

Nature of Conflict and the Prospect of Traditional Institutions of Conflict Resolutions in Contemporary Africa: The Nigeria Example

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Abstract

The paper underscores the nature of conflict and examines ethnic and communal conflicts in Nigeria. It proposes a mechanism for resolving ethnic conflicts, which melds the theory of conflict, conflict resolution, and peace-building with traditional African values. It also highlights the importance of empowering local community leaders with appropriate skills in conflict prevention, management, and resolution without recourse to external intervention. Given that the abandonment of 'utility-laden' traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution for foreign models mostly gave rise to the myriads of avoidable violent conflicts all over Africa, it becomes a desideratum to revive and promote hitherto traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution in Nigeria. The paper adopts the historical and analytical method of research deploying secondary data to achieve its aim. The paper in its little form contributes to the trajectory of alternative conflict resolution process of ethnic and community conflicts in Nigeria, which serves as a possible model for other African nations.

Keywords: Conflict, ethnic, Africa, traditional institutions, resolution, Nigeria.

Introduction

Globally, history is laden with conflicts. The consequences of conflicts have consistently been dire for man and society. Clashes often happen when a group of people are denied their rights and entitlement to build a lot of influence, authority, and abundance or attempt to adjust the predominant qualities, standards, convictions, and philosophy that have kept them in a distraught position. As it were, the ethnic conflicts found in Nigeria and other neighbouring states in post-colonial times are the consequences of the inconvenience of colonialism in Africa. Likewise, the assorted exchange of governmental issues, boundary delineations, indigene and settlers clashes, chieftaincy, religion, underestimation, administration disappointment, the absence of responsibility, and ethnic closed-mindedness have prompted conflicts and crises in Nigeria.

In his postulation on the role of history in conflict resolution and national unity in Nigeria, Adejo (2004) deposes that albeit the information on history does not just make for a simple answer in the answers for clashes and struggle circumstances, it,

at any rate, makes conceivable a vital differentiation between the individuals who are negatively utilising mainstream bias. The more changes happen in society, the more it gets basic for the past to be concentrated with the end goal of building up the association and progression between what has been and what is.

Without conflict, the world would be a different place to live in but this would be against the law of nature because without friction there would be no motion. African custom agrees that within the mouth there occurs conflict and that explains why the teeth sometimes bite the tongue, yet the two organs, consciously or subconsciously, continuously make effort to co-function in harmony with each other. Therefore, Nigerians must find means of resolving ethnic conflict to live in harmony with one another, especially because conflict can arise even in situations of 'perfect' harmony and much more in situations where differences exist, as in Itsekiri ~ Ijaw, Itsekiri ~ Urhobo relations in the oil-rich Warri city of Delta State, Nigeria (Okpevra, 2000).

Differences among various groups of people based on natural or fiscal resources, ethnicity, religion, customs, and values are a normal part of life. Such differences often generate scenarios that cause disharmony and violent conflict within and between social groups. A balance is achieved, however, through the use of resolution processes that have evolved. When an alien force interrupts this natural balance, regions and entire continents can be destabilised (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Nigeria has been subjected to several such destabilising forces among them are colonialism, neo-colonialism, new social systems and policies that threaten age-old traditions, the introduction of new religions, a changing world economy, and a perpetual struggle by the political, military, and religious classes for control of political and economic powers (Ebegbulem, 2011).

The ramifications of each of these forces together with the complexity of their combined effects on socio-political and economic stability in Nigeria are enormous. The Machiavellian features of colonialism, for example, brought about the extension of alien controls, arbitrary political boundaries, new forms of social justice and ethnic competition (ethnomania), shattering the country's inner rhythms of cooperative self-

development. The colonial system required the African people to discard traditional ways in pursuit of Western norms under the guise of modernisation and, in doing so, stripped a traditional heritage of social control which, among other things, placed a high premium on the consensual resolution of communal disputes. As a result, many disputes that would have ordinarily been resolved consensually and at an early stage are left to fester. Such disputes have, all too often, escalated and spiralled beyond the hope of easy resolution (Tefera, 2015).

In Nigeria, where various religious and ethnic groups have lived together in harmony for many decades, relationships have increasingly become strained for the past four decades. Nigeria's unstable democracy (albeit, exacerbated by prolonged military rule), second in size only to India in the Third World, has increasingly come under threats of religious, ethnic, 'militia-civil' (military-civil) and class-spearheaded political conflicts. In his paper, Olupona (1991) remarked that 'events... in Nigeria have indicated that the general position held by scholars... that the potential for occasional religious and ethnic skirmishes leading to any major crisis is slim... is no longer valid today'(p.1). What are the underlying factors?

