

CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE CAUSES OF INTER ETHNIC VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY - RESOLUTIONS, MANAGEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This work is concerned more in explaining how the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria in respect of ethnical, cultural, lingual and tribal diversities constitute the major causes of inter ethnic violence conflicts ravaging the present day Nigeria and making political seats very hot and the country most ungovernable. We looked at different causes of inter-ethnic violent conflicts in Nigeria. We discovered that inter-ethnic violent conflicts in Nigeria are not a product of any single causation but a product of several variables which we are able to examine. We inquired into the behavior of different ethnic groups and the feeling of alienation and denial which culminated into violent reaction in different quarters. We applied the need-aggression theory as our theoretical framework of analysis noting that the human needs theory as propounded by Maslow is very close to explaining the work as the theory states that every human being has various needs and can resort to violent conflict if frustration sets due to activities of another individual or group of persons. The needs theory is closely related to the needs, frustration-aggression theory. The work is presented in a historical, descriptive, comparative and analytical method, using 'Content Analysis' as our methodology. We reviewed so many literatures relevant to the topic in issue, as well as analyze some documents based on facts and figures. The work finally illustrates that violence was the only tool available to one suffering alienation, denial of right to life and various other fundamental rights vis-a-vis ethnic groups faced with the challenges of marginalization, alienation, fear of insecurity and survival which gave rise to various ethnic groups taking arms and resorting to violent conflicts in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: HETEROGENEITY, CONFLICTS, VIOLENCE, ETHNICITY, ALIENATION.

Introduction

Alaku, (2020) narrates that before the advent of British administration in Nigeria, the different ethnic nations that make up Nigeria today lived as free independent kingdoms, emirates and autonomous communities with hegemonic controls. He further named some of these independent nations to include - Oyo, Benin, Calabar, Opobo, Sokoto Caliphate, Igbo, Tiv, Yoruba, Hausa, Egba, Jukun, Biram, Ibibio, Efik, Idoma, Nupe, Kanuri, Ijaw, Itsekiri and many others.

He stated that even the name Nigeria was derived from Niger area by Flora Shaw, then wife of the British governor general of Nigeria Lord Frederick Lugard, in 1898, and applied the

administrative pattern of dual mandate policy otherwise known as indirect rule to govern Northern Nigeria before the amalgamation of Northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914.

The heterogeneity of Nigeria culminated into mutual antagonistic suspicions among ethnic groups who are forced to remain together by the British/Nigeria Constitution in 1966.

Such ethnic antagonism resulted into civil conflicts by the Eastern part of Nigeria who are predominantly Igbo people.

Nnamdi Azikiwe quoted that's Nigeria is made up of more than two hundred and fifty (250) language groups.

This research work is interested in finding solution to the ethnic violent conflicts ravaging the entire nation since independence till the 21st century Nigeria. The entire social media is embedded with one violence or the other, the Boko Haram sometimes sound religious and at other times sound banditry, the Yoruba Oduduwa agitation, the Biafra agitation and the Middle Beltans sometimes going violent against the government, destroying public properties and institutions claiming marginalized and alienated and seeking for right of self determination or self rule.

We layed a number of theoretical and methodological propositions and at the end decided to work with the Needs/Frustration-aggression theory because they are closely related.

Conflict is vulnerable to human nature, endemic and particular to human society. Otite (2004) stated that conflict is caused by divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals, groups or persons in defined social and physical environments. Also other writers like Coser (1958) emphasized that conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponent is to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Obasikene (2019) saw conflict as an expression of hostility, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and negative attitude towards an individual, groups, nations or structures. He equally included that conflict can be linked with situations which involve the contradictory or irreconcilable interests between two opposite parties. To us conflict is a clash, disagreement, sometimes violent between two opposing individuals or groups. A contradiction, incompatibility discord or irreconcilable interest between two opposing groups or individuals.

However, Hegelian dialectics of thesis - anti thesis - synthesis states that contradictions is not entirely negative but leads to conflict and tension while it's resolution brings about social change that catapults society to higher levels of development. Also Nwobodo J. C. (2019) in his work 'role of religion in achieving sustainable peace and conflict resolution in Nigeria stated that there is the other side of the coin when discussing conflict. He cited Obasi Igwe (2007) as saying that Marxist/Radical writers adopted the 'conflict theory' as full of contradictions and necessary for moving society forward from one stage to another; from the primitive to the socialist/communist era or stage. He stated that conflict is a veritable tool for change and that without conflict society, shall be so dull, stagnant, immutable and

underdeveloped. Violent conflicts like wars, ethno religious conflicts can move society positively towards development. He finally concluded that such violent conflicts at the end of reconciliation brings about peace, good neighborliness and inter ethnic cooperation.

