HISTORICIZING THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN YORUBA - FULANI RELATIONSHIP IN OTTE, ASA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KWARA STATE, 1970 TO DATE

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Abstract
Inter-ethnic relations between Hausa/Fulani pastoralists and Yoruba farmers have endured for centuries. This paper examines the phenomenon of inter-group relations amongst the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani in Otte community, Asa L. G. A, Kwara State, Nigeria. Otte is a traditional town in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara state, Nigeria. Otte shares boundary with Oyo state. It was founded in the 19th century by Yoruba people. It became the commercial center for other surrounding towns and villages. Historically, Nigerian ethnic groups had achieved a high level of integration prior to the colonial conquest. Long distance trade, migratory movements and socioeconomic inter-group relations had helped made ethnic and cultural integration an integral part in the evolution of modern Nigeria. In this paper, an attempt was made to scrutinize some popular, but defective, assertions relating to inter-group relations, ethnicity and national integration in such multicultural societies as Nigeria. The paper seeks to investigate the socio economic relationship between the indigenes and the settlers in the Nigerian societies with a particular reference to Otte community. The paper equally confirms the assertion that the indigene/non-indigene dichotomy has posed greater challenges to the cohesion of Nigerian state and its citizens. The paper therefore recommends among others the development and formation of *more cooperative societies among the people which will also enhance mutual and communal relationship.*

Keywords: Islam, Role, Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, Relationship

Introduction

Inter-ethnic relations between Fulani pastoralists and Yoruba farmers have endured for centuries. Land use in Otte and Budo Egba towns 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 among 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. According to Guyer: Negotiation took non-verbal forms when the herdboys behaved as if they did not understand the angry shouting of a farmer trying to head off the steady march or the aimless meandering of a dozen cows' right through his planted crops. People said that there were murders over cattle disputes, and farmers quickly discovered that the only effective way to drive the herders out of specific regions was surreptitiously to poison a cow or two.

In southwestern Nigeria, the establishment of cattle ranches did not curb the high mortality among cattle herds. The drought of the 1970s spurred the migration of more aggressive Bororo Fulani who permanently settled among the Yoruba. Relationships became more hostile than in the past. 6 In addition to cattle destruction of crops, Fulani herders were alleged to have engaged in double dealing with the Yoruba chiefs who entrusted them with cattle: One prominent Yoruba chief had his entire Fulani-guarded herd of at least 20 heads simply walk off one day along the trails into the more distant savannas. Regularly, the Yoruba-owned cattle in the herds meet with unfortunate 'accidents' such as snake-bites. (Guyer, 1997). Bororo Fulani migration further created a vicious circle of conflicts over dwindling natural resources. There are interlocking factors of conflicts over grazing rights and farmlands: conflicts arise from competition over cattle markets and hiccups of compensation, as well as the rise of armed banditry and other social crimes. Bororo Fulani were accused of perpetrating atrocities against Yoruba hosts. Bororo Fulani youths were accused of rape cases and molestation of Yoruba ladies as well as armed banditry. It was further alleged that Bororo Fulani robbed their town Fulani kinsmen of the proceeds from sales of cattle (Bamgbose, 2002). These crimes, though not associated with conflict over grazing issues, provoked the resentment of the Yoruba against the Bororo Fulani whom they considered as perpetrators of crime, violence and pervasive insecurity in their midst. Many Yoruba were allegedly injured and lost their money and properties (Ogunsanya and Popoola, 2000). In most cases, community vigilante groups arrested the Bororo Fulani perpetrating crimes on the highways and handed them over to the police. The criminal tendencies escalated the prospects for conflicts. The mutual trust between Fulani and Yoruba was systematically disappearing as Bororo Fulani often reported that the cow kept in custody by the Yoruba disappeared, was killed by

snakes or crushed by vehicles. This type of case brought mistrust in commercial transactions and peaceful cohabitation. There was competition as Yoruba accused Bororo Fulani of destroying their farms and monopolizing the cattle market. Indeed, conflict over the control of markets was abounding in Nigeria between migrants and the host community. An example of this was the periodic conflict between Yoruba and Hausa traders at the Mile 12 Yam Market in Lagos.

