



Research Paper

Inter-Religious Peace, Tolerance and Co-existence in Northern Nigeria: A perspective Study on Muslim-Christian Relations in Sokoto Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

Peace is very essential because without peace no meaningful development can take place. Every religion preaches peace, tolerance, loves and co-existence. This research aimed at finding factors which engendersustainable peace among Muslims host and Christian settler communities in Sokoto metropolis as a case study. For the purpose of this research work, the descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect data and inferential statistics was employed for data analysis. Meanwhile, purposive sampling technique was used by the researcher to select six (6) areas within the metropolis which comprises seventy five (75) people each from KofarAtiku, KofarMarke, Old Airport and Hajiya Halima Area. This is due to significant presence of Muslims at KofarMarke and KofarAtiku Area as well as presence of Christians at Old Airport and Hajiya Halima Area. Then, simple random sampling was employed to select 300 sample from the various areas while questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and only 247 were retrieved. The study revealed that, obedience to law and legacy handed down by Usmanu Danfodiyo, leader of the Sokoto Caliphate are the leading factors for peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims within Sokoto Metropolis. It concluded that, there is need to sustain the relative peace in the metropolis through religious education among followers of the two faith. Also, it was recommended that, religious leaders should endeavour to make their preaching persuasive rather than inciting or insulting. They should mind and weigh their utterances and actions.

KEY WORDS: Inter-Religious Peace, Tolerance, Co-existence, Muslims, Christians

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I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is an instrument of building peace, enlightenment, development and inspiring one for co-existence not only among its adherence but also outside the fold of its faith and ideology. It is a concept that promotes human welfare and better spiritual well-being for man (Sahee, 2013). Over the decades, some part of northern Nigeria experienced ethno-religious conflict, which led to loss of lives, and destruction of properties. Those states that become fragile and breeding ground of these kinds of social milieu include Jos, Southern Kaduna, Bauchi as well as Taraba. The present Boko-Haram factors, which devastated peace in Bornu and Adamawa is a clear testimony on how terrorism caused massive inflow of internally displaced person and refugees with unprecedented humanitarian service. Nevertheless, the situation in some part of the northern Nigeria like Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina and Kebbi states are incomparable phenomenon. This is because these places have not been experience frequent delicate ethno-religious and inter-religious conflict if compare to those fragile States. The fact here is that Muslims-Christian relations has been growing rapidly as a result of building bridges through dialogue, mutual understanding, the art of spirit of brotherhood and cooperation between themselves.

Sokoto as the center of learning and capital of the Caliphate founded by Muhammadu Bello in 1809 as new military base for the Jihad. Although Sokoto was in existence before turning it into center for planning the Jihad (Sale, 183). No doubt, the position of Sokoto as the capital of the caliphate facilitated its development as a leading center of Islamic education in West Africa in the 19th century (Mahdi, 2004). It is, however, imperative to note that the Caliphate within its one hundred years of survival left an exemplary trends, creating an enabling environment for peaceful co-existence with the traditional people (i.e. 'maguzawa' in Hausa language) who refused to accept the religion of Islam. In the light of this, the early 19th century indicated that contact with the

Christian European, the level of tolerance and accommodation exhibited by the Caliphate leadership to the European missionary is worthy of examining, assessing and emulating in the contemporary era. The same spirit of hospitality and generosity had been applied to other tribes and ethnic groups who lived without discrimination peacefully as brothers keepers with no record of conflict and violence between them. Not only that, even the Christian missionary organizations that operated in Sokoto since the early 1930s were treated with high level of maturity, understanding and accommodated by the emirs as well as the host community (Juanidu, 2013).