Operational Terms

Heterogeneity - As opposed to homogeneity. Webster Dictionary (1989) defined heterogeneity as being heterogeneous, ie consisting of dissimilar or diverse ingredients or constituents derived from another specie. We are able to use heterogeneity as best suitable to discuss Nigeria because of its diverse nature, borne out of different species of people with different religions, different tribes, races, languages and cultures joined together by the white man as a nation state. That is why Nigeria claims unity in diversity.

Violence - Okanya (1999) saw violence as a human phenomenon that carries overtones of violence associated with illegitimate force. He stated that violence occurs when any group in a political system oversteps its constitutional bounds to the extent that some other groups experience some degree of constraints. He enumerated a number of violence such as political violence, civil violence, ethnic violence, religious violence, etc. However we are concerned here with ethnic violence. To us, violence is the use of extreme force, action intended to cause destruction, pain or suffering, widespread fighting, caused by injustice or agitations.

Ethnicity - Historically, the word ethnicity in Africa vis-a-viz Nigeria was coined by the colonialist who categorized African linguistic groups as tribes. According to Mandani, there was a time when the word tribe possessed scientific content, when it characterized those social formations that did not possess a state - the communal, classless societies such as the German tribes.

Nnoli (1980) in his ethnic politics in Nigeria, asserted that today - every language group in Africa is referred to as a tribe regardless of the nature of its social development. Nnoli reiterated that it was the colonialists who separated these linguistic groups from one another, especially in residential areas. He referred to Hausa-Fulani in Northern Nigeria as a tribe separated by the British over lords from the Southerners for reasons of racist/imperialist interests. He stated that before the British imperialist administration of Nigeria and before the official British policy to separate the Northern and Southern Nigeria, the Southern and Northern migrants migrate from the South to the Northern cities and lived together in harmony with their hosts before the white man's exploitative tendencies.

According to Nnoli, ethnicity is a more universal concept than tribalism because it is not limited by space, it is more dispositional than tribalism in identifying the features that would be exhibited, including hypothetical ones if certain conditions were fulfilled.

Nnoli Finally defined ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different Ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture or bo th. However language has always been the most crucial variable as social formations, ethnic groups are not necessarily homogeneous but heterogeneous entities even linguistically and culturally.

Ethnicity possesses the following characteristics namely:

Heterogeneity, colossal, discord, conflict, endemic, volatile and so on.

However, to us, ethnicity is a word coined by the colonial lords to separate us and make us believe that we are diverse and different individuals with different interest so as to separate us from being united or acting or speaking with one voice so as not to attack them or resist them from exploiting us for their materialistic and imperialistic interests.

Theoretical Perspectives

We had a problem of selecting the best theory for this work we selected from the following related theories namely:

Vroom valence/expectancy theory

Theory of political realism/power politics

Structural conflict theory

Human needs theory

Biological theory

Frustration/aggression theory

Relative deprivation theory and so on.

However from research perspective, none of these theories could fit completely on the topic in issue. However, we identified the needs theory and frustration/aggression theory as very close to explaining the causes of heterogeneity - the major cause of ethnic violent conflicts in Nigeria.

The human needs theory as propounded by Abraham Maslow and the frustration/aggression theory has it that if the ethnic groups are frustrated as a result of denial or alienation to the national wealth the tendency for aggression and subsequent violent attack or conflict on the government may result. Though the theories may differ, yet, they can still be situated within the needs theory of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.

The following authors in their works namely: Azar (1994), Rosati et al (1990), Gurr (1970), Burton (1972) and Neef (1991) and others in their works identified with Maslow's theory of human needs.

Causes of Ethnic Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria is a heterogeneous nation state with over 250 language groups, multifarious nationalities, different tribes and multiplicity of cultures. Christianity is dominant in the South and in the North. The dominant religion is Islam, while traditional religion is practiced in every part of the country. Otite (1999) asserted that Nigeria as a country came into being in 1914 with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by Sir Frederick Lugard as a British colonial creation. The British practiced indirect rule in the North to divert the people's attention from their exploitation of the system and so prevent the people from seeing them as their enemy.

