of strength and weakness: the male is identified by physical strength because the exposed part that produced him suffered from the heat of the sun and became stronger; while the female is identified with weakness because the part that produced her was always covered and did not suffer (2010). These differences do not matter because the one-ness of the yam plant and its tuber is what

constitutes every reason for harmony and peaceful living among the creatures. The male and female have responsibilities that reflect their physical qualities. These distinct responsibilities are meant to facilitate their mutual relationship (2010) for peaceful living. See below is a sketched diagram illustrating the wild yam according to the ethnic group (Pokol and Kaunda, 2015, Kaunda and Poko, 2019):



A tuber of a wild Yam illustrating *Kadung's* creation worldview (adopted from Pokol and Kaunda, 2015, Kaunda and Poko, 2019).

According to the *Kadung* ethnic group, the difference between male and female is for complementarity and not competition, otherwise critics would find this worldview as a fertile ground for upholding patriarchy and gender inequality.

### ***Isuum-ngias* a peacebuilding model among the *Kadung* ethnic group**

*Isuum-Ngi* emerges as a creation worldview of the *Kadung* minority ethnic group in Plateau State, Nigeria. The ethnic group is located in Pankshin Local Government Area of the State. Etymologically, '*Kadung*' means a better place to settle (Lusa, 2010). *Isuum-Ngi* serves to affirm that African wisdom and philosophy offers worldviews and mythologies that may constructively promote living in harmony, togetherness and peace. Paradoxically, this demonstrates that Nigerian ethnic groups and communities have in their cultures what it takes

to promote living in peace but they may not know or may not want to use them because they have been brainwashed by colonial tutelage to believe that nothing indigenous can work for peaceful co-existence.

### **The relevance of postulating *Isuum-ngi* as indigenous peace-building model**

The author is arguing and advocating for *Isuum-ngi* as an alternative indigenous model of peace-building in Nigeria as an insider or participant-observer; therefore, he is aware of how this worldview has helped in reconciling warring factions during intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic clashes, and also building structures of peaceful living within the ethnic group (Joubert & Alfred, 2007). The argument for this model is premised on the fact that foreign models of peace-building like peace-making and peace-keeping have not helped matters in Nigeria because the processes end up destroying more lives than saving them. This is clear from the activities of some military personnel who have been brought out of their barracks to keep or enforce peace. Many of them have turned more deadly than peace-builders. Maltreatment and extortion of money from innocent citizens is also a form of violence unleashed on citizens by these so-called peace-keepers. *Isuum-Ngi* as an indigenous worldview is postulated in this paper in line with David Bosch's notion of *missio-Dei*, which sees every sphere of human life as integral mission of God. He describes this as wholistic mission of God in the world, aimed at promoting well-being and peaceful co-existence in the society (Bosch, 1991). It seeks to uphold and promote the well-being of the human society through the recognition of the common *humanity* that binds people together. Even religion and politics do not bind people together as *humanity*.

As a creation worldview that has potential for that promoting reconciliation, peaceful living and co-existence, *Isuum-ngi* is always sung as a reconciliation poem by the *Kadung* ethnic group whenever there is break of law and order resulting into violence:

*Suum-ngi shan gama, ip-boh gong-gong maghi piagha wor kap mora. I-yan bbaghaka magha ko yaba sogha rami dhalla dha kap mora, I-kop diag-diag magha mu kopsora na mu dara sogha rami shembella; Adimori yighi lishem ni'm; I sha dusa bbeh, adusa shiri, a dusa kaal, a dusa yallagha, a dusa*

*gallura, a dusa wondon; wo wari araghat, wo kena dha araghat; ko gha wo yah a mujana, kogha wo yah dhak, suum shiri yighi didam ni'm; anak-mori ghat; adimori ghat; arama dhalla mora ghat; tom mori ghat, dhaksara mori ghat. Awamaghi dhalla miwomi sha dhak ni; nungvya nikapsana shadhak.*

[*Humanity* is more than a joke; it is so deep that it can cover all of us; it is wide enough to provide space for each one of us; it is high enough to accommodate every one of us regardless of our different sizes. Our origin is like a chameleon; some of us are red, some as black, some are white, some are yellow, some are blue, some are green, some are mixed, but all from the same origin, and rushing to the same destination. As human race, we are like termites, coming from one mother and one father. We have the same space to occupy, common responsibilities to accomplish, and common challenges to face. What peaceful relationship cannot do for us, violent conflict and division cannot do for us either] (Lusa, 2010).

