

INTER-GROUP RELATIONS: STUDY OF AFO AND GWANDARA PEOPLE OF NASARAWA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the concept of inter-group relations. Inter-group relations is a worldwide phenomenon which portrays to a very large extent the nature of relationship which exist among people of different cultural ethnic and religious background. It depicts and exposed the extent to which one society influences the other. This phenomenon is based on social, economic, and political factors. Inherent in the society. Although some society employs the instrument of violence in dealing with the problems due to fear of expansion and betrayal, the general factor underlying inter-group relations as a phenomenon still rest, primarily on the mutual relation which exist, between the Afo and Gwandara, is such a classical examples of mutual relationship. This study will contribute immensely to a deeper understanding of social-political and economic historical background and development of these group and how each influences the activities of the other. This study particularly examines interactions between the Afo and Gwandara. Such as cultural diffusion, cultural acculturation, language assimilation and adaptation, through trade links and conflicts.

PREAMBLE

This study explores the historical, cultural, and socio-economic lives of the Afo and Gwandara peoples of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The Afo, primarily found in Kokona, Nasarawa, Toto and Keffi are an agrarian people with deep cultural ties to other Nupoid-speaking groups. Meanwhile, the Gwandara, historically linked to Kano, migrated to the region during the 17th century, rejecting the spread of Islam and preserving their traditional religious practices. Both groups have experienced socio-cultural transformation through interactions with Islam, Christianity, and modern influences, while maintaining strong traditional identities, including their unique festivals and agricultural rituals. This study also highlights the linguistic distinctions of the Afo and Gwandara languages, placing them within the larger context of Nigerian languages. The Afo belong to the Benue-Congo language family, while the Gwandara language is part of the Chadic subgroup of the Afroasiatic family. The research provides a comparative analysis of their political and religious systems, emphasizing how these ethnic groups have adapted to external pressures, including colonization, urbanization, and religious movements, while retaining core aspects of their heritage. The study aims to contribute to the understanding of Nigeria's ethnic diversity, particularly how indigenous groups like the Afo and Gwandara have balanced modernization with cultural preservation. It offers a comprehensive examination of their historical migrations, cultural practices, socio-economic activities, and religious syncretism, supported by oral traditions, historical records, and linguistic studies. The findings reveal the resilience of the Afo and Gwandara people in maintaining their identities amidst changing political and social landscapes in Nasarawa State.

Key Words: Inter-Group Relations, Afo, Gwandara, Nasarawa State, Linguistics, Cultural Heritage.

1. Introduction

The Study deals with the migration of the Afo, their interrelationship with Gwandara, the economic activities of the people and their social political organization. The Afo have many

nomenclatures. They are also called the Ajiri, the Eloyi, and the Ebe.

It has been noted earlier that Afo had no written records before the 18th century. Therefore, the major source of reconstructing

the history of the people is oral traditions. While some of the oral traditions appear frivolous for lack of grounds and other corroborative evidences, however, some of them could be analyzed using some other supplementary sources. Two main traditions seemed to have gained more popularity among the Afo. One of the traditions is concerned about the beginning of Afo as a people in their present places of abode. The second one traces their origin to the fourteenth century Ngazargamo¹. Kana speculated that this was the period when the Afo people were formed and as an ethnic group. But what ever happened was shrouded in traditions of different versions without reference to dates.

The history of the Afo people who are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nasarawa State today is said to date back to the 14th century AD when they arrived at the present places of abode. According to Kana: "The Afo people originated from the Borno Empire of Modern Borno State, on the eastern part of Northern Nigeria, a considerable distance from the present Afo homeland.

