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PEACE AND CONFLICT BEHAVIOUR IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

No two individuals are the same, not even identical twins. In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Nigeria, conflict is bound to exist. With about 400 tribes and 250 ethno-linguistic groupings in Nigeria from different socio-cultural background, sentiments along different dimensions is enough force to trigger rancour and acrimony of different colouration, each of the groupings striving for dominance, relevance and prominence in the scheme of things. This paper is an attempt at exposing the violent conflict-infested nature of Nigeria. Despite efforts made and measures put in place by successive governments to ensure peace, conflicts of different magnitude abound. Some measures put in place to foster unity and peace in Nigeria include: quota system, Federal Character Commission, derivation and amnesty programme for oil producing states, National Youth Service Corps, Federal Unity Schools, zoning formula, freedom of speech and association, citizenship and the inclusion of peace and conflict resolution in school curriculum, among others. Some of the violent conflicts that characterize Nigeria include but not limited to the following: identity-based violence such as ethnic, religious, indigene/settler claims as well as politically-motivated crises in different parts of Nigeria. Others include: Fulani herdsmen/farmers crisis, militancy in the Niger Delta and Insurgency in the North Eastern parts of Nigeria. The paper recommended peace education and the restoration of African cherished social values characterized by philosophy of 'live and let live', being one's brother's keepers, community fellow-feelings, respect for human lives, tolerance, integrity and hospitality as the sure way to enthrone sustainable peace in Nigeria.
Keywords: peace, conflict, behaviour, peace education.

Introduction

Peace has become a catch word in social sciences and humanities due to the strategic role it plays in all spheres of human existence. Be it at the level of individuals, groups, institutions, states, nations, class, race, ethnicity and the society at large, peace is inevitable in all human relations. Peace is a good virtue and a cherished value to an extent that even trouble makers use the word peace to justify their actions. For instance, you will not know peace until this or that is done. Peace is both Biblical and Quranic, both Christian and Islamic.

To the best of my knowledge, none of the two major religion, Christianity and Islam, preaches anti- peace message. The past prophets of God use peace as their greeting styles,

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“Peace be upon you” or “Assalamu alaikum” an Arabic way of extending peace to others. In Catholic, the priest starts the holy mass with peace and end with peace. “May the peace of the lord be with you” (Beginning) and ‘Go in peace, the mass is ended.

Peace is desirable but not easily realizable due to the complexity of human nature. Efforts made at ensuring peace are often frustrated by other individuals due to incongruence of ideas, divergent views, prejudice, suspicion, mistrust and distrust, different perception or conflicting interests of key players or actors in different social settings.

The League of Nations was formed to ensure peace and security in international relation and, when it was discovered that the league could not stop the Second World War from taking place, the United Nations Organisation was formed in 1945 to forestall peace, unity and security at the international level. Peace behavior is any behavior that is aimed at preventing conflict while conflict behavior is a behavior that undermines the atmosphere of peace.

In Nigeria, while some peace-loving individuals and the government try to maintain peace, others are making it impossible for reasons best known to them. This paper attempts to enumerate some of the measures put in place to ensure that peace prevails but, series of conflict still exists as an attribute of humanity.

Methodology

The study used secondary source of data collection. Relevant data were extracted from textbooks, academic journals, and from other secondary sources such as the internet and library. The data collected were content analysed as captured in the headings and subheadings of this piece.

Defining the Concept of Peace

In defining peace, we shall present both nominal and operational definitions of peace for analytical purpose. Nominal definitions are definitions from dictionary and encyclopaedia while operational definitions are individual scholarly definitions that are proposed or constructed as it applies to a study or studies as the case may be. It is pertinent to draw our attentions to the fact that operational definitions are in most cases derivatives of nominal definition in order to facilitate the applicability, suitability and practicability of definitions to issue of interest or social problems. Nominally speaking, peace is an occurrence of harmony characterized by the lack of violence, conflict behaviours and the freedom from fear of violence (Wikipedia). Peace is a period of freedom from public disturbance or war; a quiet and calm state of mind as well as agreement and harmony among people or an agreement to end a war (Webster Dictionary). Operationally speaking, peace has been severally defined by scholars to mean something desirable, pleasant and important. This is reflected in the following synonyms of peace: law and order, harmony, accord, concord, amity, amicableness, goodwill, friendship, cordiality, nonaggression, nonviolence, ceasefire, and respite (Wikipedia).

