

Discordant Beliefs and Conflict Avoidance among Islamic Sects in North-Western Nigeria*

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Abstract

This article examined the discordant beliefs among Islamic sects in Northwest Nigeria on the second coming of Prophet 'Iisa (Jesus), within the context of Hadeeth as a primary source of Islamic law; respecting the companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW); abiding by the governance of secular political rulers and using Shaykhs (past pious spiritual leaders) as intermediaries to attain spirituality from Allah. It then investigated how each sect reacts when confronted with rivalry or aggression from another sect(s). Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was used to collect data from male and female members of four purposively selected sects in Katsina, Kaduna and Kano States. Findings were analysed using thematic, narrative and textual explication approaches. Findings indicate that discordant beliefs within the context of believing in the second coming of Prophet 'Iisa (Jesus), using Hadeeth as an Islamic source of legislation, respecting the Prophet's companions, and abiding by secular leaders' rules exist among the sects. While some of the discordant beliefs among them led to verbal insults and confrontations, some were managed and handled with calmness, wisdom and avoidance of potential conflicts, thereby averting any potential combative/physical intra-religious and inter-sectarian violent conflicts that may arise from discordant beliefs among the sects. The study concludes that although there were discordant beliefs among the four Islamic sects, they were able to manage their discordance through strategic conflict avoidance techniques. Therefore, we recommend that members of different Islamic sects in Northwest Nigeria find time to enroll themselves in formal education where they can seek knowledge for self-development and intellectual growth instead of relying only on the interpretations of their leaders on religious matters.

Keywords

Discordant belief, Islamic sects, peace and conflict, Sunni-Sufi, Qur'aaniyyuun-Shia, Northwest Nigeria

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Introduction

One of the problems traced to the emergence of religious conflict in Nigeria is the absence of tolerance not only among different sects of a similar religion (intra-religious conflicts) but also among different religions (inter-religious conflicts) (Ngwok & Ituma, 2020). For example, the heritage of tolerance that greeted various belief systems before the 19th century in the North began to be eroded in the early 19th century, and that enmity had been resulting in religious conflicts since then (Abar, 2019). Dominant causes of this drastic change include the situation of a poorly managed national economy, the actions of dishonest politicians and preachers as well as a weak security system (Eyeh, 2020). Thus, a report from the International Crisis Group (2020) for example identifies communal and religious conflicts as well as criminal violence as anti-peace issues ravaging the Northwestern region of the country. These conflicts have not only led to the loss of many lives in the region but have also left a number of socio-economic inequalities among victims (such as displacement, hunger, bereavement, famine and poverty), most of whom are residents of rural communities.

In a pluralist society such as Nigeria (Olasunkanmi, 2021), adherents of different religions and ethnic affiliations are expected to enjoy the liberty to promote and practise whatever concepts they believe in as long as such belief systems do not undermine the rights of others. Notably, many religions have different sects within the religious institution with some similarities and contrasts in their belief system. Islam is one such religion with different sects (e.g., Sunni, Sufi, Shia, Qur'aaniyyuun, Ahmadiyya, etc.) whose members share some aspects of convergence and divergence in beliefs. Like every religious being who is likely to be emotional when other people do not share in his belief system, members of these sects are also likely to confront one another at a point where their beliefs clash. Whether such confrontation results in violence or conflict is therefore dependent on how each sect manages its discordant beliefs with other sects.

It is vital to state that Chapter Four of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) guarantees that every individual is at liberty to practise the religion of their wish for as long as the religious belief does not infringe on the religious rights of others. Predominantly in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity account for the dominant adherents while African Traditional Religion is regarded as the minority (McKinnon, 2021). In 2015 research conducted by Pew Research, Nigeria was the fifth of the ten countries with the highest number of Muslims (90.02 million/50%) coming after Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Diamant, 2019).

