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INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: A CASE STUDY OF INDIGENE/SETTLERS RELATIONSHIP IN ASA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

In Nigeria, academic discourse on inter-group relations over the years has been narrowed down to only two interrelated terms: conflict and violence. This is due to the rising cases of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts witnessed in the multi-cultural and multi-religious Nigeria. This paper intends to argue that the escalating ethnic and religious consciousness is greatly the handiwork of elites and politicians who employ both ethnicity and religion as effective tools for mass mobilization and manipulation of citizens' psyche in their attempt to dominate the state power apparatus and resources. It also affirms the view that, as far as the Yoruba and other ethnic communities of Asa Local Government are concerned, a high level of cordial inter-group relations had been achieved, owing to inter-communal mechanisms developed amongst the Yoruba and other ethnic communities over the years of interaction. One of the effective vehicles through which the cordial [redacted] inter tribal relations are achieved is Islam and economic relationship. From the foregoing, it is obvious that Nigeria as a country has had a checkered history of intergroup relations shaped by the existing system of material production and appropriation in the country. Therefore, to

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strengthen the shattered socio-economic and political relationship between and among the constituent ethno-linguistic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and the other minority ethnic groups) in the country, there must be a restructuring and redirecting of the system of material production and appropriation in the country.

Introduction

Nigeria, as a country, came into existence in 1914 as a product of the British amalgamation of the erstwhile autonomous ethnic groups politically organized into City States (in the North), empires, kingdoms etc. (in the south). These autonomous city states, kingdoms, empires (ethnic groups) existed independent of others politically other than trade and commerce until the amalgamation cum colonization. However, with the exit of the British colonial masters heralded the independence of Nigeria in 1960. It could be deduced from the above that Nigeria as a country is composed of various ethnic groups federating in the political entity called Nigeria. It has about 250 ethno linguistic groups, the major ones among them being the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani (see Otite, 1990).

These multi ethno-linguistic groups also reflect the multi-cultural diversities in the country. These multi-cultural diversities manifest themselves in the nature of relationships that exist between and among these diverse ethno linguistic groups in the country. The diversity has and is still being reflected in the form and nature assumed in these intergroup relations. According to Muhammad, et al. (2006), ―regional location and religion have served to reinforce the tripartite cleavage of the three dominant ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa). British colonial rule reinforced these regional and cultural differences. These disparities have been a source of intolerance, discrimination, political tension and instability ever since‖. The questions then are, why the disparities in the first instance and why are these disparities reinforced by the so called regional and cultural differences? Why must these disparities become a source of intolerance, discrimination, political tension and instability ever since in the country? An answer to these requires an understanding of the historical antecedents and antitheses to the formation of the country called Nigeria. This is because such an understanding will give an illumination into the nature and why the complexities in the relationship between and among the various interacting ethnic groups in the country.

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Inter-ethnic relations between Fulani pastoralists and Yoruba farmers have endured for centuries. Land use in Asa local government was extensive, and sharing of land resources between agriculturalists and pastoralists was customary since the 18th century AD. Due to the centrality of agriculture to the rural economy, land and land resources are crucial to the reproduction of social and economic life (Egwu, 1998). The Fulani, as an economic unit, constitute one of the oldest migrant groups among the tribes in West Africa sub region (Atanda, 1972). In the 1960s the growing migration of Fulani produced semi-permanent Fulani settlements whose leaders spoke Yoruba and mediated diplomacy with the host communities over trampled crops and farmlands (Guyer, 1997). Some wealthy Yoruba invested in cattle that they placed in trust of the Fulani herders. However, simmering tension was already recorded in the conflicts over destruction of crops by cattle herds.

The Fulani became a significant part of the states in the entire southwestern Nigeria (Adebayo, 1997). Though competition existed, a profound commercial network existed between Hausa, Yoruba and Fulani as cattle traders. The two economic groups profited from each other's livelihood. There was economic symbiosis between the Fulani and Yoruba. Fulani women produced and sold (wara) cheese, the manure from cattle was a cheaper source of fertilizer for farmers, and most of the settled Fulani spoke Yoruba and socialized in the markets. The settled Fulani were influenced by Yoruba culture and western technology (Adebayo, 1997). Many built houses with corrugated iron sheets, acquired motorcycles for transportation and electronic gadgets for entertainment (Adebayo, 1997). Yorùbá farmers witnessed a shift in the identity of the Fulani herders composed of the settled Fulani and the Bororo Fulani who were more volatile, non-Yoruba speaking and quick to resort to violence.

Conceptual Clarification

Intergroup relations. The term *intergroup relations* refers to both individual interactions involving members from different groups and the collective behaviour of groups in interaction with other groups, at either the intra or inter organizational level.

