ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT: A THREAT TO BENEVOLENT INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN WUKARI METROPOLIS, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

Daniel, Rosemary Onchi
Department of Sociology
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State
ronchidaniel@fuwukari.edu.ng
+2348033211903
&
Ajiyitu Bako
Department of Sociology
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State

Abstract

Globally, there are variant patterns of intergroup relations that determines when interaction and contact between individuals and groups in the society produces benevolent or malevolent outcomes.In recent times, the growing interest for political and economic domination among the major ethnic groups has resulted in power tussle.This study examines the ethno-religious conflict and its effects on intergroup relations in Wukari Metropolis, a multi-ethnic society in Nigeria. The aim is to understand the patterns of intergroup relations and the impact of ethno-religious conflicts on social cohesion. The conflict theory is employed as a theoretical framework to explain the phenomenon. A simple random sampling technique was used to select wards, and the Tare Yamane formula determined the sample size. Data was collected through questionnaires from 391 respondents using quantitative methods. The findings reveal that ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari Metropolis are intense and centered around competition for limited resources such as land, political positions, economic resources, natural resources, and human resources. The effects of these conflicts include segregation, underdevelopment, malevolent relations, and loss of lives. The study recommends inclusive distribution of political positions, economic resources, human resources, and natural resources to foster relative peace and accommodate the diverse population in Wukari Metropolis.

Keywords: benevolent, conflicts, ethno-religious, and relations

Introduction

Ethno-religious conflicts pose a significant security challenge globally, with Nigeria being particularly affected. The work of Iruonagbe and George (2007) highlights that Africa, including Nigeria, has been plagued by ongoing conflicts and security issues, primarily stemming from social, ethnic, cultural, and religious differences. These challenges are exacerbated by profound inequalities in the distribution of power, wealth, and resources, creating an environment where resistance to the prevailing status quo becomes inevitable. Ethno-religious conflicts often lead to destabilization at various levels, from countries to states and local government areas, particularly in Africa. Such conflicts are accompanied by severe human rights violations, including genocide and crimes against humanity. Additionally, they contribute to

economic decline, state fragility, environmental problems, and the displacement of populations as refugees. The consequences of violent ethnic conflicts are marked by the loss of lives, immense human suffering, and substantial destruction of properties.

Intergroup relations refer to the interactions between different groups within a society. The nature of these interactions can be categorized as either malevolent or benevolent. Nigeria, with a population of over 150 million people, is characterized by major religious groups, namely Christianity and Islam. The Islamic faith predominantly exists in the northwestern and northeastern regions of the country, encompassing states such as Sokoto, Zamfara, Borno, Yobe, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Jigawa, Bauchi, Taraba, Gombe, and Adamawa. On the other hand, Christianity is more prominent in the southeastern and south-southern geographical zones, including states like Imo, Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Delta, Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom. The southwestern and north-central zones, which include Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Kaduna, Niger, Plateau, Nasarawa, Benue, Kogi states, and the Federal Capital Territory, have a relatively balanced number of Muslims and Christians. Traditional religion, although often marginalized, also has followers and is not immune to religious violence (Terwase, 2012).

The concept of ethnicity itself is a subject of debate among sociologists and anthropologists. It encompasses various elements such as language, religion, identity, national origin, and even skin color. Ethnicity can be employed either to foster national separation or to establish political dominance over certain groups. In practice, the term "ethnicity" is often used broadly to signify shared characteristics and affiliations within a particular group (Iruonagbe and George, 2007). The history of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial period when the various ethnic groups in the northern and southern provinces were amalgamated into a single entity called Nigeria in 1914. Colonialism played a significant role in generating animosity and conflict among different ethnic groups. Between 1952 and 1966, the political landscape of the country underwent changes, transforming the three regions into distinct political entities. This shift reduced the struggle for independence to a quest for ethnic dominance (Jacob, 2012). Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity coincides with a north-south divide, with Muslims dominating the North and Christians dominating the South. This situation has created geo-religious identities, where religion and the tensions it generates pose a threat to the country's security (Ukandu, 2011; Onah, Diara & Uroko, 2017).

The introduction of "the principle of divide and rule" by the colonial masters during the pre-independence era in Nigeria deepened ethnic divisions within the country (Iruonagbe and George, 2007). The colonial legacy left Nigeria ethnically and religiously divided, which eventually led to the bloodiest political crisis in the country's history, known as the Nigerian civil war. This crisis, often described as "ethnic cleansing" or a euphemism for genocide, resulted in the deaths of over 30,000 Igbos living in the Northern region (Iruonagbe and George, 2007). Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, there has been a perception that religious violence in Nigeria has

significantly increased. Statistics on religious crises indicate that at least 95% of these conflicts have occurred in the northern part of the country (Ezeanokwasa, 2009; Terwase, 2012).

Conflict can generally be defined as a situation of disagreement and competition between social groups with different interests and interpretations within a social system. Conflicts can manifest in various forms, such as antagonism, struggles, opposition processes, and threats to cooperation. In the construction industry, conflicts can arise from unmet needs or desires, disagreements to be settled, and the sharing of ideas that can lead to changes in attitudes, feelings, and perceptions (Mba, 2013; Okuntade, 2014; Dokubo and Oluwadare, 2011). Conflicts can be understood in two senses: an incompatibility in a multi-party or multi-issue situation and the violent expression of this incompatibility (Dokubo and Oluwadare, 2011).