In Nigeria, some popular Islamic sects include Shi'a, Sufi, Ahmadiyya, Sunni and Qur'aaniyuun, though there are several other Muslims who do not belong to any of these groups. Shi'a is an Islamic sect with a predominant presence in some Northern states, and it was introduced as the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) in Nigeria by Ibrahim El-Zakzaky (Tangaza, 2019). The Sufi, on the other hand, preaches ascetic and mystic lifestyles, and emphasises Sufi brotherhood known as "Tareeqa." Popular among this movement are Qodiriyyah and Tijaniyyah (Denzer & Shereikis, 2015; Pecia, 2017). The next sect, the Qur'aaniyuun, relies on the contents of the Qur'aan only (the Book of Allah) for their guidance, rulings and governance, and they are always found in the poor communities of northern states (Khakpur & Ahmadizadeh, 2012). However, to Sunni, the guiding principles of man should be derived from the Qur'aan and the Hadeeth (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) [Nuruzzaman, 2017]. Thus, these varying religious beliefs are discordance and set a background for religious conflicts emanating from members of some of the sects.

When discord/disagreement in religious beliefs of these sects is not tolerated, name-calling such as "You are an unbeliever", "You are going to hell", "You are a fanatic", etc. begins to emerge. Such stereotypical utterances are likely to appeal to the emotions of the addressee, which then leads to violence if not controlled on time. According to Juergensmeyer (2017), whenever enmity or hatred emerges between two parties, violence may erupt if neither of the parties controls the emotional outburst contributing to the enmity.

A few Nigerian scholars have, through empirical studies, contributed to discussions on extremism and religious violence, with a special focus on Islam, but none had investigated the belief discordant among Muslim sects and its implications on peacebuilding and religious conflict resolution in Nigeria. For example, Adesoji (2010) studied the uprising of Boko Haram and Islamic revivalism in Nigeria, Alao (2013) and Karakaya (2015) established a link between Islamic radicalisation and violent extremism in Nigeria. Triandis (2013) studied violence in Islam; Olojo (2014) analysed the frames of religious violent conflicts in Nigeria while Basedau et al. (2011) investigated the place of religion in armed conflict. Hamza (2020) was interested in understanding violent conflicts among different sects in Islam while Basedau (2019) investigated the relationship between religious discrimination and religious armed conflict.

As such, three factors motivated this study. One, none of the identified articles examines the implications of conflicts among Islamic sects in Northwest Nigeria as driven by differences in their belief. Two, the methodological approaches adopted by the previous studies were not Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Three, Northwest Nigeria is a region with many Islamic sects whose belief systems differ from one another, though they have areas of convergence. Hence, the study sought to understand how members of

four religious sects (the Sufis, the Sunnis, the Shiites and the Qur'aniyyuun) manage conflicts that (may) emanate from their discordant beliefs with members of other sects.

Conceptual Clarifications

- i. **Discordant belief:** A situation where individuals or groups hold conflicting or contradictory beliefs about religious, philosophical or ideological matters. It implies a lack of agreement or harmony between different belief systems, resulting in divergent perspectives and opinions.
- ii. **Religious sect:** A religious sect is a distinct subgroup within a larger religious tradition or denomination. It typically arises when a group of followers holds specific interpretations, practices, or doctrines that differentiate them from the mainstream or established religious body.
- iii. **Religious harmony:** Refers to a state of peaceful coexistence and cooperation among different religious communities or individuals with varying religious beliefs. It involves mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance.
- iv. **Religious differences:** Religious differences refer to variations and distinctions in beliefs, practices, rituals, doctrines, or interpretations among different religious traditions or within a single tradition.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What positions do the selected Islamic sects hold about the return of Prophet 'Iisa, Hadeeth being one of the primary sources of Islamic law, respecting the companions of Prophet Muhammad, using Shaykhs (past pious spiritual leaders) as intermediaries to attain spirituality from Allah as well as on abiding by governance of rulers in a secular state like Nigeria?
2. How does each sect react when confronted with rivalry or aggression from another sect (s)?