The poem above is always used to remind warring factions of their common *humanity*, origin, essence and destiny. Whenever this poem is sung, warriors sheath their weapons because it reminds them of their brotherhood and sisterhood as human beings.

*Isum-ngi* emphasizes the 'one-ness' and 'same-ness' of the plant, regardless of its separate parts, as a basis for 'one-ness' and 'same-ness of human beings (Pokol and Kaunda, 2015). This seeks to facilitate promotion of peaceful living across all divides. The fact that the male, female, and other creatures originated from distinct parts of the yams only explains diversity in creation and not differences (Lusa, 2010). *Isum-ngi* provides that if everyone plays their essential roles and respects the other's role because of their essential oneness, peace reigns. Impotent and destructive hierarchy comes in only when people forget their essential unity and begin to use their essential quality and responsibility selfishly and disregard others. The idea is that peace-building ought to start from treating each other on the basis of our common *humanity* as contained in *Isum-ngi*. If we recognize our essential one-ness and respect that one-ness, social constructs such as religion, politics, and indigene/settler identities will never lead us into taking arms against each other.



***Isuum-ngi* and promotion of a beloved community**

In a beloved community, discrimination, exploitation, oppression and marginalization are removed from social relationships (King Jr., 2013). There is always the recognition that people are called to love their neighbours, that is all others, so that each individual becomes someone who both loves and is loved by others (Gamwell, 2005). In the beloved community, war, marginalization, oppression and strife are excluded (King Jr., 2013). Here, human beings live together as an organic community. In this community, we are reminded that our call to common love is an expression of the creator's love for us because we are made in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26 NIV). The command to love is not imposed in order to exploit or debase humans but is, rather, given by God who wills us good; who wills all the good life (Gamwell, 2005). *Isuum-ngi* advocates that the individual is related to the community in such a way that the highest reaches of his individuality are dependent on the social substance out of which they arise and they must find their end and fulfilment in the community (Niebhur, 1994). The principle of *Isuum-ngi* also implies that in this world, the principal source and end of good life is human mutuality (Gamwell, 2005). It is only the realization of the community of love as human mutuality that is the principal source of inclusive worldly end of the good life and God wills for all. Calling this community, a source of our flourishing means that empowerment is a gift from our life together (Gamwell, 2005) as human beings.

The general nature of loving others is giving of oneself in a manner that seeks their own good; in mutual love, therefore, each receives creative opportunities from her or his relations to the others (Gamwell, 2005). Human peace and flourishing require a kind of mutuality between the human community and the orders and creatures of its natural habitat. For this reason, we can say in summary that human mutuality is to be maximized and is, in this sense, our inclusive world end. Such mutuality is the community of love in which all are both beneficiaries and benefactors, each empowered for the greatest possible achievement, and making the most of this opportunity and contributing to further creativity of all (Gamwell,

2005). *Isuum-ngi* also calls for maximizing love among all humans and in the longest possible run...to emancipate all through and for the sake of maximal human mutuality.

Another message of *Isuum-ngi* is a call to unity and celebration of mutuality through the promotion of survival opportunities and peaceful co-existence. Just as the God of Christianity calls all humans to direct their purpose towards the community of love and to maximize the creativity of all humans, *Isuum-ngi* does the same (Gamwell, 2005).

### ***Isuum-ngi* and the principle of justice in the community of love**

Stopping at human mutuality and community of love alone may sound too utopian or romantic because of the presence and persistence of sin in the world. Even Christians are still weak and susceptible to fall. Augustine of Hippo has warned, “Political rule will only greater evil without recognition that sin is an irrevocable feature of the human condition (Gamwell, 2005), this is partly why even the use of guns alone cannot restore peace in broken relationships. So far from mutuality from which all benefit and to which all contribute, our life together will always be profoundly invaded by overt or covert exploitation and strife. To avoid misunderstanding, then, it is well to stress that the community of love is an ideal to be pursued.

