Ethical Approaches to Conflict Management As A Panacea to Ethno Religious Conflicts in Africa

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Abstract
Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the world has witnessed more violent ethnic and religious conflicts than it was the case hitherto. In his classic, the clash of civilization, Huntington (1996) noted that the post-cold war years witnessed not only the end of ideological war, but dramatic changes in people's identities and a tilting of politics toward cultural lines. Since then, Africa has experienced serious conflicts in Somalia, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote'd Ivoire, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Rwanda, Nigeria, Eritrea, and Uganda among others. This works examined ethical approaches to conflict management as a panacea for ethno-religious conflicts in Africa. The study made use of both socio-ethical and historical approaches to achieve its aim. The research discovers that most ethno religious crises in Africa are predicated on economic change, political change, human migration and real or perceived injustice. The paper recommends that the various religious traditions in Africa should fully exploit opportunities for dialogue so as to ensure peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships in spite of the pluralistic nature of the continent.

Key word: Ethical approaches, Conflict management, Ethnicity, Religion and Africa

Introduction

Conflict in human society is the inevitable. It is part and parcel of human existence. All that is important therefore is not conflict per say, but how people respond to it in terms of management. A minor conflict can degenerate to a major one; while a major one can be settled amicably, depending on the ways and manners with which each situation is managed or handled (Olatunde 2006). If a conflict is properly managed or handled, it can be a precursor to social changes in terms of progress, growth and development of a society. But, if wrongly handled can easily degenerate to violence or a full-scale war.

Conceptual Clarification of Terms

The terms to be clarified here are predicated on two variables, namely conflict management and ethno-religious conflict.

Ethics

There are certain actions which all people would condemn as morally wrong and ought not to be done by anybody, for me example, armed robbery, embezzlement public funds, bribery and corruption, stealing, neglect of one's duties, adultery, dishonesty, etc. Even those who indulge in this kind of actions would agree that the actions are morally wrong - they know that they are wrong actions which nobody ought to perform, hence they try to escape and avoid being

caught (Omoregbe, 2008). They are also certain kinds of action which all people would consider as morally right, for example, fidelity to one's duties, respect for human life, hospitality, kindness, helping those in need, honesty etc.

Ethics has no univocal definition. It can be and has been defined in various ways. Oderinde (2012) defines ethics as a code or set of principles by which men live. Omoregbe (2008) sees ethics as the branch of philosophy which deals with the morality of human actions or as the branch of philosophy which studies the norms of human behavior. He further added that ethics is a normative science of human conduct. This means that ethic is a normative science as distinct from the empirical sciences. The empirical sciences are descriptive. Their aim is to describe the way things are, the way things behave. But ethics does not set out to describe the way things are, but the way things ought to be. It is not a descriptive science, but a normative science, that is, it's deals with norms or standards of human behavior. The aim of ethics is not to describe the way men do behave in practice, but to state the way men ought to behave. There is a big difference between what men actually do and what they ought to do, between the way they behave and the way the ought to behave. Ethics is concerned with the latter.

Dzurgba (2008) strengthens this assertion, "Human conduct deals with relationships between persons and between social groups. It deals with the conditions and consequences of people's interactions in society. Thus, a person's conduct affects one other member or other members of the society which results to conflict." His personal capacities and his private abilities, but what he does with them cannot stay exclusively within his own person; it has very far-reaching effects on other people because they involve his external conduct. In his personal conduct, the rights, the duties, interests and the conditions of others are directly or indirectly implicated. Sellars and Hospers (1970) collaborated that this conduct are implicated in his knowledge, thinking, reasoning, decisions, willingness, judgment, opinions, choices, rejections, intention is, motives, prejudice, hatred, love and other actions. It is in the context of people command relationships and institutions that ethics is studied. Similarly, Shields (2008) submit to this assertions that ethics is concerned with conscious and purposeful behavior and with the obligations and rules that relates to it. It aims to discover what factors make actions good or bad, right or wrong, both for individuals and for social groups.