Background Information of Asa Local Government

Asa Local Government is one of the oldest in Kwara State, Nigeria. It was created in 1976 with it's headquarter in Afon. The Local Government Area has 12 wards and shares boundary with Osun State in several locations. It has an area of 1,286 km2 and a population of 1,26,435 at the 2006 population census. (National Population Commission, 2006). The categories of people living in the rural areas of Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State include farmers, hunters, petty traders, teachers, cattle-rearers, Local health workers, Local Government workers, artisans, politicians, students, etc. The rural communities in the Local Government Area include: Afon, Igbo-Nla, Igbo-Aran, Oguntoyinbo, Otte-Oja, Aboto-Oja, Okeso, Ballah, Alapa, Laduba, Ogbondoroko, Olowu Oko, Lasoju, Igbo Aran, Eiyenkorin, Budo Egba, Ilaji Garuba, Idiapa Sadadi, Ago Oja, Ila Oja, Faje, Budo Are, Aladera Magaji, Akunyun and Elebute. Others are: Iyana Alakuko, Gaa-Lamba, Okepete, Pampo, Apata Ajele, Ogiri, Onile Aro, Ajuwon, Efue, Gaa Abuyanrin, Berikodo Dongari, Gbaja, Ologbo, Agboyi, Ilaji Owode, Owode Alagbon, Oniyere, Ajagusi, Budo Adio,Onikeke, Yede, Oja Iya, Kupola, Awe, Agbonna, Jagun and Agbolu. Yoruba and Fulani are the major languages of the people of the Local Government Area. The major economic activities of the people are farming, trading, carving, cattle rearing, hunting, and garri processing. The major festivals include; Egungun Festival and Alagbe Acrobat. (www.kwarastate.gov.ng/asa/lga, 2011).

Climate and Vegetation of Otte

The town is within the tropical humid climatic zone of Nigeria, which is generally characterized by high rainfall and high relative humidity. This is attributable to the prevalence of moisture laden tropical maritime air mass over the state for about nine months in a year. The mean relative humidity varies from 66.2% in January to 88.4% in July (Abubakar, 2000). The rainfall shows a double-maxima distribution reaching the peak during the months of June and September. The average monthly rainfall for the state ranges between 7.1mm in the month of January to 208.27mm in the month of June. The mean annual temperature is 260C; although with some variations over time. The mean diurnal minimum temperature varies from 21.80C in December to 24.340C in April while the mean diurnal maximum temperature varies from 33.920C to 37.10C at the onset of the wet season (March and April) (Abubakar, 2000).

On the basis of climatic features, the town is characterized by two distinct weather seasons: the wet and dry. The wet season marked by lower mean

temperature, higher total rainfall and higher relative humidity is usually experienced between the months of February and October. However, little dry season is sometimes experienced in August, a phenomenon characterized by drastic reduction in the frequency and intensity of rainfall and referred to as 'August break'. The dry season sets in by November and persists till the end of January. It is usually accompanied by harmattan cold, brought by the prevailing north-west winds.

Cultural Life of the People of Otte

Oral information of Mallam Musa suggests that Otte is a cosmopolitan town inhabited by Yoruba and few Fulani who lives with them. The Otte people are known to be noble, peace-loving, transparent and accommodating people. John N. Paden posits in his seminal biography of the late Sir Ahmad Bello entitled "values and leadership in Nigeria" that two things make Yoruba people more distinct from any other people in Nigeria, and those two things are their undying clamour for peace and their impenetrable culture. It is interesting to note that the observation made by Paden in his book about three decades ago is still associated with the Otte people today, most especially their cultures that are still kept intact. One of these undying cultures according to Paden is accommodation of strangers. In addition, the Otte people have emerged as a unique breed of people among South West Nigerians; the culture shows how much they have come to terms with the universe.

According to oral tradition, Fulani migration to otte began in the 19th century. Two categories of Fulani lived in Otte: Sokoto Fulani and Bororo Fulani from Katsina, Nigeria. The Bororo Fulani are those who graze their cattle all around and mostly live in secluded huts in the villages. They do not live in the town like those who settled among the Yoruba host community. Their impact was often felt in the town during festivities and celebrations that demanded cows. There were interrelationship between Hausa, Yoruba and Fulani. The Fulani live within the town and are concentrated largely at the Kara (the cattle market), basically along ogbomoso road in Orile Igbon. In some cases the offices of the Fulani Ardo and Sarkin Hausa are located at the Kara.