This essay is an addition to the ongoing effort to find innovative strategies for resolving ethnic and community disputes in Nigeria, which could serve as a model for other African countries. It investigates the concept, nature, and handling of ethnic disputes in Nigeria and demonstrates the difficulties in resolving complicated and entrenched disputes and conflicts. Thus, the continuing ethnic and community conflicts poses challenges to the effectiveness of existing management and resolution methods, hence, the need for Alternative Conflict Resolution mechanisms rooted in the 'utility-laden' traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution.

Statement of Problem

African nations today face more prominent difficulties in peace and security now than at any time in recent memory. The nations of sub-Saharan Africa are an unstable blend of weakness, flimsiness, degenerate political establishments and poverty. Alarming, the greater part of these nations does not have the political will to keep up with past non aggression treaties and, consequently, have succumbed to prolonged ethnic conflict (Monty, 2003). This is invariably the consequence of bad handling of conflict in Africa.

It would seem we tend to dread conflict in Nigeria, understandably because, as a result of bad handling, this country continues to experience the disruptive rather than the creative element of conflict. For instance, the various inter-community conflicts and the frequent conflicts by different groups with authority have not helped in the development of a bargaining culture; rather they have merely sharpened the pangs of punitive measures and adversarial relationships in this country. Thus, in the preference for crude arbitrary action, the institutions for managing conflicts have never been put to effective use in Nigeria. And because these institutions have remained under-utilised, no qualitative development could take place.

The Nature of Conflict

According to Imobighe (1995; as cited in Okpevra 2017), the term conflict could simply be referred to as a condition of disharmony in an interactional process. It is the direct result of a clash of interests by the parties involved in some form of relationship. Conflict usually arises as a result of the pursuit of incompatible ends, or the use of incompatible means to pursue desired goals by the parties concerned.

Conflict is a fact of life as long as there is a relationship between and among human beings. There is a general agreement among scholars that conflict is virtually inevitable in the interactions between human beings, either as individuals or in groups (Burton, 1987; Fraser & Hipel, 1984; Moore, 1987). In other words, a conflict is not restricted to any level of human interaction. It can occur at any of the levels of human interactions such as within a group and between groups, within a state and between states, and within an organisation and between organisations. It can also occur within a community and between communities, within a family and between families, in interpersonal relationships, as well as in relationships with the authority within a state or any social formation (Imobighe, 1992). Although conflict might be inevitable in human relations, there are differing views as to the usefulness of conflict. While some people consider conflict to be disastrous, baneful, abnormal, and as such something that should be avoided, others think that conflict is not always evil, abnormal, or dysfunctional and that conflict can really be beneficial. According to Burton (1987), conflict is 'an important creative element in human connections' and 'is the means to change,

how our society's objectives of welfare, security, fairness, and possibilities for personal development can be attained' (pp.137-138). In the light of this, he argued that society would become static if a disagreement is suppressed.

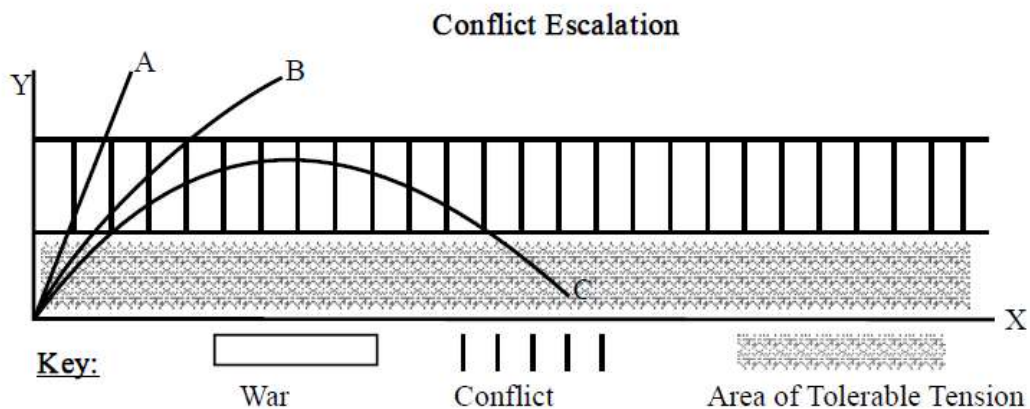
If, however, we consider the horror conflict has caused in various parts of Africa, and the wastage of human and material resources on such conflicts, as in the Horn of Africa, in Liberia, Sudan and Chad, the tendency is to conclude that conflict has nothing but a destructive role in human relations. Back home in Nigeria, if we compute the immense resources that have been wasted in the various inter-community, inter-ethnic conflicts and conflicts with authority, a similar conclusion is likely to be drawn. However, Abdulahi Funsho in the *This Day* Editorial of Wednesday 15 January 2003 deposed that how a disagreement is handled and resolved will determine whether it plays a constructive or destructive role in interpersonal relationships. If properly handled, it could result in some qualitative improvement in the interactions between the persons involved. This is especially true if the parties involved devise effective, cooperative problem-solving techniques to govern their future interactions and eliminate mistrust and hostility between

