

PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF MODERN CONFLICT- A RELIGIOUS LEADER'S APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Modern conflicts have manifested in different ways, with violent and non-violent conflicts prevalent in most societies in the last few decades. In spite of the efforts of United Nations and national governments at resolving conflicts, many of them have remained intractable. The study examined the approaches adopted by religious leaders in resolving conflicts. The study adopted a qualitative approach, in which documentary review of archival materials, periodicals, news sources, journals and relevant books were undertaken. Data were content analyzed. It was found that combating conflict involves promoting cooperation and unity among religious adherents. In addition, religious leaders adopted media sensitization for peaceful resolution of conflicts. The study concluded that conflicts affect the growth and development of a state and that religious leaders' efforts toward conflict resolution helped maintain the unity of the citizens. It is recommended that religious leaders should engage in peace building initiatives to combat rising incidence of conflicts and insurgency. Furthermore, religious leaders should collaborate with the government to set up peace building projects in conflict prone areas.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict resolution, Modern conflicts, Peaceful resolution, Religious Leaders approach

INTRODUCTION

Modern conflicts have manifested in different ways, with violent and non-violent conflicts prevalent in most societies in the last few decades. In spite of the efforts of United Nations and national governments at resolving conflicts, many of them have remained intractable such as conflicts in Israel-Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Congo, Cyprus, Syria, Kashmir and Sri Lanka (Amaechi, 2018). Many countries of the world like Somalia, Congo, Nigeria, Sudan, Mali, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan are engulfed in one form of conflict: violence, terrorism, civil unrest, insecurity and insurgency resulting to deaths and increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) (Nweke, 2018; Amaechi, 2018; Richard, 2020). The number and intensity of the high profile conflict extremism, violence, terrorism and civil unrest have had a

detrimental effect on peace and development in many developing countries including Nigeria (Obamwonyi & Owenvbiugie, 2015).

Conflicts are capable of destroying human and physical as well as economic and financial institutions as seen in the cases of Syria, Somalia and South Sudan where majority have fled and become refugees and economy seems to be in a state of shambles (Hassan & Olugbo, 2015; ACLED, 2019). Further, it can lead to disruption in consumption, investment, business and trade, production and divert investment from productive areas of development including entrepreneurship development, education, infrastructure and health into areas of violence containment: security, high prison population and others. Thus, the cost of conflict, violence and terrorism on a society and nation is significantly very high (Adebajo, 2013).

Conflict resolution and peace building initiatives therefore become an essential prerequisite because without peace, it will not be possible to achieve the level of cooperation, trust and inclusiveness necessary to solve the challenges that exist in the society, as well as empower the institutions and organizations. In post-conflict societies and nations, like the North Eastern part of Nigeria, conflict resolution offers itself as an important option for rehabilitation, integration and economic recovery (Orhero, 2015). Conflict resolution has been evolving as the dynamics of the global environment dictates. Conflict resolution has expanded beyond the United Nations popularized definition of action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into terrorism to a holistic understanding of the needs for security, justice, political stability, socio-economic recovery and sustaining peace (Hayward & Marshall, 2015).

More so, studies such as Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013; Obamwonyi & Owenvbiugie, 2015 indicate that regions (especially north-eastern part of Nigeria) and countries (like Libya, Cameroun and Syria) with high profiles of conflict experience low economic activities and lack sustainable livelihood. As a result, these countries are poor compared to those that do not experience conflict, insecurity and violence (World Bank, 2011; ACLED, 2019). On this note, the 2016 UN secretary general's report on peace building set out five priority areas for interventions in post-conflict contexts: establishing security, building confidence in a political process, delivering initial peace dividends and expanding core national capacity (UN, 2016).

In Nigeria, conflict, violence and insecurity occasioned by the activities of Boko Haram insurgency in the North East geo-political zone appear to be the primary challenge in recent time and a very significant factor militating against development including sustainable entrepreneurial activities that would have reduced poverty in the geo-political zone and by extension in Nigeria (Abubakar, 2013). The challenge of development has been further compounded by the following drivers of conflict, extreme violence and insecurity: youth unemployment, lack of empowerment (dependency syndrome), poverty, political exclusion and corruption, inadequate room for creativity and innovation, gender inequality, high rate of illiteracy, ethnic diversity and religious intolerance. These drivers are certainly responsible for the woes in the society (Adelusi & Oluwashakin, 2014).