Ethnicity is derived from the Greek word "ethnos," which refers to a community of common descent. Ethnic conflict poses a significant threat to international peace and security. Ethnicity refers to people who share common cultural, traditional, and origin-related characteristics, while ethnicity itself is the practice of identifying and relating to people of the same origin. Ethnic discrimination occurs when members of one ethnic group discriminate against others based on exclusive criteria (Otite, 2004; Salifu, 2014). Ethnicity is a complex and relatively new concept that emerged less than half a century ago in literature (Fawole & Bello, 2011). It involves grouping people based on shared characteristics such as national origin, language, or culture (Kassah, 2016; Jones & George, 2008).

Fawole & Bello (2011) highlight that religion holds different meanings for different people. Emile Durkheim's definition of religion as "unified systems of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" is referenced. Religion is viewed as a set of unique beliefs and practices that distinguish it from other social institutions. In Nigeria, religion is ranked next to ethnicity and is often categorized into three main groups: Christian, Muslim, and Traditional. Traditional religions involve the worship of various gods and goddesses, while Christian and Muslim identities have been central to religious differentiation and conflicts in Nigeria.

Conflict is considered a major social problem in all human societies. Ekpenyoung (2011) asserts that the fundamental issues contributing to conflicts include religious beliefs and practices, ethnicity, boundary disputes, land ownership and resource competition, poverty, marginalization, unemployment, and underdevelopment. Nigeria, since its independence in 1960, has experienced various conflicts involving ethnic divisions, political confrontations, economic struggles, religious tensions, and class differences. The emergence of ethnicity in Nigerian federalism has led to the formation of ethnic identities, which in turn has contributed to conflicts and rejection among individuals.

Madu & Goni (2013) identify three major implications of ethno-religious conflicts on youths and the community: socio-economic, political, and educational. Socio-economic implications refer to the

adverse effects on the economic and social well-being of individuals and communities. Political implications involve the influence of ethno-religious conflicts on political dynamics and governance. Educational implications pertain to the disruption of educational institutions and the hindrance of educational opportunities for the affected population.

Nigeria has a long history of ethno-religious conflicts, which have posed substantial obstacles to social cohesion and intergroup relations. Wukari Metropolis, located in Taraba State, is one such conflict-affected region. Wukari Metropolis is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, including the Tiv, Jukun, Hausa, and Fulani, who live in an intricate social structure. The Wukari Metropolis' ethno-religious conflicts can be traced back to historical tensions caused by struggles over territory, political authority, economic resources, and religious differences. These confrontations have resulted in a cycle of violence, property devastation, loss of life, and community displacement. Wukari Metropolis, long recognized for its peaceful coexistence, has suddenly become a hotspot of tension and hate, calling into question the region's once-benevolent intergroup ties.

The ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari Metropolis have had a wide-ranging impact on various facets of communal life. Social trust between various ethnic and religious groups has deteriorated, resulting in the emergence of isolated enclaves and widening divisions. Economic activities such as trade and commerce have been disrupted, resulting in economic stagnation and impeding regional development. Conflicts have also had an impact on educational institutions, since schools have been forced to close on an irregular basis due to safety concerns, depriving children of their right to an education. Many lives have been lost and property worth billions destroyed leaving people destitute and homeless (Onah, Diara & Uroko, 2017). The research study was be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of ethno-religious conflict in Wukari Local Government Area
2. What are the causes of ethno-religious conflict in Wukari Local Government Area
3. How has ethno-religious conflict affected intergroup relations in Wukari Local Government Area

Nature of Ethno-Religious Conflict in Society

The nature of ethno-religious conflict in society is characterized by tensions, hostilities, and violence that arise from differences in ethnicity, religion, or a combination of both. These conflicts typically involve clashes between different ethnic or religious groups, where individuals or communities perceive their identities, beliefs, values, and interests as being threatened or undermined by others.

One significant aspect of the nature of ethno-religious conflict is the deep-rooted social divisions that contribute to the polarization of communities. These divisions often result from historical grievances, territorial disputes, power struggles, or competition over resources. The conflict may be fueled by perceptions of inequality,

discrimination, marginalization, or exclusion experienced by certain groups, which in turn can foster a sense of resentment and hostility.

The role of colonial masters in the growth of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria was significant. These colonial powers, including the British, introduced Christianity and Western values to Nigeria, attempting to penetrate the existing system. Their actions often resulted in the production of ethnic group conflicts, exploiting the traditional culture of Nigeria. The British employed their infamous divide and rule policy, intentionally sowing the seeds of conflicts based on religious differences among the Nigerian people (Nazhat, 2014). Ethnic consciousness is a factor that fuels ethnic conflicts. It refers to the loyalty or attachment to one's ethnic group, whether as a social, political, and economic entity or as a cultural community. Ethnic consciousness involves promoting the interests of one's own ethnic group over others (Umar, 2015).

Violence in Nigeria has manifested in various forms over the decades. Political issues, particularly those associated with the struggle for elective offices and power allocation, have been significant sources of violence. This situation is often intensified by a combination of deep-rooted socioeconomic and ethnic concerns, some of which may be legitimate while others are held spuriously by different actors and groups. The overall frequency of violent deaths in Nigeria is influenced by other factors such as car accidents and crime (Akinola, 2014). Ethno-religious conflicts are complex and varied, with social, cultural, economic, and political components. They can vary from isolated acts of violence and discrimination to full-fledged communal or intergroup fights, which frequently end in loss of life, displacement, property destruction, and social breakdown. Such conflicts can also have far-reaching consequences, such as destabilizing entire regions, impeding economic development, eroding social cohesion, and undermining national unity.