Problem Statement

This research work is carried out in order to find out what are the factors motivated the inter-religious peace, tolerance and co-existence in Northern Nigeria, with the view to understand long lasting Muslim-Christian relation in Sokoto metropolis. Previous works have given impetus to the inter-religious conflicts that caused mayhem to the socio-economic setting of many societies in the western region especially in Kaduna, Jos and Bauchi. Those researches failed to identify in some part of the Northern, which experienced inter-religious peace and tolerances particularly in Sokoto state of the Northwestern part of the country. Previous writings have connected this peaceful co-existence with the inherent legacies left by the Sokoto Caliphate. But that was the 19th century period; but there are other reason behind this mutual relations and tolerance which the research intended find out. This research, therefore, intended to investigate the peaceful co-existence that married the two religious communities for decades without conflict in the 21st century.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this research include the following:

1. To identify the remote factors that facilitates peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christian community in Sokoto metropolis.
2. To evaluate the economic and political roles in sustenance of inter-religious peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christian in Sokoto metropolis.
3. To highlight some challenges that impede on inter-religious peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christian in Sokoto metropolis.

Research Questions

1. What are the remote factors that facilitate peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christian community in Sokoto metropolis?
2. To what extend does economic and political play vital roles in sustenance of inter-religious peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christian in Sokoto metropolis?
3. What are the challenges that impede on inter-religious peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christian in Sokoto metropolis.

Conceptual Framework

● **Inter-Religious Peace**

The issue of inter-religious conflict is contentious, dynamic in context, crucial process, complexity in nature. It is problematic in understanding its scope and parameter. A number of literatures have extensively conceptualized the inter-religious peace and tolerance in a broader sense. The fact that scholars perceived it entirely different, because the magnanimous of inter-religious conflict is central of discourse from window of multi-disciplinary approaches. The point here is contextual in the sense that historian and sociologist differed in term of conclusion on the actual root of the conflict. This is because of the divergent perspectivism in relation to human social behaviour and the dialogue between past and present antecedents that cannot be ignore in critical objectivity. Inter-religious peace viewed as an intentional structured encounter between Muslims and Christians. A conversation of the two dominant religious in Nigeria seeking to express their free opinion accurately and to listen respectively. (James, 2013). In another word, inter-religious peace has been term as dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Others see it as contentious, tiny misconception, which can create rancor especially if one religion wanted to call attention on other on a societal issue. So, if such religion is misinterpreted due to misunderstanding of stand issue, in that case, culminated into un-necessary tension. Relevancy is another central factor which played pivotal role in dominant conflict between two religions. In this perspectives one religion tries to show supremacy over one because the terrain is their domain (Hashimu, 2017). In essence, therefore, intra-religious conflict believed to be aggressive behavior between '*in-group*' and '*out-group*' (Gordon, 1967). Linville, (1988) discourse extensively on the core issue underlying root conditions and causes of '*in-group*' and '*out-group*' inter-religious 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. The path of violence including the role of stigmatization, dehumanization, moral exclusion, impunity as well as bystander interactions (Wailimann, 1998). Interfaith dialogue is essentially covering all aspect of conversations in which two or more parties seek to express their counter parts (Abubakar, 2013). The motives behind contemporary dialogue is to inculcate the art of fostering understanding, to disseminates and bridge information and communication. Dialogue is about to correct stereotypes, to work on specific problems of mutual concern, to explore avenue of understanding differences in terms of culture and tradition similarities, and to facilitate means of witness and cooperation (Abubakar, 2013).

Gerard (2009) posited that religion does not dialogue in itself but people do. The reason here is that inter-religious dialogue is simply an encounter between human subjects, not a comparison of doctrinal belief systems. He, however, argued that dialogue is an event of inter-subjective communication (meaning to say the element of bias in dissemination of information). Those involved in such dialogue are not simply intellectual beings but also spiritualmorally, bodily affective creatures. Family, relatives, people, nation, culture, religion no doubt have established their identities. These identities have also been formed in a history of relationship with and too often conflict between other people and tradition. Jan (2000) belief that religious peace is nothing but interplay of dynamic relationships of groups and individuals claiming to follow various religious means. They should adopt solving method in an existing conflicts between them and out their religion in a non-violent.

