

ELEMENTS OF PEACE STUDIES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE DYNAMICS OF CONSTRUCTIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT APPROACH IN NIGERIA SINCE 1960

Onyendi Chinaza G.N.

Department of History and international relations
Abia State University, Uturu

onyendi.chinaza@abiastateuniversity.edu.ng or nelvinchinaza@gmail.com
08060979762 / 07019624480

Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of peace studies and conflict resolution in Nigeria since 1960, analyzing the scale and scope of new mechanisms to better understand how various factors such as politics, economic, social, and cultural intricacies have caused conflict in Nigeria. It also demonstrates how a systematic constructive approach can be engineered to address violence and war. The research primarily used secondary sources to explore how values, resources, existential needs and information management have impacted conflict, and how individuals and institutions have adopted initiatives to promote peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Peace and Conflict Resolution, Conflict Dynamics, Constructive and Destructive, Political, Economic, Social

Introduction

Nigeria as an independent nation is made up of various ethnic groups with varied cultural backgrounds. As members of these ethnic societies relate with one another either at the federal, state, local, and ethnic levels, there are often cases of conflict situations which could be religious, political, economic, cultural, boundary disputes or differences in values. Peace and conflict studies are generally imperative due largely to these diverse and heterogeneous structures of peoples therein. As an element of study, it is therefore defined from the instrumentalist, functionalist, sociological and political perspectives. From the instrumentalist and functionalist point of views, peace is seen as an end which is necessary for the development of social function, structures, progress and institutions. This means it promotes absence of fear, war, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence. For the sociological views, peace is seen as a condition where a social conflict does not exist and where, by obvious implication, individuals, and groups are able to satisfy their needs and expectations. Additionally, Karl Marx viewed the concept of sociological interpretation of peace as a social phenomenon of dialectic materialism. Its thesis was that society is best understood by examining and appreciating the processes through which the society produces and distributes its material existence, as well as the class struggles which are part and parcel of the process. This happens when societies create enabling environments and strong institutions for social activities to thrive orderly (Ceasar & Akonye, 2018).

From the political perspectives, peace is anchored on the assumption that there must be some form of institutionalized political structures before peace can prevail in any society. In other words, it is argued by exponents of this school of thought that if there is an absence of some form of institutionalization, every group could resort to using its own unique endeavors to ensure that it achieves its own interests. But the disadvantage of this school according to Ota (2009) is that institutionalization of political structures has been designed by the ruling class to protect their selfish advantages and defending their parochial interest and present status which Nigeria today is a typical example.

Conflict is inevitable, it occurs because human beings live in a group and interact with each other. The interaction most at time could generate conflict mainly when and where differences over goals, objectives, or expectations exist between and among individuals or groups. Conflict could also occur when there is a competition between individuals or group. The escalation of a violent conflict could be checkmated through the adoption of a process that will restore and sustain peace in a durable manner.

Reasons for Peace Studies and Conflicts Resolutions.

The study, element of peace and conflict resolution in the 21st century, is germane because in Africa, Europe, Asia, America and Latin America, news of conflict is heard all over the world. When it is not this dispute, it is that declaration of dispute. We are also inundated with news and rumours of war. As it is with countries, nation and nation states, so it is with towns, communities, villages, clans and individuals. Therefore, as conflict situations abound, so abound efforts to make and maintain peace. Example, organization like the United Nations, the African Union, and the European Union were formed principally as a means of seeking and maintaining peace. There are also family and town unions, professional unions and associations, etc, all of which aim is to seek areas of cooperation and pursuance of common good and welfare. Unfortunately, in spite of the efforts to stem conflict, it

has remained with us. The problem is that those who consider themselves powerful would always want to lord it over the weak. At times, the weak upon gaining some strength (assumed or real) challenge the strong or associates of the strong. The vanquished today, seeks to be the victor tomorrow. The result is a vicious circle of anarchy (Emezue, 2009). The inevitability of conflict in human interaction is a fact of life. Conflict is natural and always present in every society. In African societies where governments are unwilling to satisfy or provide the citizens' basic human needs, the struggle for access to the scarce resources available generates tensions that might, if not adequately and satisfactorily addressed, snowball into violent conflicts. Such conflicts portend great dangers for peoples already traumatized by political ineptitude and economic emasculation (Sydney & Ota, 2009). Peace studies, therefore, becomes a desiring tool that facilitates the understanding of the essential ingredient of harmonious co-existence, interactions and advancement.