Religion and ethnicity are frequently used as important identity identifiers and sources of social cohesion in communities. However, in a conflict situation, these identity markers can become powerful drivers of separation and stress. Extremist groups or political players attempting to rally support might exploit religious differences and sectarian rivalries, repeating cycles of bloodshed and exacerbating community tensions. The history of religious conflicts in Nigeria can be traced back to the period of independence in 1960. Prior to that time, there were three major religions in Nigeria: African Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity. The relationship among the adherents of these religions was generally cordial and peaceful. However, religious crises in the country emerged after independence, primarily on tribal and regional bases, driven by the desire to acquire political and economic control over the nation's infrastructure (Alagbu, 2007; Ushe, 2015). Taraba State, with over eighty (80) ethnic groups and diverse religious sects, has remained the most highly multi-ethnic state in Nigeria since its creation. This diversity makes the state volatile and places it in constant struggle with issues related to ethnicity and ethno-religious conflicts (Magu & Goni, 2013).

Ethno-religious conflict is also characterized by the persistence of stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes toward other

communities. Pre-existing biases and prejudices can exacerbate intergroup enmity, leading to increased polarization and conflict escalation. These disputes frequently result in human rights violations, such as discrimination, persecution, and even atrocities such as ethnic cleansing or genocide. Understanding the nature of ethno-religious conflicts in society requires acknowledging the complex interaction of social, cultural, historical, economic, and political elements that contribute to their genesis and persistence. To resolve ethno-religious conflicts, the fundamental causes and dynamics must be addressed.

Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflict in Society

Some scholars believe that competition for limited resources is a common contributory factor to ethnic wars, particularly in some parts of Africa. Ethnic groups battle violently for property, rights, jobs, education, language, social amenities, and adequate health care facilities in multi-ethnic countries such as Nigeria (Jacob, 2012). The causes of ethno-religious conflict in society are numerous and frequently result from a confluence of factors that interact and intensify tensions between various ethnic and religious groups. Understanding these causes is critical for dealing with and preventing such disputes. The following are some of the major variables that contribute to the creation of ethno-religious conflict:

a) Differences in Identity and Groups: Ethnic and religious identities shape individual and group identities. Differences in cultural customs, beliefs, values, and traditions can produce a "us versus them" mentality, leading to splits and conflict.
b) Historical Grievances: Past occurrences like colonization, discrimination, marginalization, or perceived injustices can stoke intergroup animosities. Conflicts are frequently perpetuated by deeply ingrained historical grudges that are passed down through the generations, fostering a sense of collective memory.
c) Socioeconomic Inequalities: Ethno-religious tensions may be exacerbated by economic gaps, resource competitiveness, and unequal access to opportunities. Conflict may result when particular groups feel disenfranchised or disadvantaged in terms of socioeconomic development. Such situations can give rise to feelings of unfairness and resentment.
d) Political Manipulation: Political actors may use divisive language and the mobilization of support along ethnic or religious lines to their advantage. This distorting of identities and interests has the potential to intensify divisions within communities and conflicts.
e) Competition for Power and Resources: Ethno-religious conflicts are frequently stoked by contests for political influence, ownership of resources, or entry to lucrative employment opportunities. Competition over scarce resources has the potential to exacerbate already existing tensions and fuel violent confrontations.
f) Extremist ideologies, whether they are founded on religious or ethno-nationalist convictions, have the potential to radicalize people and escalate confrontations. Radicalized people or groups may use violence to accomplish their

ideological goals, escalating tensions and dividing society even more.

g) Weak Governance and State Failure: Ethno-religious conflicts can flourish in nations with poor governance, inadequate institutions, or a lack of the rule of law. Intergroup violence can flourish when the state does not provide security, defend minority rights, or apply the law fairly.

According to Ekpenyong (2011), one of the major causes of conflict is land claim and ownership, as some communities and ethnic groups within and across the boundaries of states and local government council areas lay claim to land as original owners (settlers) or "aboriginals," and those regarded as intruders are fought against.

According to Omotosho (2003), the following causes contribute to inter-religious violence in Nigeria:

a) Lack of mutual recognition: Muslims, in particular, think that Christianity does not acknowledge Islam as a religion with the right to exist, and so does not respect their (Muslims') other rights. They believe that if Christians in Nigeria recognize Islam, it is merely because Muslims have refused to be ignored.

b) Hatred and blackmail campaigns: Both Christians and Muslims are actively involved in hatred campaigns against each other. This manifests itself in a variety of ways, including provocation, distortion of facts about each other, and stifling each other's opportunities, as seen in the Shari'ah and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) disputes. According to Bashir Isyaku and Imo, the historic Kafanchan riot was sparked by blackmail and the misrepresentation of facts.

c) The lack real desire to understand each other's beliefs and cultures: While some institutions of higher learning provide courses under various names, a careful examination of such programs reveals that they were not designed to encourage understanding and respect. Instead, they are utilized to blackmail and provoke people under the guise of academic freedom and discourse.

d) Extremism: Extremism on both sides is another major cause of religious violence in Nigeria. As previously stated, most incidents of extremism are motivated by a lack of understanding of the teachings of the religion being defended by the group in question.

