'IN- GROUP' *VERSUS* 'OUT –GROUP' MODEL: CRITICAL ISSUES IN INTRA AND INTER- RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Conflict in northern Nigeria has flared up periodically over the last three decades. These conflicts were mainly in the form of urban riots, clashes between Muslim and Christian groups, as well as confrontations between different Islamic sects. The trends of violence associated with these conflicts are reflection of high level of misunderstanding among the religious ethnic group or sects in the northern region. However, these kinds of conflict seem to have been generated by the politicization of religious identities known as 'Group Membership' in contemporary Northern Nigeria. It is therefore against this background that this paper intends to examine conflict in perspective. The conceptual issue and perspective of inter and intra-religious conflict with a distinction within the religion is also examined. The paper also argue on a group membership with distinction in social identity between 'Us' versus 'Them' as an element of factionalism in intra and inter religious conflict in contemporary Northern Nigeria. Finally it concludes with way a suggestion on the forward for achieving greater unity.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a nation is a flash point of all sorts of conflicts and violence in ethnicity, religion, social and indeed political battle-ground. Since independence Northern Nigeria has been experiencing ethno-religious, intra-religious and inter-religious violence, many people are now skeptical and view each party's religion in a negative light. The trends of violence associated with these conflicts are responsible by many factors that include ignorance or half- baked knowledge of the true teachings of the very religion that people involved claim to be defending. Also said to be a sign of high level of misconception, and campaign of hatred and blackmail among the major religious ethic group or sects in the region. Most of internal conflict in Nigeria especially in the northern path as always been regarded as politically motivate and socially influenced. Some of the prominent states that become fragile relation between Christian and Muslims culminated in riots in the past decades include Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri, Yola and Bauchi which claimed hundreds of lives and destruction of properties(Ayinla, 2005)(Rotimi, 1996)(Matthew, 2003)(Muhammad, 2006).With regards to these kinds of conflict seem to have been influenced by the politicization of religion and socio-cultural identities in contemporary Northern Nigeria.

2.   'IN-GROUP' AND 'OUT-GROUP' MODLE IN PERSPECTIVES

Group is one of the most important concepts in the study of social behavior and relations. Hunt (1983) define group as any number of persons who share a consciousness of membership and of interaction. This conception emphasizes that the essence of the social group is not physical closeness but a consciousness of joint interaction. Thus the term could cover a wide variety of human association. While each group is composed of individuals, the individual gains' a sense of morale and identity from the group. A person's feeling, character or behavior is often affected by a group membership (Ibrahim, 2005). However, when statements are made by individual members of a group that exhibit strong feeling of emotional attachment to the group, they go to show the strength of social group influence. For example, "there are many groups I belong-my family, my tribe, my village, my church/mosque, my profession, my nation. In fact any group which **"I"** precede with the pronoun, **"my"**. These are often *in-groups*, because the individual feels he/she belongs to them. But there are other group to which the individual do not belong- other families, tribes, occupations, kinship- tied, occupations, nationalities, religions, and the other sex. These latter groups are *out-group*, for the individuals are outside them (Ibrahim, 2005).

In-groups and out-groups are very vital in the sense that they change the behavior of members. From fellow members of an in-group we expect recognition, loyalty, and helpfulness. From out-groups the expectation varies with the kind of out-group. From some out-groups, generally, we expect neither hostility nor indifference; yet in our behavior a difference undoubtedly remains. The fact was that social distance theory was developed in order to measure the degree of closeness or acceptance we feel toward other groups. Social distance refers to the degree of closeness among groups of all kinds (Bogadus, 1958), (Westie, 1959).

On the aspect of intra or inter-religious conflict consist of self-recognition and the negative attitudes formed by '*in-group*' members about '*out-groups*'. Therefore, inter or intra-religious conflict will be defined as aggressive behavior between '*in-group*' and '*out-group*' (Gordon, 1967). (Staub, 1989). Sociologist like (Linville, 1988.) have extensively examined the core issue underlying root conditions and causes of '*in-group*' and *'out-group'* conflict and mass violence. The perception they made about '*in-group*' is that these theoretical models can be combined to create an interactive model of mass violence that can be utilized to assess the risk for '*in-group*' formation of hatred and '*out-group*' directed violence (Staub, 1989). The fact is that, this attitude of formation of hatred toward '*out-group*' was influenced by other factors that include group cultural history, social background, psychological factors, and situational factors, and the path of violence including the role of stigmatization, dehumanization, moral exclusion, impunity and bystander interactions(Wailimann, 1998). From above perspectives indicate that cultures shape our identity and perception of what is considered normative. In relation to cultures that have a propensity for mass violence, there are three common patterns: the use of aggressive as a normative problem solving skill, a perceived threat orientation, and an ideology of supremacy (Scmid, 2000). Each can exist on the broad cultural level within nation-state like Nigeria as well as within more localized cultures associated with smaller groups or organizations. The argument was that many religions have within their histories a pattern of glorification of violence such as Art, Mythology, and Oral history include representations of this glorification as a holy battle between the forces of good and evil(Linda, 2002).