All societies and nations need peace to exist and develop. However, peace is often violated due to conflicts, violent extremism, terrorism, and insecurity arising from youth unemployment, poverty, gender imbalance, economic and political exclusion, faith based intolerance, low level of education, ethnicity, corruption, inadequate room for creativity and innovation among others (Obamwonyi & Owenvbiugie, 2015). These vices have brought negative consequences on economic development of many African nations including Nigeria. Nigeria as a country is under internal security threats occasioned by acts of domestic terrorism which greatly affects the nation's stability and well-being (Ogundiya, 2009).

However, the peace building initiatives have failed to effectively eradicate conflict in the 21st century and thus this paper seeks to introduce the approach of religious leaders as the missing link to conflict resolution in the society.

The issue of conflict is global and could be found in different areas such as marriage, family, community, state, office, religion or belief system, governance and politics. For instance, conflict situation occurs in marriage and family when there is disagreement between husband and wife or parents and children over a

given matter. It could be on management of family finance, incompatibility of characters of the couple, laxity of either party on his/her responsibility, lack of love or humility by the husband or wife. At the community level, disputes can arise over land and boundary matters, between one community and another community or one state and another state. There could be conflict between employer and employees on working conditions. In governance, the masses or subjects sometimes disagree with their leaders (Obiorah, 2011).

Nigeria, over the years, has experienced series of religious conflicts resulting from clashes of belief system and practices between Christians and Muslims. Consequently, many lives and property worth millions of naira were wasted. Some of the conflicts include, the Zango-Kataf conflict in Kaduna State (1999-2001); Tiv-Jukun Wukari conflict in Taraba State (1999-2001); Itsekiri-Urhobo Warri crisis, (1999-2000); Yelwa-Shendam conflict (2003-2005), Mangu-Bokoss crisis (1988-1999), the Ife-Modakeke crisis (1999-2000) (Oji, Eme & Nwoba, 2014; Uka, 2010; Nweke, 2018; Amaechi, 2018). There is no gainsaying that it retarded the socio-political and economic progress of the nation. This is because conflict environment leads to insecurity of lives and property.

Okafor (2011) in studying the ethno-religious and communal conflicts that has befallen Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999, argues that these violent conflicts are inbuilt in socio-economic and political management of post-colonial Nigeria. However, with the renewed attempt at entrenching democracy, the struggle for political and economic spaces had intensified between and among the various ethno religious and political groups, thus making these conflicts inevitable (Ganiyu, 2010). Poverty in the country occasioned by social and economic dislocations, as well as ethnic and religious manipulations by the elite has been identified as the brain behind the spate of ethno-religious conflicts in the country. He had it had been further argued that pluralism and diversity in Nigeria, abundant human and natural resources have deepened suspicion, hatred and distrust among the people (Ibenwa, 2010).

Nnamani (2011) examined violent conflicts in northern states using Bauchi, Plateau and Taraba states as case studies. Violent conflicts, he argued, have become a recurrent and incessant feature in the past three decades in Nigeria and that no part of Nigeria is left out in these violent conflicts. He explored various theoretical perspectives to provide an insight into the ramification of violent conflicts in Nigeria especially in Bauchi, Plateau and Taraba states (Nnamani, 2011). The study assessed the causes, effects, dynamics and mechanisms for managing conflicts with a view to finding solutions to the problem of ethno-religious conflicts. The study found that religion, ethnicity and the manipulative roles of the political elite are mainly responsible for the spate of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, it also identifies ignorance, poverty, marginalization and fear of domination as equally responsible for these conflicts (Nnamani, 2011).

Ukoha (2015) examined the explosion of violent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria contrary to the expectation that the inauguration of civil rule will usher in stability and peace. He argued that the nature of the politics of the transition program and the reluctance of the civilian regime to address the national question led to the resurgence of social groups that make demands for incorporation and empowerment. According to Ukoha (2015), the central argument is that competition for power and the inability of government to deliver dividends of democracy have resulted in violent conflicts between ethnic and religious groups.

Nweke (2018) in studying religious peace building in Nigeria argued that several players such as the religious leaders and communal heads need to undertake more roles in the process of conflicts resolution. He argued that since the society is comprised of different persons with varied worldviews, there are bound to be conflicts hence the need for the leaders to take proactive measures in ensuring such conflicts are resolved as soon as they arise.