According to Umar's (2015) research, ethnic issues are the main cause of most interethnic conflict in Nigeria. Conflict can be attributed to seven key reasons, according to Onigu and Isaac (1999; Umar, 2015). These are:

a) The land space and the resources available which consequently degenerate into the question of “settlers” and “indigenes”.

b) Secondly, is the jurisdiction of certain traditional rulers and chiefs. E.g. when a king of one ethnic group or sub-ethnic group claims ruler ship over people belonging to another ethnic group, his action often generates conflict.

c) The creation of local government councils and the location of their headquarters is the third factor generating conflicts.
d) The fourth factor is the competition over access to scarce political and economic resources for instance. The creation of states and local government councils means the availability of more political and administrative positions in the localities. Contestants mobilize members of their ethnic and religious group for support in the competition to hold such positions.
e) The fifth factor derives from the micro and macro-social structures in Nigeria as can be seen in the conflicting cultural interest, values and preferences. So, the exploited coexistence of cultural, ethnic, and religious differences amongst people in the same polity is itself inherently conflictual.
f) The sixth factor is the population growth and expansion tendencies to sustain ethnic bound occupations. This occupation has to do with land and other available resources. A resource in this sense may be seen as an opportunity in the environment that has been identified and appraised by a population of potential users.
g) The seventh factor of conflict is the perception of disregard for cultural symbols and the "pollution" of cultural practices which if goes unchecked will lead to violent conflict (Umar, 2015).

Consequences of Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Society

Salifu **(**2014**)** ethno-religious conflicts have indeed cast a large and dangerous shadow over the north and by extension the entire country since the early 1980s. Idike&Okechukwu (2015) explains that apart from loss of lives and property and the emotional trauma that accompany these, the persistence of ethno-religious tension and conflicts has resulted in declining national cohesion and identity, undermining of legitimacy of the state and considerable loss of confidence on the machinery of government. There are striking consequences of ethnic and religious conflict. Madu & Goni (2013) highlighted some consequences ofethnic and religious conflicts;

Socio-economic implications: ethno-religious crisis causes the youths to experience lots of deprivations due to weaknesses in social organization, social institutions and structural deficiencies in creating enabling environment for the society and economy to grow and retards all economic and social progress. Ali, (2008; Madu & Goni, 2013) for example, established that, 'Throughout the crisis years in Takum/Ussa, there was a decline in the level of agricultural investment/yield, decline in income levels of the people of the area, and increased level of social and residential segregation and damages to lives and property worth millions". The resultant effects of these are high level of poverty and unemployment, particularly to youths.

Political implications: ethnic and religious conflicts has impacted negatively on the growth and development of the youths in the state. The incessant crisis experienced in Taraba state right from inception and the weak position of political class and its perpetual struggles for political power to accumulate wealth have continuously put the

youths on the disadvantage position and makes their future in jeopardy and in sorry situation.

Educational implications: the incessant spates of ethno-religious crisis in the state may leads to the shift of emphasis on government strides to restore security at the expense of developing the key sectors like education etc. The resultant effect of this retrogressive phenomenon, is that youths spend less time in school and may led to some been dropped out of school and perhaps ventures into unproductive activities that can affect their future career development to becoming responsible citizens and future leaders. In most cases, many are being forced to take to the street as hawkers and are no longer attracted or motivated to pursue their educational career.

The effects of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, as highlighted by Egbefo (2015), are far-reaching and have significant implications for the nation's political, economic, and social fabric. Some of the key effects are as follows:

a) Hindrance to Effective Political, Economic, and National Unity: Ethnic and religious conflicts pose challenges to the effective functioning of the Nigerian state, hindering efforts towards nation-building and the development of a coherent national identity. These conflicts create divisions among ethnic groups, impede political stability, and undermine efforts at achieving a united and cohesive society.
b) Economic Decline and Investment Aversion: The ongoing conflicts have led to a steady economic decline in Nigeria. Adeze (2009) affirms that the volatile nature of areas affected by ethnic and religious crises deters both foreign and local investors from making investments, fearing the loss of their resources. This lack of investment contributes to economic stagnation and hinders the country's development.
c) Poor International Image: The disintegrative elements of ethnic and religious conflicts have tarnished Nigeria's image in the international community. The perception of internal conflicts and instability negatively impacts the country's reputation, making it more challenging to build positive relationships with other nations and attract foreign investments.
d) Loss of Human Lives: Ethnic and religious conflicts have resulted in the tragic loss of many lives. Instances such as the attacks by Boko Haram, where hundreds of lives were lost, highlight the devastating consequences of these conflicts. The loss of human lives not only represents a tragedy for families and communities but also depletes the nation's human resources.
e) Destruction of Social Fabric and Trust: Conflicts have torn apart the social fabric of Nigerian society, eroding trust and mutual respect among different ethnic and religious groups. Fear and uncertainty prevail, leading to a decline in intergroup interactions and cooperation, further fracturing the social cohesion of the country.
f) Strain on National Resources: The deployment of government troops, including the police and the army, to address internal security threats and religious violence puts a

significant strain on the nation's scarce resources. The financial and human costs of maintaining security forces in conflict areas divert resources that could be used for developmental purposes.