The recognition of the inestimable value of peace and conflict resolution education has, for instance, informed the wise decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the National Universities Commission (NUC), to introduce Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies as a compulsory core course for all Nigerian Universities (Nder, 2013). According to Nder (2013:2), peace can be commonly defined as the absence of any of the following: conflict, war, fear, anxiety, suffering, hardship and violence. This definition does not address the concept of peace

in real life situation because there is no permanence in peace. A war-torn country enjoys moments of peace as a result of the application of conflict resolution mechanisms such as mediation, conciliation and negotiation. On the other hand, the so-called most peaceful nations experience one form of acrimony or the other. Another salient issue about peace is that it is imperatively a cross-institutional affair. Put it differently, every institution needs peace. Peace is equally a cross-cultural phenomenon as every culture is desirous of peace. Peace is a universal language.

Another fundamental thing about peace is that peace means different things to different people. To sociologists, peace means the maintenance of social order. To political scientists, peace means political stability. To economists, peace means economic stability. To lawyers, peace means adherence to the rule of law. Another thing worth-mentioning about peace is that people do all manners of things in an attempt to secure peace, including anti-peace activities such as violence to rescue threatening situations. Examples of such activities include a fierce gun battle between violent criminals such as armed robbers, militants, kidnappers on one hand, and the security forces on the other hand.

Characteristics of Peace

From the various components in the definition of peace, Fazoranti (2004) identified the following attributes of peace:

Absence of Turmoil, Suspicion and Chaos: This is abnormal because humans are naturally domineering, envious, wicked, stubborn, oppressive, and exploitative. Karl Marx notes that conflict is inevitable in the society because of the existence of two major opposing or antagonistic groups of exploiters or oppressors (owners of mop), the advantaged group and the group of the exploited and the oppressed (those who don't have the means of production) the disadvantaged group. Apart from communalism where collective owners of means of production and distribution existed, every other historical epoch was characterized by class struggle. In his words, "the history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle". For instance, in the era of slavery, it was between the masters and slaves. Feudalism was characterized by class struggle between the serfs and the serflords. In the same token, capitalism is characterized by class conflict between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. While the disadvantaged group wants to change the status quo, the advantaged group will want to maintain the status quo.

Consensus, Collectivity and Harmony: This is not practically possible because of the elusiveness of human beings. We cannot expect all people to be on the same page on all matters or issues. There is a common parlance that corroborates this assertion, "we agree to disagree", "in politics, there is no permanent friend and no permanent enemy but permanent interest" "no brother in army" etc.

Absence of War, Imbroglia or Tension: This is technically and humanly impossible. Even if there is no war, there are certain distractions like vandalism, poverty, unemployment, corruption, lack of synergy between the legislative and the executive arms of the government, marginalization, cessation, and other forms of agitation, among others.

Quiet, Tranquility and Freedom from Disturbance: This is equally not feasible or realisable in human relation. As stated earlier, the disadvantaged group must speak out in the form of protest, strike, demonstration, riot and warfare to mention but a few of similar instances. No insecurity, injustice, deprivation, inequality, oppression, exploitation and marginalization in the attributes mentioned above which have rendered it incomprehensive. Going by these features of peace as emanated from the various definitions, there is no peace in the world.