The classic definition of intergroup relations was originally provided by Sherif (1966) who suggested: "Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their

group identification, we have an instance of intergroup behaviour." Intergroup relations imply therefore, the existence of mutually exclusive groups that are in constant interaction with one another. These mutually exclusive groups due to the mode of their social bond usually exhibit the 'we' attitude toward members of their mutual group while exhibiting the 'they' attitude to the other members of the out-group.

Dynamics. This is a force that stimulates change or progress within a system or process; Of a process or system characterized by constant change, activity, or progress; Pertaining to or characterized by energy or effective action (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com). It here connotes a process and stimulants to change. It involves the various forces within and outside the system (country) that synthesize in stimulating the nature and mode of intergroup (ethnic groups) relations in the country.

Complexities. This stands for intricacies. It also means complications. In the context of this study, we will be looking at the intricacies and the complications associated in the interactions of the different multi ethno-linguistic groups in the country. What are the complexities and how did these intricacies emanate in the first instance? These are begging questions.

"Inter-group relationship", writes A.E. Afigbo, "is multi-faceted and dynamic. Among its more common facets are the political …, the economic and technological, the cultural … so far the tendency has been to concentrate on the military and political aspects of the relationship to the neglect of all the others." It is not clear what Afigbo had in mind when he used the word 'political' in this context. In an objective judgement, merely stating that B migrated from A or that C conquered D, or that E borrowed certain sociopolitical institutions from F does not constitute any real study of political relations between our diverse peoples. In fact, it is the contention of scholars like Obaro Ikime that in the study of inter-group relations thus far historians have been extremely wary about venturing into direct discussion of political relations between groups, in the period before 1800. Comments about inter-group relations were first made in terms of Nigerian historiography in the attempt to assail the concept that Nigeria is an artificial creation of the British. Thus, we have been quick to point out that long before the British arrived on our shores, our peoples traded together, inter-married became aware of the presence of neighbors around them Tijani (2008). Nevertheless, a reading of *Groundwork of Nigerian History* does, in the strict sense, provide

material for a discussion, including but also going beyond the arguments about economic relations and conquests, etc.

Nwabueze's analysis of the scope of Inter-group relations study is imperative here. He asserts that "a comprehensive approach to intergroup relation study should embrace seven areas of interest". One of these is Interethnic Relations as Inter-group Relations. Here it is meant the interaction of one ethnic group and another which cooperates and compete with one another in economic, political and social fronts sometimes under well organized group contexts with leaders playing prominent roles and at other times under less defined organization in which the sense of group is sustained by common interest and territoriality. By and large, Inter-group relations as a theme in Nigerian history, is sufficiently familiar. It was an important feature of our pre-colonial sociopolitical history. However, recent Nigerian historiography revolutionized the study of inter-group relations by giving more emphasis to it.

Geographical Nature of the Study Area

The importance of geography and environmental factors to the determination of a people's polity, economy, social and inter-group relations cannot be over emphasized. For, it is argued that "The geographical location of each group has been a major factor in the type and source of dominant influence that is experienced". The land, climate, rivers, vegetation, fauna, among other environmental features, are critical determinants not only for the study of state formation, demographic and occupational profile, but also vital to human culture, settlement patterns and economic activity. The type of political systems – whether mini or mega – state structures adopted, or/and adapted, was to a large extent, dependent upon the environment of the people. It should however be noted that much as the environment plays crucial role in human and historical geography of all societies, man's ability to influence the natural setting of his environment to his advantage or otherwise, cannot be underrated. This demonstrates the dialectical relationship between man and his environment. For, "while environment plays a major role in human history, man also utilizes the environment for his benefits" because of his unique membership of the animal kingdom. Our attempt to study the early history of communities in Asa local government area which had, and still occupied a prominent political, social, economic and cultural position in Nigeria, cannot, therefore afford to ignore the significance of geography and environment

in its evolution and transformation as we attempt to reconstruct its history in the early period.

A number of sources have already described the geographical location of the study area. The people of Asa occupy the geographical area lying in the North Central of Nigeria. The area falls within the lower basins of River Niger. Udo describes the Niger Region as extending from the Niger-Benue confluence at Lokoja in the south to Timbuktu in the North, covering large tracts of Land on both sides of Niger River. In the same vein, the area is described as being generally in the area of "low relief and abundant drainage, formed by the influence of the surrounding Rivers and its tributaries and distributaries…"(Measuring) not more than 140^{m} in the low lying areas and not more than 600^{m} in the highest points if the broken rocky hilly areas found here and there above the surrounding plains. Having a transitional climate, the region stands between the North and South as a zone of mixed culture, in which the food crops of the south are cultivated side-by-side with those of the North.