Amaechi (2018) examined the intractable conflicts and the imperative of the indigenous idea of peace building. He argued that some conflicts have remained intractable because of inability of the people to identify their differences and resolve them. This idea of peace building centers on tolerance and understanding which he opined are the essence of religious leaders. Thus, according to Amaechi (2018), the

core benefit of having religious leaders is to inculcate forbearing attitudes in people such that different people can coexist without chaos and conflicts.

National Security

National security implies requirement to maintain the survival of the state through the use of economic power, diplomacy, power projection and political power. It is simply the ability of the state to cater for the protection and peace of the citizens (Makinda, 2018). In Nigeria, the prevalence of band of soldiers and violent groups with international linkages has constituted potent threats to national security and economy, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state and its citizens. For instance, the activities of the groups have resulted in the loss of lives and property. A recent statistics released by Niger Delta Development Monitoring and Corporate Watch (NIDDEMCOW), a non-governmental organization, shows that between 2008 and 2018, a total of 308 hostage taking incidents occurred in the region (Ajibade & Musa, 2018).

In addition, militant groups have carried out deadly and paralyzing attacks on oil and gas facilities with their weapons. For instance, on March 16, 2013, Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC), Nigeria's biggest oil producing company, evacuated non-essential staff from its facilities in Warri, Delta State and shut down oil production, following a month of mounting unrest by ethnic Ijaw militant groups that culminated in an attack on the Nigerian Navy on the Escravos River that left seven people dead, several soldiers wounded and significantly disrupted riverside travel. Subsequent attacks by militants killed one Chevron contract worker and five TotalFinalElf (IFE) personnel, while gunfire badly damaged a Shell helicopter seeking to evacuate employees (Bassey & Osita, 2017; Maduagwu, 2016). But as Eso (2011, p. 15) has observed, "the root causes of resort to violence and criminality in order to influence public policy is rather deep-seated and beyond the sectarian". This is because the attacks of the group have been targeted or directed at the State, its institutions and the civilian population. Several police stations including the force headquarters, Abuja, army barracks, schools, government establishments and places of worship have been attacked in several states of the federation (Abu & Ola, 2011).

But the attack on the UN House in Abuja in 2011 was according to Eso (2011, p. 21), "a game changer replete with new dynamics, far reaching and imponderable reverberations that dramatically altered the scope, intensity and focus of Boko Haram's violence mission, as well as any consideration of sect". Apart from the threat to life, national security, unity, sovereignty and territoriality, the operations of these violent groups have also impacted negatively on the Nigerian economy. For instance, in 2008 alone, it is estimated that Nigeria lost over 3 trillion naira as a result of militancy in the Niger Delta while Boko Haram has caused extensive damage to property and reduced government revenue with a negative impact on the socio-economic development of the northern region in general and North-east states in particular (Ebije, 2011).

Conflict and Violence

Conflict is a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument. Conflict is a necessary process of life. Within the individual, there is always conflict of thoughts, choice and interest, to mention but a few. This is known as intra-personal conflict. This not only makes decision taking difficult, but also has been identified as one of the major sources of stress (Obah-Akpowoghaha, 2013). On the other hand, the inter-personal conflict occurs between individuals, group, members of an organization and states. Conflicts can also be either constructive or destructive. If conflict is properly managed or resolved, there will be peace. If on the other hand, resolution and reconciliation fail, the conflict will degenerate to chaos, crisis or war (Ifeanyi 2016).

Furthermore, Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013, p. 14) defined conflict as "any divergence of interests, objectives or priorities between individual, groups, or organizations or nonconformity to requirements of a task; activity or process". Duncan (2015) noted that conflict implies some types of hostility and some desires to do harm which may be considered an extreme case of competition. Conflict is different from competition, although competition may result in conflict. This suggests that conflicts may occur without any specific reference to competition, as it could occur as a result of breakdown in the mechanism of decision-making.

Fischer (2012) defined violence as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence a process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection,” blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. Similarly, Aniekwe & Kushie (2011) views it as any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post electoral process, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt the process (meetings or voting at polling stations) or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate the processes (voters and other electoral process) or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with processes.

