CONFLICT AND PEACE AS ANTAGONISTIC NEIGHBOURS: A STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF PEACE AND CONFLICT IN CONTEMPOARY SOCIETIES

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Abstract

Conflict and peace have been a trend in human affairs right from time immemorial. It is either a society is peaceful or in conflict. Peace and conflict determines human relations. The two terms are antagonistic because there will be no peace if a society is in conflict and at the same time conflict disrupt development and retards progress in the society. Parties to conflict cannot fight till eternity, measures have been devised to tame conflict and restore peace in any society. In communities, third parties including in-laws, grandchildren and some eminent persons enhances peaceful settlement of conflict. At the international level, international and regional organizations enhance peaceful interventions and settlement of conflicts. This work examines the concept of peace and conflict using predominantly secondary sources. The work proffered that although the two scenes cannot cohere or exist together, early detection of conflict can go a long way to nib in the bud the potential sources of the conflict before it escalate to an unimaginable stage which is crisis.

Keywords: Conflict, Peace, Antagonistic Neighbours, Impact, Contemporary Societies.

INTRODUCTION

Human societies are divided into two faces, that of consensus and that of conflict Akpan, Galadima (2003:64). Peace and Conflict are determinants of human societies. It is either there is conflict, or the society is peaceful. From time immemorial, issues of peace and conflict have always been the determinant of human relations. Peace time are usually terminated by conflict which may escalate into crisis. Crisis has never eluded settlement or resolution. This is because belligerent cannot fight till eternity, the need for resolution is usually devised either by the disputants through negotiation or by third parties through mediation.

People in all human societies yearn for peace, but conflict defies these peaceful tendencies and erupt because of certain compelling factors which are inevitable. First, differences in values and cultural practices and aspirations of individuals make it difficult for people to live without discord. Secondly, excessive need of humans amid scarce resources makes it difficult to think of peace without conflict and crisis. The pursuit of these resources usually leads to conflict. Lastly, as the holy book says, every inclination of the thought of man were bad all the time. This implies that conflict is genetic oriented. Since human ancestors were violent beings, their posterity bear the same violent disposition because of genetic makeup Faleti (2006:46).

Conflict and peace cannot co-exist at the same time. They are two different sides of the same coin. There is no meaningful progress and advancement when a society is in conflict. Such advancement can only be achieved when the compelling issues of conflict are resolved, and the people learn lessons from it. For a clear understanding of conflict and peace as antagonistic neighbours, the concept of peace, conflict, crisis and development are analysed.

THE CONCEPT OF PEACE

The concept of conflict has been given more attention by scholars to the extent that societies tend to focus more on it than peace, but the fact is that peace is highly needed for the progress and development of the human society. The focus on conflict has prompted people to think of peace as the absence of conflict and conflict as the absence of peace. This notion of peace regarded as the "converse of war". Ibeanu (2006:3) has been criticized by a number scholars including Akpan and Ikejiani Clark Akpan (2011:xxix). Even with the controversial nature of the concept of peace, it still receives some scholarship and attention by notable peace thinkers.

St. Augustine of Hippo contributed to the concept of peace in his Magnus Opus on peace entitled "Civitas Dei", The City of God. Augustine created two concepts, the city of God and the city of man. The city of God is peaceful and good with the delivery of peace which surpasses all human understanding. It is expected that human life and societal organization should be so organized to the extent that they will succeed in attracting heavenly perfection and peace on earth. The city of man is founded on appetitive and possessive impulses and is corrupt and torn by strife. It is on this realization that Ibeanu states that:

St. Augustine of Hippo distinguished between two cities namely, the City of God, which is founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual foundation, and the earthly City of Man, which is founded on appetitive and possessive impulses, is corrupt and torn by strife Clark (2009:7).