### **Critique of peace-keeping and peace-making strategies**

It is to be argued that the Nigerian authorities will finish all resources on peace-keeping and peace-making and still fail to achieve positive peace in the country unless alternative indigenous models of peace-building like *Isuum-ngi* are explored with deliberate intention to instil consciousness about essential humanity and sanctity of human life as enshrined in the above model. Whatever that are causing break down of peace in Nigeria are social constructs or imported ideologies that prove irrelevant to Nigerians; hence, the need for indigenous model of peace-building. One could make bold to argue that all military officers brought out to the check-points should return to their barracks because they inflict violence and violence cannot quell violence. Violence is a symptom of some social injustice, which must be radically addressed through contextual indigenous approach. Modern nation states have always used peace-keeping and peace-making as models of peace-building thinking that peace will result

but to no avail (Pokol, 2021). Jacques Ellul (cited in Reeve, 1984) has described the uselessness of every modern state as “totalitarian recognizing no limit either factual or legal. This is why I maintain that no state in the modern world is legitimate. No present-day authority can claim to be instituted by God, for all authority is set in the framework of a totalitarian state. This is why I decide for anarchy” (1976).

This paper re-emphasizes that what Nigerian Government has been doing to build peace in the country is a fruitless effort. This argument is supported by the fact that peace is not just the absence of actual battle, but of known willingness to battle (Rouner, 2004). The nature of violence in the country is not in the actual terrorist acts, kidnapping, armed banditry and corruption, but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary (Rouner, 2004). It is only a proper awareness of human essential unity and respect thereof for sanctity of life as created in the image of the make that can be effective in building peace in Nigeria.

#### ***Issuum-ngi* worldview and gender discrimination**

Such a worldview and retrieval of culture tends to justify African patriarchal society and the exploitation of women. Care must therefore be taken otherwise instead of fostering peace-building, it may work the other way round. What happens to husbands who are protected by their wives? What about single parent-females who have their own houses, who protect them? It is even an over-statement to say that males are stronger than women. Therefore, while the *Issuum-Ngi* worldview offers an important analogy for peace-building and theology of peace, one ought to be careful about its implications on gender issues (Pokol, 2021).

#### ***Issuum-ngi* and social constructs**

It is worth stressing here that Nigerians need to relate to each other based on *Issuum-Ngi* as a peacebuilding model that contributes to formulating a healthier model of essential oneness of humanity based on a common humanity above what human beings have constructed for themselves. The world is characterized by life-denying conflicts and this is rooted in humanity’s deviation from and denial of a common *Issuum-Ngi* (*lit*: humanity) (Adu, 2012).

*Isuum-Ngi* tends to call for the reconstruction of destructive social constructs by arguing for a return to the recognition of our common humanity.

*Isuum-Ngi* maintains that since all creation originated from the same origin, they share a common origin, common essence, and are moving towards a common destination (Lusa, 2010:20). These common grounds give creation equal standing, equal identity, and equal dignity (Adu, 2012). The basic implication of this is that every human being possesses a common *humanity*, a common origin, common identity, common dignity and equity, based on humanity or human-ness. It implies that what makes human beings what they are is not what they do, but what they are essentially. It also means that being a Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or African Traditionalists does not matter because none of these can make anyone more or less human. Our basis of living in peace should therefore be our common origins, common essence, and common destination. The poor and the rich are all human; white and black people are all human; the indigenes and the settlers are all human; whatever we have chosen to be, can be changed; but our essential humanity cannot be changed or replaced. Hurting the fellow human being, therefore, means denying them humanity and hurting oneself (Lusa, 2010).

The concept of *Isuum-Ngi* is similar to what Martin Luther King Jnr. calls the “single garment of destiny” (King Jr., cited in Chunakara, 2013), focusing on mutual interdependency so that constructed fences are not making bad neighbours. These profound natural and organic common grounds call for peaceful living. This notion of peace speaks volumes against social constructs that divide us. Human beings are so tied together that whatever happens to one happens to all.

Although Nkrumah made this statement in a political context, it is true that there is more that unites human beings than there is that divides them. Selfishness, greed, and hatred are not primarily against social values but against a commonly shared humanity. When people take their eyes from their common origins, common essence, and common destination, they begin to value social constructs above their common natural and common origins, essence,

identity and dignity (Lusa, 2010). This deviation seems to be the source of all conflict and violence in society. Mother Teresa (cited in Wallis, 2014) once remarked that “if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other [and for each other].” *Isuum-Ngi* serves as a reminder that despite what human beings have made of themselves and constructed for themselves, they still have a common ground that binds them together, which is *Isuum-ngi* (Lusa, 2010).