However, Aniekwe & Kushie (2011) identified four descriptive categories of conflict and violence that emerge, suggesting a variety of motives, perpetrators, and victims which includes the following: Disgruntled voters against the state arising from perceived unfairness in the election process; The state in conflict with voters who challenges election results or hegemony of the state; Political rivals in conflict with each other in the quest to attain power; and A combination of two or more of the above categories.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Festinger (1951) developed a theory about communication’s social influences, referred to as cognitive dissonance which is one of the most important psychological concepts that shed light on conflict process and terrorist behavior. Cunningham (2003) observes that men prefer a situation of stability in respect to values, behavior and their environmental conditions when people experience a difference between what they perceive and what they desire (cognitive dissonance), they seek to reduce this dissonance by reducing this gap through actions, filtering information or altering perceptions.

In this specific instance, it develops to terrorism as the movement enjoys widespread overt or covert support among the disgruntled elements within the society (Ogoige & Osuyi, 2012). The goal of such individuals is to remove the hindrances through whichever methods that Ibeanu (2009) refers to as maladaptive means. Maladaptive means could include forming a terrorist organization and carrying out terrorist acts. It needs to be acknowledged that not in all instances of cognitive dissonance or everybody that experiences it as well as deprived individuals or groups may choose to commit terrorist acts. Some people may suffer in silence or adopt constitutional means to address their grievances.

The cognitive dissonance theory therefore applies to this paper in the sense that understanding the process and behavioral pattern of conflict agents will help to adopt suitable approaches to curb and eradicate the scourge. It is thus evident that cognitive dissonance theory helps to comprehend the measures taken by conflicts agents and behavior pattern adopted to carry out such activities.

EFFECT OF ETHNIC CONFLICT ON NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

The negative effects of conflicts cannot be over-emphasized. Unfortunately, this tends to be implanted by the elites, who in turn manipulate the most vulnerable, the youths, to engage in destructive acts (Ekwunife 1992). According to Gotan, (2008) these crises include: the Maitasine riots- 1980-1985, Bauchi riot-1990, Kano-15th October, 1991 (Reaction to Reinhard Bonnke’s Crusade), Zangon Katab- 1992 (Ethno- religious crises), Kaduna- February 2000 (Sharia crises); Bauchi- June, 2001 (as a result of the introduction of the Sharia legal system in the state). Jos-7th September, 2001, Kaduna- November, 2002, Yelwa Shendam ethno-religious crises- February 2004, religious crises in Sokoto, Kaduna- 2005, Jigawa -2006, Jos 2008. In fact, religious riot has been a recurring issue in Nigeria especially in the northern parts-Kaduna, Jos, Sokoto, Bornu, Zamfara, Jigawa, Katstina, Bauchi, Kano, etc. Bonkat (2014) record that between 1980 and 2004. There have been more than 150 incidents of conflict in Kaduna state, in which more than 2000 people lost their lives, over 50,000 people were injured and 4,000 people displaced.

Another worse and more devastating conflict and violence situation is the current trend of mass destruction by Boko Haramist, an Islamic sect. According to Ola (2011), 10,000 residents were displaced in Yobe on 27th December, 2011 and 40 people killed at church in Madalla, Niger State, by bombing of Boko Haram. Ola also reported the bombing of police outpost and the office of the Federal Road Safety (FRS) in Borno

on November, 10th 2011. Two persons were killed in the incidence. On 4th and 5th November, 2011, Islamic sect struck Damaturu and Potiskum in Yobe State and Maiduguri, Bornu State. 100 people were reported killed, though, police admitted- only 53 people. The churches at New Jerusalem area of Damaturu and private property were burnt.

Onuora (2011) posits that on 3rd March, 2011, there was bombing in a political rally in Suleja, Niger State. INEC office and Churches were also attacked. Two policemen were murdered on 23rd May, 2011 at Bwari, Abuja. In Yobe, 26th November, 2011, precisely, four policemen were reported killed and eight churches burnt in Geidam, a small community in Yobe. Ebije (2011) records a bomb explosion in Pompomari, Damaturu in 19th December, 2011. Mgboh (2012) noted the incidence of multiple bombing in Kano on 21st January, 2012. On 4th January 2012, eight people were killed in Bogo District of Nassarawa, Gombe State and 20 Killed in Adamawa (Banchoff, 2014). Ogoige and Osuyi (2012) record that Islamic School was bombed in sapele, Delta State on 27th December, 2012. 10 pupils were injured.