Conflict Management

The word conflict comes from the Latin word Fligere which means "to strike together." To have a strike, there must be two different objects coming against each other (Ishola, 2022). Conflict could therefore arise between two or more people. Myron (2021) has viewed conflict as an open and hostile opposition occuring as a result of differing viewpoints. They further state that, conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce reward and interference from the other party in achieving their goal. This definition implies that for conflict to happen, there must be too opposing views. Conflict occurs everywhere and among everybody who come together to achieve a common goal. Because of fundamental background issues like language, culture and people's level of maturity within a society and nation, there would always be differing opinions which must be properly managed. Conflict management could therefore be said to be ways of minimizing effect of conflict on the individuals and on the organization they belong. It helps to control and to coordinate the efforts of the aggrieved parties or a group of persons so as to accomplish the desired goals and objectives, using available resources efficiently and effectively (Motty, 2016).

Motty further notes that the goal of managing conflict is not resolution but a process of returning the aggrieved parties to normal relationship as they accept legitimacy of the others identity and aspirations, apologize for and forgive the order for fast, aggressive or violent acts. Reason for this position is that conflict management theorist/practitioners believe that conflict can only be controlled it can never be totally resolved.

Ethno Religious Conflicts

Ethno-Religious conflicts are conflicts that often emanate from ethnic divides and religious cleavages (Kayode, 2013). In Africa, ethnic interest does overshadow national loyalty. People

are often seen in the spectacle of their ethnic affinities and not as Africans. On the other hand, the activities of religious fundamentalists, fanatics and bigots do also engender conflicts, though most of the time, through political manipulations. However, in most part of African society, religion and ethnicity are interwoven to the extent that conflicts between groups, tend to simultaneously be interpreted as ethnic and religious conflicts.

In consequence, it becomes difficult to distinguish among conflicts that have their origin in religious or ethnic dispute. In view of the above, we may reiterate that simply put, ethno-religious conflicts, as used in this paper, are conflict or acts of violence that have ethnic and/or religious origin. Thompson (2003) posits that the continent of Africa is filled with ethnic conflict, wars over resources and failed States. From South to North, West to East, fighting, burns or simmers in Africa.

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical presuppositions have been provided to explain the ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria. Some of these include: the continuance of arbitrary colonial delineations of boundaries that did not take care of the ethnic peculiarities, the colonial policy of "divide and rule", elite manipulation, struggle for scarce resources, poverty, unemployment, external forces, violation of human right, the military factor, effects of the world bank and IMF- induced economic policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), the collapse of traditional values, and stresses related to urbanization (Gwanma: 2010).

One of the casual factors for explaining ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is the manipulation thesis popularized by Bala Usman (1987), Jibrin Ibrahim (1991), Joseph Kenny (1996) and Jeff Haynes (1996). This position holds that is the elite who manipulate religion in order to serve their personal interests. These elite bourgeois exploit the vulnerability of the poverty stricken and illiterate masses to whip up religious sentiment which they so cherish in order to unleash violence against their fellow masses, hence the validity of this theory to the subject under reviews.

Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Africa

In Africa, war and conflict are seldom international. Instead they involve conflict between fractions within a state (civil war), between ethnic groups (ethnic war) or between two religions (religious war) (Kunhiyop, 2008).

Most wars in Africa arise from tensions between ethnic groups within the state. Ethnicity is a characteristics of a group of people, whether a few thousands or several million who share a persisting sense of common interest and identity that is based on some combination of shared historical experience and value cultural treats (Thompson, 2003). It is associated with shared culture language religion social customs physical appearance and graphic origins and affect whom people turn to for security and protection. In African countries, which often include a number of different ethnic groups, ethnicity still has great psychological and sociological significance. It can be used as a powerful tool to unify a group against another group of a different ethnicity (Kunhiyop, 2008). Ethnic consciousness and interests often lead to conflict and violence.

These Ethnic conflicts are complex and intractable and can only be solved by lengthy negotiations. There is also always the danger that the violence will spill across political boundaries and affect the neighboring countries, as happened when the violence in Rwanda spread to Congo and when the Liberian crisis transferred itself to Sierra Leone.

Ethnic conflicts can be exacerbated when there are also religious differences between the parties. "Religion is one of the features that can distinguish one ethnic group from another." Since religion pertains to core values, it can inflate the intensity and intractability of ethnic conflict. Religious belief can even be used to legitimate or authorize intolerance toward another ethnic group.

