

Book review

Creed & Grievance: Muslim-Christian relations & conflict resolution in northern Nigeria

Mustapha, Abdul Raufu and David Ehrhardt, editors 2018

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*Reviewed by Jannie Malan**

This is a book with a thought-prompting title and cover, and with thought-prompting contents and conclusions. The colourful cover picture takes the reader into a historical background of hundreds of years. It shows a parade of men mounted on adorned horses 'greeting the Emir of Kano during the annual Durbar Festival in Kano's Old City, 2008'. The Durbar (*military* parade) Festival dates from the time when in the then Emirate (state) horses were used in *warfare* (NigeriaGalleria 2017), but it also has *culturo-religious* connotations. It is held at the culmination of two great Islamic festivals at the end of the month of Ramadan (NigeriaGalleria 2017). The sub-title points to a recent history of a few decades which is discussed in the book: Muslim-Christian relations and conflict resolution in northern Nigeria.

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The title implies a linkage with theories about greed and grievance as causes of civil conflict. In *Creed & Grievance*, the key publication *Greed and Grievance in Civil War* (Collier and Hoeffler 2000) is mentioned where the author of chapter 7 refers to its finding ‘that religious diversity, like ethnic diversity, is associated with an increased propensity to conflict’ (p. 186). However, Collier and Hoeffler also found that the greed for resources to finance rebellion seems to play a *greater* role in causing civil conflict than grievances about ethno-religious discrimination, political repression and inequality. One may therefore wonder whether the *Creed & Grievance* title is not perhaps meant to imply that creed may be greedy, and that greediness for more support of one’s own religion might be a stronger motivation for conflict than grievances about suffering discrimination. And, therefore, that absolute loyalties to creeds may be the fundamental[ist] cause of conflict in northern Nigeria.

The author of chapter 2 is cautious about this contentious terrain in the domain of religion, but does venture to mention that ‘[t]here is still a high degree of religiosity among northern Muslims, just as there is among Christians: a lot of firm belief in systems of metaphysical-theological-moral propositions, founded on sacred texts ...’ (pp. 76–77). He adds that such convictions are held even by people with Ph.D. degrees, and are well and widely established, so that ‘Nigeria’s believers of all persuasions’ tend to guard and defend them (p. 77).

Apart from these frank comments about religiosity, religiousness is apparently treated in an uncritical (*bona fide*?) way throughout the rest of the book. What is stressed in the Introduction (chapter 1) as well as in chapters 4, 7 and 9, however, is that any conflict which seems to be somehow related to religion should not simplistically be labelled as ‘religious’. This applies to conflict in northern Nigeria, in the whole of Nigeria and probably ‘in any society’ (p. 18). For a proper understanding of such conflict, the social, political and economic context must be taken into account. Following this emphasis on contextuality, the next few pages of the introductory chapter are focused on the educational, social and economic

disadvantages suffered by northern Nigeria since the early colonial period (pp. 19–21). The discussion is endorsed by a table showing poverty levels of more than 70% (p. 21).

The first of the three parts of the book is about the Muslim and Christian context. Chapter 2 describes the Muslim majority of over 70% in northern Nigeria – according to the last census that gathered data about religious affiliation (55 years ago). It also gives questionnaire results (of just over 9 years ago), from which may be derived that probably 80% of Muslims in the whole of Nigeria belong to sub-groups of the Sunnis, while the remaining 20% is made up of several smaller groupings. It is acknowledged that over more than 70 years there has been intra-Islam intolerance as well as violence in northern Nigeria, which in some cases led to state intervention. It is stated that while Boko Haram and a few other groups are rejecting any secular state, '[e]veryone else accepts the constitution and laws' (p. 79), including Sharia law in the states where applied. But also that everyone experiences the problem 'that the laws are constantly corrupted and subverted by human greed and incompetence from which no religious or ethnic group is immune' (p. 79).

Chapter 3 is about the significant Christian minority with its diversity of denominations. According to the 1963 census, Christians were just below 10%, and followers of African Traditional Religions just below 20%. Various issues, for instance leadership and gender relations, are discussed. In chapter 4, historical contexts of Muslim-Christian encounters are described and discussed. There were the shocks of aggressive colonialism and contentious religious pluralism as well as legal pluralism. There were the missionaries who proclaimed 'the superiority of Christianity' (p. 113), and there were the states where Sharia law was instituted. There was fear of discrimination and domination. But there was also the reality of Muslim and Christian communities who 'live peacefully side-by-side for the most part' (p. 126).

This phenomenon of peaceful coexistence interrupted by antagonistic confrontation is called 'the central puzzle' of the whole book (p. 126).

Possible and partial answers to this puzzle are given towards the end of chapter 4 and in the subsequent seven chapters, but I will not reveal them here. A book review is after all (usually) supposed to recommend review readers to read the book itself.

Part two is about key contemporary issues: Sharia law and legal pluralism (chapter 5), Boko Haram, youth mobilisation and jihadism (chapter 6), and complementarity and competition (chapter 7). In chapter 7, several informal, occupational enterprises are described and discussed – showing that while they may at times aggravate competition and conflict, they are playing an important role in promoting complementarity and mitigating conflict.

Part three gives practical examples and details of conflicts and peacebuilding in Jos (chapter 8) and on the Jos Plateau (chapter 9), and a comparison between bottom-up and top-down approaches to peacebuilding (chapter 10). Various causes of conflict are discussed – for instance, problems between herders and farmers, ‘indigenes’ and ‘settlers’, religious majorities and minorities, and commissions of inquiry and military interventions.

The concluding chapter (11) is about diversity, religious pluralism and democracy, and contains a very useful overview of problems and possibilities. There are most relevant recommendations and implied recommendations to governing bodies and political leaders, religious bodies and their leaders, ethno-linguistic groups and their leaders, and to religiously affiliated and other members of the public.

As such an instructive and insightful book, it can be strongly recommended to practitioners and researchers in the field of dealing with challenging conflict – whether ethno-religious, socio-economic, politico-hegemonic, or all of these interrelated, and whether in northern Nigeria or elsewhere in Nigeria, Africa or the world. A book built on so much experience, expertise and research – including previous research as manifested in the impressively long bibliographies – should encourage ongoing dialogue and research.

Technically, the planning, editing, lay-out and printing have been very well done. I did not read in a proof-reading mode, but I seem to have an editing alertness whenever I read, and in this way I happened to notice only four minor omissions and one or two style discrepancies.

Creed & Grievance is indeed a very recommendable book. Its authors have managed to share a wealth of data and discussions about contentious issues in an impartial way, but with a message about the possibilities of mutual understanding and tolerance, of restoring damaged relations, and of transforming contra-existence into co-existence.

Sources

Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler 2000. *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*. Washington, D.C., World Bank.

NigeriaGalleria 2017. Kano Durbar Festival. Available from: <https://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Kano/Durbar-Festival-Kano.html> [Accessed 5 June 2018].