Nnoli (1978) reiterated that the British seized every available opportunity to spread the propaganda that Nigerians were different people and never homogeneous and therefore, are not the same, as they as separated from one another by great distances, by differences in history, racial, tribal, political and religious barriers.

However, our leaders since independence in 1960, built on these sentiments to advance their political careers. For instance, the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa capitalized on this to say that Nigeria Unity is only on paper.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Western Nigeria was equally credited to have said that Nigeria is not a nation but a mere geographical expression.

One would see from the above assertions that political struggle has changed from class lines to communal lines, so loyalty is no more to one Nigeria but to one's ethnic nationality.

Majority of the inter ethnic violent conflicts we have had in Nigeria in the past have their roots in inter ethnic antagonism and struggle for power and control of the country's resources.

Leadership: Achebe stated that the problem of Nigeria is bad leadership.

Emeka (2007) stated that leadership in Nigeria have been vision less, inept, corrupt and selfish. Yosufu (1978) averred that conscienceless people are in power while powerless people are the ones with conscience. Those in power see it as an opportunity to amass public wealth to better themselves and not for the general interest of the public. The people in power use the instruments of intimidation to control the people. These gave impetus to the emergence of so many militant groups feeling alienated, intimidated, denied and marginalized.

Feeling of Injustice: The theory of frustration/aggression is the causes of the increase in inter ethnic militancy in Nigeria. The feeling of injustice has helped to fuel violent conflicts in Nigeria. The theory explains how the denial of ones desires by another individual or groups can lead to aggression and frustration which is capable of necessitating ethnic violent conflict bedeviling Nigeria today.

Presently, violent conflicts in Nigeria among ethnic groups have reached a level that calls for national concern. Millions of lives and properties worth billions of naira are lost every day in such conflicts throughout Nigeria but more especially at the North-West Nigeria. The frustration has led to banditry, kidnapping of people of all classes but especially among the politicians and wealthy class for ransoms. Even the people in power with their security guards are molested, kidnapped or killed. The aggression has degenerated to the proliferation of sophisticated arms everywhere which is so dangerous to the security of lives and properties. The latest development is the agitation for separation, secession or freedom for self rule amongst ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

The Poor Judicial System: Matters in the courts are over delayed, that people fear taking their cases to the courts. Cases may take 10 to 20 years at the supreme courts before justice can be reached. Justice delayed is justice denied. The people or group advocating for justice may lose hope and seek alternative justice measures which sometimes may be violent.

The Issue of Nigeria Police: The Police is established to maintain law and order and to secure lives of citizens and their properties. They lack proactive measures in doing their

constitutional mandates of protection of life and property. They wait until violence is made before they can act.

Sometimes the police will take sides by backing one side against the other. This is because they know the best ways to circumvent the law in favor of any side they are interested in. They can arrest and detain individuals at will because they know how to bend the law to achieve ugly purposes.

They are accused of extra judicial killing of citizens without trial. It was such aggression and frustration that led to the national protest against police brutality and abrogation of the Special Anti Robbery Squad of the police (SARS) in 2019. The SARS was accused of extra judicial killing, arrest and maiming of innocent citizens. The youth protested and marched to the streets in almost all major cities in Nigeria for almost one month calling for the end of SARS and police brutality. Although the noble idea was hijacked by frustrated hoodlums who unleashed violence and destruction of government establishment, public properties and killing innocent police officers.

Poverty: one of the characteristics of developing economies of the world vis-a-vis Nigeria is poverty. Poverty can pre-dispose people to violence. In line with that common maxim " a hungry man is an angry man" statistics has it that Nigeria is rated as one of the poorest countries of the world. Half of the country's police live below the poverty line and so the bulk of the people are hungry and frustrated and therefore looking for where to unleash their anger and aggression. That gives impetus to the mass turn out of people during any form of opportunity to protest such as during the END SARS or other public protests against the government. It is always very easy to mobilize the people who are angry and frustrated or ethnic groups agitating for cessation or freedom from Nigeria. That is why the organizers or sponsors of these conflicts find it easy to mobilize hungry youth as their armies, they recruit from the unemployed, under employed, who may accept little sums of money and arms to prosecute wars which may even claim or eliminate their lives. They work as thugs and in current ethnic agitations, they work as soldiers for the ethnic agitators. Those boys are not interested in the consequence of their actions as they already feel that they are not fairly treated by the society.