Flourishing markets and commercial centers are said to have established certain strategic settlements along the community and most likely in the environs. Oral evidence collected recently mentions some of such centers as Gambari, Iregba, Ajunwon, Alapa, Igbeti, Igboho, Banni, Eiyenkorin among others. At most of the centers, as this source further claims, tribute to taxes were charged and collected from foreign traders along the route within the jurisdiction of Asa local government area. The method of assessment of the charge in the markets, whether on individual commodities and traders or collectively, may not be easy for us to determine given our present state of knowledge. However, the tribute would seem to have been paid either in cash or kind by traders traveling up and down along the area. The appointed emissaries in such centers collected tribute on behalf of the community head. Payment of tribute ensured protection for the traders and their goods on the waterways and land as well as revenue for the state.

Social Life and the Religion of the People of Asa Local Government

The commercial and religious interactions between the inhabitants and the visitors have always been cordial. The people were products of two religious waves. Although, the indigenous people of Asa are predominantly Muslims but there are few populations of Christians who resides in the area as well. In most

communities in Asa local government for instance, Islamic brotherhood constituted a fundamental relationship between the non indigene and their community. Thus while Islam inspired the migration of Muslims, the drive for evangelism motivated most Christians in the area. The practice of traditional religion was also prominent among its adherents up till the last quarter of twentieth century.

There were element of the reformed Ogboni fraternity and the presence of babalawo herbalists in the communities. Herbal medicine traders, both itinerant and those in diaspora, often sold their products on the market days. It is equally note worthy to understand the dynamics that gave rise to the formation of religious institutions within an ethnic framework to some extent. Some of these religious centers maintained linkages with the headquarters based in the Yoruba homeland. For example, the establishment of mosques such as Ansar-ud-deen, Naiwairudeen, ISBON and Yoruba churches such as Baptist, Cherubim and Seraphim and Aladura churches is an indication of religion harmony and peaceful co existence of the adherents of both religion. It is important to note how religious centers invested in human development through education in the communities. Some mosques in Asa Local Government operated their own Nursery, Primary and secondary schools.

The people are involved in one social activities or the other. The business men and women are known for their unionism and as such, they are involved in creation of unions such as alapere associations, tailoring associations, etc. it should be noted that there are other township unions like Ogbomoso parapo, Omo olofamojo (Offa union), ibo group, etc. Although Ogbomoso parapo was said to be the first union or association that started in the Local Government area, it started at a place called Isale Ogbomoso, Budo Egba and having late Pa Yellow as the leader of the union. The Ogbomoso parapo was a union that was established by Baptist descendant. There are also room to celebrate festivals and organize seminars. The traditional attires of the Yorubas were displayed in their day to day activities. It was said that festivals and occasions were graced by the presence of the community leaders and by the traditional drum beating by the non indigenes

Economic History of the Study Area

The major economic activity is agriculture: farming, fishing and cattle rearing. The other economic activities (though limited in scale) include; trading, transportation

and local arts. Asa Local Government is accessible by only road. Important markets that surrounded the area are Gambari, Eiyenkorin, Odo Oba, otte, Ganmon, Iregba, Temidire, Igbeti, and Alapamarket on Saturday and Wednesday respectively (weekly). Natural resources abound in Otte like food, handcraft, oils, vegetables, animals, etc. Major festivals: Edeilfitri, Edeilkabir, MaoludNabiyy, and Hijra. It will interest you to know that Otte is blessed with mineral resources like marble, limestone, charcaol, etc.

The economy also supports cattle trading (as earlier stated), shea nut processing and pottery. Traditional industries and crafts in Otte include leather work and metal working. Otte people are known for arable agriculture, wood fetching and pottery. However, these subsistence farmers were dispossessed of their farmlands to accommodate the Federal Hospital. Moreover, the extended family labour force has been fragmented as its youths took to white collar jobs. Farming was left mostly to the aged, under-aged and under educated. People imbibed the notion that "Art is man", nature being so kind provided materials which through practice, religion, occupation, belief and culture propelled the visual arts of the people which is in the following areas: traditional iron smelting, pottery, indigenous textile and general domestic crafts

Islam and Inter Group Relations in Asa Local Government

One of the best known ethnic groups associated with the pre-colonial long distance trade in West Africa was the Hausa/Fulani whose homeland is in the present Northern Nigeria and the neighbouring Niger Republic. The Hausa/Fulani have been known for high degree of mobility, skill and shrewdness in business. Hence, in the course of the long distance trade, they were able to develop sophisticated economic organization, with network of localized Hausa/Fulani communities in the major towns of the coastal and forest regions of West Africa. Moreover, the Hausa/Fulani communities established in those areas they were trading with in both Yorubaland of Nigeria and Gonja in Ghana were formed on the basis of Hausa/Fulani cultural distinctiveness: Islam, language, mode of dress, the political/traditional institution of chief (Sarkin Hausawa/fulani), a mosque, market and Chief's palace were some of the features associated with Hausa/Fulani Diaspora communities.