Sadly, the bane seems not to diminish even after more than 11 years Boko Haram insurgency is still a violent security threat to Nigeria. In a news report of Aljazeera (September 26, 2020), several security personnel were killed in attack on security convoy in Northeast Nigeria. The convoy was taking people displaced by an armed uprising back to their homes in Baga, Borno State. Also, reports of August 29, 2020 confirmed 27 died after Boko Haram attacked some Nigeria villages. Such deadly attacks in recent months have pressured Nigerian government to increase its efforts against a homegrown Islamic extremist group it had recently declared to be crushed (Sahara Reporters, 2020). It is no gainsaying that this menace has adversely, immensely and negatively affected the national development in all ramifications. This poses a big treat on the security and unity of the nation.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS APPROACH

According to Genesis 13:8, Abraham adopted the approach of dialogue to settle conflict between Lot and himself. Through dialogue they reached to a compromise; he succeeded in initiating peace. Kaigama (2016) and Gangwar (2008) posit that dialogue is an important tool in resolving disputes. Okuke (2016, p. 19) remarks that: “dialogue which brings peace, unity, harmony, development, and progress, is a good means to break the barrier between peoples of different culture, language, history and geographical locations”. The fact is there is no way different people with several and diverse ethnicity as well as varying religious affiliations can thrive at any meaningful level of mutual understanding, cordial relationship, respect for each other and peaceful co-existence devoid of dialogue.

Both parties should respect the differences of each other and let conversion and winning of membership be through persuasion and conviction. It is wrong for any person (because of religious affiliation) to promote one religion against another religion. For instance, declaring a state of many religions a Sharia state will only lead to disunity and disharmony of that state. A compromise is necessary since the two religions have come to stay in Nigeria. In order to ensure a peaceful and proper management of conflict or violence situation, Gaya (2009), among other strategies, recommends communication, collaboration and negotiation as the most effective tools to achieve peaceful resolution.

Selfishness does not give room for dialogue, rotation of political power, equity, justice and interest in others. Nigeria can only experience peace and progress when our religious and political leaders become selfless in their dealings with others. They should not be so selfish as to deprive others their rights. Everyone needs to respect the other irrespective of his tribe; language or religion and no groups should see itself as above the other in any way. The solution of the matter is dialogue, compromise and tolerance. In compromise, both loose some and gain some and are given equal consideration.

Love and faith were so intrinsic in the life of Abraham. These virtues should be emulated by Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. In dialogue, it will be very difficult to reach to a compromise devoid of love. Fortunately, both the Bible and Qur’an teach love for one another. For instance, in the Gospels (Matt. 5:44, Lk. 6:23) Jesus taught the disciples, “You have heard that it was said; you shall love your neighbor and hate your

enemy; but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The issue of love has been so cardinal in the Christian religion since the Bible times.

David (2009, p. 16) asserts that “peace is the prime value in contemporary Africa today, the most valuable ‘public good’, but yet the most elusive... peace is therefore the most pressing challenge faced by Africa in the 21st century”. The fact remains that there cannot be a sustainable national development devoid of sustainable peace. David (2009, p. 17) posits that “Peace is generally defined as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence, and about peaceful coexistence. It is primarily concerned with creating and maintaining a just order in society and the resolution of conflict by non-violent means”.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that when people get together there is always impersonal tension and conflicts. Human beings are complex creatures with incompatible individual characteristics and strong wills. Nevertheless, the problem is not the occurrences of conflicts but its degeneration into violence and people’s approach to it. It is true that Nigeria over the years experienced series of religious mayhems which obviously affect the national development; there is still hope that the peace of the nation will be restored if Christians and Muslims in Nigeria would emulate the good qualities and attitudes of Abraham. The cognitive dissonance theory adopted by this paper helps to understand the process and pattern of behavior of conflict mongers (either for tribal or political gains) and offer the most suitable method of resolving the conflicts. The study concluded that conflicts affect the growth and development of a state and that religious leaders’ efforts toward conflict resolution helped maintain the unity of the citizens.

It is recommended that religious leaders should engage in peace building initiatives to combat rising incidence of conflicts and insurgency. Furthermore, religious leaders should collaborate with the government to set up peace building projects in conflict areas. More so, the political and religious leaders in Nigeria should adopt dialogue as means of resolving their conflicts. This involves a careful practice of religious teachings on peace and unity as demonstrated in the Bible and Quran.

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