Some Afo people claim a tradition of origin conterminous with that of the Gwandara, that their ancestor had a common origin with the Gwandara's. According to this tradition, the Afo together with the Gwandara people migrated into northern Nigeria from the east they refer to to as Yemen, east of Mecca, as a result of religious persecution on the onset of Islamic propagation beyond Saudi Arabia. That the name Afo originated from a man called Eloyi who was said to be a brother of the Galadima of Ngazargamu. They started their migration from the Arabian Peninsula and first settled in Yemen. They later continued with the migration to the Kanem Borno Empire where they with a Kanuris for many years. While in Borno Empire, they live in a popular historical place called Angban in Ngazargamu in the year 1350 Mai Ali Ghaji Dunama was then on the throne of the Empire. However, the peaceful relationship which the group once enjoyed with their Kanuri neighbours later grew sour as a result of leadership tussle. This further necessitated their migration to the Kwarafa

Empire where they met other ethnic groups such as Jukun, Angas, Geomai, Alago, Odoma, Agatu, etc who have similar cultural traits with them. Afo people did not only stop there but being a tribe which so cherished independence and also for reasons of finding better land for settlement, they decided to leave Kwararafa for its present settlement in the present Odege, Loko and Agwada Development Area in Nasarawa State. Oral tradition has it that the Afo People first settled at Agwada, Agowa Kana and Apawu. Because of insufficiency of farm land, some of them decided to move towards the bank of River Benue in search of farm land, coupled with the feeling of independence chiefdom a paramount chief for the whole Afo tribe. Today Afo community consists, of many walled villages that are living independent of each other. These are: Kana, Onda, Agyiguwu, Epowu Agwada, Endo, Agaza, Ombi, Agazo, Odege (Mbeki and Mbeji), Eyita, Agbodama, Eyenu, Knivo, Usha, Odeni (Kwogba and Ena), Akum, Ogamu, Apura, Obgba, Onogboh, Ankewa, Kana, Ogeini Opgapa, Itta and others. Around 1835 AD, there were efforts to unite all the chiefdoms of Afo into an empire. Such effort could not materialize as a result of the series of wars waged on Afo people by Nasarawa and Keffi emirates that really brought a threat to the unity of Afo towns, until in 1858 AD. When the 10 years' old boy succeeded in killing Umoru Makama Dogo the founder and first ruler of Nasarawa emirate Umoru Makama was killed with a poisonous arrow at a place called Ajiri in Ankewa village. This event marked the return of peace and unity among Afo people.

In 1957 when the British ruler allowed democratic elements into the Nigeria constitution and a hot pressure was put on them to grant independence for Afo people, the first son of Afo, Alhaji Muhammad Wada (late) was appointed as the District Head of Odege in 1957-64. This event marked the return of independence Afo people. In June 1980, Odege District was given recognition as Chiefdom by Governor Solomon Danship Lar, and the first Osu Ajiri was appointed on the 13th February, 1981, in the person of his Royal Highness, Late

Alhaji Musa Okaki Odumu. His installation as a fourth-class chief took place on the fourth 4th July, 1981. He passed away on the first of July 1992 after a brief illness. His Royal Highness Alhaji Abdulrahman Oto was the second Osu Ajiri whose installation ceremony was witnessed on Saturday 24th April, 1993 as a fourth-class chief. The first Executive Governor of Nasarawa State- Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu promoted him to 2nd class chief status and later 1st class chief Feb. 2011 and died a week later. The government of Alhaji (Dr) Abdullahi Adamu also recognized Agwada and Loko as separate Chiefdoms in May 2003 with 3rd class chief status.

Location of Afo People

C. K. Meek indicated that they are located in the whole Odege, Agwada and Loko development areas. J.C. Scriortino located the Afo as spreading from the Benue to the Central district of the province. The most notable geographical feature of Afo land is the ranges of steep rocky hills where some of the Afo lived until 1918. It is a stretch of uninhabited bush area. Its most important towns are Odege-Mbeki Akun, and Udeni-Magaji. The area is richly blessed with resources such as tin and columbite most of which were mined by colonial government, found rich arable land for farming around Agbada, Kana, Odu, Onda and other places.

Afo land is predominantly an agricultural area with arable farming as the main occupation of the inhabitants. Both males and females equally cultivate the land. They produce such crops as; Yams, Guinea corn, Maize, Beniseed, Melon, Millet, Beans, groundnut, Cassava, acha, and rice. During the short period of dry season which starts from November to April the next year, people engage in hunting, fishing and trading. Afo people are famous in their arts of wood carving, crafts like weaving, also undertaken for local consumption.

Political and Legal System of Afo People

The Afo people have a unique compartmental governmental system. This hierarchical system has the following bodies; Igabo or Kusa congress. This is the highest authority headed by the Osu (chief) of the clan.