Northern Nigeria as the case may be, most of the conflicts are at least ostensibly between two major religious groups i.e. Christian and Muslim. Although religion may be only one factor in this aspect of conflicts in combination with other cultural identification and social background which posed hatred toward one another and couple with political and economic issues, nevertheless, it is a major motivating and legitimizing aspect of violence.

3.   THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CONFLICT

Scholars have examined conflict in many perspectives. It has been variously reviewed as the existence of non-compatibility or disagreement between two actors or parties (individuals, groups, organizations or nations) in their interaction over the issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, scarce resources. It has been examined as "a struggle over values and claims to secure status, power and resources, a struggle in which the aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals"(Linda, 2002).In another perspective the word conflict is view by Jan (2010) as a "violated" word; which our culture conditions as to have mainly negative associations about it, and we connect it with our worst life expenses(Jan, 2010).Jan further to explain it that conflict is a complex phenomenon. Its formation is influenced by many factors: the number of parties, the content of argument, the history of the relationship, the emotions in the situation, and the personalities concerned.

Human conflict is omnipresent and ubiquity. The potential for conflict exist whenever different individuals or groups pursue goals that they perceive to be incompatible. In this sense, conflict is an inescapable feature of our social life(Cheldelin, 2003).However, conflict is part and parcel of lives, but when it leads to violence, it has become something else. Destructive conflict is one that destroys or injures valued lives, psyche, institutions and possessions. Against this background, conflict has been classified into four kinds: ethnic conflict, class conflicts, Hosts-settlers conflict, Environmental conflict, Political and Economic conflict and Religious conflict which is our main perspective.

4.   THE CONCEPTUAL ISSUES OF INTER INTRA-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

A number of literatures have reviewed the conceptualization of the religious conflict in broader sense. From the point of view of religion, the words "religious conflict" is such kinds of conflict in which religion constitutes the determining factors through some of its dimensions. On a strictly theological basis, it is difficult to define what would be considered intra or inter-religious distinction (Jan, 2010). Some theologies examined this distinction and faction within religions that may or may not view themselves as part of a broader whole. For example, is the violence in Northern Ireland between the Protestants and Catholic or between Shiite and Sunnite in the Middle –East, an instance of intra or inter-religious conflict? For instance if one perceives these to be simply denominations within Christianity as a religion or Shiite and Sunnite as the same sects, then, this conflict would be identified as an example of intra-religious conflict. But in situation where someone identified Protestantism and Catholicism or Shiite and Sunnite as distinctive religions, then, this conflict represent an instance of inter-religious conflict(Linda, 2002).

4.1   *'Muslims' Versus 'Christians' Tensions*

Some of the conflicts that involve Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria signified some religious identity with ethnic division and economic. In most cases, these confrontations may be in the form of misunderstanding or misrepresentation by the parties to the conflict and that is why the parties to the conflict brought a notion of superior and inferior known as **'***Them***'** and 'Us'. Take example from the Jos conflicts where the Hausa community where regarded as settlers who dominate economic activities of the state and they have no right in making the politics of the state. Similarly in Kaduna state where Southern Kaduna felt marginalized both in politics and economic by the dominant section of the Northern Kaduna. The Christian in northern Nigeria claimed to be among the in-group because of being part of cultural identity and historical antecedent of their origin in the northern region, therefore they see no reason for being culturally relegated as out-group. So also to Muslims who see the establishment of Sokoto caliphate gave them upper hand to occupied in in-group position because culturally they are majority in the region. These negative attitudes reached a climax where each sees party's religion in a negative light. For instance, Muslims view Christian as an insensitive, wordily and intolerant religion, while many Christian view Islam in a negative light as a blood thirsty and violent religion that tries to impose its religions doctrines on other groups. These different views and misunderstanding have set both religious groups against each other in the region. Therefore, whatever anyone does is judged in the light of 'in-group' aggressiveness (Yake, 2015).