them after the specific disagreement has been successfully resolved. Unwise handling of a disagreement could cause it to escalate, which would be detrimental and wasteful of scarce resources. In any human relations, there is a level of tolerable friction under which normal

relations are not unduly disturbed.

Beyond this is the area of conflict which, if not properly managed, could develop into armed hostility and possibly escalate into war. This is represented in the sketch below:

Fig. 1. A sketch showing stages of Conflict Escalation¹.



Y-Axis represents tension, conflict and war
 X-Axis represents time-space

Depending on the manner a conflict is managed, the ladder of escalation could be steep as 'A', or slanting as in 'B' in the sketch above. Curve 'C' represents a case of a successfully managed conflict, in which the relationship between the parties involved is returned to a tolerable

level of tension when normal relations can continue. If the successful management of the conflict is achieved before any harm is done to a mutual relationship, and the parties, as a result, can evolve some confidence-building and problem-solving measures to guide

against the strain and stresses in future relations, the conflict could be said to serve a functional purpose. Conflict managed in this manner usually brings about a 'win-win' rather than a 'win-lose' outcome.

A conflict could be classified in terms of the number and spread of the actors involved, such as bilateral or multi-lateral conflict, local, regional or global conflict. A conflict could also be classified in terms of its nature, such as simple and complex conflict. In this sense, a simple conflict is straight forward, in which the issues are clear and the actors are easily identifiable. On the other hand, a complex conflict is one in which the issues are neither clear nor could one easily identify the actors. Most interstate conflicts in Africa fall into the category of complex conflicts because of the many unforeseen hands intruding on African affairs. Hence some interstate conflicts in the continent are usually sprawling, shapeless and indeterminate. Even some of the interstate conflicts in Africa now fall into the category of complex conflict and therefore difficult to manage.

Another popular mode of classification is the one based on the nature of the existing relationship between the key

actors, which gives rise to intramural and adversary conflict. Intramural conflict refers to a conflict between friends or within an organisation with no tradition of hostilities between its members. Adversary conflict, on the other hand, relates to a conflict between invertebrate enemies and rivals. Whereas a failure to manage adversary conflict could easily lead to war, a failure to manage intramural conflict may not easily lead to war but a rupture. Different techniques abound for the management of conflicts. Some of these are coercive, resulting in a 'win-lose' outcome. Others are conciliatory and could result in a 'win-win' outcome.

Myriad scenarios of violent ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be traced to 'a phenomenon that is related to the legacy that has been inherited from colonialism' (Tefera, 2015). Three broad patterns of conflict can be distinguished in Nigeria: sectarian, political, and communal (intra- and inter-ethnic). The three-dimensional classification of conflict in Nigeria is made only for the convenience of reference and must not be construed as being mutually exclusive or as being, *per se*, the only axis of conflict in Nigeria because conflict in Nigeria is a fluid phenomenon. For what may start seemingly as sectarian conflict can evolve

to manifest ethnic or regional overtones and can easily become ethnicised or geopoliticised if past conflicts in Nigeria are indices to be reckoned with. For this reason, the concept, ethnic conflict in the Nigerian context, should be understood as a broad spectrum of intergroup conflict.

Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis of Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict

As of late, researchers have come out with various ways to deal with conceptualising ethnicity. The simple definition of an ethnic group is a community of individuals who share social and etymological attributes including history, custom, legend, and origin. Researchers have been attempting to foster a hypothetical way to deal with identity and ethnic conflict for quite a while. Scholars such as (Okpevra, 2017), (Rothschild, 1997), (Levy, 1993), (Azar, 1990), (Horowitz, 1985), and (Gurr, 1970) agree that contemporary ethnic challenges – in the continent are profoundly established. As exemplified, the contentions that border on religion, identity, tribe, and language tended to be so intricate and difficult to determine or oversee. Ethnic identity no doubt affects one's status locally. Ethnic contentions along these lines are regularly brought about by an endeavour to get more force

or access more assets. This investigation argues that conflict in Africa and Nigeria in particular is inseparable from inequality. Anywhere such disparity shows among groups, conflict is unavoidable. Thus the inquiry, how might we successfully resolve ethnic conflict in Africa to stay away from additional human misfortunes? Is there an outline for peacemaking?