There are also the Omadaki (deputy chief), Utukkura (next to Omadaki), Eyiysu (information officer to the chief), and a few co-opted elders. This body has the legislature and the executive powers. It makes policies governing the entire clan. The next body of authority is Anga (Middle groups) this group coordinates policies or projects between the council and the youth. Eshi's concerns itself more with the spiritual initiation of male children. It is the next in power. Ashi (Youth) arranges dancing masquerades during certain festivals. It is charged with responsibility for the providing signal fire in a shrine situated within the Agirika hamlet. It also undertakes organization of communal labour particularly farming, road construction and bridge building. They water the chief houses etc. The Emeshi or Alalumu is the last in the governmental system of Afo people. This is comprised of every male child of about seven years and above, it undertakes very high and miscellaneous labours. The principal aims and objectives of this categorization are to infuse the values of the senses of responsibility into the young ones and realize the sense of respect for elders and those in authority. The names of these bodies and their functions may vary from one clan to another.

The female married folk of the clan are under Omakajiya (the Head of women). There is no hierarchical authority in the female government like that of the male counterpart. The function of this body is primarily the preparation of native liquor, sweeping of the Agirika (Hamlet surrounding) and settlement of very minor family's cases.

The Judiciary and Administration of Justice

The Judiciary system of Afo people is bounded up with religious life. The main bodies of Judiciary are: Edekudu or Iyo, Adeweji, Asheka and Agelebe (all these are masquerades dealing the spiritual cases and to tell the death of the chief or the father of the clan or village. Edekudu and Agelebe mainly adjudicate spiritual cases. The administration of Justice is upheld with high degree of devotion and dedication. Adewaji is the highest Judge. With the power Adewaji now is the people of Kuri (Apawu Udege). They have Kwozo which have

the same functions with that of Adewaji. Adewaji Adjudicated both major civil and criminal cases and investigations. Such cases of land dispute, chieftaincy strife, matrimonial misunderstandings, micro insult and assault whereas such cases meet with resistance from both complainants and defendants, Kusa simply refer the case to Adewaji or Kwozo in the case of Kuru people. Adewaji passes judgments in the presence of both females and males of the clan. After having heard from both parties "he" Scrutinizes by analyzing and finally dishes out the penalty. The pronouncement of the penalty comes after the acceptance of guilt by the offender. This is exactly in the same pattern with the modern court procedures are which the members of the jury ask "Are you guilty or not guilty?". It differs, in Afo people. A guilty person will be asked to give Enu (chicken) or cash in money of any amount) to show that he is guilty. The penalty is normally in form of giving a goat or hens and sometimes little cash, depending on the gravity of crime.

Many years ago, according to oral tradition, Adewaji used to administer criminal cases of high degree by condemning the criminal to death. Adewaji applied the method of trial by ordeal giving a concoction called "Ende" to suspects. The two parties were made to drink the "Ende" whereas innocent, the person vomited it. If guilty the person died instantly or after some days, normally within seven days. This form of administration of justice was on mostly cases of accusation of witchcraft and person on account of their magical considered to be dangerous by clan, powers

Social System of Afo People

Marriage: Marriage institution is considered as mark of self-respect, honour and sense of responsibility among Afo people. According to Meek, there is only one type of marriage system that operates among this community: Exchange marriage (Ideshi) with some lineages thus, capturing or elopement is still common. All these branches are an innovation from other ethnic groups. They described it as a form of "slavery". There was also levirate marriage- marriage of the wife or

wives of a deceased father, brother or relative. It is the custom of Afo people that the number of wives and children of a man are a symbol of their social status. One Akun Chief in 1841 was described as having about one hundred wives all living in his prestigious palace.

Objectives and Purpose of the Study

The main objectives of the research were as follows: -

This research has to examined the nature and forms of inter and intra group relations that existed among the Afo and Gwandara people of Kokona local government area. This has given the understanding of the nature of socio-political organization of Kokona LGA, some of the root causes of conflicts, political domination and marginalization and poverty in the area.