Conceptual Clarifications of Peace and Conflict Resolution

Scholars have diverse school of thought. They have different conceptual perspectives adopted to demystify comprehension instead, it perhaps becomes more complex or difficult to understand or grab. However, the need for the current study stems from the inevitability of conflict in human society and the need to seek means and ways of making peace and maintaining it. According to Ota, 2009, the field of peace and conflict resolution has recorded increased interest recently, due, perhaps to the seemingly intractable violence that is gradually enveloping the 'civilized' world in this 21st century. The wave of violence and wars, both of low and high intensity, is a pointer to the increasing number of failed states especially in Africa and other developing countries, and of the flow of international politics in a unipolar world where competition rather than cooperation seems to be the cornerstone of most country's foreign policy thrust in spite of forged alliances. This concept was collaborated by Emezue, 2009 and averred that "Prior to this period, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, Europe scored all cards in the Guinness Book of violence, having witnessed two World Wars and several cases of sectarian violence". The causative factor of violence and wars, whether in Africa or elsewhere, is conflict. And conflict (of course we cannot wish it away) is an inherent attribute of our human nature. Generally, it signals the presence of a problem or misunderstanding that needs to be resolved. It also indicates that there is a clash of interest between two or more parties within a given social context. Most often, the clash is over scarce resources with the frequency of interaction, a determining factor measuring the degree of such clashes/occurrences. Emezue 2009 went further and discovered that the United Nations represents the second effort by mankind to found an organization specifically charged with the responsibility of promoting the cause of peaceful co-existence between members of the international community. The first organization- the League of Nations- came into being at Versailles Peace Conference which was held to resolve the many international issues and problems that arose at end the First World War of 1914-1919. The idea of the League was initiated by US President- Woodrow Wilson. The birth of the organization was part of a fourteen-point plan brought to the peace settlement by Wilson. The aim of the plan was not only to deal with the issues and problems thrown up by the war but also initiate an era using a just and equitable approach to the resolution of international problems. The League was founded in the belief that, had members of the international community acted together, they would have prevented or at least delayed the outbreak of the First World War and possibly moderated the vehemence with which that war was fought. It is clear that that the major reason for the founding of the United Nations Organizations' (UNO) in 1945, after the Second World War is the promotion of global peace and prevention of war. This has failed in the present times because of the arm conflict between Russia-Ukraine and Israeli-Palestinian/Gaza wars. Despite the failures there are approaches to peace by the UN deployed to restrict belligerent countries to wind down crisis namely, economic sanctions to Russia, travel restrictions for leaders of recalcitrant groups or states, and arms embargoes. Therefore, peace, conflict studies and conflict resolution aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of conflict dynamics and the promotion of peace and social justice globally. It also involves finding solutions to conflicts in ways that promote understanding, cooperation, and harmony among individuals or groups. It often requires communication, negotiation, mediation, and sometimes, reconciliation processes to address underlying issues and prevent future conflicts. Peace and conflict resolution can take various forms, from diplomatic negotiations between nations to community-based mediation efforts. It often involves addressing root causes of conflict, such as inequality, injustice, or resource scarcity, and promoting dialogue, empathy, and compromise to build sustainable peace. Conflict resolution strategies can range from nonviolent communication to formal peace agreement and peace building initiatives aimed at fostering reconciliation and long-term stability.