The Need-Conflict Equation Theory

In any system that comprises individuals, groups, organisations, or states, every actor or unit of actors responds to a stimulus which falls under the rubric of 'need'. The concept of 'need' has to do with something that is required or wanted. Thus, human needs relate to those things that are necessary for the human person. Furthermore, because they are necessary, they tend to determine human drives and activities, and hence they represent what you might call things that generally motivate human beings to action (Imobighe, 1992).

The basic human preoccupation with the drive to satisfy their needs has been captured by Maslow (1987) thus:

The human being is a wanting animal and rarely reaches a state of complete satisfaction except for a short time. As one desire is

satisfied, another crops up to take its place. When this is satisfied, still another comes into the foreground, and so on. This is a characteristic of human beings throughout their whole lives that they are practically always desiring something (p.7).

Thus, for humans to satisfy their needs, wants and desires, they make demands upon themselves, the physical environment, and other people. They also make demands upon state authority, and whatever organisations and institutions available. For the individual to meet his needs and such resources and opportunities, which are not deliberately constrained by those whose responsibility it is to provide and create them, there is no conflict. The very moment available resources and opportunities are denied or constrained, an environment of conflict is created. In this sense, the incidence of conflict depends on resources and opportunity availabilities and their distribution.

The need-conflict equation is predicated on the idea that unmet human wants are the basic root cause of conflict. Thus, it is stated that it is important to discover the unmet needs, desires, or interests in order

to satisfy them to ensure societal harmony and to resolve conflict situations. The major proponent of the theory, Burton, claims that for behaviour to evolve and conform, a person's wants must be met. These requirements are inherently human and cannot be changed. Therefore, regardless of how oppressive a policy is, it will always result in protest behaviour and conflict when human needs are ignored.

This study, therefore, is anchored on the Need-Conflict theory to explain ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, by teasing out the background scenario for the conflicts that have bedevilled Nigeria. To that extent, this paper centres on John Burton's theory to clarify ethnic conflict in Nigeria, since it gave relevant motivations to the conflicts that have perplexed the country (Burton 1979). The human need equation theory is abreast with exposing different speculations that qualify reasons for the struggle to the naturally forceful nature of individuals (Burton, 1990). The significance of this theory in managing ethnic conflict in Africa is that it moves past speculations that fault African conflicts in an early stage past. All things considered, it focuses on inadequate organisations unfit to fulfil the fundamental human

requirements of their citizens. According to Irobi (2005) in any place such non-negotiable needs are not met, conflict is inescapable. Clearly, the issue of ethnicity in Africa generally relies upon the degree of state viability, responsibility, and straightforwardness in taking care of the requests of diverse people. The attention to the human needs theory in this examination does not mean disregarding different speculations, which are similarly valuable.

The Primordialist Theory

The term 'primordial attachments' refers to the 'fundamental human demand for identity in terms of community memberships, or what we call identity groupings', as stated by Burton and Sandole (1986). They contend that larger and more complicated communities are more likely to have individuals who are unable to directly satisfy their desire for identification and who instead turn to a metaphorical portrayal of it, such as associational sentiment, to do so. According to their claim, conflict may instead involve a collision of metaphors with culturally specific methods of expressing wants. For many African groups, the clash or loss of such metaphors may have come about, first, through their encounter with colonial nationalism, when several 'tribal nations'

in Africa were arbitrarily amalgamated into new nation-states in which they were subjected to alien political and social controls; and second, through post-colonial experiences which suppressed age-old traditions, forcing many of them into cultural bankruptcy. This state of affairs raises a hypothesis: Having lost those features of traditional cultures (metaphors) which provided what many African groups regarded as impeccable avenues for addressing social needs, many of them readily take recourse to conflict behaviour which is sometimes violent.

The primordial paradigm theorists further argue that :

Conflict resolution involves among other things, the disputants discovering or inventing new metaphors, either alone or with third party assistance. This is a process which reflects 'a multi and not a unidimensional theoretical orientation' (Burton & Sandole 1986: p.337).

As we explore new modes for resolving ethnic conflicts, we must search for new metaphors that would serve as links between ethnic groups and their historic culture, which is their past social identity.

This is necessary especially since virtually all social groups in Africa do, to a large measure, have one foothold in the modern world and another in their traditional culture.