In historical epoch, this religious identification, misunderstanding and misrepresentation got its origin during the colonial administration in the Northern Nigeria and the reason was part of the British Divide and Rule policy. The fact was that colonialism faced with numerous challenges and resistance during its penetration from the then rulers in the region. But with used of force it managed to get control and established its administrative rule after the final conquest of Sokoto caliphate. The British colonial administration did not openly encourage the evangelization of the entire Northern region. This was in keeping promise by the British to preserve the status quo of the Northern region. Those Muslims leaders who agreed to accept British overrule after conquest had been promised to keep away missionary activities where Islam was predominantly occupied. In the urban centers of the North like Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Bauchi and Maiduguri, Christian population were allowed to settle in separate quarters at the outskirts of the towns, which were referred to as Sabon- Gari or the non-indigenes, strangers or settlers quarters. This segregated settlement patterns, surely, changed the relationship between the Christians and Muslims especially when evangelistic missionary fervent too were restricted to the Sabon- Gari areas only (Uji, 2011).

This is part of British Divide and Rule policy and ever since then, the British colonization in the early 1900s, have crystallized into what are commonly referred to as " majority group" and "minorities", with further complexity added by the rival of substantial number of mainly Christian immigrants from the country's south (International Crisis Group Working to Prevent Conflict Worldwide, 2010). The colonial rule facilitated the domination of Hausa Fulani elites, especially in areas that minority groups had historically considered their exclusive domains and sowed the seeds for conflict claims to political space, economic rights, societal values and status. This had no doubt, the lasting effects on the socio-political formation, activities and the struggle for identity in the Northern region (International Crisis Group Working to Prevent Conflict Worldwide, 2010).

It has been observed that conflict identified as religious usually does not frequently stem from disagreements over theological issues. Its impact usually results from the association of religious identity with ethnic division and economic factors. Similarly, character of the Nigerian state is such that permits to an extent, the interwoven of religious and ethnic issues especially at moments of crises. This is because the different origins of two predominant religions of Islam and Christianity couple with their being rooted in separate geographical localities created a situation whereby the resulting religious composition closely follows geographic and ethnic divide(Abdulrasheed, 2008).

4.2   **'Sunnite' and 'Shiite' Intra-religious conflict**

The Sunni-Shi'ah conflict is centuries old and deeply rooted as both Islamic groups claim to be the righteous one in the Islam and constituted assemblage of adherence. Their claims and demands for the recognition of their assertions present an in surmountable problem. Throughout the centuries the claims of Sunnis and Shi'ah to the origins and property of the Prophet's succession have been a source of open conflicts and skirmislies as well as in tense communal animosities. This is because the persistence with which Shi'a clings to its basic belief in 'Ali and his sons as the true imams, has ever, remained the distinguishing features of conflict perception. According to Shiite argument as opposed to Sunnite view was that the imam is the sole legitimate head of the Muslim community divinely designated for the supreme office. He is a 'lineal' descendent of the prophet (S.A.W) through Fatima and 'Ali (R.A) (Philip, 1960). The above perceptions by Shi'a reveal that family kinship and marriage tie ship became

the criteria for succession and once you are not belong to the family member of the Prophet you are not qualified to be a successor. This group membership which Shi'a based their beliefs that only 'Ali (R.A) to have such cultural history and family lineage while the rest imams were not tied to that lineage.

But from the Sunni point of view, they accept the first four Caliphs (contrary to Shi'a) including 'Ali as 'right guided' rulers who followed the prophet. In theory, Sunni believe that the leader (Imam) of the Muslim community should be selected on the basis of communal consensus on the existing political order, and on a leader's individual merits. This view was contrary to Shi'a belief and for Sunni anyone who excluded these four imams such person was not among Sunni group or follower.

Indeed, differences in terms of belief, ideology and theology remained the central factors which classified the Muslims world into groups (i.e. 'in-group' and 'out-group') and were the main issues of the conflict. This social and religious cognition by which both Sunni and Shi'ah sects thought about them remain the back drove that influence intra-religious hate and violence. It is argued that people who try to sustain their positive self-identity like Shi'ah and Sunni, by assuring themselves that their membership in the group is highly valued and distinct from other groups, a phenomenon referred to as bias. Devotion to one's in-group can produce out-group-directed prejudice, discrimination and, potentially, violence (Shehu, 2015). This behavior by no means has a negative consequences and frequent extreme violence.