Another philosopher that analysed peace in its natural state was Jean Jacques Rousseau. He stated that man in his natural state had no desire, that man was born free, and indeed a gentle savage. Ibeanu argued that the tranquil state of man subsequently became corrupted by human desires and greed, thus, undermining the peaceful, pristine state of nature Clark (2009:9). Karl Marx in his conception of peace stated that peace can only be achieved in a classless society. This led to antagonistic class struggle until the emergence of the communist system in which all are equal in a State Clark(2009:10). This is not realizable in today's political system.

Aristotle conceived peace as realizable only in the polis (State) when it serves the purpose of human life. He stated that peace is the essence of human life and can only be attained in the polis. The polis (State) is the only forum where man can develop his potentials and become a happy and fulfilled man. Aristotle argued that the objective of the society is to provide for the welfare of its members and therefore unfold their potentials Clark(2009:9). This Aristotelian view of peace is further elaborated by Ikejiani Clark thus:

> For Aristotle, politics must be tied to the ethical to enable man to achieve peace, the purpose of life. He must live in an ethically built society, which is organized that the socio-economic, democratic and justice minimal are assured the citizens and that they are allowed to participate in governance (Clark,2009:9).

The philosophical conceptions of peace by philosophers mentioned above tend to focus more on the natural or original state of peace in the society. This conception of peace is the ideal situation of the term peace, in a natural state in human societies. But there is the need to address the concept beyond the state of nature.

The sociologist or sociological conception of peace addresses exactly what peace is. According to the sociologists, peace refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonism. This conception sees peace as a condition. Therefore, individuals and groups do not fight against each other, and their needs and expectations are assured. To achieve these basic needs, Ibeanu presents two stylized sociological responses thus:

> "There are two stylized sociological responses namely, structural-functional and dialectical-materialist responses. Structural functionalism sees the society as a mosaic of functions and structures that performs them, for example, in order to survive, society needs to educate its children, produce goods, govern its affairs and provide security for its members. These are functions and they necessitate a number of structures such as schools, industries, parliaments, courts, armed forces and so on. Structures means a set of interrelated roles necessary for performing specific functions. When structures perform their functions properly, there is order in the society and in fact, society inherently moves in the direction of order and stability. Consequently, from a structural functionalist perspective, peace is achieved where existing social structures perform their functions adequately, supported by the requisite culture, norms and values" Clark (2009:10).

The common meaning of peace as the absence of war receives attention by David Francis who argues that a society fragmented and polarized by perpetual war and armed conflict will interpret peace as the absence of war. When war ends and people return to their settlements, peace is achieved. Francis also points out some other conditions that could lead to peace. For example, a political community that has experienced unjust structures and policies will equate peace with justice and freedom. Also, people suffering from material deprivation and poverty will therefore perceive peace when there is equity, development and access to existential necessities of life. Above all, Francis generally defines peace as "the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence and peaceful coexistence Francis (2006:17).

The University of peace look at peace as a political condition that makes justice possible. This implies that to entrench peace, the political class must provide stable structures and secular structures. This means that government must be participatory and also, political values such as tolerance, bargaining and nepotism must become a culture in the society Ibeanu (2006:8)

The department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo also look at peace as only existing or created structure or mechanism that adjust, manage and harmonize in a satisfactory manner, contending and conflicting issues and interests Akpan (2011:xxxi).

Otoabasi Akpan also sees peace in terms of relations. For instance, relationships may be characterised by "absolute peace (total peace), cold peace (unfriendly peace), cruel peace (peace attained at great pains and cost), tenuous peace (peace that hardly exists), armed peace (peace induced by the influence of arms or threat of use of arms), guided peace (peace controlled by propaganda) and active peace (peace earned through deliberate and determined efforts (Akpan, 2011:xxxii).

In the final analysis, different perspectives and explanations have been given on the concept of peace. However, irrespective of the differences, it is safe to say that the outcome of any peaceful situation is a state of harmony and public security in the society, institutions or the nation.