Religious Tolerance

Religion in every society serves as an instrument of oneness, togetherness, brotherhood, cohesion, unity and tolerating one another for the progress of peace. It is, also used to control the social and spiritual of the people in a community and in wider society (Nkechi, 2013; Momoh, 1989; Njoku, 2013). Tolerance has been described as the willingness to accept the opinion or behaviour of others that one may not like or agree with even though it causes pain or suffering for the purpose of peace and harmony. It also referred as the act of fairness to others with diverse opinions on issues be it religious or political. It however examined as the showing an attitude of respect or endurance towards others' opinion even if they are obviously wrong (Sahee, 2013; Nkechi, 2013).

From the perspective point of view, religious tolerance has distinct characteristics include individual freedom of thinking, worship freely, propagation of one's religion or renunciation of one's religion. The central issue here is that tolerance is between an authority or majority and a minority group. The fact is that majority allowed minority live with their life based on their beliefs, on the condition that they will respect the constituted authority. This indicates that as long as the minority accepts their inferior state and they are not going to challenge the constituted authority, they can be tolerated. The relationship is based on power, subordination, domination and absolute control over all. Concisely, religious tolerance has to do with the ability to appreciate spiritual values, beliefs and practices which are different from your own (Thowfeek, 2014; Shehu, 2016; Mary, 2014).

It isobvious that, there are various groups and organization that are governmental and non-governmental in contemporary societies that are striving for peace and non-violence. Some of these organizations carryout the task explicitly and consciously, through professionalism while some work indirectly through various networks, engaging personal relationship, and participation in the life affairs of the community. The main central component of peaceful cohabitation in the world is impossible to achieve without taking into consideration religion as an importance element that forms the thinking and behaviour of people (Jan, 2000).

Sokoto as the center of Islamic knowledge and capital of the caliphate has demonstrated starling qualities of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence as a result of inherent legacy handed down by Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo and his lieutenants. Christians are almost found every strategic area in the metropolis living peacefully conducting their businesses and practices religious activities at various worship places. It istherefore, against this background this research intended to explore the fundamental factors that built strong and long lasting peaceful co-existence and relationship among Muslims-Christian in Sokoto metropolis.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is survey research design. Survey research design is probably the best method available to social scientists interested in collecting original data for population too large to observe directly Babbie (1986). The use of survey in the present study is justified since the study is descriptive, explanatory and has individual as the unit of analysis for assessment. Survey are also frequently analyzed and reported by such classification as age, sex, location, and income. Meanwhile, Likert scale was adopted to explore information and encourage easier access to response while hypothesis was tested using chi-square technique.

Study Area

Sokoto state has a projected population of 3.7 million people based on a 2006 census made up of two ethnic groups namely, Fulani and Hausa. Sokoto town, the capital of Sokoto state, has a population of approximately 2.5 million. Apart from Fulani and Hausa, there are the Zabarmawa and Tuareg minorities in the local government border areas. All these groups speak Hausa as a common language. Fulfulde is spoken by the Fulani. The name Sokoto (which is the modern/anglicized version of the local name, Sakkwato) is of Arabic origin, representing sooq, 'market' in English. It is also known as Sakkwato, (BirninShaihu da Bello) or "Sokoto, Capital of Shaihu and Bello" Bello Umar Maikaset (Mayaki, 2017).

Population

Sokoto is a major city located in the extreme northwest of Nigeria, near the confluence of the Sokoto River and the Rima River. The metropolis comprises Wamakko, Sokoto North, Sokoto South and some parts of Kware Local Government Areas (LGA). Meanwhile, According to latest revision of UN World Urbanization Prospects, the estimated 2021 population of Sokoto Metropolis is 662,173 (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/sokoto-population>). This include Muslims and Christian indigenes and residents across the city.

Sampling and Sample Size

Purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) areas within the metropolis which comprises seventy five (75) people each from KofarAtiku, KofarMarke, Old Airport and Hajiya Halima Area. Daramola (2006) explained that purposive sampling technique is a procedure in which a researcher decisively selects certain groups as samples due to their relevance to the investigation under consideration. To this end, significant presence of Muslims at KofarMarke and KofarAtikuArea as well as presence of Christians at Old Airport and Hajiya Halima Area justifies the purposive sampling employed. Finally, simple random sampling was employed by the researcher to select 300 respondents from the various areas. To Ofo (1994), simple random sampling is a method of selecting a sample in such a way that members of the population have equal chances of being selected. The selection of one subject has no influence on the selection or non-selection of the other. However, only 247 questionnaires were retrieved.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents.