g) Growing Unemployment: The scale of ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria has discouraged investment, particularly in the private sector. This leads to a lack of job opportunities and growing unemployment rates, exacerbating socio-economic challenges within the country.
h) Instability and Fragmented Loyalties: Ethnic and religious conflicts destabilize the government and undermine the institutions of national integration and intergroup relations. Loyalties become fragmented, as fear and uncertainties drive individuals and groups to prioritize their ethnic or religious affiliations over national unity.
i) Brain Drain and Skilled Labor Flight: The conflicts have contributed to a labor flight of skilled graduates and professionals seeking employment opportunities abroad. The fear, threats, and marginalization experienced in Nigeria lead many individuals to pursue opportunities elsewhere, resulting in a loss of human capital and hindering national development.
j) Ethnicity as a Dominant Factor: Ethnicity now plays a significant role in decision-making and policymaking in the country. This can result in policies that prioritize the interests of specific ethnic groups over national interests, further exacerbating divisions and tensions.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the Conflict theory and the social identity theory in explaining ethno-religious conflict in Wukari metropolis. Conflict theory and social identity theory offer different perspectives on understanding the dynamics of social conflicts, with conflict theory being a macro sociological theory and social identity theory operating at the micro level.

Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory emerged as a critique of the prevailing social and economic conditions during the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) developed this theory as they sought to understand and analyze the societal conflicts arising from capitalism and class struggles. Their seminal works, including "The Communist Manifesto" (1848) and "Das Kapital" (1867), laid the foundations for Conflict Theory. Conflict Theory primarily operates at the macro level, analyzing social structures, institutions, and power dynamics. It focuses on social classes, such as the bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the proletariat (working class), as units of analysis. While Conflict Theory does not specifically address individual identity, it considers how collective identities, such as class consciousness, shape the social relations and conflicts between groups.

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how collective identities, such as class consciousness, shape the social relations and conflicts between groups.

Assumptions of the Theory: Conflict Theory is built on some key assumptions:

1. Society is characterized by inherent conflicts and inequalities rooted in the distribution of power, wealth, and resources.
2. Conflict arises due to competition for scarce resources and the struggle to maintain power and control over these resources.
3. Social change occurs through conflicts and revolutions, leading to the transformation of social structures.
4. Inequality and oppression are inherent in social systems, leading to division and tension between different social classes.

Applying conflict theory to the context of ethno-religious conflicts, powerful forces in society often exploit these divisions to further their own interests, prioritizing the welfare and interests of their particular ethnic or religious group over the general well-being of the country. Tribalism and ethnic dominance become vehicles for expressing and enforcing their desires. Conflict arises due to the struggle for limited resources, with different ethnic and religious groups competing for access to economic, cultural, political, and other resources. Inequality, in terms of resource distribution among different groups, fuels these conflicts (Croteau&Hoynes, 2013).

1. Conflict Theory provides insights into the causes and dynamics of ethno-religious crises by emphasizing power struggles, competition for resources, and social inequalities. In the context of ethno-religious conflicts, Conflict Theory highlights the following:
2. Power Struggles: Conflict Theory argues that powerful groups in society exploit ethnic and religious divisions to maintain their dominance and further their own interests. These conflicts often arise from a desire to control resources, territories, or political power.
3. Inequality and Oppression: Conflict theorists argue that ethno-religious conflicts are rooted in systemic inequalities and the marginalization of certain ethnic or religious groups. These groups may perceive their interests as being disregarded or suppressed, leading to collective grievances and conflict.
4. Resource Competition: Conflict Theory posits that ethno-religious conflicts occur when different groups compete for limited resources, such as economic opportunities, political influence, or access to social services. Unequal distribution of these resources can exacerbate tensions and fuel conflict.
5. Division and Solidarity: Conflict theorists highlight how ethnic and religious identities can become focal points for social mobilization and solidarity. These identities often serve as rallying points for groups to assert their rights, challenge dominant power structures, and pursue their interests.
6. Class Dynamics: While Conflict Theory primarily focuses on social class conflicts, it can be applied to analyze the intersections of class, ethnicity, and religion. Ethnic and

religious groups may align with certain social classes, further shaping power dynamics and conflicts.

Strengths of the Conflict Theory is demonstrated in their analysis of the existence of two social groups in every social institution of the society. The upper class and the lower class, the owners and the renters/workers etc. this analysis explains the issue of ethnic and religious conflict in Wukari Local Government Area.The weaknesses of this theory lies in their emphasis on struggle for power, dominance and scarce resources. The theory is not able to explain stability in the society, times when peace reigns in the society.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was developed by British social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner. The theory emerged as an extension of Tajfel's earlier work on intergroup discrimination and prejudice. SIT focuses on understanding the psychological processes that underlie intergroup behavior, including ethno-religious conflicts. Social Identity Theory emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as Tajfel and Turner sought to understand the cognitive and motivational processes that shape intergroup behavior. Their work was influenced by social psychology theories, including cognitive psychology, which emphasized the role of cognitive processes in shaping social perceptions and behavior.

Assumptions of the Theory: Social Identity Theory is based on these key assumptions:

a) Individuals strive for positive self-esteem and seek to maintain a positive social identity.
b) Social groups play a significant role in the formation and maintenance of self-identity.
c) Individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, creating an "us" versus "them" distinction.
d) Group membership leads to social categorization and the development of a shared social identity.
e) Individuals engage in social comparison processes, evaluating their group positively in relation to outgroups.