CONCEPTUALISING CONFLICT

As already stated, the human society has two faces, that of consensus and that of conflict. Conflict is so pervasive to the extent that it has received much attention than any other issue in human societies. Conflict is an inevitable part of human existence Utin (2021:98) to the extent that it covers a greater part of the news in television, radio and even newspapers and magazine. There is also the existence of different kinds of conflict which include personal conflict, community conflict, religious conflict, racial conflict, organizational conflict, occupational conflict, intra-national conflict, inter-state conflict and International conflict. Conflict has been equally analyzed from different perspectives such as religion, economics, history, sociology, psychology, law and political science Utin(2022:50).

The pervasive nature of conflict has made it difficult to give it a clear and definite meaning or definition. Scholars have rather operationalized the concept of conflict where some view it as a condition in the society, while some view it as a process. These perspectives have received the attention of scholars including Johan Galtung, Lewis Coser, David Lockwood, Ralf Darendof, Herbert Spencer, Robert Park, Morton Deutsch, Habu Galadima, Otoabasi Akpan and others. Even with these differences in perspectives or positions regarding conflict, its manifestations, nature, goals, and outcomes are the same, leading to the conclusion that conflict usually arises due to incompatible interest as a result of struggle over values and attempt to lay claim to inadequate and valuable resources.

The pervasive and expansive nature of conflict does not mean that when it erupts, and escalates into crisis, its actors and fighters must fight till eternity. From time immemorial, measures have been devised to either mitigate or resolve conflict. For instance, in some communities, in-laws and grandchildren acted as third parties that enhanced mitigation and resolution of conflict. Peaceful settlement through concessions by both parties is the only means of resolution of conflict (Utin, 2023:29).

Presently, the concept of conflict, its management and resolution have led to terms such as peace-making, conflict prevention, mediation and negotiation, preventive diplomacy, peace keeping, peace enforcement and peace building. The need to mitigate conflict has similarly led to the concept of early warning. The United Nations in 1993 stressed the importance of creating an early warning system for the early detection of potential sources of conflicts and its mitigation before it escalates into crisis. The concept of early warning comprises:

1. Collection of information using specific indicators.
2. Analysis of information - attaching meaning to indicators, setting it into context and recognizing crisis development.
3. Formulation of best- and worst-case scenarios and response options.
4. Communication to decision makers Ifesinachi (2009:106).

Writing on the veracity of early warning system, Ifesinachi states that

"early warning is essentially aimed at providing practitioners in the field of conflict management the possibility of anticipating and responding to crisis situations before they become violent or afford them the coverage to take remedial action. Therefore, the essence of early warning is to nib in the bud conflict at the early stage before it escalates into violent conflict which will be expensive in terms of management, resolution and peace building (2009:107).

CONFLICT AND PEACE AS ANTAGONISTIC NEIGHBOURS
Conflict and peace are not close relatives and therefore cannot exist together. This is because there will be no meaningful progress and development during crisis. Infrastructure and other development apparatus build up during peace time are usually destroyed during crisis. In the context of this analysis, it is imperative to X-ray some of the outstanding effects of conflict.

The effects and consequences of conflict can be discussed in terms of international effects and effects of community-based conflict, although some of the effects are the same on both areas. Destruction of lives and properties is a norm, both in communal conflict and international conflict. Any conflict that defies resolution at the early stage and escalates into crisis usually results in wanton killing and destruction of properties. Destruction of lives in some civil wars are usually described as genocide because of the high rate of slaughter and carnage during such crisis. Genocide was experienced in Rwanda during the ethnic crisis between the Hutu and the Tutsi in 1994 (Ibu, 2023:76).

Similarly, infrastructural facilities that took many years to construct and build are destroyed during crisis. The money spent becomes a waste and reconstruction may not be easily realized. Some countries lost unique historical and cultural sites as a result of civil wars. For instance, Nigeria during the Civil War which lasted between 1967 and 1970 (Utin, 2023:5).