The study has also examined the nature of intergroup relations between the Afo and Gwandara people of Kokona and their neighbors Eggon, Mada, Hausa/Fulani.

The research also examined the changes that have occurred in the intra and inter group relations especially from the period of jihadist movement, and the impact of Islamic religion on the intra and inter group relations in this area.

This study has attempted an evaluation of the impact of colonialism on the intra and inter group relations in the area. Colonial impact here has very significant impacts since it profoundly affected the pre-colonial political arrangement and the relation that existed amongst the people. Some of the post-independence policies produced new intergroup relations, like grouping many people of different backgrounds into one LGA, setting up political parties, established trade-networks, the civil service, and so on.

Significance and Justification

The finding of this study has shed light on some of the dynamics of change and continuity in the state. Some forms of Inter-group relation are major trends in the development pattern of any civilized society world-over. It could lead to the harmonizing social, political, religious and cultural arena for

the progress of the groups concerned. This will go a long way in establishing acceptable and cordial relationship devoid of all kinds of misunderstanding and dissensions.

A research of this kind has come out with clear understanding of coexistence in the state Kokona LGA and the birth of a working for inter-groups relation in the area of study for the betterment not only the LGA but the state and the country at large.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study will limit itself to only interrelations amongst the people of Kokona LGA (Afo, Gwandara) from the earliest time to the colonial period. A brief reference to the post-colonial period will be made.

2. Research Methodology

This research has utilized primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are oral interviews and other relevant information's. Secondary sources are library materials, textbooks and colonial documents etc.

Methods of research included oral interviews. These will be thoroughly used in order to come out with a balanced work of higher academic value.

3. Review of Related Literature

Inter-group relations: Intel-group relation is a world-wide phenomenon obtained in every part of the world. One aspect of it is conflict. In America there has been hostility between the Whites and the Bosnia-Herzegovina is another case in which they had serious Inter-group ethnic hostilities. In Asia, especially in Iraq it has been ethnic conflicts between the Arabs and the Kurds, Shiite and Sunni. In Israel and Palestine, the Jews, Muslims and Christians have not been peaceful. Similarly, there is a fierce conflict between Muslim and Hindus. In Africa the history of Inter-group conflicts has much higher records.

In Nigeria there are many cases of inter communal clashes and many peaceful inter-group relations, In the far north the major ethnic groups are Hausa Fulani, on one hand and the Kanuri and Shuwa Arab on the other hand.

There existed a hostile as well as peaceful coexistence among them in the past, VOLUME: 8 ISSUE: 3 SEPTEMBER, 2024

but now they live largely on friendly terms. Similarly, in the south, there were many communities that co- existed peacefully while others had serious conflicts.

For instance, there were inter-group relations between the people of Igbo land and their neighbors of the Niger Delta area, the Benue valley and Benin kingdom. The review starts with primary sources.

Professor Afigbo in his book titled "the Igbo and their neighbors) drew our attention to the fact that the theme of inter-group relations in Nigeria is not a recent development of Nigerian historiography. According to him. "only the emphasis given to it and the care, sympathy and understanding with which it has been investigated varied from epoch to epoch,"⁵ This is because almost all groups in Nigeria have one form of relation or the other. There is a vast array of tradition which portrays the relations that existed between the people and their neighbor. The traditions give the different aspects of inter-group relations, which include trade, wars, among others.

It has been noted earlier that the area of study lies within the central Nigeria. The location of Afo/Gwandara in the interior of the country meant the Area has contacts with the literate world of the Christendom on the coast and Islamic world do the Northeast. These were advantages enjoyed by the southern and the northern parts of the country respectively. Because of the relative isolation of Central Nigeria from early contacts with the outside world there was no written history of the peoples of the Area before the advent of colonialism.

Indeed, as noted by Bukar Da'azumi that the Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces were the first attempt at writing the history of the area. These were based on the reports obtained from colonial officers in the process of gathering information for colonial administration. This therefore leaves oral tradition as a major source of preserving the history of the people and this indeed is a very useful source of information for reconstruction of Afo/Gwandara writing.

Most of the works done on the area were based on oral tradition. The people of

Kokona LGA just like their neighbors have been able to preserve a lot of the traditions of their migration, settlement, expansion and warfare. These constitute a major source in the writing of inter-group relations between Afo and Gwandara.