The analysis of conflict resolution among the Nigerian Hausa-Fulani led Paden(1990) to observe that, 'traditional cultural patterns in Nigeria are important to understand, not least because in time of stress the learned behaviour and attitudes of early socialisation may resurface as the more modern rules of the game seem to be inadequate' (p.425). By extension, it is reasonable to assume that some serious intercourse with the past traditional social behaviour of one's social group can ameliorate social stress which seems to characterise many ethnic conflicts in several parts of Nigeria. In this connection, the model for resolving ethnic conflict in those parts of Nigeria, where this tendency exists, must draw upon those salient conflict deterrence behaviours and attitudes of early socialisation that manifest themselves in times of stress.

Social Structuralist Theory

The social structural theorists hold a view quite contrary to the primordials. They argue that different patterns of intergroup relations are determined by

social settings (Hechter, 1989, Shils, 1957). The theory maintains that ethnic solidarity and conflict can result from 'objective intergroup differences in the distribution of economic resources and authority,' especially in a society whose constitution provides for the same civil and political rights to all ethnic groups (Hechter, 1989:16).

In social contexts where ethnicity is very important, such as in Nigeria, Rabushka and Shipsel (1972); as cited in Diamond (1988), remark that 'pre-independence ethnic cooperation gives rise to significant ethnic political confrontation. With independence, distributive issues take centre stage, the national coalition of several ethnic groups grows larger, and ambitious local politicians start to "ethnicise" politics'. In a bid to satisfy their ambition, especially in circumstances where the modern rules of competition become unfavourable, leaders of communal groups often resort to methods that are bound to precipitate conflict. Thus, according to Diamond (1988), there must be a method to control competition and to confine the conflict within specific behavioural boundaries if freedom and free competition are not to devolve into extremism, polarisation, and violence. The search for such a mechanism should be

the central concern of inter- and intra-ethnic peacebuilding in Nigeria.

An important difference between the Tiv and say, the nomadic Fulani concerns their philosophical or cultural orientations towards the meaning of land. For the nomadic (Fulani) a significant value is the freedom to move from place to place (tribal, state, and national boundaries notwithstanding) to seek favourable sites in terms of rain and grazing opportunities; they are not attached to a particular piece of land. For the Tiv, the value is just the opposite. They prize the freedom to own land, to be identified with a specific area of freedom to move as against freedom to remain fixed Moti, (2010) & Ferguson(1970:131).

The sporadic conflict between the nomadic Fulani and the Hausa-Fulani peasants can be traced to this philosophical difference. Each of these groups can claim their freedom to the use of land as fundamental human rights. Anything contrary - any act of restriction to exercise these rights is viewed as an infringement on one's rights and can readily translate to conflict. The mode for resolving such conflict must, therefore, not negate the group's cultural

philosophy to the use of land. A delicate balance must be maintained avoiding winner take all outcomes.

For all practical considerations, whatever mode or mechanism will evolve should underscore the problem-solving paradigm that is consistent with social realities and traditional negotiation behaviours of many ethnic groups in Nigeria. The fundamental code of social exchange among many Nigerian ethnic groups is fairness. This code transcends all aspects of social conduct, such as the fair sharing formula of resources and power and the dispensation of social justice. In this connection, therefore, the traditional social behaviour of many African social groups can be said to be atypical of the competitive theory which seeks to maximise public resources at the expense of the larger community's interest.

Since 'mutually agreeable solutions to problems' is the *sine qua non* of social exchange among many ethnic groups in Africa, it would seem logical to assume that the problem-solving paradigm of conflict resolution would be the ideal theory for the ground mechanism of negotiating and resolving ethnic conflict in Nigeria.

Background to Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

Ethnic conflict and colonial injustice are intertwined in Nigeria's history. In 1914, the Northern and Southern Protectorates were combined, which suggests an unholy marriage. This turned out to be the case since the several ethnic groups that the amalgamation brought together were not consulted. It goes without saying that this undemocratic and even authoritarian British strategy caused ethnic conflict. According to one hypothesis, artificially created British boundaries caused ethnic groupings to realign socially (Emhenya & Efanodor-Obeten, 2020).

According to Leith, and Solomon, (2001) and Lawal(2015), Emhenya and Efanodor-Obeten(2020) depose each of these affected ethnic groups was compelled to mobilise in a particular geographic area that closely mirrored the territorial divisions of the colonial era. Within each region, ethnic groups worked to establish and reaffirm their identities. Regionalist pressures and ethnic conflict resulted from this. However, in order to simplify administration and strengthen the colonial hold on Nigerian society, colonial policy tended to favour the establishment of distinct governments in the North and

South. The developing ethnocentrism was not taken into account by the policy.