These doctrinal variances create confusion, misunderstanding and violence on many occasions among Shi'ah and Sunni in places like Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi and Sokoto which saw many houses burnt and several people wounded. The Shi'ah in Nigeria felt dehumanized and stigmatized because of being excluded from the in-group's normal moral boundaries. In other words, certain moral principles that may be applied to one's own group do not pertain to those outside of the group (Wailimann, 1998).

Religious organizations are also deeply impacted by the leaders of those organizations. Leaders who demand unconditional belief and support are in a position to manipulate not only the information received by their followers, but whether the group functions to promote religious tolerance and constructive action or hatred and destructive violence (Linda, 2002).

5.   THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE CONFLICT

In every conflict there has to be an element of political economy because both the parties to the conflict wanted to achieve one gain or the other. Upon all the conflict that engulfed between Northern Christians who were regarded themselves as minority, being marginalized and oppressed by the Muslim majority in the north was simply brought forward for political end. The Northern Christians had for long aired their grievances on the fact that their political right has been denied and manipulated by the political class to enhance their selfish objectives (Uji, 2011). It has been observed by Falola (1998) that most of the Northern minorities' tribes in the Middle Belt and Southern Zaria are Christians, in most cases, the struggle for their "rights" ends up in religious tension.

In general, Christians in the North constitute a minority in both the way the defined themselves and also because of the dominance of Islam. They believe that, their rights and existence are being denied by the Muslims. Not only would they continue to fight, they are likely to escalate vigilantism in the country as they seek the means to protect themselves and to pursue their rights in aggressive way(Falola, 1998).

This conflict has brought benefit to the Northern Christian minority because to them they had emancipated themselves from the bondage of northern political domination. This is because in states where Christians constitute 20% to 30% some sensitive posts are given to them (like deputy Governor, commissioner etc) to occupy. Such states include Kaduna, Borno, Adamawa, Niger, Gombe, Bauchi and Yobe respectively. Again, from the Northern Muslim side, still the politics of that region is being control by the Muslim. In addition to that, the conflict was further aggravated by the fact that: Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria are more commercially oriented and enterprising than the Northern Christians especially in places such as Kano, Kaduna, Borno and Taraba among others and this gave them upper hand to gain from the political economic of the conflict. This also provided Muslim in the north ample opportunity and advantage economically above their counterparts (International Crisis Group Working to Prevent Conflict Worldwide, 2010).

On the issue of Sunni and Shiite conflict, the one who most benefited with is Sunni because their population is higher than Shiite. Shiites have lost political machinery in the northern Nigeria because they are rejected by the Sunni communities. And no matter how they try to seize power it always become difficult. In terms of economic benefit the Shiites are at receiving end. This is because Sunni Ulama'a have condemned any kind of trade or enterprising with them. So in the market the transaction is always on the Sunni advantage and benefit (Abiodun, 2014).

6.   CONCLUSION: CRITICAL ISSUES IN MANAGING THE CONFLICT

Religion should not be the avenue for conflict or violence but rather should be binding thing that unite people because no religion teaches violence but preach peace and harmony. Inter-religious violence is encouraged by the failure of good governance in religious leadership .The intellectuals need to imbibe the spirit of living together, by accommodation and accepting the existence of other religions alongside their own. And through demonstrating this acceptance by recognizing all necessary rights to which others constitutionally entitled. In a democratic state like Nigeria constitutional right must be observed in reference to tolerance, impartiality, and neutrality in religious matters because it must ensure the respect of individuals' fundamental liberties, especially freedom of religion and conscience (Shehu, 2015). This is because citizens in a free and democratic society shall be entitled to practice the religion of their choice, through within certain limits for the sake of preserving public order and individual liberties (Galtung, 1996).

In the Nigerian constitution the government has no business preferring one religion to the other. The role of government is to protect lives and properties of citizens, to respect and protect their constitutional rights. One critical freedom that every government must strive to protect is the liberty for citizen to exercise their respective faiths, Christians and Muslims or any traditional believer in a lawful manner without fear or hindrance and to prosecute those who use religion as an excuse to destroy homes, schools and places of worship (Shehu, H., 2015). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stated the Right to Freedom of thought, Conscience and Religion as enshrined:

> "…Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance…"
>
> "…No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own or a religion not approved by his parent or guardian…"
>
> "…No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination…"
>
> "…Nothing in this section. Shall entitle any person to form, take part in the activity or be a member of a secret society…"(Nigeria, 2011)

7.   REFERENCES

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