*Suum-ngi* puts human beings in the same boat and at the same level. One can change religion, political association, cultural identity, and social status, but no one can change their humanity. The argument here is that if our understanding of what constitutes a neighbour does not transcend our ethnic, religious, and political boundaries, we debase our common humanity and we create a situation that will lead to life-denying crises. M. K. Gandhi (cited by Reeve, 1984) argues that:

All living creatures are of the same substance as all drops of water in the ocean are the same in substance. I believe that all of us, individual souls, living in this ocean of spirit are the same with one another with the closest bond among ourselves. A drop that separates soon dries up and any soul that believes itself separate from others is likely destroyed... In all situations of conflict, there is something in the opponent that can be appealed to—not only common humanity but... that of God in man... no one can be utterly and finally an enemy because no one is without that divine spark within them... people may consider themselves to be our enemies, but we should reject such a claim... it follows that in injuring others, we are injuring the whole world of which we are part, and injuring the ultimate truth or reality which we call God (Gandhi (cited by Reeve, 1984).

Gandhi is right because no matter how much we tend to hate one another, we cannot take them away from their Creator nor can we gain anything from it. Religion appears to be the worst enemy against our common *humanity* in this century, but the sooner we realize that no social construct should tear us from our natural oneness, the better for us. In a recent sermon entitled, “See if you can find a man among you,” (Scottsville Presbyterian Church Sermon, 21 June 2015), Roderick Hewitt observed that all religions are guilty of terror. He went on to argue that:

God is not the enemy of your enemies. He is not even the enemy of his enemies. When God hates all the same people that you hate, you can absolutely be certain that you have created him in your own image...All forms of dehumanization, demonizing those who differ from you, treating your neighbour as the other, and claiming that God is on your side alone...fanatical claims of absolute truth. Doubt-free, no question asked, an uncritical confidence that one understands such absolute truth absolutely...Blind obedience to totalitarian, charismatic, and authoritarian leaders or their views that undermine moral integrity [are responsible for violence].

If the understanding of neighbour does not transcend our ethnic, religious, and political boundaries, then it debases our common *humanity* and a situation is created that may threaten life itself. *Suum-Ngi* locates all human individuals in a position of caring for each other because of common origin, essence and destination. It aims to promote unity in diversity and the welfare of the community. It challenges all forms of discrimination and violence among human beings and it seeks to uphold the principles of the kingdom of God which are love, forgiveness, cooperation, equity, compassion and, because of their common heritage, the celebration of community. *Suum-Ngi* and other African wisdom tropes and philosophies may attest that peaceful living is inherent in the culture of Africans but because they have allowed in foreign social constructs many of which have been imported and forced upon them to determine how they treat each other; peaceful living has given way to life-denying violence.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued for alternative indigenous model of peace-building to replace the peace-keeping and peace-making that the Nigerian Government has been using fruitlessly for many decades without much result. The paper has critiqued the above models because in the process, more lives have been lost and the root causes of violence left unaddressed. The author has postulated *Isuum-ngi*, an indigenous worldview as having more relevant potential for promoting peacebuilding without taking arms to quell violence. The author has argued that proper awareness of our common *humanity* originating from the same source and sharing common essence is able to create respect for sanctity of life, thereby causing us to treat each other on the basis of the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12 NIV).

### **Recommendations**

- i. It is incumbent on us all to return to our common *humanity* to see that any injury inflicted to others is also our own injury. We are caught in inescapable garment of destiny so that no one becomes anything until he or she allows other become what they want to become. Africans need to reinvent those life-giving philosophies that they allowed colonialism to wash away.
- ii. There is something about the Nigerian religious that is peculiar and dangerous to life. Mbiti's submission (1969) that "Africans are incurably religious" is valid but it is spitting death on the Nigerian citizens because religion has become dangerously divisive. Religion has promoted strife and division among Nigerians.
- iii. Every government's policy should be judged by its effects on the development of the multitude ordinary citizens. The grinding poverty and starvation with which our country is affected is such that it drives more and more men [and women] into the rank of beggars, whose desperate struggle for bread renders them insensible to all feelings of decency and self-respect.
- iv. Nigerian seems to have contributed to the destruction of peace in our society in many ways. For instance, during the recent Christmas celebration, most of the fuelling stations in the cities locked up their stations even when there was no official communication for price increase from the authorities concerned. Such business individuals did this just to overheat the already tight economic challenges in the country.

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