By implication, Hausa/Fulani long distance traders were not only networking their commercial activities but also acted as Islamic missioner, promoter of their

language and culture in all the areas they had commercial networks or where they had settled. It is good to note however that Islam remains a key feature in the distinctiveness of the Fulani/Bororo trading community in Yorubaland (Adamu, 1978:127-132). Even as Diaspora community, they maintain their religion. Thus, the transit camp (Zango or Sabo) in a Yoruba city is a distinctive social group, with Islam and their culture and language maintained. This apart, Cohen (1971) argues that there was a great relationship between morality and success recorded by the Hausa/Fulani long distance traders. For Cohen, the success was due to the Islamic moral code of conduct which made trust and credit possible. Such a moral code, he continues, was provided by Islam, the religion of the Hausa/Fulani. Hopkins (1973:64-65) summarises Cohen's analysis of the role of Islam and its moral code of conduct in the organisation of the long distance trade by asserting that Successful integration required a formal moral code to sanction and control commercial relationships.

The 'blueprint' for the formation of a moral community of businessmen was provided by Islam, which was closely associated with long distance trade in West Africa from the eighth century onwards. Islam helped maintain the identity of members of a network or firm who were scattered over a wide area, and often in 'foreign' countries; it enabled traders to recognize, and hence to deal readily with each other; and it provided moral and ritual sanctions to enforce a code of conduct which made trust and credit possible. It was through Islam that the people of Asa Local Government and Hausa merchants established the commercial networks, or Diasporas, which made them so prominent and successful in long distance trade. Thus, besides serving as unifying factor the Diaspora Hausa community, Islam also attracted other non-Hausa but Muslim Diaspora groups from Northern Nigeria such as Ebira, Kanuri, Shuwa Arabs, Nupe and even those from other West African regions such as Ghanaians and Togolese Kotokoli into major Hausa/Fulani settlements in Yorubaland, especially some communities in the study area. Places like Otte, Budo mEgba, Eiyenkorin, Lasoju, Afon, Ogbondoroko, Laduba, Aboto, Ballah, Alapa, Bakasse, and so on. Thus, the subsequent Fulani/Bororo communities established in Asa Local Government area especially from 1970s were composed up of divergent Diaspora communities of various ethnic groups from both northern Nigeria and other West African countries, with Islam and language as unifying elements. It is pertinent to note that for the purpose of this discussion, the term 'Hausa/Fulani' is used as generic term, referring to Hausa/Fulani and all

those people who share some cultural and religious affinity with them especially the Bororos who are the main subject of discussion in this paper.

Aspect of Socio Economic Interrelationship

A number of factors significantly helped shaped the inter-group relation between the Fulani/Bororo and the host communities in Asa Local Government. First, the long established commercial relationship remained a binding force in their relationships. Many Fulani families continued to share the same compounds with the Yoruba where their grandparents used to camp during the pre-colonial kola trade days. The Fulani/Bororo-Yoruba compounds at Budo-Egba/Otte illustrate this kind of mix residential set up. The Fulani/Bororo and Yoruba residents of the area interviewed considered the social cohesion as one developed over the centuries, recalling the memories of the kola trade period.

The social ties continued to wax stronger with the construction of railway lines linking Lagos and North, and the change of pattern of colonial trade with the emphasis on cash crops such as groundnut and cotton. Both the Yoruba kola and European goods dealers and their Hausa customers mutually shifted their commercial base from Kambi/Oloru to Eiyenkorin. Market stalls and plots of land at the Ogbondoroko railway station were equitable shared to both the Yoruba and Hausa. That made Ogbondoroko village to rapidly transform into a significant commercial centre, especially with the flourishing of company like Olam Farm where Cashew nuts that was brought from South West by trailers could either be sold up or transported by rail to the Northern Nigeria. The Olam Farm, adjacent to the rail station, became a depot for cash crops produced in the North.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Nigeria as a country has had a checkered history of intergroup relations shaped by the existing system of material production and appropriation in the country. Therefore, to strengthen the shattered socio-economic and political relationship between and among the constituent ethno-linguistic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and the other minority ethnic groups) in the country, there must be a restructuring and redirecting of the system of material production and appropriation in the country. The system that gives credence to exploitation and marginalization of the resources of a weak ethnic group by a more dominant and powerful ethnic group

does not encourage a harmonious intergroup relations in the country and so, should be reconsidered.

Conclusion

The conflicts in the country may assume ethnic, political or religious coloration as deemed fit by the elites, the fact remains that outside the struggle for the material condition of existence, the relationship between the various ethno- religious groups in the country will be more of cooperation than competition, peaceful co-existence than conflict/hostility. It is good to note that one of the vital tools that helps sustain this cordial relationship is, no doubt, Islam, which provides a rallying point for both groups that incidentally are mainly Muslim. The religion also influences the rate of intermarriages amongst the Yoruba and Hausa communities

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