Fulani contributed to the commercial development of the town. According to Alhaji Abdullahi, a Fulani leader," we cannot compare Otte with other places we have been. The land is suitable for our cattle and the people of Otte are nice to us. As far as I'm concerned there is no other place for me to go except my future generation decides to leave on their own". Bororo Fulani pastoralists live in the rural areas in makeshift settlements which enabled them to evade justice after committing havoc on the farms. They were often intercepted through the seizure of their cattle.

The major factor for conflict between Fulani pastoralists and Yoruba farmers was identified as the incursion of cattle onto farms which destroyed either planted or harvested crops. It was alleged that the Fulani often graze their animals over the farm which causes destruction of farmland. Fulani herd boys

often allowed cattle to graze farms causing havoc on planted and harvested crops. Fulani boys were contracted to graze at least 25 to 30 cattle. The boys rear the cattle for at least five months and in return receive a cow and a specific amount of money determined by the individual owners. The Fulani often revolted and further provoked the farmers when the cases were reported. This usually led to conflicts.

Economic Relationship between the Community and the Host

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. Oral source confirmed 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.

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According to Ustaz, in 1997 a group of Bororo Fulani expelled from Oyo town migrated to Otte and caused more havoc to farmers. They were alleged to be aggressive in nature and never felt remorse after their cattle destroyed farms. In 1998 a Yoruba man was butchered by the Fulani pastoralists over the case of farm incursion by cattle. Yoruba youths mobilized themselves and attacked their various camps (Gaa Fulani Bororo). The conflict led to the intervention of the Kwara State Commissioner of police, the Emir of Ilorin and the Fulani Ardo (head of Fulani) which led to the formation of the peace committee. The Ardo assisted the committee to identify the accused Bororo Fulani whose cattle destroyed farms and wounded the farmer. The committee inspected the farm and quantified the value of the damage to enable the pastoralist to compensate the farmer. Composite cases were referred to the police or the newly initiated PCRC Otte. However, Yoruba farmers alleged that the Fulani often bribe the police and the traditional ruler to deny them justice and compensation for their farms destroyed by the cattle. Administration of justice was protracted, truncated and often denied. They reverted to pervasive forms of justice by forming the local wing of the OPC. In the event of conflicts between farmers and the Fulani, the OPC were mobilized to unleash violence on the latter through the use of arms and the oro traditional ritual. 12 The rise of armed banditry in the area has been associated with the Bororo Fulani who violently stole the cattle of their settled Fulani folks, raped women, waylaid and killed traders.

Influence of Islam on the Peaceful Co-Existence between the Host and the Fulani Community

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). 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) 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 Dioula 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 Otte and Budo Egba communities. Thus, the subsequent Fulani/Bororo communities established in Otte and Budo Egba 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.

Conclusion

Egwu (2009) has pertinently observed that democratization process has impacted in the rising tide of ethno-communal and religious violence in Nigeria. The return to civilian rule in 1999 has raised the level of ethnic and religious consciousness amongst Nigerians. In some cases, as was the case in Jos in 1994 and 2001, the misunderstanding could be due to public or political appointment in which citizens of a given area would be divided on religious lines. This paper surveyed the role played by Islam in the harmonious relationship between the Yoruba nad Hausa/Fulani communities with a particular reference to the pastoral Bororos. The paper has established the fact that Muslim scholars in general and traditional leaders of Otte State in particular, have had a long-standing opportunity of participating in decision making and maintenance of peace and orderliness because of their specialized knowledge. It should be noted that the Community leaders of both ethnic groups plays an important role in conflict management in the town and the environs. Their quick intervention has helped to forestall or minimize intra- and inter-group conflicts, which have a potential for snowballing into wider conflagrations. A notable example is the Hausa-Yoruba clashes in Otte as sited in the body of this work in which leaders of religious and ethnic communities have had to interact to take steps to avert reprisal killings in the event of fresh attacks on the Fulani communities. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to act fast enough to prevent violent clashes. Nevertheless, the Alangua of Budo Egba and Otte has had to convene peace meetings with leaders of the various groups in the communities to avert crisis and preach for local diplomacy.

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