Peace can generally be seen as a process, as an interaction and as an action. The discussion is deepened below: Peace as a process is a situation where normalcy returns generally after a while without any intervention from anywhere while peace as an interaction is a form of collaboration which is usually championed by parties directly involved in the conflict, no need to engage the services of a third party. Peace as an action, on the other hand, connotes efforts made by individuals, groups, organized social movements, legislators and cabinets to ensure peace through any of the following means of conflict resolution- mediation, negotiation, conciliation, legislation, arbitration and adjudication.

Dimensions of Peace

The Norwegian peace theorist, John Galtung, re-echoed by Nder (2013:2-3), identified two fundamental dimensions of peace: positive and negative peace. Negative peace, as posited by Galtung, involves direct violence, war, fear and conflict at individual, national, regional and international levels. Positive peace, on the other hand, has to do with the absence of unjust structures and unequal relationships. Justice and respect for Human Rights and dignity are equally critical considerations under positive peace.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the conflict theory which sees society existing in antagonistic form as against the functionalist theory which views society existing in harmony and stability. According to Haralambos et al (2013) all conflict perspectives use, in one form and another, the notion that there are groups in society that have different interests. Because of the competing interests of different groups, the potential for, and likelihood of, conflict is always present. In an attempt to protect the competing interests of different groups, conflict is bound to come up. The disadvantaged group will want to change the status quo while the advantaged group would want the status quo maintained. The various conflict theoreticians whether it is Marx, Weber or Dahrendorf, agreed that there is conflict of interest. It is either conflict over economic interest or other interests; the bottom line is that there must be a bone of contention. In Nigeria, the major ethnic, religious and socio-political groups, in a bid to overshadow the other groups will be checkmated by other groups and, consequently conflict will occur. All the various forms of conflict discussed in this paper are natural responses to protection and promotion of divergent interests.

Causes of Lack of Peace in Nigeria

Factors such as ethnic cleansing, religious crisis, political upheavals, resource control, population census, election, alleged northern hegemony, lack of development, lack of good governance, prejudice, discrimination, marginalization, poverty, unemployment, land disputes, chieftaincy title, communal clashes, indigene/settler insurgency, fear of domination, problems

of responsiveness and accountability in complex organization are some of the issues responsible for perceived lack of peace in Nigeria.

Religious conflicts have led to social dislocation, economic loss, and loss of lives and property worth millions of naira. Examples include the 1980 Maitatsine uprising in Kano, Gongola, Gombe, the 1984 Muslim and Christian youths in Gombe and Gongola, the 1986 militant Muslims and Christians in Ibadan, Ilorin and Sokoto, the 1987 Muslim students versus Christian students, the 1999 Hausa/Fulani Muslim versus Christian in Kwara State, the 2000 reprisal violence on Hausa/Fulani Muslim in Abia State, the 2000 Hausa/Fulani Muslim Versus Christian in Oyo(Saki), and most recently, the Boko Haram insurgency that had led to the internal displacement of people in Nigeria (Aghemelo and Okiri 2011). Despite the government announcement that the group had been crushed, attacks have continued (Peace Initiative Network, 2019).

Ethnic hostilities or conflicts include the Kaduna/Zango Kataf crisis of April, 2001 and Jos riot of September 2001 between Hausa/Fulani and others which led to loss of lives and property in Nigeria. Indigene/settler conflicts such as Zango Kataf, Jukun/Tiv conflicts, Jos/Hausa conflict, and Ife/ Modakeke. Another form of violence in Nigeria is the violence in rural areas between Fulani herdsmen and farmers amid claims of trespassing and sabotage. This cycle of violence is also catalysed by the drought.

The Niger Delta has also been the scene of serious violence. Between 2006 and 2009, a militant group named Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) protested against the poverty of the region despite the oil wealth produced. In 2016, President Buhari's 70% cut to the amnesty program prompted further unrest in the region by militants named Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) since 2016 targeting major pipelines. The Biafran struggle by Igbo youths and the alleged excessive use of force by the Nigerian government, killing 150 protesters is another form of violence that is not negligible in the history of Nigeria between August, 2015-2016 (Peace Initiative Network, 2019).