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage %) |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| Male | 183 | 74.1 |
| Female | 64 | 25.9 |
| Total | 247 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 1 represents gender distribution of respondents; it was observed that, 183 respondents (74.1%) were male and 64 respondents (25.9%) were female. Majority of the respondents were male.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Duration in Sokoto Metropolis

| Duration | Frequency | Percentage %) |
|------------------|------------|---------------|
| Less than 1 year | 26 | 10.5 |
| 1-5 years | 78 | 31.6 |
| 5-10 years | 104 | 42.1 |
| Above 10 years | 39 | 15.8 |
| Total | 247 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by duration in Sokoto Metropolis. It was observed that, 26 respondents (10.5%) have spent less than a year in the metropolis, 78 respondents (31.6%) were within 1-5 years, 104 respondents were within 5-10 years and 39 respondents (15.8%) were above 10 years. Majority of the respondents have spent 5-10 years in Sokoto Metropolis.

Table 3: Religious Affiliation of Respondents.

| Religion | Frequency | Percentage %) |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| Islam | 128 | 51.8 |
| Christianity | 119 | 48.2 |
| Total | 247 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents by religious affiliation. It was observed that, 128 respondents (51.8%) are Muslims and 119 respondents (48.2%) are Christians. Majority of the respondents are Muslims.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Area of Residence

| Area | Frequency | Percentage %) |
|---------------|------------|---------------|
| KofarAtiku | 62 | 25.1 |
| KofarMarke | 59 | 23.9 |
| Hajiya Halima | 64 | 25.9 |
| Old Airport | 62 | 25.1 |
| Total | 247 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents by area of residence. It was observed that, 62 respondents (25.1%) reside at KofarAtiku area, 59 respondents (23.9%) reside at KofarMarke, while 64 (25.9%) and 62 (25.1%) respondents reside at Hajiya Halima and old Airport Area respectively. Majority of the respondents reside at HajiyaHalimaArea.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by factors that facilitate peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christian in Sokoto metropolis

| Factors | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|-------------------------------|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| S/ N | | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) |
| 1 | legacy handed down by Usmanu Danfodiyo, leader of the SokotoCaliphate remain the leading factors for peaceful co-existence between Muslim and Christian | 72 (29.1) | 68 (27.5) | 44 (17.8) | 30 (12.1) | 33 (13.4) | 247 (100) |
| 2 | The good tradition and culture exhibit by the Muslim in the metropolis | 61 (24.7) | 73 (29.6) | 36 (14.6) | 37 (15.0) | 40 (16.2) | 247 (100) |
| 3 | because both Muslims and Christian in the metropolis are law abiding citizens | 84 (34.0) | 91 (36.8) | 36(14.6) | 36 (14.6) | - | 247 (100) |
| 4 | Adherence to religious teachings of brotherhood and peaceful co-existence | 61 (24.7) | 62 (25.1) | 44 (17.8) | 46 (18.6) | 35 (14.2) | 247 (100) |
| 5 | The two faith shun intolerable act, interference and inflammatory statement. | 59 (23.9) | 63 (25.5) | 42 (17.0) | 47 (19.0) | 36 (14.6) | 247 (100) |
| 6 | Muslims hospitality and high self-discipline toward settler communities is the reason behind this mutual coexistence | 62 (25.1) | 71 (28.7) | 39 (15.8) | 37 (15.0) | 38 (25.4) | 247 (100) |
| Average Percentage (%) | | 26.9 | 28.9 | 16.3 | 15.7 | 12.2 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 5 indicates the distribution of respondents by factors that facilitate peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians in Sokoto Metropolis. It was observed that, obedience to law and the legacy handed