Dynamics of conflicts and the Nigerian Experience before 1960

Conflicts are almost as old as human society. In pre-colonial Nigeria, for instance, there were frequent skirmishes and wars between groups. Most of the conflicts had economic origins. The most common cause of conflict then was the struggle for land. Conflicts in pre-colonial times were means of inter-group relations whereby groups' strength and capabilities determined which was the most powerful amongst others-Defeated groups were made vassals or forced to pay tribute to their conquerors. Such was the scenario before the arrival of the British. A major cause of conflicts in colonial Nigeria was the artificiality of boundaries many of which uprooted people from their

kith and kin forcing them to live with 'foreign' groups. Another cause of conflicts was the agitation for the citing of social amenities. For example, Dan Chukwu, (2009: 169-170) acknowledged that until 1934, Itumbauzo, a clan that has since split into two with one section belonging to Abia State and the other to Akwa-Ibom, enjoyed relative peace as a homogenous group with a common social and political heritage. Until that year all of Itumbauzo was in owerri Province. Following a proposal by the Bende Divisional Authority to build a customary court in the area in 1934, the people who had hitherto co-existed as a homogeneous group split into factions over the citing of the court. While Ogu, Itu, Ananamong Nchara-Ebo, Nkpu and Ikporom-Ebo villages contended that the court be sited at Ikporom, Okopedi, Ntalakwu and Ubia took sides with the Assistant District Officer (ADO) for Bende Division- Mr H.H. Marshal that the court be built at Okopede, the ancestral headquarters-of Itumbauzo clans. This resulted to an agitation by the villages of the lower Itumbauzo for a transfer to Ikot Ekpene Division.

The historical and socio-political dynamics in Nigeria, with particular focus on the Itumbauzo and Ikot Ekpene Divisions highlights how the structure of Nigeria' first republic created a fertile ground for ethnic conflicts, with each of the three regions dominated by a majority ethnic group and numerous minority groups. For example, the East was dominated by the Igbo, the North by the Hausa-Fulani, and the West by the Yoruba. The Igbo develop socio-political institutions and character traits that differed from their minority neighbors, while the Ijo, Efik, and Ibibio developed a unique socio-political structure called the House system. It is against the backdrop of the above that the agitation for state creation in the region, propelled by fear of the Igbo domination, proliferated among the minority groups. There were as many as four state creation movements in the region. The movements included those for the creation of

- (a) An Ogoja State
- (b) Cross River State
- (c) Calabar-Ogoja-River (COR)
- (d) Rivers State

The movements for the creation of new states in Nigeria during the colonial era were driven by two main objectives, (1) the preservation of the culture of the people within their geographical enclave, and (2) protection from alleged Igbo domination. For instance, the movement for an Ogoja State was championed by elements within the former Ogoja province who sought to free themselves from the alleged domination of the Agbo, Efik, and Ibibio groups. Agitation for a Cross River State was propelled by a strong desire to unify all speakers of the Efik language and preserve the Ekpe Society, which had over the centuries provided an enabling environment for the growth of commerce and missionary activities in the Cross River basin.

Protagonists of the COR State believed that its creation would enable the various minority ethnic groups in the area to have a predominant population. The proposed state included Uyo, Ekoi, Calabar, Enyong, Ogoja, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Opobo, and Ogoni. On the other hand, the proposed River State, according to the report of the Henry Willink Commission of 1958, was to be comprised of the groups in the River Province, including Brass, Degema, Ogoni, Port-Harcourt, and Ahoada. Others to be included were the Ijaw Division to be excised from the Western Region, Opobo, Andoni (Obi-Obolo), Ndoki. The agitation for a River State was championed by the Council of Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference. The fear, distrust, conflict, and agitation that characterized the demand for states by minority groups in the Eastern Region during the colonial era were intense. The Commission however admitted that the fears of ethnic domination were real and suggested that minority area councils should be set up for Calabar to keep watch on the activities of the regional government. It further proposed that the minority question could be resolved by entrenching fundamental human rights in the constitution.

The strong rift between the non-Muslim and non-Hausa-Fulani minority groups of the Middle belt and the Hausa-Fulani minority in the North was caused by religious political/ethnic domination. Politically, the issue of state creation has been a major source of contention between the two groups. Non-Muslim and non-Hausa-Fulani minority groups have argued for the creation of new states or the redrawing of existing state boundaries to better reflect the diversity and aspirations of the population.