Empirical Review

Beyond the Fundamental Islamic Principles

In Islam, there are five fundamental pillars and six articles of faith every Muslim is expected to believe in and use as guides to their lives and existence on earth. These five pillars are faith in Allah and His messenger (Prophet Muhammad), observance of five daily prayers, payment of Zakat (annual cleansing of wealth), fasting in Ramadan and pilgrimage to Makkah (for

whoever has the ability), while the six articles of faith include beliefs in Allah, His angels, messengers, revealed books, the day of resurrection and man's destiny (whether good or bad). According to Islamic scholars, these are the foundation through which every practice of Muslims is laid (Al-Jifri, 2012; Denny, 2015). Scholars have argued that belief in Allah and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the first root of every Muslim, and as such, dictates the level of one's monotheism toward the Creator (Philips, 1994) as stated in Qur'an 61:10-11. In fact, Islamic scholars regard anyone who only believes in Allah, but without believing in His Prophet as an outcast, misguided individual and violator of the orthodox Islam practised by Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Fanack, 2019).

Another important belief in Islam centres on prophethood. As stated in Verse 285 of Chapter 2 of the Qur'an, Muslims' faith is not complete until they strongly believe in the existence and message of all prophets of Allah, including Jesus (Prophet 'Iisa). However, despite that Allah and Prophet Muhammad inform Muslims in the Qur'an that Prophet 'Isa is still coming back to this world, some Muslim sects, particularly the Ahmadiyyah, do not believe in the coming back of Jesus because of their argument that "Jesus did not ascend to Heaven and therefore could not come back to life as the latter day promised Messiah. Instead, they believe that Muhammad's prophecy regarding the coming of the Messiah and Mahdi (the Guided One) was fulfilled in person by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad" (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2006). This thought/ideology goes against Allah's revelation in Qur'an 4:158- "Allah raised him up to Himself. Allah is Almighty, All-Wise."

Beyond the fundamentals, Islam does not remain silent on leadership positions. Islam enjoins every Muslim to obey Allah, His messenger and the chosen leaders among them (in as much as the leaders do not compel them to act contrary to the tenets of their religion). To show how important following the leaders is in Islam, the Prophet, as reported by Bukhari and Muslim said, "Hear and obey, even if a black, ugly, small-headed black slave is made your leader." However, some Islamic sects argue that they have to resort to violence and revolt whenever they hold enmity with a leader/government (as popular with the Shiites) [Oduah, 2019; Council on Foreign Relations, 2021]. Another important belief outside the fundamentals is to believe in the rightly guided companions of Prophet Muhammad. As such, every one of them must be regarded as rightly guided as the Prophet (in his farewell sermon) and Allah had rightly called them.

Islamic Sectarianism and Conflict of Self-purification

For years, the Sunnis and the Shiites have been trading invective words at each other, most of which revolve around their doctrinal leaning. The Sunnis describe Shiites' ideology as heresy and apostasy, as their comprehension and interpretations of basic Islamic tenets are contradictory to traditional Islam--they tell lies, misrepresent facts and distort the teachings of Islam (such as

mut'ah-- the marriage of enjoyment-- which keeps promoting promiscuity and social vices) (Mervin, 2013).

It is therefore important to state that there are aggression-control strategies each of the identified sects uses whenever provoked by another sect's stereotypes, name-calling, prejudice and self-purification. According to Isa (2018), disagreements and confrontations among various Islamic sects in Northern Nigeria date back to the 1950s. Since that time, strategies such as public condemnation, invective songs, theological debates and literary antiphons are being used by some Islamic sects to vilify one another.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict Theory

Proposed by Karl Marx, this theory proposes that conflicts arise frequently in society as a result of its inhabitants' competition to control limited resources. It also assumes that people maintain social order by showing domination and power over others instead of conforming to rules and reaching consensus. Conflict theory is an argument of struggles and domination over limited societal resources (Barnier, 2020). That is, conflict occurs as a result of inequality among people in areas of class, status and power. Conflict is therefore imminent when a group in the society sees itself as being alienated by another social group. The conflict becomes violent when emotional involvement has been woven around the attainment of a group's goals (Dahrendorf, Collins & Further, 2006).

Belief Discordant Alief

Tamar Gendler, an American philosopher, developed the term "alief" to describe a variety of belief-discordant activities (Gendler, 2008a, 2008b). She claims that under these situations, people display behaviours that are initially difficult to explain in light of their stated beliefs and desires. Gendler contends that the concept of "aliefs," which can be broadly defined as mental states—typically ones with representational, affective, and behavioural components—that directly give rise to a set of response patterns that are automatically triggered by some stimulus in a person's environment, is the most effective way to explain these cases. According to Gendler, the reason why belief and action do not match up is that people entertain and act upon a belief that contradicts their behaviour (Kwong, 2012).