Political violence is another form of conflict that is widespread in Nigeria with devastating effects on the fabric of our society. This, according to Akpo (2013) is a deliberate use of force to achieve specific political objectives. Corruption, poverty, unemployment and high rate of illiteracy promote the culture of political violence in Nigeria. Post-2011 general election violence is a good example in Nigeria. Political violence has, unfortunately, become a central aspect of political competition in Nigeria. Violence is most often carried out by gangs often called cults, of unemployed youths, and paid for by politicians, party leaders or other patrons often called "Godfathers. The gangs are ordered to attack political enemies, rig elections and secure their own patrons. For example, in two weeks surrounding the election in 2003 more than a 100 people were killed (Human Rights Watch, in Ajayi 2006:8).

The national election conducted in 1983 witnessed post-election violence following the declared landslide victory of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in Oyo and Ondo states considered to be the stronghold of the Unity party of Nigeria (UPN). Several persons lost their lives and large scale destruction of property was recorded. There is substantial similarity between the post-election violence recorded in 1983 and the post-election violence recorded after the presidential election on April 16, 2011 in which hundreds of people lost their lives (CLEEN Foundation, 2011).

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Nigerian has a history of violent and deeply flawed elections. Observers from the European Union described the 2007 elections among the worst they have witnessed anywhere in the world. Corrupt politicians in many cases backed by nation-like “godfathers” openly mobilized gangs of thugs to terrorize ordinary citizens and political opponents and to stuff or steel ballot boxes. The police were often present during such incidents but frequently turned a blind eye or, at times, participated in abuses, yet no one has been held accountable for these crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

There were few instances of violence in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. According to the United States Institute of Peace (2019), Africa’s most populous country, largest economy, and biggest democracy, Nigeria is a bellwether for the continent. National and state elections in 2019 were deeply competitive, with scattered instances of violence amid a mostly peaceful process.

Building a People of Peace

While it is natural that people want peace, it doesn’t come naturally. People have made concerted efforts in an attempt to find peace to no avail. This is where the need to build peace arises. What then is peace building? This refers to efforts and intervention measures adopted by individuals, groups, communities and corporate bodies with the objective of overcoming the root cause(s) of conflict or preventing conflict from taking place. It is an effort made to dethrone crisis and enthrone crisis-free atmosphere or social order.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and religious societies practicing presidential democracy with a multi-party outlook where people are free to join any legitimate association of their choice. Successive governments have made concerted efforts to ensure peace and unity in Nigeria. In the words of the country’s war time Head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, ‘to keep Nigeria together as one is a task that must be done’ (nd) and it was for this reason that he had to fight a civil war to stop the secession of Eastern Nigeria. Other regimes after him-military and civilian have never toyed with the unity of Nigerians.

All the various constitutional conferences that were convened by various regimes were meant to avail Nigerians with the opportunity to appraise the state of their ‘union’ and consequently work out templates for more harmonious and mutually fulfilling co-existence who were unequivocal in their insistence that the country’s indivisibility and indissolubility is not a subject for debate (Adejoh, Adejoh and Adesola, 2017). Addressing the delegates to the national constitutional conference of 2014, then President Goodluck Jonathan had said inter alia:

Even though you come to the conference as nominees and representative of different sinterest groups, I urge you all to make a more united, stronger, indivisible and prosperous Nigeria as your preoccupation and reference at this national gathering....(Vanguard, March 17, 2014).

This is in tandem with what President Muhammed Buhari said on his return from medical vacation in the United Kingdom “that the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable”. Some of the efforts made to unite Nigerians include quota system, Federal Character Commission, derivation for oil producing states, National Youth Service Corps, Federal Unity Schools, zoning formula, equal representatives, the need to strike a balance on the basis of competition for

political ascendancy (for instance, if the presidential candidate was a muslim, mandatorily, the vice president will be a Christian), creation of more states and local governments, to mention but a few.