Furthermore, the agitation for the creation of a Mid-Western region, which would include Benin and Delta Division with possible adjustments to include the villages of Ugbolu and Ijagba, was one of the major causes of political crisis and conflicts in the Western region. While there was unanimous agreement among all stakeholders, including the Igbo elements in present/day Delta/Phonmino, the Action Group (AG), the ruling party in the Western region, opposed the creation of a state that included the Igbo of Asaba and Agbo, advocating instead that they be merged with their kith and kin in the Eastern region. The AG also proposed that the Ijaw of the Eastern and the Western Regions should be grouped together in the Western Region. This proposal was seen as an indirect invitation of acrimony and conflict. Some of the issues raised in the preceding paragraphs were either resolved before the attainment of political Independence in 1960 or were deferred to the post-colonial era. For instance, the case for the creation of a Mid-Western Region was only resolved in 1963, the year of a republican constitution

for the country. In that year, the Mid-Western Region was created with Dennis Osadebey of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens-NCNC (an Igbo of the Asaba area) as the premier. The creation of other states to allay the fears of the minorities had to wait for the future. Addressing these rifts will require a nuanced understanding of the dynamics and the willingness to engage in inclusive and constructive dialogue to find solutions that respect the rights and aspirations of all groups involved

An Assessment of Conflicts in Nigerian since 1960

The conflicts in Nigeria since 1960 can be assessed by examining various events and issues that have shaped the country's political, economic and social landscape. One significant event was the 12-day revolt in the Niger Delta area led by Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966. This uprising was driven by the perception among Niger Delta people of being denied the right to control the oil resources in their area. This became crucial which led the federal military government to view Boro as a threat to the Nigerian economy including the internal security and her sovereignty. Therefore, the Military government arrested, detained, trailed, and eventually executed Boro by hanging. Furthermore, the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a human rights and environmental activist, by the military government of General Sani Abacha, further fueled the tensions in the region. Saro-Wiwa was perceived as a terrorist and security risk to Nigeria, and his execution sparked international outrage. The exploitation and neglect of the region by the federal government has resulted in the loss of lives and property worth millions of U.S. dollars. This conflict and total neglect exacerbated the crisis in the region which gave rise to the formation of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, who also escalated the tensions in the region. Dokubo perceives Nigeria as a dubious entity and describes the Lugardian Amalgamation of 1914 as a fraud. He frontally confronted the Federal Government over what he regards as the exploitation and neglect of the Niger Delta. The Federal Government engaged Dokubo in a dialogue and successfully tricked him to Abuja ostensibly for negotiations. He was arrested, tried and jailed for treasonable felony. He was pardoned and released. Since then, instead of the federal government of Nigeria to develop the region, it has been plagued by environmental degradation, pollution, and social unrest. The region has been the centre for exploitation by multinational oil companies which have further complicated the situation. The local communities have been marginalized and excluded from the decision-making processes related to the exploitation of their resources. The region has been the centre of debates and controversies due to resource allocation, ethnic and regional tensions, and the need for inclusive governance to promote peace and development. These conflicts and controversies surrounding Niger Delta Region in Nigeria highlight the challenges faced by the country in achieving political stability and social unity since independence.

Additionally, politics has played a significant role in the assessment of conflict in Nigeria since independence in 1960. The country has faced numerous internal conflicts, including ethnic, religious, and regional disputes, as well as struggles for political power. These conflicts have often been fueled by political factors, such as the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities for political gain, the marginalization of certain groups, and the failure of governments to address underlying issues. Also, another major conflict in Nigeria has been the struggle for political power. Since independence, Nigeria has experienced numerous military coups and periods of political instability, which have often led to conflict between the north and the South. The country's elites have also been known to exploit ethnic and religious divisions for their own gain, further exacerbating tensions and contributing to conflict.