There are two vital arguments Gendler raised in this framework. First, beliefs can persist despite evidence to the contrary because they are reality-insensitive. Associative patterns that have been ingrained in our minds as a

result of our experiences and those of our genetic predecessors are one reason why beliefs are insensitive to proof. As a result, they are automatically activated when the appropriate stimulus is present, even if the stimulus is only perceived and does not accurately represent reality. Such insensitivity reveals a key distinction between belief and alief. The former does not track truth in the world and does not react to evidence directly, whereas the latter does. As a result, beliefs go against standards relating to cognitive-behavioural coherence. Second, since beliefs are ingrained in our thoughts in the aforementioned ways, it is challenging to control them. Gendler proposes that we either develop belief-concordant habits by consciously acting in ways that are consistent with our reflective commitments or use our imaginative resources to reshape our behavioural dispositions in a way that is consistent with our beliefs in order to bring our beliefs into alignment with our reflective commitments (Gendler, 2008b & Kwong, 2012).

In summary, the two theories are selected for two reasons. First, conflict theory enables the researcher to empirically establish how likely the belief discordant among the sects can result in conflict or otherwise. Secondly, belief discordant alief helps the researcher to argue whether the belief systems of the sects contradict their actions or align with their actions, especially during confrontations with members of other sects.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design so as to understand the “what” of the concepts of belief discordant and conflict within the voices of members of selected Islamic sects in Northwest Nigeria (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). Thus, a qualitative method, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), was used for data collection. This research method was adopted because it is through it that the two research questions raised in the study could be empirically answered. Purposive, snowball and convenience sampling techniques were used to select the research participants. For purposive sampling, only members of the four sects were selected for discussion. However, convenience sampling explains that only participants who were available and willing to participate in the FGD sessions were considered. Then, reaching some sects (e.g., the Qur’aniyyuun and the Shiites) for data collection was cumbersome. As such, one of the researchers relied on referrals before he could meet their leaders to seek consent (snowball sampling). The Sunni, the Sufi, the Shia and the Qur’aniyyuun sects comprised five discussants each. Four different sessions of FGDs were conducted among members of the four sects (one session for each group). These sects were considered because they are the most common Islamic sects that have different viewpoints on certain Islamic fundamentals. For gender representation, each group comprised three men and two women. The FGD guide for data collection was semi-structured, and the questions were asked in the Hausa language for convenience and easier flow between the moderator and the participants. The data were collected in Kaduna, Kano and

Katsina States, Northwest Nigeria, using a face-to-face data collection method. These Northwestern states were selected because the states have the highest population of members of these Islamic sects in Northern Nigeria. After the fieldwork, the data were translated and simultaneously transcribed into English language. The transcript was then coded manually and grouped into relevant themes, using the research questions as a guide. Afterwards, the coded themes were discussed thematically using thematic analysis and explication of texts as quotes/voices. In order to promote ethical research, the consent of the participants was sought before recording the sessions.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What positions do the selected Islamic sects hold about the return of Prophet ‘Iisa, Hadeeth being one of the primary sources of Islamic law, respecting the companions of Prophet Muhammad, using Shaykhs (past pious spiritual leaders) as intermediaries to attain spirituality from Allah as well as on abiding by governance of rulers in a secular state like Nigeria?

The Sects’ Beliefs on the Return of Prophet ‘Isa

In this theme, the participants were asked about the return of Prophet ‘Isa based on their understanding and the position of their respective sects. Data show a disparity of beliefs about the second coming of Prophet ‘Iisa among the four sects. The *Sunni* who also call themselves *Ahlus Sunnah* (the people upon Prophet Muhammad’s traditions) unanimously agreed that Prophet ‘Iisa is returning to the Earth as promised by Allah and recorded in Prophet Muhammad’s tradition. According to them, it is compulsory for whoever believes in the sanctity of the Qur’aan and Prophet Muhammad’s message to accept the return of Prophet ‘Iisa. According to them, failure to believe in the divine message of the return of the Prophet is like not toying with one’s Islam. One of the discussants among the *Sunni* sect, Mallam Ismail Musa said:

Qur’aan and Sunnah are the major sources of Islamic legislation. Anybody that does not believe in Qur’aan and the hadith of the prophet, such a person is not a Muslim. Qur’an is guidance, while the hadith translate some of what the Qur’an says. Anything you do not understand in the Qur’an, then you would be back to the hadith. (*Mallam Ismail Musa, FGD Session 1*)

Just as the *Sunni* sect, the Suffi, represented by the *Tijaaniyah movement*, held a similar position that Prophet 'Iisa will surely return to the Earth. Their only addition was that he would come back as a follower of Prophet Muhammad and one of his selected pious servants (*waliyullah*).

Isa alayhi salaam will surely come back; even Sheikh Ibrahim Niyyass confirmed in many of his books he wrote. There is no objection to that. Jesus will be back as a follower and also *waliyullah* (the selected servant of Allaah) because Prophet Muhammad is the seal of the holy prophet; there is no other prophet after him. (*Mallam Aminu Bello, FGD Section 3, Sufi Sect 2021*)

The *Shia* also believed and believe that Prophet 'Iisa is coming back when the time appointed by Allah reaches. However, the discussants added that when the time comes for the prophet to return, he would be accompanied by Imaam Mahdi with whom he would work together on his second-coming mission as earlier found out by Australia's Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) (2006).

Isa alayhi salaam is coming back and he is not coming alone but coming back with Imam Mahdi. He is the one they will work together and complete the mission of Prophet Muhammad SAW. (*FGD Session 4, Shia Sect 2021*)

The fundamental belief among the *Sunni*, the *Shia* and the *Sufi* that Prophet 'Iisa will come back follows Allah's statement in Qur'an 4:158 that "Allah raised him up to Himself. Allah is Almighty, All-Wise", meaning that he shall return to the Earth. On the contrary, the *Qur'aniyyuun* differs entirely from these first three positions. To the *Qur'aniyyuun* (those who only believe in the Qur'aan as the only divine source of Islamic legislation), believing in the return of Prophet 'Iisa as Muslims is like the Christians' belief about Jesus' seconding coming.

Prophet 'Iisa is not coming back till the day of judgment. Based on the Qur'aan, it did not say Anabi Isa will come back. Some hadith where Muslims Alisunnah believe that Jesus alayhi salaam will come back is the same as the Christian belief. (*FGD Session 2, 2021*)

Hadeeth as one of the primary sources of Islamic law

All the four sects were asked about their beliefs in accepting the Prophet's tradition (*hadeeth*) as a fundamental source of Islamic legislation. There was a unanimous agreement among the *Sunni* about accepting *hadeeth* as a primary

sour of Islamic legislation, as all the five discussants in the FGD attested that Hadeeth is a very vital part of Islam, and as such, must be considered as a source to legislate rulings in Islam. In their explanation, some Quranic injunctions are only referenced in the Qur'aan, but with Hadeeth, such injunctions are fully and clearly expatiated. According to the discussants, rejecting Hadeeth as one of the primary sources of Islamic legislation is enough to turn a Muslim into an unbeliever. One of the discussants, Mallam Ismail Musa, said:

The Hadeeth explained what is not understood in the Qur'aan. Anybody that does not believe in Qur'aan and Hadeeth, definitely the person is not a Muslim. Hadeeth is used to understand the depth of religion because there are a lot of things the Qur'an does not explain. For example, we should pray five daily prayers, but we should just pray; it does not specify the number of prayers we are to pray. The Qur'aan also doesn't specify the time for each solaat. There is also solaat Ishai and other solats that the Qur'aan does not specify, but the Hadeeth of the Prophet SAW brings it. Also, when we are to bathe dead bodies, the Qur'aan does not say anything, but the Hadeeth talks about it.