Social Identity Theory provides insights into the dynamics of ethno-religious crises by focusing on the role of identity processes. According to SIT, conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups occur when individuals and groups develop strong social identities tied to their own group. In the context of ethnic and religious conflicts, social identity theory helps to explain the dynamics at the individual and small group levels. People develop a strong attachment to their ethnic or religious group and perceive it as an important aspect of their identity. This attachment can lead to ingroup favoritism, stereotyping of outgroups, and intergroup tensions. Conflict arises when individuals and groups perceive threats to their identity, resources, or status, leading to competition and hostility between different ethnic and religious groups.

These conflicts can be explained through the following mechanisms

a) Ingroup Favoritism: Individuals tend to favor their own ingroup over outgroups. In ethno-religious conflicts, this favoritism manifests as support for one's own ethnic or

religious group and the belief that it should receive preferential treatment or resources.

b) Outgroup Homogeneity: Individuals perceive outgroups as more homogeneous than their own ingroup. This perception can lead to stereotypes and generalizations about outgroups, fostering prejudice and discrimination.
c) Intergroup Differentiation: To enhance their social identity, individuals and groups emphasize the differences between their own group and outgroups. This differentiation often reinforces existing divisions and can escalate conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups.
d) Threats to Identity: Ethno-religious conflicts often involve threats to the identity, resources, or status of groups. Individuals and groups may perceive these threats as challenges to their social identity, leading to defensive responses and intergroup hostility.

Methodology

The sample technique adopted for this study was the probability sampling technique. The simple random sampling was utilized to select five (5) out of the ten (10) wards in the study area. The selected wards are Hospital, Puje, Akwana, Kente and RafinKada. The study employed a Taro Yamane's formula to determine an appropriate sample size for the study.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where: n = sample size

N = total population

e = level of significance $(0.05)^2$

Therefore $$n = \frac{238,283}{1+238,283\ (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{238,283}{1+238,283\ (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{238,283}{1+595.7075}$$

$$n = \frac{238,283}{596.7075}$$

$$n = 399.33$$

The figure was approximated to the nearest hundred which is from 399.33 to 400. For each ward, 80 questionnaires were administered to respondents. The method of data collection employed was the quantitative, because it supports the collection of large volume of information from large number of people as this research. For the instruments, the research questionnaires was designed to address the objectives of the study. The questions were self-administered and after completion of the questionnaires andretrieved, 391 questionnaires data was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

Data presentation and Analysis

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents in Wukari Local Government Area

Personal information of the respondents from the quantitative method utilized on Table 1. The socio demographic characteristics of respondents consist of the distribution of the following variables; sex, age, marital status, educational attainment, ward of residence, and religion distribution all presented in one table.

Table 1: Socio Demographic Distribution of Respondents.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex Distribution		
Male	189	48.3
Female	202	51.7
Total	**391**	**100.0**
Age Distribution		
15-24 years old	99	25.3
25-34 years old	152	38.9
35-44 years old	102	26.1
45 years and above	38	9.7
Total	**391**	**100.0**
Marital Status Distribution		
Single	87	22.3
Married	212	54.2
Divorced	58	14.8
Widowed	34	8.7
Total	**391**	**100.0**
Educational Distribution		
Primary	14	3.6
Secondary	58	14.8
Diploma/NCE	129	33.0
Graduate/HND	190	48.6
Total	**391**	**100.0**
Ward of Residence Distribution		
Hospital	80	20.5
Puje	76	19.4
Akwana	79	20.2
Kente	79	20.2
RafinKada	77	19.7
Total	**391**	**100.0**
Religion Distribution		
Islam	171	43.7
Christianity	209	53.5
Traditional	11	2.8
Total	**391**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey (2018)

The figure displayed for the Sex distribution on the Table 1 shows that majority 51.7% of the respondents were female while 48.3% of respondents represented men. The difference in the figures shows that more females were represented than men in the sampled representatives. The Table also displays the age distribution of respondents. On the table 38.9% represents the majority of respondents sampled were between the ages of 25-34 years, the second highest figure in percentages shows that 26.1% of the

respondents were between the ages of 35-44 years, 25.3% of respondents were between the ages of 15-24 years while the least figure represents 9.7% of respondents were from 45 and above. This means that majority of respondents sampled are middle aged and still vibrant.

The Marital Status distribution displayed, shows that 54.2% of respondents are married, 22.3% of respondents are single, and 14.8% of them are divorced while 8.7% of the respondents are widowed. This table also records that all questionnaires were fairly distributed across all the categories of marital status. The Table further displays the educational distribution of respondent and it records that majority of respondents 48.6% are graduates, the second highest record shows that 33.0% of respondents have Diploma/NCE, 14.8% of respondents are secondary school leavers while the least, 3.6% of respondents have obtained are primary school leavers. Obtaining information on educational attainment is one very important socio demographic characteristic because it shows how well the respondents understand the questionnaire to be able to give accurate answers to the questions asked.

The ward of residence which also shows the number of questionnaires retrieved from respondents in each of the selected wards. From Hospital ward 20.5% of respondents answered the questionnaire, 20.2% of respondents from Akwana and Kente wards returned their copies, RafinKada ward records that 19.7% respondents responded to the questionnaires and returned their copies while Puje ward records that 19.4% of respondents answered and returned their copies. This implies that all the selected ward were well in this study.Lastly, Table displayed the distribution of respondents by their religion which shows that majority of respondents 53.5% selected for this study were Christians, 43.7% of respondents were Muslims while the least indicated that they were traditionalists. This distribution is very relevant to this study since the main objective of the study is to investigate the ethnic and religious conflict in Wukari Local Government Area.