Another major conflict was the 30-month civil war, also known as the Nigeria-Biafran War, which occurred from 1967 to 1970. The conflict pitted the federal government against the former Eastern Region, which declared itself an independent republic called Biafra. The causes of this conflict were diverse, including ethnic, cultural, and political factors. The war resulted in significant loss of life and displacement of people, and it remains a sensitive and controversial topic in Nigerian history.

Religious and culture conflicts have remained a major source of strife and tension in Nigeria. A situation where one religion and culture don't tolerate others. The feeling of superiority to other people's life style has generated lots of conflicts in Nigeria. For example, the genesis of religious conflict in Nigeria could be traced to the meeting of the Arab countries in Rabat, Morocco in September 1969 during which efforts were made to put finishing touches on a proposed organization of Islamic conference. Late Sheikh Abubakar Gumi led the Nigerian delegation with the support of the then Sultan of Sokoto, late Abubakar 111, to register Nigeria's presence at the conference. This generated some disagreement between the Christian and Muslim which attracted violent reactions from non-Muslims. For years, Nigeria continued to enjoy an observer status until the military administrations of General Buhari and Babangida in 1984 and 1986 respectively attempted registering Nigeria as a full-fledged member of the organization of Islamic conference. In contemporary Nigerian history, no decade has passed without reported cases of religious violence and conflicts. Before Nigeria-Biafra war, thousands of Southern Igbo indigene Christian orientations were killed by Northern Hausa (Muslims). Similarly, in 1980, hundreds of Igbo Christians

were massacred following several weeks of rioting sparked off by a confrontation between Maitatsine group and the Nigerian police at a religious rally in Kano State. Also, in 1966, there was the popular “Pogrom” that took place between the Christian and Muslims in the North and many more.

Recently, Nigeria has been faced with conflict and crisis situations in all regions of the country. Example, Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, the Niger Delta Militant and Avengers in the South, the Fulani herdsmen in various parts of the country and the unknown gunmen parading as IPOB in the East, including the Emetoku in the Western part and banditry in the North Central and North West and kidnapping all over the country have threatened the peace, lives and properties in Nigeria. There are some other groups whose presence has contributed in intensifying crises and conflict in Nigeria. They include the Egbusu Youth Movement, Urhobo Youth Council, and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) etc.

Conflict as Constructive and Destructive Tool in Nigeria.

Obafemi Awolowo observed that conflict and security crisis in Nigeria is very constructive and as well as destructive. Ethnocentrism was frequent and became the political manifestation even before independence. The British and the educated (Nigerian) elites knew only too well that neither of them had been working towards the evolution of a crisis-free Nigerian nation-state, both knew the concept of Nigerian nation being galvanized by them had never entered their thoughts... they know that all were not well, yet they went on pretending that the stage had been set for the birth of a cohesive and united Nigeria. He continuously averred that Nigeria is a mere geographical expression, where there are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are English, the word ‘Nigeria’ is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not.

These threats to the corporate existence of Nigeria have led one of the nation’s leading lights-Wole Soyinka, to advocate for a peaceful break-up of the country. “If it is going to cost millions of lives to keep an entity together, it is better that you break peacefully” Lets look at the following reasons conflict can be constructive as well as destructive.

Political Reasons

Political conflicts occur in society when individuals and groups manipulate politics for their undue advantage. This brings about conflicts of interest, and thus, polarizes the society into different and conflicting interest groups. Ambitious individuals, in pursuit of their narrow political interests, create mistrust, distrust and misunderstanding which often end up in violent confrontations between groups. Some people have gone as far as advocating that violence is always a part of politics and that politics is violence of sorts. According to Bruce Smith, violence has always been part of the political process. Anyone who fails to see this is a political infant. The decisive means for politics is violence.