down by Usmanu Danfodiyo, leader of the Sokoto Caliphate are the leading factors for peaceful co-existence with 34.0% and 29.1% in strong affirmative. Moreover, majority of the respondents agreed to the factors highlighted in the research with 28.9% respondents.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Economic and Political roles in sustenance of Inter-religious Peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Sokoto Metropolis

| Economic and Political roles | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|-------------------------------|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| S/N | | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) |
| 1 | business opportunity and expansion of enterprises remain the reason for this long understanding between Christian and Muslims in the Sokoto Metropolis | 56 (22.7) | 80 (32.4) | 36 (14.6) | 39 (15.8) | 36 (14.6) | 247 (100) |
| 2 | state politics has given everyone level of play ground to contribute its quarter for state development | 52 (21.1) | 77 (31.2%) | 41 (16.6) | 39 (15.8) | 38 (25.4) | 247 (100) |
| 3 | The fact that political crisis in the state has never affected Christian in the state because of political awareness | 43 (17.4) | 68 (27.5) | 44 (17.8) | 41 (16.6) | 47 (19.0) | 247 (100) |
| Average Percentage (%) | | 20.4 | 30.4 | 16.3 | 16.2 | 19.7 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 6 represents the distribution of respondents by role of politics and economy in sustenance of peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Sokoto Metropolis. It revealed that, business opportunity and state politics contributed peaceful co-existence with 32.4% of respondents in affirmative while 31.2% also believed that state politics has given everyone a level playing ground. However, majority of the respondents (30.4%) agreed with the roles highlighted in the research.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents by challenges that impede on inter-religious peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christian in Sokoto metropolis.

| Challenges | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|-------------------------------|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| S/N | | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) | Frequency (%) |
| 1 | Subtle discrimination and marginalization among member of the two faith | 35 (14.2) | 61 (24.7) | 44 (17.8) | 62 (25.1) | 46 (18.6) | 247 (100) |
| 2 | Inciting preaching by some religious leaders against opposite faith | 36 (14.6) | 59 (23.9) | 42 (17.0) | 63 (25.5) | 47 (19.0) | 247 (100) |
| 3 | Inconveniences during worship by some members of the two faith | 38 (25.4) | 62 (25.1) | 39 (15.8) | 71 (28.7) | 37 (15.0) | 247 (100) |
| Average Percentage (%) | | 18.55% | 24.6 | 16.9 | 26.4 | 17.5 | 100% |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 7 shows the distribution of respondents by challenges that impede on inter-religious peace and cooperation between Muslims and Christian in Sokoto metropolis. It was indicated that, 28.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed that, there are inconveniences generated during worship by some members of the two faith even as 24.7% agreed that, there is subtle discrimination and marginalization among members of the two faith in the state. Though, about 26.4% of the respondents disagreed, 24.6% agreed with the challenges highlighted in the research.

III. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The above findings were revealed:

1. Obedience to law and legacy handed down by Usmanu Danfodiyo, leader of the Sokoto Caliphate are the leading factors for peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims within Sokoto Metropolis.
2. Business opportunity and state politics contributed to peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims within Sokoto Metropolis. This is achieved through a level playing ground to everyone.
3. Though, a significant number of the respondents agreed with the challenges highlighted in the research, majority actually disagreed.

IV. CONCLUSION

Religious tolerance is a veritable tool for peaceful co-existence in a plural religious society like Sokoto Metropolis. Without doubt, the presence of considerable religious tolerance has been the major factor responsible for Inter-Religious Peace, Tolerance and Co-existence in the state. Nevertheless, there is need to sustain the relative peace through sustained religious education and sensitization among followers of the two faith.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. Religious leaders should endeavour to make their preaching persuasive rather than inciting or insulting. They should mind and weigh their utterances and actions.
2. Dialogue should be used as an effective weapon in conflict resolution, not only between Christians and Muslims, but among all religionists, internally and externally (inter and intra). When dialogue is adopted with full determination for peaceful coexistence, violence can be excluded to a great extent.
3. There is a Need for the Development of Early Warning Signals on Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Co-existence to timely address cases of religious intolerance before degenerating into conflict.

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