Table 2: The Description of Ethno-Religious Conflict in Wukari.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Bloody	95	24.3
Destructive	113	28.9
Devastating	123	31.5
Intense	60	15.3
Total	**391**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey (2018)

This Table records the description of conflict in Wukari. The question was left open for respondents to fill in what they exactly felt the nature of the conflict was. From their responses, 31.5% of respondents described the conflicts as devastating filled with fear of the unknown, 28.9% of respondents described their experience as destructive; building, shops, structures were not left out of the destruction, 24.3% of respondents indicated that the conflicts were bloody due to the killings they witnessed at every nook and cranny of the town and lastly, 15.3% of respondents described the conflicts as intense which means that the conflict were extreme in degree and strength.

Table3: Percentages of those who escaped the Dangers of the Conflicts in Wukari.

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Stayed in-doors	57	14.6
Participated to protect	295	75.4
Went to a safer location	39	10.0
Total	**391**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey (2018)

The Table above displays figures in respect to ways of escaping the dangers of the conflicts in Wukari. The majority 75.4% of respondents admitted that they participated fully to protect siblings and relatives from getting hurt, 14.6% of respondents said they stayed home while other protected them while 10.0% of respondents revealed that they relocated to safer location until the heat of the conflict was over. This supports the assertions that the Jukun people are warriors, they do not run away from war, they face conflict as they come. For the people who relocated to safer grounds, they had nothing to do with why and who were fighting which could mean they were more of strangers or settlers in this land, while the other who stayed home already had relatives in the battle front and they waited for their return.

Table 4: Factors that Causes the Conflicts in Wukari

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Retaliation	143	36.6
Land disputes	201	51.4
Unexplained deaths	47	12.0
Total	**391**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey (2018)

The Table above displays responses on the possible causes of ethnic and religious conflict in Wukari. From the figures, majority 51.4% of respondents highlighted land disputes as major causes of ethnic and religious conflict in Wukari, 36.6% of respondents indicated that most of the conflicts that has occurred is due to some form of retaliation in respect to a previous unforgiven attack while 12.0% indicated that explained deaths of any member of rival groups could trigger an attack on the other group.

Table 5: Effects of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts on Wukari Town

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Increase in Rents	94	24.0
Loss of lives	106	27.1
Destruction of properties	74	19.0
Underdevelopment	42	10.7
Unsettled Rift	75	19.2
Total	**391**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey (2018)

In the quest for the effects of conflicts in Wukari, displays the responses of respondents. The majority 27.1% of respondents highlighted that loss of live is the major consequence of the conflict,

24.0% pointed towards the increase in rents as so many housing and business structures were brought down during the conflicts, 19.2% asserts that unsettled rift is one huge effects of conflicts in Wukari because of the rivalry of groups, some group are segregated, unforgiveness is in the air as angered group wait for when to strike again. 19.0% pointed out to the destruction of properties such as houses, cars, goods etc while the least indicated that underdevelopment is a glaring effect of the conflict. Business oriented people, industries, economic institutions etc abandon their work and fled the town as this has cause the town to be underdeveloped.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that virtually all 99.5% respondents have witnessed series of ethnic and religious conflicts in Wukari The respondents gave reliable information of what they really experienced at the times of conflict. The study discovered that the year respondents witnessed conflict in Wukari, in recent times were 2013, 2014 and 2015. And in the space of these years, respondents were able to identify the number of times conflict erupted in the town. Figures showed 39.3% of respondents witnessed conflict 6 times and more, 27.4% witnessed conflict 5 times, 17.2 % witnessed conflict 4 times while the least 16.2% of them witnessed conflicts 3 times in Wukari. Which means that ethnic and religious conflict has been a major social problem in Wukari. Respondents described the conflict as bloody, destructive, devastating and intense. In other words conflicts were accompanied with fear of the unknown, series of killings, destructions of buildings, shops and properties. 97.7% respondents have their families here in Wukari so the level of insecurity was high. However, the indigenes of Wukari are said to be warriors and this makes ever ready for any conflict without fear as the study gathered that 97.4% of respondents do not regret being around during the conflicts rather they were proud of defending their land. This shows patriotism and loyalty to their ancestral land. 75.4% of respondents fully participated in the fights in order to protect their people and their land while 14.6% stayed home awaiting the return of their family members. In terms of warnings, the study discovered that most conflict comes unannounced due to the promptness of what triggers the conflict in particular.

In attempt to investigate the causes of ethnic and religious conflict, figures revealed that 51.4% of respondents indicate land disputes as major causes of ethnic and religious conflict in Wukari, 36.6% of respondents is due to some form of retaliation in respect to a previous unforgiven attack while 12.0% indicated that explained deaths of any member of rival groups could trigger an attack on the other group. This explains that the frequency of the conflicts could be unsettled disputes from previous fights, a pay back to recent attack on other groups etc. Caselli & Coleman (2012), established that in many countries ethnic groups are or have been visiting and revisiting violence on each other, sometimes on a horrid scale. In some countries ethnic groups compete through overtly ethnic parties, vying for power. Even more often a dominant group discriminates against and exploits the others. This implies that Wukari is not the only community experiencing social problems as this.