Traditions abound on the relations between the Afo of Kokona and her jihadist neighboring states of Nasarawa and Keffi. The series of wars that existed between the people are preserved in the tradition of the people. The battles, defeats, peace settlement and the eventually many relations were established between them⁷.

The Afo of Kokona have traditions regarding the different ethnic groups that exist in the area. The origin of each ethnic group and its division into distinct states/societies. The absorption of people into Afo polity among others are history richly preserved in the traditions of the people. However, they form a very rich source of information for the reconstruction of the history of the people.

There are many problems associated with these traditions. One of the problems associated with oral tradition is the loss of some information during the transmission passed from generation to generations. Some vital aspects of the story got lost. This makes it incomplete. There are individual and group biases. Objectively is difficult to attain in oral tradition. Finally, the problem of chronology makes it extremely difficult to provide any accurate dates in the accounts of traditions.

Yet, as indicated by Professor Afigbo, oral tradition remains the major source of reconstructing the history of inter-group relations between the peoples of Nigeria. It is even more so with the people of central Nigeria especially the Afo/Gwandara of Kokona LGA who never had the art of writing and presentation of information before their contact with literate world of Islam and European Missionary activities

4. Theoretical Framework

Concepts, theoretical framework and the methods and techniques of inquiry are ultimately interwoven with each other. The reasons for this are not hard to find. In addition

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to the that determine the selection and arrangement of facts and our evaluation of them, they also determine what the researcher either observes or fails to observe during the process of gathering and interpreting data. It is therefore, of utmost importance for any researcher to first of all establish the central concepts or theories regarding his subject matter before plugging into shifting sands of interpretation. 'This, it has been observed, it is ultimate wisdom in empirical research and for our purpose in this essay, interpretative history. This work attempts an exploratory analysis of conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues arising from the studies in inter-group relations in the, 20th century and the implications of this on the overall evolution of our knowledge of this important aspect of human experience, In trying to do this, the paper raises and address questions regarding how and in what ways the phenomenon was approached by those who attempted to study it and the contending issues that informed their perceptions and understanding, In attempting to achieve this, our discussion revolves round a structural frame premised on the following questions:

- i. As a human phenomenon, what is inter-group relations and how was it rationalized during the 20th century?
- ii. What are the contending conceptual and theoretical which emerged from studies in inter-group relations during the 20th century and how did these impact on the development of the Nigerian nation a plural polity?
- iii. What are the methodological problems that emerged from studies on inter-group relations in the country during the period and how did they affect research on the subject.

On the basis of the above, we attempted a conclusion, emphasizing the heuristic value of conceptual and theoretical considerations in the study of human relations.

Definition of Terms

Inter-Group Relations: Inter-group relations entail contract between interaction

groups.

Gwandara: Simply refer to Gwanda-rawa da Sallah, means dancing is more than prayers.

Afo: Refers to people that are unique in their character and behavior.

Agwada: Means expansion

Pre-colonial: This is a period before the coming of colonial masters which was said to be primitive and barbaric period.

Colonialism: This is a period when the Whiteman came and established their political, economy and social domination against the people they met.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the inter-groups relations between the Afo and Gwandara in Kokona Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. 'The two prominent ethnic groups in the LGA are the Afo and Gwandara, the earliest inhabitants, In the area in question the Afo and Gwandara people who live contiguous have some common

traditions. customs and values, which this research wishes to identify. The main motivation for this research is fundamental issue in country and Nasarawa State in particular is the emphasis on tribal cum identities especially in this contemporary political period. Earlier studies over-emphasis on the tribal, religious have identified many causes, while the strongly stress the issue of streamlining of segments of Nigeria politics along-line the religious, tribal or geographical differences/identities. No society ever existed in isolation. As such people of Kokona Local Government Area of Nasarawa State cannot be an exception. These people have lived together for a long period and have certain common traits of identities, which are the basic issues of this research. The correlation of groups in many facets of life has been a life wire waxing the cultural and custom of the societies. History has it that no nation, society, or tribe ever lived as an island without contacts with outside bodies.

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