The perspectives shared by the *Sunni* were also shared by the Sufi discussants. In fact, they maintained that despite the existence of some differences in their own style of Islamic practice with other sects' such as the Sunni's, they have a similar understanding of Qur'aan and Hadeeth being the two primary sources of Islamic legislation like some other sects. According to them, anyone who thinks Hadeeth is not a source of Islamic law has gone outside the dictates of Islam- so, such an individual will not be regarded as a Muslim for going against one of the fundamentals of Islam. One discussant stated:

...whoever does not believe in those two legislations (Qur'aan and Hadeeth) definitely is not a Muslim... the Qur'an and the hadith are the most important Islamic legislation. (*Mallam Aminu Bello, FGD, 2021*)

However, despite that the Sufi believe in the Qur'aan and Hadeeth as the primary sources of Islamic legislation, they tend to reject some traditions traceable to some Sunni scholars such as Shaykh Albani, Imam Ibn Kathir, among others. During their discussions, they maintained that they feel more

comfortable accepting Hadeeth used by their scholars in their books more than those written by other non-Suffi scholars. Then, the *Shia* discussants believe in Hadeeth as a source of Islamic legislation, but not all the Hadeeth. According to them, most Hadeeth are fabricated. Instead of believing in many Hadeeth, they choose to hold whatever the *Ahlul Bayt* (the Prophet's household) in more esteem than any statement emanating from anyone who lived with or reported traditions from Prophet Muhammad. Unlike the other three sects, the *Qur'aaniyyuun* do not even have any belief in the sanctity of Hadeeth, let alone holding it as a source of Islamic law, as earlier established by Usman, Shaharuddin and Mohamad (2018). According to all the five discussants of the sect, Qur'aan is a complete book of law that does not require any other supporting documentation for its completion. One of the reasons deduced from their rejection of Hadeeth as a source of Islamic law was that they have access to many fabricated traditions of the Prophet which they assumed were written in collections of Hadeeth but could not have been stated by Prophet Muhammad himself, contradicting Qur'aan 61:10-11 and showing religious incompleteness (Hamid, 2007).

In addition, just as the *Sunni* earlier described those who do not believe the Hadeeth to be a source of Islamic legislation as non-Muslim, they also described any individual who does not respect Prophet Muhammad's companions as not only a non-Muslim, but also a hypocrite. One of the Sunnis explicitly stated:

Disrespecting the prophet's companion is a sign of hypocrisy in Islam. So, anybody who disrespects any of the sohabah, that person is not a Muslim. Even though, he is a Muslim but he's not a Mu'meen.

A similar position was espoused by members of the *Qur'aaniyyuun* discussed with. A male discussant was direct with his response by saying that "whoever does not believe in all companions is not a Muslim." Although the Sufi members also maintained that the Prophet's companions deserve to be respected, they disputed the claim that they always hold their own scholars in higher esteem than Prophet Muhammad's companions. To them, no scholar or Shaykh can be as deserving of respect about the companions after the Prophet.

It is a very interesting question because Sunni usually believe and accuse Tareeqoh of downgrading sohabahs in superiority to our sheikhs. Saying that our Sheikhs are more important than the sohabahs, is a lie. Out of the hundred blessings one companion had, our Sheikhs will not get even one. The sohabahs are far better than their sheikhs.

Although the Shia sect were of the argument that some companions are respected by their members while some are not based on the 'sins' they committed.

We respect all of them, but there are some of them that committed sins... but we don't insult them because every human being is a sinner. We don't insult the wife of the Prophet, Aishah. We believe after Prophet Muhammad, Seyidina Ali should have been the successor of the Prophet SAW after his death. If we find anyone of them (companions) guilty, we will accuse that person without insulting him or her. (*A Shia Member, FGD, 2021*)

The sects' beliefs in using Shaykhs (past pious spiritual leaders) as intermediaries to attain spirituality from Allah

This theme explains the sects' discordant beliefs on the connection between the attainment of spirituality and the use of Shaykhs as intermediaries to ascend to Allah and attain piety/spirituality as practised by some sects. This is known as *tawausul*.

The Sunni do not believe in using the names of Shaykhs or even the Shaykhs themselves as ladders to attain spirituality. According to the discussants, using Shaykhs as ascensions to Allah is a form of associating partners with Allah, and should be desisted from. The only accepted practice one can get from Shaykhs is knowledge. A member of the sect succinctly stated:

We don't believe in any Sheikh's intermediary. Everyone is on his own. Sheikh and any others. The only thing is, you can go to Sheikh and add knowledge to what you have. There is no Sheikh that can humbly come out and say I am better than you or than any other person. This thing is to struggle for your Aakhirah, struggle for your hereafter. No one, but only the Prophet SAW has the right to intercept between you and Allaah as long as you don't come with any forms of shirk.