Historical Perspectives of Traditional Institutions of Conflict Resolution

Social formations in pre-colonial Nigeria, as in many other African societies, were principally based on the philosophy of communalism (Okpevra and Efe, 2012). In virtually all of these societies the overall desire was to maintain common ties and collective unity as a whole. The social structure was such that the life of the individual was interwoven with that of his/her family, clan, and tribe. However, opportunities for realising their needs varied according to the different interests in the family, community, or clan (Nkabahona, 2007).

These, therefore, created conflicts that required a system of settlement. This was to reduce tension and maintain a balance between the various opposing interests to guarantee the peaceful coexistence of the various members and the community as a whole. Thus, according to Yakubu (1995), 'the resolution of the conflict was guided by the principle of collective responsibility and communal solidarity. This meant that communities were collectively responsible for the harmony and discord caused by their members' (p.5). For this reason, a dispute between

two persons meant a cleavage between their respective groups and therefore, a potential danger to the corporate existence of the whole.

Underscoring the concept of the traditional institution of conflict resolution further, Yakubu (1995) in a paper presented at the Conflict Management Seminar organised by the African Leadership Forum/Academic Associates and Friedrich Naumann Foundation, at the United States Information Service (USIS), Bodija, Ibadan, points out that contextually, conflict resolution is, therefore:

guided by the necessity to keep the community or group together and thus prevent it from disintegrating. The issue of who is right or wrong was not strictly debated, rather, it was the reconciliation of the two parties that was of prime concern. The laws or rules of adjudication were not rigid, but flexible and served only as guides in reaching a decision. The elders or chiefs who were at the helm of the 'judicial' process settled rather than decided, appeased and reconciled rather than enforced their authority. 'The whole process was consensual and every member of

the community was free to participate in the process of settlement' (pp.6-9).

The overriding concern was to identify the cause of the dispute and reconcile the two parties in such a way as to restore harmony in the society (Bohannan, 1968; Bohannan & Curtin, 1971; Tefera, 2015).

The subsequent introduction of European law tradition in the nineteenth century completely abrogated African institutions of conflict resolution and settlement profoundly and modified them in line with the European style of conflict and dispute settlement. However, in some instances in the British colonies, for example, Nigeria, some elements of the traditional approach to dispute resolution were adopted side by side with the British system if they did not threaten colonial interests, as was the case in the Hausa-Fulani emirates (Diamond, 1988, Dudley, 1968). In such instances, the colonial system utilised socio-anthropological knowledge of the traditional culture to establish areas of common ground with theirs to achieve some sort of harmonious relationship before striking such deals (Sone, 2016). In some other instances in the British colonies, the colonial pattern, as shown among the Tiv, was mainly

aimed at destroying the indigenous institutions and mechanisms of social control to break the cohesion of the society to exert firm political control over a people who fiercely resisted centralised authority and were thus branded as being uncompromising (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Thus, the pre-colonial African principle of Social Justice which, emphasises collective responsibility and group solidarity was abandoned or relegated to the background.

The Proposed Traditional Mechanism of Resolving Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

Stedman (1991) has distinguished two dimensions to which processes of conflict resolution in Africa ought to focus: 'the resolution of specific, manifest conflicts and the institutionalisation of long-term stable ways of bounding conflict.' The latter is the central proposition of this paper, which is enhancing processes of bounding ethnic conflicts through community-based systems before they get out of control. Mpofo and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Uryet *al.* (1988) have highlighted numerous advantages of establishing such systems for resolving conflicts. They, particularly, have encouraged building up community peer mediators to serve as people 'on the spot' to intervene informally before disputes have a chance to escalate. Such people

would function as agents of change; that is, to become the prime movers of peace to bring about greater understanding and cooperation among different social groups – ethnic, religious, etc. They would also serve as rallying points for their community's efforts to build peace as well as disseminate and propagate peace in times of crisis (Tefera, 2015).

To solve conflicts, according to Mpofo and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), communities have often resorted to the African traditional mechanism of conflict resolution. Since the western or modern system has failed to mitigate, if not eliminate outright, animosity between disputing parties during and after litigation, leaving the litigants confused as to which system to rely on. Thus, in the African traditional mechanism of conflict resolution, community elders, religious leaders and other influential community members form a team of arbiters. Painfully this indigenous mechanism of conflict resolution has been, according to Tefera (2015), 'persistently under siege over the years partly due to colonialism, globalisation and urbanisation'.

In the same vein, Ajayi and Buhari(2014) argued that Africans had peculiar ways of effecting peace-making, peace-building and confidence-building. Nonetheless,

the introduction of western ways adulterated and in some cases, wiped out African methods of monitoring, preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts. The resultant effect of the above is that many ethnic groups in Africa have been forced to fit into structures that destroyed many of the roots of traditional ways including ways of conflict resolution.