In some cases, ethnic tensions are so strong than shared religious values, as is happening in the conflict in Darfur where all the parties are Muslim. In other cases, religious tensions override ethnic links. An example is in Northern Ireland where Catholics battled Protestants and in

India, where the conflict between Muslims and Hindus led to the brake up of the nation into two states of India and Pakistan.

Sadly, even the churches in Africa have been infected by the cancer of ethnicity. "Within the churches of Rwanda, ethnic tensions often surfaced at the time of elections or nominations to senior ecclesiastical positions. Splits were glossed over but never healed; people were elected for spiritual administrative or leadership qualities but along ethnic lines" (McCullum, 1995).

These ethnic tensions in Rwanda culminated in a genocide in which church groups and religious leaders participated in the killing of Christian brothers and sisters.

Ethnic and religious tensions and wars are probably the two greatest threats to nations and governments in Africa. They make it impossible for government to carry out their task of maintaining order, justice and freedom. Instead, there are gross violations of human rights as the conflicts affect, the cohesion and stability of nations, shaking them to their very foundations.

Factors Responsible for Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Africa

The reasons for the growing tide of ethnic conflicts in the world and in Africa include the following as itemized by Mcullum, (1995) as cited by Kunhiyop (2008) thus, a reaction against over-centralized, corrupt and exploitative governments, a search for cultural identity, and the constant changes and confusion of modern society and alienation, which threatens the very roots of communities.

In Africa, the conflicts are also being driven by profound forces of change in the economic and political spheres, by increased human migration and by resentment of injustice, both real and perceived.

Economic Tensions: Economic tensions arise if the rate of economic growth slows. When this happens, "ethnic identity will become more salient". This is due to competition over scarce resource, or in this case, a shrinking pie (Sithole, 1985). Economic tension also rises when "new resources" hitherto unallocated, are to be distributed, and when the new patterns of distribution create alterations in the existing ranking of individuals (Lloyd, 1974).

Political Change. Because of the prevalence of patronage in Africa, political leaders feel free to use their own ethnic group or class. The result has been social stratification in which positions of power, status and prestige are assigned according to one's membership in a particular ethnic group (Sithole, 1985). The resentment this arouses means that when an opportunity for political change arises, there is pressure to align oneself with one's own ethnic group in the pursuit of power. In Nigeria, there has long been a struggle for power between the Hausa-Fulani, who are predominantly Muslim and have occupied key government positions since independence, and the Yoruba and Igbo. Many other smaller groups in the nation are also struggling to gain influence. Similar ethnic struggles are occurring in Kenya, Liberia, Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda. These ethnic struggles for power can flare into violence when one group does not get what it deserves.

Human Migration: Tensions arise when ethnic groups from one area move into and settle in areas already occupied by other groups, regardless of whether the area is rural or urban. Ethnic groups then start to hold their own tribal meetings and to set up political pressure groups, clubs and so on to promote their own interests. The situation highlights the differences between groups and does nothing to encourage national unity.

Real or Perceived Injustice: Several injustices exist in many countries and affect millions of human beings, children of God, reducing them to a sub-human conditions (Camara 1971). They lack portable water and endure political oppression and degradation, unemployment, insecurity and a poverty that does more than killing, it leads to physical deformity (just think of Biafra), to psychological deformity (there are causes of mental sub normality for which hunger is responsible) and to moral deformity (those who, through a situation of slavery, hidden but nonetheless real, are living without prospects and without hope, foundering in fatalism and reduced to a begging mentality) (Camara, 1971).

Ethical Approaches to Conflict Management in African Society
In every human society in the world – be it primitive or civilized – three major ethical approaches are commonly adopted in the process of tackling, handling or managing conflict either at community; national or international levels. The approaches are as follows: Conservative Approach, Liberal Approach and Moderate Approach, (Olatunde 2006).

Conservative Approach
The approach is being held by some individuals, communities or nations in the process of handling their conflict. This approach is usually characterized by certain peculiar principles which when put into practice obviously demonstrate the whole idea or concept of the approach. These principles include rigidity, dogmatism, repression and tradition. Let us examine these one after the other so as to shed more light on the discuss.