Also, the Qur'aaniyyuun shared this same position. Their leader said:

The Prophet SAW has the authority that no one can free you from the punishment of Allaah and no one has the

right to tell you that you must follow him to get to one certain level in Islam. The Prophet SAW, the only guidance, if you follow him and his sayings, you're at the highest peak of success. But if you deny or abandon what he said, such people are at loss. No one can say you must follow him to attain spirituality.

On the other hand, using Shaykhs as intermediaries is one of the core practices among the Shia sect. According to them, they use their Murshids (those who guide) as intercession, for they can only be put on the straight path by these Murshids. According to the leader of the sect,

...we have what we called Murshids in which we use to do tawassul (intercession). We believe our leaders will put us through in a straight way. We are not like other Tariqoh.

On the side of the Sufi, people from other sects have misunderstood the concept of using Shaykh as an intermediary to attain spirituality. The discussants submitted that they do not use any of their Shaykhs as an intermediary to attain piety or spirituality because they believe no one is superior to another fellow being. However, their main reason for always wanting to learn from their Shaykhs is that many of their Shaykhs always practise *Zuhd* (denying themselves with worldly amassment of wealth and property).

We follow them (Shaykhs) to learn, but they don't have any superiority over any other person. So, we must learn from them. They (Shaykhs) also have something called *zuhd* meaning the avoidance of worldly materials. Also, they are not attracted by worldly material and so on. (*A Sufi Discussant, FGD, 2021*)

The sects' ideologies on abiding by the governance of rulers in a secular state like Nigeria

Another discordant belief that was investigated was to understand the views of the sects on abiding by the political governance of secular leaders in a democracy. The *Sunni* sees it as a compulsion to abide by the rulings of political leaders Allah appoints for them irrespective of the religion of such leaders, for it is a direct instruction from Him as stated in the Qur'aan. The Prophet also advised Muslims to follow their leaders. The sect however unanimously cautioned that any leader, Muslim or non-Muslim whose rules are contradictory to Allah and Prophet Muhammad's injunctions must be flouted.

Whoever is appointed as a leader is mandatory for all Muslims to obey that person even if he is not a Muslim. The prophet SAW says that you should obey your leader even if he's not a Muslim unless he denies you your religion. But if as long as he's to give you the worship rights and freedom, then, it is mandatory for you to abide and obey that leader. (A *Sunni Discussant*, FGD 2021)

The same perspective was shared by all the *Qur'aaniyyuun's* discussants. One of the discussants clearly noted that "Allaah is the one who gives power, leadership to those who He wishes whether a Muslim or not", affirming Allah's instruction in Qur'aan 4:59 and scholars' positions (Oduah, 2019; Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Also, among the *Sufi* sect, supporting and following a political leader is an injunction from Allah which must be followed strictly, but with the same conditions earlier put forward by the Sunni and the *Qur'aaniyyuun* sects.

However, the discussants for the *Shia* sect explained the differences in the belief system of different Shia groups when it comes to following the political leadership of a country. According to them, the El-Zakzaky's group is averse to political leadership, and they are always against following the rules of political leaders, except if Islamic law is enacted (as also established by Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2001; Black, 2011; Oduah, 2019 and Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Though the Shiites are different. We believe in governance. Even now, the Zakzaky's side is different from our own because the Zakzaky's followers once said they don't believe in any leadership if Islamic Shariah is not implemented... We participate in governance. Even we have a Shia that is a senator, house of rep. We have quite a number of people in this government. We are ready to support in any worldly affairs.

Research Question 2: How does each sect react when confronted with rivalry or aggression from another sect(s)?

According to the Sunni sect, cases of rivalry and aggression from any opposing sect had happened to them on some occasions, but only one of such cases resulted in conflict, though they later reconciled with the other sect through mutual dialogue. When probed further about what the cause of the conflict was, one of the members responded:

The person we argued with is a Tijaniyyah. We argued whether Prophet SAW died or not. The Tijaniyyah said the Prophet SAW did not die while we said the Prophet died because his grave is there.