The institutionalisation of long-term stable ways of bounding conflict in Africa and Nigeria in particular is an assumption at the face value. Two cardinal principles of conflict mediation and resolution underpin this assumption: The recognition that people are capable of resolving their conflicts if they have the right resources; and, if people participate in a process, they have an investment in its outcome. Since the greatest collective resource in any community is its people, it is reasonable to assume at this stage of our knowledge that where culturally sensitive mechanisms of conflict management are put into place for the empowerment of community leaders in Nigeria through the enhancement of methods, skills, and self-confidence in managing conflicts in their communities, they can shape their future as they realise their potential, self-worth and,

ultimately, the reward for success in the process. This assumption is consistent, not only with the way peace was built and maintained in the traditional societies of Africa, but also with the fundamental norms of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), which are: 'non-interference,' 'African solution to an African problem', and 'the preservation of territorial integrity' (Chan, 2017; Foltz, 1991). The assumption is also shared by several peace scholars in Africa, among them Deng and Zartman(1991), who propitiously asserted that conflict resolution in Africa should assist Africans in assuming control of their development.

Several conflagrations of intergroup conflicts have been recorded over the past four decades in Nigeria. Those occurring along the inter-ethnic line include the bloody conflict in Zangon Kataf between the Hausa-Fulani and Kadara of Southern Kaduna; the Kasuwan Magani involving Hausa-Fulani, Kadara, and Gwari; the Tiv-Jukun in Taraba State; the Tiv (Mbaduku)-'Udam' in Benue and the Cross-River States; the Tiv (Masev)-Northern Idoma in Benue State; Tiv (Nongov-Iharev)-Doma in Awe of Benue and Plateau States (Aluaigba, 201; Aule, 2010).

In the southern part of the country, the roll call of both inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts is equally disturbing. These range from the Ife-Modakeke conflict in Osun State, the Ijaw-Itsekiri crisis, Delta State, the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict, Anambra State, the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba in Shagamu, Ogoni and Andoni in Rivers State, and a host of others.

The ethnic conflicts mentioned above are not peculiar to Nigeria. Irrefutable evidence around the world shows that a sudden increase in the scale and intensity of ethnic and religious intolerance could render the task of nation-building and conflict management difficult. In Nigeria, therefore, there is a need for a new approach to intergroup problem solving that cross-cuts cleavages and connects social groups in ways that overcome in-group/out-group distinctions and prejudices. Whatever can nurture a more cosmopolitan identity rather than parochial, narrowly defined religious and ethnic identity will be helpful. For this will provide a basis for a new system of intergroup problem-solving in a society like Nigeria where intergroup conflicts can easily spill across blurred ethnic and religious lines. One approach would require a systematic analysis of the problem-solving culture and styles of

related groups to establish common ground for a new theoretical framework for institutionalising inter-culturally sensitive mechanism for long term stable ways of resolving conflicts between such groups.

Significance of Ethnic Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

The extant mechanisms for resolving social conflicts in Nigeria, as well as elsewhere in Africa, need to be appraised to ascertain their validity to extant social realities. For the most part, the modes employed for resolving social conflicts in modern Africa are alien to the generality of Africans to the extent they may not be having the desired effect. The most striking thing about them is that they tend to undermine the importance of some customary legal norms and values that play important role in resolving disputes between individuals and between groups (Ihunna, 2018). This may help explain why the task of conflict resolution in the transitional societies of Africa is becoming rather cumbersome and burdensome. An alternative approach would require the empowerment of the community and civic group leadership (political, ethnic, student, and religious) in assuming more control of their territorial security through the use of

conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms they can easily identify with.

The significance of establishing a framework for a mechanism of ethnic conflict resolution in Nigeria cannot be gainsaid. Nigerians are poised to sustain the fledgling democratic government even at a time when ethnic polarisation, the virulent call for restructuring, and intolerance are strong. This perhaps explains the rising demand for restructuring. The repercussions of such polarisation, especially intolerance along geo-ethnic lines will be enormous not only for Nigeria but also for the entire world since the basic challenge of national integration and nation-building is to allow human rights and democratic practices to co-exist, to promote tolerance at local and global levels, and to establish mechanisms of conflict resolution which are based on consensus rather than coercion.²

The cultural pluralism in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, where a broad spectrum of cultural norms and values abound, presents the problem of fashioning a culturally sensitive model of the preventive system for resolving intergroup conflicts that can be put to use within and across diverse ethnic groups. This is particularly so because

cultural conventions and norms play important role in negotiation – an important component of conflict resolution (Cohen, 1987; Elgstrom, 1990; Gulliver, 1979; Windham, 1980), for it has been established that the cultural realities of a social setting determine its negotiation pattern (Murray, 1986). But, apart from the cultural differences that exist among ethnic groups in Nigeria, numerous commonalities cut across groups which are yet to be effectively explored to enhance the task of peace-making across ethnic groups. How should such an important task be approached?