Land Matters: Otite (1999) stated that such conflicts exists between farmers and cattle herders, fisherman and pond owners, foresters and timber loggers, ETC. Such clashes exists throughout Nigeria - over contraverted uses or exploitation of land and water resources. The conflicts sometimes start with boundary disputes, citing of local government headquarters, citing of markets and other social amenities such as schools, health centers, etc, which are capable of attracting social benefits.

Solutions/Management of Conflicts

Onu (2009) stated that conflicts resolution and management refers to the process of engaging with and transforming the relationship, interest, discourses and if necessary the very constitution of violent conflicts.

Otite (2007) discovered that Nigeria social structure is inherently prone to generate conflicts from diverse ethnic cultural interest and goals from the political and economic necessities of survival as individuals and identifiable autonomous social groups struggling for advantages. Crucial in this aspect especially amongst rural people is the world of work to achieve substance in the economic order and the sphere of material and physical resources. The meaning of his statement is that conflicts are caused by many factors ranging from people's divergent interests, values, systems and ideological convictions to economic, social and environmental factors. It is because, conflict is endemic and vulnerable to human nature, efforts should therefore be made to manage conflicts through transformation and conflict management techniques such as negotiations, mediations, role of dialogue in a round table involving neutral personalities.

Also the role of empathy in conflict resolutions, role of gifts, conflict counselor or advisor, role of tolerance, or let the matter go and of course, conflicts can be resolved according to McKenna (1999) if the following points are maintained;

1. Avoidance
2. Accommodation
3. Compromise
4. Competition
5. Negotiation

Obasikene (2019) stated that multidimensional approach which means a combination of both dominant prescriptive models and the environmental friendly culture circumscribed methods are conflict dynamic approach to conflict resolution should be preferred.

We wish to adopt Obasikene's assertion of multi-dimensional approach were by such use of elders, family heads, clan heads, intermediaries, religious heads and traditional rulers should be explored in resolving local conflicts. We must equally note that the world today is bedeviled with conflicts both locally and internationally.

Obasi-Igwe (1997) said that the practical efforts of the 1967 Aburi accord between Odumegwu Ojukwu and Yakubu Gowon and other Nigerian leaders at the height of national crisis was to transform the country from coerced colonial inspired institutive federation to a locally inspired voluntary and constitutive union. The Aburi accord was organized under the auspices of the then Ghanaian head of state to mediate in the Nigerian national crisis. These are the methods of crisis management and transformation techniques. Finally the Westernized modern model of conflict resolution and management involves such channels clearly spelt out and well-known to the citizens. Such westernized method includes the courts (Traditional/Sharia), magistrate courts, high courts and courts of appellant jurisdiction.

The difference between the traditional methods of conflict resolution and the westernized model is that courts are interested in finding out the guilty and apportioning blames and punishment according to the law, while the traditional method is more interested in reconciliation, making use of historical relations and the love that existed in the past to reconcile the two parties or groups.

Conclusion

Nigeria as a country of ethno religious and ethno cultural and different language groups should understand that conflict is endemic and inevitable to human nature and therefore should imbibe management techniques to coexist as a nation.

Augustine Comte - stated that the management of men is the management of crisis. This means that in Nigeria as a nation must not only coexist but learn how to manage or live with conflicts. We must remember that we are bound together by history and nature and therefore should avoid ethnic rivalry at all costs. Violent clashes should be de-emphasized. Nigerian leaders should apply good leadership qualities that will unite the ethnic groups albeit diversities.

Leaders must understand the causes of ethnic conflicts and should avoid utterances or policies that may generate ethnic and religious feelings or inclinations that may fuel ethnic crisis. Corruption, nepotism, favoritism and other negative vices should be avoided by the leaders. The nation should be transformed by restructuring the following areas;

The Constitution, equal number of states, methods of sharing the national cake (wealth), national appointments must be balanced according to the geopolitical zones or states or geopolitical equilibrium, whereby all geopolitical zones or states gets equal share of the national cake. By such restructuring, Nigeria will boast of a nation state where love, justice, rule of law, equity and fair play prevails.

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