The above is largely true of the Nigeria. In 1959, the British colonial rulers of the country conducted the general elections to herald the country’s independence. That election was not free of violence. The colonial administrators allegedly used the police to intimidate innocent Nigerians and political parties they did not favor to win from succeeding them. The parties included the National Convention for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG). They favored the Northern People’s Congress, (NPC) which later formed an alliance with the NCNC to form the government at the Centre, leaving the AG as – the opposition. This development marked a turning point in the future of political violence in Nigeria. The violence that marked the election in the Western Region in 1964 can be traced to 1959. Subsequent elections in Nigeria, whether at the federal, state or local levels would all seem to have taken a cue from these bad examples in manipulating political power to favor groups or individuals in Nigeria since independence. The repetition this maladministration has caused a situation of political crisis and instability which has resulted to protest, agitations and secessions in Nigeria. These social ills and deviant stories are capable of grinding to a halt, the growth of democratic culture in Nigeria and as the giant of Africa in particular and as well as other African countries in the 21st century.

Economic Reasons

Marxist scholars explain conflicts within human societies with reference to the economic factor. The Nigerian society has witnessed economic manifestations of conflicts. This is true, considering the structure of the Nigerian state which not only divides the country into disproportionately sized entities, but also does not specify the formula for the allocation of federal revenue among the different parts and levels of government. As a result of the inequality in the allocation of Nigeria’s wealth, the issue of revenue allocation has continuously reared its ugly head in the politics of the country. These issues have remained contentious in the relationships between the component units of the country. In some federal arrangements, component units are allowed to exploit their natural resources and pay royalties to the central government. The controversy in Nigeria as to who controls the resources has been attributed partly to the mode of federation and partly to the unequal relationship of groups to state power with respect to majority dichotomy. It is instructive to note that what the above explanation suggests is that, where control of state power lies with the majority and perhaps less wealthy groups, the tendency is that resources will

be centrally controlled and its distribution determined by the interest of the dominant group. This obviously is Nigeria's situation.

The issue of recourse control has generated disagreement and conflict between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Niger Delta Region from where the nation's oil wealth is derived. Furthermore, the source of conflicts is the fact that frequent oil spillages, gas flaring and other forms of environmental pollution have put the entire ecosystem and aquatic life of the region under threat of extinction. This is because, oil spillage usually destroys marine life, contaminates sources of drinking water, causes fire hazards, followed by visual pollution and possible damage to plant and animal life. This problem occasioned by exploitation and neglect of the region has resulted in the rise of various movements and groups seeking to secure the rights of different segments of the country through self-determination, return to the principle of derivation in revenue allocation, and compensation for pollution of the environment by oil prospecting companies. Notable among the movements is the now defunct Eastern Mandate Union (EMU), which sought to address the perennial issue of marginalization and unjust character of the polity which sets different standards for different peoples, depending on their geopolitical and ethno-cultural axes. Another is the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) which, at the 1994/95 constitutional conference demanded that communities from whose area (onshore) oil is derived should be part owners together with the federal authorities of the resource and proceeds from it. Others are the Ijaw Congress, the Niger Delta Consultative Assembly, and the Movement for the Actualization of Biafra, (MASSOB).

Social Reasons

It should be noted that conflict is natural with man. Life in itself is a conflict phenomenon. This is because individuals, groups and societies do not live in isolation, they interact. So, conflict occurs when people interact. Conflict is part of life and is associated with, growth and change, man lives with it, learns lessons from it and makes judgments from its illuminating lessons.

The seeds of social antagonism and mistrust were sown in the country by the British; they did not make any worthwhile efforts to integrate the country. They rather made the people of one section of the country to see those from other sections as enemies and competitors. This was particularly the case with northerners who were often ill-at-ease with other Nigerians. Most of the social and cultural conflicts, including religious intolerance in Nigeria, stem from mistrust among the people. Issues that generate conflicts among Nigerians include sports, politics and economic matters. In Nigeria, one has to be very careful in expressing one's views in order not to attract the wrath and anger of the social groups in a given environment.

Conclusion

This study has examined those elements of peace studies and conflict resolution with ideas that tended to ignite conflicts in Nigeria. The issues raised in the paper show that conflicts can be managed or minimized, if Nigerians are sincerely committed to peace. Although, conflicts are inherent in every society, we can turn those things that cause them into constructive or positive use to build a less conflict-ridden Nigeria where all sections and peoples will live in harmony.

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