Deng and Zartman (1991) have raised the need to address the contextual analysis of conflict and conflict resolution from a cross-cultural perspective. They pose the questions: 'to what extent do different cultural contexts reflect different techniques of conflict resolution? Assuming a diversity of cultural techniques, can a comparative approach be cross-culturally enriching in developing more effective methods of conflict resolution in the context of cultural pluralism or the emerging universalism?' Bohannon and Curtin (1970) have raised similar concerns with regard to two traditional modes of conflict management among two indigenous broad political systems in

Africa: 'state systems' and 'stateless or segmented societies.' They have called for the development of a new theoretical framework, 'one which is inclusive of both the law of a state system and that of stateless societies,' arguing:

Such a framework is particularly necessary when we investigate the ways in which the stateless societies have changed and are changing on the demand first of the colonial governments and now of the independent governments. Africans who are adapting to state forms on-demand often experience severe difficulty because they see law based on precedent as always arid and necessarily tyrannous (Bohannon & Curtin, 1971:10).

Summary and Conclusion

Albeit each conflict has its hue, one needs to know the reason for a specific conflict in a particular region for successful management and resolution. The information on the historical backdrop of the practices, starting points, and settlement examples of the different ethnic groups are basic for the process of resolving conflicts. Notwithstanding, note that the opposing ideologies of democracy and free enterprise cannot flourish in any general public in which

individuals do not feel got. It ought to be, in this manner, be the natural privilege of the networks to possess their territory in its entirety, including all assets, both human and material. The disappointment of extant coercive choice necessitates that some different options be investigated.

The foregoing has raised the following concerns: The need to examine extant modes and strategies employed in resolving conflict among the various ethnic groups and communities/societies and to assess their effects on the processes of peacemaking.

- The need for a new theoretical framework for resolving conflict: 'one which is inclusive of both the law of a state system and that of stateless societies'
- The role of culture and social setting on conflict behaviour and processes and outcomes of conflict negotiation needs to be examined with particular attention to culture and environmental determinants of ethnic conflict and negotiation behaviours among different ethnic groups as follows:
 - a. The learned behavioural and attitude patterns of early socialisation to determine what ways and under what

conditions they affect ethnic conflict and its behaviours

b. Cultural conventions and norms that enhance the building of relationships, negotiation processes, and those that determine negotiation outcomes in the situation of shared values and norms, and

c. Cultural determinants of harmony of relationships in the absence of shared values and norms, and attitudes and behavioural traits that breed hostility.

The system of social justice imposed by the colonialists remains alien to many ethnic groups in Nigeria as it does not take into consideration the interest of all parties in a dispute. Thus, rather than settle disputes, it creates more dissension among individuals and groups. The virtual collapse of the indigenous mechanisms has created many problems in many parts

of Nigeria, especially as the new system of social justice negates the African philosophy of collective responsibility in social justice – an essential feature of African peace-making and peace-building process.

By and large existing literature tends to locate the root cause of ethnic conflicts in ethnic cleavages entrenched in post-colonial African states. This assertion one may posit is no longer tenable. Thus, contrary to claims in the literature and public discourse/domain, most so-called ethnic conflicts are not caused by ethnicity; rather ethnicity was/ (or has been) exploited to mobilise sectional support for such conflicts. Intrinsically, if ethnicity is properly harnessed it could be a veritable mechanism for sustainable peace, security and development in Nigeria and the African continent in general

¹ (Source: Author's creation for a conflict simulation exercise at a Conflict Management Seminar. Author was nominated as Faculty of Arts/Social Sciences Representative/Participant, Edo State University, Ekpoma at the Conflict Management Training Programme, organised by African Leadership Forum (ALF) in collaboration with Academic Associate and Fredrich Naumann Foundation, at the United States Information Service (USIS), Bodija, Ibadan, Nigeria, July 6-9 1995. The programme was funded by the British Council to help promote and enhance peaceful co-existence on campuses.

² Adapted from John Paden, 'National System Development and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria'. In *Conflict and Peacemaking Multi-ethnic Societies*. Eds. Montville, J.V. eds., (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1990), 41-42.

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