The study further revealed that the consequences of ethnic and religious conflict in Wukari affects both the people as well as the community itself. Aleyomi (2012) pointed that, it must be noted that ethno-religious conflict does more harm to the federalism and development than good. Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have presented many challenges that border on security and the corporate existence of the country which is the fundamental reason for the adoption of a federal system. The figure from this study revealed 76.5% of respondents have been affected by the ethnic and religious crisis in Wukari. Majority 27.1% of respondents believes that loss of live is the major consequence of the conflict, 24.0% affirms that the increase in house rents is a consequence of conflict in Wukari because so many housing and business structures were brought down during the conflicts, land lords used that opportunity to exploit the settlers. 19.2% asserts that unsettled rift is one huge effects of conflicts in Wukari because of the rivalry between ethnic and religious groups, some of the groups are segregated. Unforgiveness wallows in the air while they wait for when to strike again. 19.0% pointed out to the destruction of properties such as houses, cars, goods etc. Insecurity and underdevelopment is another glaring effect of the conflict. The struggle to secure the most basic necessities of life such as food, fuel, clothing, medicine and shelter for the ordinary people living becomes difficult in times of conflict. People residents in Wukari Local Government are living in fear of the unknown, not knowing when it is safe to leave their house, when is safe to go to the market, the staff of institutions posted to Wukari are not settled security wise. Business oriented people, industries, economic institutions etc abandon their work and fled the town as this has cause the town to be underdeveloped. Salawu (2010; Aleyomi, 2012), affirms that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have presented many challenges that border on security and the corporate existence of the country which is the fundamental reason for the adoption of a federal system.

Conclusion

Ethno-religious conflicts are inevitable because it pose a significant threat to benevolent intergroup relations in Wukari Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria. As a result, the people of Wukari Local Government Area and Nigeria as a country deserve to be free from fear and feel safe in their own home. The detrimental effects on social cohesion, economic development, and human well-being necessitate urgent action. By promoting dialogue, reconciliation, intergroup education, addressing socio-economic disparities, and strengthening governance and security, the foundations can be laid for fostering a peaceful and inclusive society where intergroup relations are characterized by understanding, cooperation, and respect. It is through these concerted efforts that the detrimental impact of ethno-religious conflicts can be mitigated, leading to a brighter future for Wukari Metropolis and Nigeria as a whole.The study concludes that, people will always struggle to provide for their family to get a better future. This struggle to secure the most basic necessities of life such as food, fuel, medicine and shelter can be done with focus and less enmity among different groups in the society.Both conflict theory and social identity theory contribute to understanding the causes and dynamics of ethnic and religious conflicts. Conflict theory provides a macro-level analysis by

focusing on the structural factors and power dynamics in society that contribute to conflict, while social identity theory offers a micro-level analysis by examining individual and group processes that shape intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Integrating these theories helps to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of ethno-religious conflicts and informs strategies for conflict resolution, social cohesion, and the promotion of a more equitable and inclusive society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations have been made to tackle the problem of ethnic and religious conflict in Wukari Local Government Area. The following recommendation have been made to improve inter group relation between ethnic and religious groups in Wukari Local Government Area;

- Strengthening Governance and Security: Enhancing the effectiveness and impartiality of governance structures, ensuring equal representation and participation of all ethnic and religious groups. Strengthening security measures to protect lives and properties, and ensuring the rule of law is upheld to foster a sense of safety and justice for all.Security ought to be an assurance to every indigenes and settlers. There should be freedom from danger and fear. The government provide adequate security and improve on the existing security agencies. The population of the country is over 200 million, the population of security staff is available to population of the country. Employment of security agencies should be of utmost priority.
- Promoting Dialogue and Reconciliation: Encouraging open and inclusive dialogue platforms that foster understanding, empathy, and reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups. This could involve community-based forums, interfaith dialogues, and cultural exchange programs.
- Strengthening Social Cohesion: Implementing initiatives aimed at rebuilding social cohesion and trust among diverse communities. This can be achieved through collaborative projects, shared community activities, and programs that promote intergroup interactions and cooperation.
- Enhancing Interethnic and Interreligious Education: Introducing educational programs that promote interethnic and interreligious understanding, tolerance, and respect from an early age. Incorporating inclusive and diverse curricula in schools can help challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, and build a culture of acceptance.
- Addressing Socioeconomic Disparities: Taking proactive measures to reduce socioeconomic inequalities among different ethnic and religious groups. This includes ensuring equitable access to resources, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities to mitigate feelings of marginalization and promote inclusivity.
- Funding is another aspect that needs to be revisited by the government. Adequate channeling funds to the right operations and security agencies will go a long.
- Indigenization which is one of the major causes of ethnic and religious conflict in Nigeria should be revisited. Inequality

between the indigene and settlers in most Nigerian communities is on the high side. There should be no segregation when it comes to issues of appointment, employments, distribution of political resources, economic resources, human resources and natural resources etc. In other words, unequal distribution of resources can be averted.

- There should be no restriction among different groups in a community. Intergroup relation among indigenes and settlers can be improved upon from malevolent to benevolent. Peace is one very essentials aspect of human existence that cannot be avoided. Opportunities should be provided for the qualified and not based on favouritism, nepotism and sectionalism.

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