Rigidity: People in conflict hold their views, opinions, belief and decision very stubbornly. They are strongly unbendable and unchangeable. They cannot be persuaded neither can they be pacified. They stubbornly remain firm on their stand. No amount of pressure, threat or effort can make them to compromise. They are unwilling to change.

Dogmatism: their behaviours and attitudes are dogmatic. As far as conservatives are concerned, what they believe is what is right (even if they are wrong), and other people should accept it that way. They don't respect other people's feelings, views and opinions. There is no better opinion than what they hold. If these people are found guilty either by local leaders or even the court of law, they will not submit to the judgement.

Repression: this is the act of using force to control a group of people and restrict their fundamental rights and freedom. They want to dominate, rule and oppress others and entangle them with conditions that violate their basic rights and freedom. Because their fore-fathers controlled a certain community in the past two centuries, that particular community must perpetually be under their control even against the wishes of the people. Any attempt made by such a community in regards to their autonomy would be frustrated either by violence or war.

Tradition: this group of people are more mindful of traditional styles or values than any other thing. They prefer the ways and manners with which things were done in the ancient days to the ways they are in our contemporary society. They pay serious allegiance to their fore-fathers and do their things in a way to please them. For example, if their fathers were brave hunters and warriors during their own time, it becomes obligatory for them to demonstrate bravery under any circumstance, and violence or war must be something not to be feared. They may begin to recite their family appellation that go in line with war, "*Awa cha amoma ama gbiche ogwu kedi kiyo"*, meaning "we are the sons of those who rejoice when they hear of war" they see no reason for compromise as that would portray them as cowards and bastards.

In sum, conservative approach gives no room for compromise. No one is ready to lose anything for the sake of peace. They have made their seals and decisions. What they have done is irreversible, while the one they plan to do is unstoppable. This is the worst and dangerous approach in handling conflict.

Liberal Approach.
The word 'liberal' or 'liberalism' is derived from the word 'liberty', and it means to free or loosen from restrain (Ellul, 1973). Also Kelly (1961) cited Professor Isaiah in Berlin inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Oxford on the 31st October, 1958 said:

> … a man is free if there is no one to dictate his actions but himself and the idea extends by analogy to a community or nation who members if governed neither by a despot nor by aliens but by themselves are in the 'positive' sense-free.

Liberal approach is opposite to a conservative approach. Liberals are strongly opposed to all laws, traditions and beliefs which are believed to restrict human freedom. In other words, it is an approach that is associated with an attitude of the mind which strongly values personal liberty. In politics, liberals are radically opposed to a dictatorial system of government and

argue for constitutional restraints on political leaders, and the protection of individual liberties. Liberal are also opposed to violence or war but at the same time, understand violence or war as a natural reaction 'to injustice' (Cloghon, 1973). Furthermore, the under-mentioned principles are also fundamental to a liberal approach, particularly in the area of conflict management.

Openness to Change: Liberals, unlike the conservatives are receptive to changes. Their Positions, directions or opinions are not rigid; rather they are flexible to suit any situation or circumstance. As far as they are concerned, change is natural to human existence. Therefore, to change from one position to another if a situation demands for it, is never a problem

Tolerance: The word tolerance according to Longman Contemporary English is "to be able to accept something unpleasant or difficult, even though you do not like it". The liberal approach is willing to accept the beliefs, values and practices of others, as a precursor to mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence. They can live with people harmoniously irrespective of their differences in terms of religion, tribe, sex, age, education, political affiliation and the like. They deal with people just as they are.

Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Liberals attach much importance to enjoyment and protection of individuals' rights and freedoms in the society. They mostly comprise of learned persons, who are very exposed to the laws and constitution of the land, irrespective of their academic areas of specializations. To them, human right is basic to human existence and to deny a person of his right is to reduce him to an animal. All human beings are conferred with human rights which must not be violated either by individuals or state under which he happens to live.