Aside from the mutual dialogue strategy to solve discordant beliefs among the Sunni and other sects, other strategies are calmness and the application of wisdom. This is more buttressed by another member of the sect during the discussion:

Whoever comes to you with aggressive action or annoyance in terms of religious arguments, the best thing is to calm down and use wisdom for that person. If you do not use wisdom, it can escalate because a religious argument is just like petrol and fire. It can escalate to the extent that two persons will never want it to go. If you cannot accommodate that kind of person, it is better for you not to start arguing with anybody. (A *Sunni member, FGD 2021*)

From the Qur'aaniyyuun however, they have never encountered a case where discordant beliefs have resulted in conflict between them and other sects. However, they always get angry whenever people call them names such as Boko Haram. When asked about the strategies they adopt whenever confront with any form of rivalry or/and aggression from any other sect, one of the members responded:

People do approach me with such statements (aggressive), but I usually act to calm myself down because fighting with one's religion's colleagues is not right nor just. It is not good for a Muslim to allow his temper to drag him to a place where both of you will now be on regulation after fighting. (A *member of the Qur'aaniyyuun Sect, FGD 2021*)

Aside from this "leave and forgo" strategy, the sect also adopts calmness just to let peace reign. In the case of the Sufi sect, their sect had on several occasions been insulted by another sect, especially the *Salafi* also known as Sunni in some climes. Instead of attacking the sect that insults them physically, they too resort to verbal attack as a defensive strategy.

At times, it does happen in this very community where I met them-- since we have mixed up with the Salafs. In their mosque, they do insult us. Though we do join their

preaching, but also retaliate. Physical combat has never happened between the two sects. Just verbal abuse from each other. Most times they do lie against us, and we usually come out to defend ourselves. People do believe them on whatever they say too. That is why we now come out to defend ourselves, but they abuse us with the use of the microphone. We do the same to them, but never up to physical combat or conflict between the two of us. (*A Member of Sufi Sect, FGD, 2021*)

For the Shia sect, being confronted with rivalry attacks is not new to them. According to its members, they try as much as possible to run away from religious issues that might invite violent conflicts. With that strategy, they have little or no clash with other sects despite confrontations that might come from the sects. These findings contradict Ahmar's (2007) finding that thousands of people have been killed in sectarian violence in different parts of the country. However, our findings have proven the assumption of conflict theory that disagreement or violence occurs whenever a group in a social system wants to dominate other groups with certain powers. From the findings, it is deduced that each sect wants to dominate others by portraying their beliefs as more acceptable than other beliefs. Each sect always stands firm in its belief regardless of what adherents outside the sect say. The study has shown that despite differences in intra-religious beliefs among the sects, they do not resort to violence whenever religious arguments emanate. Instead, they resort to anti-conflict strategies such as mutual dialogue, silence, calmness and wisdom.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has empirically established the existence of discordant beliefs among the Sunni, the Sufi, the Shia and the Qur'aaniyyuun Islamic sects in the Northwestern geopolitical region of Nigeria. The discordant beliefs were seen within the context of believing in the second coming of Prophet 'Iisa (Jesus), using Hadeeth as an Islamic source of legislation, respecting the Prophet's companions, and abiding by secular leaders' rules. While some of the discordant beliefs among the sects sometimes led to verbal insults and confrontations, some sects managed and handled belief discordant with calmness, wisdom and avoidance of potential conflicts. These aggressive-control strategies have been enabling the sects to manage and avert any potential combative/physical intra-religious and inter-sectarian violent conflicts that may arise from discordant beliefs among the sects.

Based on the findings, it is therefore recommended that periodic inter-sectarian conferences should be organised by Islamic leaders as an avenue where individuals who have been keeping malice or perception about a sect for long will express their concerns, and reconciliations might be tied in such a gathering. The National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) should also stand up to its responsibility by regulating preaching emanating from different Islamic sects. Finally, every sect should always sermonise people without abusing or confronting other sects. They should call people to the truth without name-calling, aggressiveness and attacks. inter-sectarian debates should be promoted so that truth seekers will intellectually identify truth from scholarly arguments.

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