Another effect of conflict on both community and international conflict is the issue of refugee. Refugees are displaced persons running away from war zones, seeking safety in a safe place, sometimes in another country. This results in having refugee camps which are makeshift shelters provided for people displaced by war. Poor hygiene, lack of adequate food and clean

water, outbreak of epidemic and unplanned pregnancies are some of the challenges faced by refugees in refugee camps. In most community conflict, defeated parties are displaced or evicted from their ancestral home land. Such groups of evicted people find it difficult to return to their ancestral home land owing to total razing of all houses by the victorious community. The evicted people are scattered in different areas which make it impossible to return or even mobilization of counter attack which may not guarantee a safe return. Example of this are the people of Ikot Offiong in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State who were evicted by Oku Iboku since the year 2000 (Utin, 2018:66).

The eviction of defeated party is corroborated by the eviction theory which state that

> "if conflict between two communities escalates into war and the defeated party are evicted from the ancestral homeland, the possibility of returning may not be realized. Many communities have lost their original homeland due to wanton destruction of lives and properties and finally eviction from the original homeland after cessation of hostilities." (Utin, 2022:53).

Emergence of militia groups in the Niger delta region of Nigeria is an aspect of conflict in this area. The region which is an oil producing area faces environmental problems since oil was discovered and explored. Gas flaring in the area result in environmental pollution, oil spillage destroy aquatic life of the people of the area. The people of the area out of anger formed militia groups that engaged in violent activities in the region (Utin, 2018:63).

Conflict and crisis hinder good governance, development and provision of infrastructures by government and its agencies. Government budget and allocation are diverted from human development and governance to security and acquisition of arms and ammunition. During war time, government increases its budget allocation on security, this enhances the procurement of weapons in order to win the war. This huge spending on armaments affects the economy resulting in food shortages and a fall in the standard of living of the citizens. This was experienced during the cold war between the United States and the defunct Soviet Union. Government of the Soviet Union during the period of the war concentrated on arm race to the detriment of the economy and the effect was its disintegration in 1989 Akpan (2003:303). In most community conflicts, economic activities are abandoned during inter-communal warfare. People refrain from large scale farming because of fear of reprisal attack by opposing communities. Some communities known for large-scale cultivation of rice in Ini Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State have since lost this occupation due to incessant crisis in the area. The result is poverty and a fall in the standard of living of the indigenous people.

Some countries faces sanctions from the international community, international organisation and regional organisations such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) during intra-regional conflicts. Such sanctions obstruct meaningful relations with other countries. This affects import and export of commodities and the effects is on the citizens.

Lastly, youth in most conflict-prone areas engage in negative activities such as drug and alcohol abuse. This makes them restive and therefore engage in crimes such as, rape, stealing, assault and kidnapping. Some abandon school and engage in arm robbery and cult activities (Utin, 2023:27).

The eruption of conflict in societies does not mean that parties to it must fight till eternity. Also, conflicts have both constructive and destructive elements. Therefore, mechanisms have been devised to enhance peaceful settlement of conflict. Parties who want progress can learn lessons from the conflict and advance. It is in this regard that Coser states that some conflicts can itself be functional for a society, that toleration of a certain degree of conflict tends to act as a "safety valve" to stop conflicts from threatening the whole basis of a nationally consensual social structure (Akpan,2011:xxvii).

John Burton in his "World Societies", sees conflict as an essential creative element in human relationships. It is the means to change, the means by which our social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved (Akpan:2011:xxvii). From the above statement, it is realized that conflict, when resolved, can lead to positive development and progress in the society during peace time but it is inconceivable to think of progress or development while conflict is ongoing. Conflict and peace are antagonistic neighbours, the two cannot cohere or stick together at the same time.

CONCLUSION

There are two elements in human societies. These are conflict and peace. The two concepts determine human relationships. Therefore, either the society is peaceful, or the society is facing conflict and crisis. The two concepts are antagonistic in disposition. Antagonism is a stage in the linear progression of conflict usually characterized by incompatibility of goals and aspirations of groups. It usually escalates into tension and war. War tears down the fabric of the society resulting in retarded growth and development. It stagnates the society until it is finally resolved through negotiation or mediation. Resolution of conflict set in peace, but one thing is that parties to conflict will always seek resolution which will guarantee growth and development in the society. Therefore, conflict need not be feared, it can be harnessed for positive development and progress.

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