However, while all rights and fundamental freedoms are regarded basic and part and parcel of human existence, the liberal attaches more importance to the freedom of expression or opinions. The reason for this is not far-fetched. When people's right is violated, the freedom of expression is the instrument through which one fights against it. In other words, it is the freedom of expression that advocates for other fundamental rights. When that is denied, then every hope of fighting injustice is lost. The state confers on individual citizens the right to hold opinions, and to receive and impart idea and information without interference from the government or from private groups or individuals. Under a free society, the freedom of expression allows the individual to engage in free and frank discussions and criticism of conducts and policies of the government. The cardinal idea of the liberals, if it is summarized, is that, everyone in the society irrespective of age, gender, religion, ethnic group and so on is entitled to certain rights which are to be enjoyed and protected as well. The liberals therefore, are always very conscious of these in the process of handling confljct. They do not want to exercise their own rights or freedom at the expense of other people's rights and freedom. That is why they normally imbibe the habit of handling conflict in accordance with the provision of the laws and constitutions.

In Sum, liberal approach is recommended for managing ethno-religious conflicts in Africa. The approach is based on dialogue, constitutionality and compromise. Nothing is too big for the liberals to lose for the sake of peace. They are lovers of peace, so they are never interested in violence or war as a means of settling conflict. Rather, they prefer dialogue, peaceful demonstration and compromise as instruments of settlement and they don't operate beyond what the law provides.

This is the approach adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria in managing conflict in the disputed Bakassi Peninsula between her and Cameroun. It was and it is a national pain and agony that such an oil-rich peninsula and with several thousand inhabitants of the Peninsula who were Nigerians were on the 14th August, 2006 handed over to Cameroun. This came as a result of the ruling of the International Court of Justice on the 10th October, 2002, which was in favour of Cameroun. The Nigerian government considered no better alternative than to abide by the ruling. This is a very serious compromise which a conservative approach would never have done.

Moderate Approach
This approach lies between conservatism and liberalism. It is not very conservative; neither is it liberal. It only borrows little idea from both. While conservative approach is unwilling or unable

to change its position or direction in times of conflict; moderate approach on the other hand, is willing to change, but that change must not be too much as in liberal approach.

Also, the moderates like the liberals are not unwilling to compromise for the sake of peace, but little or moderate compromise is considered enough. The idea is that if the little change or compromise they have exercised is not enough to achieve peace they needed in times of conflict, then they are ready for whatever happens thereafter. As far as they are concerned, they have done their best. For instance, on the issue of the disputed Bakassi Penninsula, the best the moderates can do was to divide the peninsula into two. Cameroun would be taking one part and Nigeria taking the other. Anything beside that is not acceptable to the moderates. This approach is usually adopted between the federal government and the Nigeria Labor congress on hike in prices and setting of minimum wage for workers in the country.

Peace in any human society is not automatic, people have to pursue, struggle, labor and sweat for it. No peace is enjoyed without sacrifice. Therefore, for the sake of lasting peace in African nations it becomes imperative to always imbibe the principle of compromise in times of conflict which will pave way for meaningful or sustainable development.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, the crux of this paper is based on ethical approaches to conflict management as a panacea to ethno-religious conflicts in Africa. In effect, some ways of preventing and managing ethno-religious conflicts are proffered below

1. Politicians in the entire African nations should put the nations' interest above their selfish personal gains.
2. Religious leaders should as a matter of necessity weigh seriously and critically their utterances and actions.
3. The rights and desires to self-recognition and determination of the minority groups across the nations should be respected.
4. To build bridges of understanding and re-establish mutual confidence, religious, traditional and ethnic leaders must be encouraged by governments to establish a network of conflict prevention and management.

Conclusion

This work presupposes the application of ethical approaches such as conservative, liberal and moderate approaches as precursor for managing ethno-religious conflict in Africa. Given that conflict is inevitable, we need to learn how to manage it. Therefore, for the sake of lasting peace in the African nations it is pertinent to always incorporate the principle of compromise in times of conflict. Moderate approach is very good but liberal approach better. Conflicting parties cannot totally have their ways nor have all their demands met if there would be peace. Each party must be willing to dialogue, and shift their positions as well (no matter how small) for the sake of peace and progress of this great continent of ours.

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