At a public lecture on detribalization of Nigeria, the deputy senate president, Ike Ekweremadu, advocated for a constitutional provision that will allow a southerner to serve in northern states house of assembly and *vice versa*, in order to foster peace and unity in the country. All these are artificial ways of solving natural problems. It is like fighting a lost battle or putting a new wine in an old wine skin. This is a height of incompatibility.

Our problems started with the amalgamation treaty of 1914 when the northern and southern protectorates were merged together to become one Nigeria. This treaty resulted in the emergence of over 400 ethnic groups with about 250 linguistic groupings in Nigeria. The arrangement appears simple for administrative convenience that will facilitate smooth exploitation of the colony by the colonialists. The problem is that these two protectorates characterized by over 250 ethno-linguistic groupings saw themselves as people from different socio-cultural background that they were. That is why they look at themselves with suspicion in their routine activities. To believe in their oneness is very difficult because they were never one. The resultant effect or spill over of this hitherto arrangement from the amalgamation treaty is the spread of identity-based violence-ethnic, religious, indigene/settler claims as well as politically motivated crises in different parts of Nigeria. One of the attributes of humans is sentiments-sentiments along the dimensions of ethnicity, regions, religion, and political parties. All of these have beclouded our reasoning, perceptions, attitudes, views and judgments. People no longer see anything good in their opponents or out-groups.

A closer look at some of the measures put together to foster peace and unity or oneness such as Federal Character Commission which was established in 1989 (Koko, 2013), is aimed at curtailing the political and economic dominance of some ethnic groups over others especially in the area of sharing national resources. Quota system, according to Ayangoar quoted by Koko (2013:183), is a proportional share of resources assigned to an area by a government or any of its agencies. This is captured in terms of available number of vacancies for jobs, available chances for school enrolment figures meant for candidates from a specific state. Citizenship, according to the provision of the Nigerian constitution, implies that each of the over 400 indigenous ethnic nationalities is a citizen of Nigeria.

Foreign countries are not left out in their efforts to ensure peace and stability in Nigeria. For instance, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) provides education, grants, training, and resources to help build peace in Nigeria seek improved governance through projects that strengthen communication between citizens and authorities (USIP, 2019). With all of these concerted efforts by stakeholders, violent conflict remains the bane of peaceful coexistence, national integration and development in Nigeria.

Way Forward

Introduction of peace education in primary and secondary schools: Peace education has been severally defined by scholars but for the purpose of this book, we shall re-echo the one given by Akubue and Ezegbe in Adejoh et al (2017:3) who, defined peace education, as an education that can and must educate man to live in peace and dignity which, according to Adejoh et al, helps young people achieve a culture of peace. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2007) defines a culture of peace as “a set of values, attitudes, modes of

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behavior and way of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations” According to Akudolu, quoted by Adejoh, et al (2017:3), some of the factors that would help youth achieve culture of peace include an appreciation of ethnic diversity, religious tolerance and acquisition of conflict resolution skills. Averink (2013 in Adejoh et al, 2017:3) observed that peace education played a critical role in healing and rebuilding inter-ethnic trust among Rwandans after the genocide of 1994. It should start from primary schools that their minds are yet to be polluted by sentiments. The introduction of peace and conflict resolution in Universities and other tertiary institutions is belated because at that level, people’s minds are already soaked with sentiments.

Going back to the age-long abandoned cherished African social values: To build a people of peace, it is important to go back to the abandoned cherished African social values which are characterized by the philosophy of ‘live and let live’, being one’s brother’s keeper, respect for human lives, integrity, and hospitality. If we are loaded with these in our value system, we will see peaceful co-existence as a pleasurable activity.

Conclusion

The rate of violent conflict in Nigeria has assumed a worrisome and alarming proportion with attendant consequences for loss of lives and property worth billions of naira. Based on this premise, it is the contention of this paper that, governments at all levels, traditional and religious leaders, security agencies, and other stakeholders should put their hands on deck in order to make peace behavior a constant, regular and pleasurable activities in Nigeria.

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